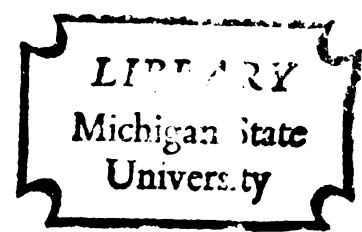


DREAMS AND THE REDEMPTIVE VISION
IN SHELLEY'S MAJOR POETRY

Thesis for the Degree of Ph. D.
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ABSTRACT

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By

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When critics have taken account of the dream content in Shelley's poems they have either commented very generally upon the dream-like quality of Shelley's poetry, or they have searched amid the symbolism and allegory of his most conspicuous dream-visions for idealized truths. Rarely have they interpreted the dream-visions in relation to the larger contexts of his poetry. Yet dream-visions figure significantly in every one of Shelley's narrative poems from Queen Mab to "The Triumph of Life." Shelley was doubtless fond of this long accepted metaphor for suspending the limitations of the objective, waking world of reality and ensuring subjective autonomy.

Besides the advantage in perspective, however, Shelley shaped the dream conventions in every poem to fit the larger thematic and narrative demands of his redemptive vision. This vision informs all of Shelley's narrative poetry. It expresses a desire to reintegrate his existence with Nature, and it therefore exemplifies the Romantic myth

of redemption. Corresponding to the ancient myth of the lost paradise of Eden, the Romantic mythos involves what Northrop Frye describes as "a sense of an original identity between the individual man and nature which has been lost."¹

While correctly identifying the Shelleyan poetic vision as starting from a human eros, Frye's mythos nevertheless falls short of explaining Shelley's expanded consciousness. Like most interpretations of Shelley, it grapples with the relationship between the subjective consciousness and the objective world in Shelley's poetry principally from within a Platonic frame of reference. But at the center of Shelley's "sense of dispossession" lies a more complex motivation than merely the desire to transcend this finite and temporal reality through his visionary eros. For within Shelley's imaginative vision the death instinct is interlocked with the life instinct (Eros) in a continual struggle which Freud postulated in his final theory as the ruling principle of all life, including that of the human psyche and its created civilizations. Life versus Death in a polarity so general and so fundamental as to seem banal. Yet its dynamics and its topography are as subtly varied as life and art, both in Freudian theory and in Shelley's poetry.

No single work of Shelley's maturity so essentializes this theme of the Life-Death struggle as his virtually ignored Una Favola, which he wrote in Italian in 1820. Had

Shelley been a Freudian he could not have contrived a more uncanny allegory than Una Favola to exemplify Freud's theory of the Life-Death struggle. The story is full of subtle dynamics, but basically, here are Life and Death, 'twin sisters' and therefore sprung from a common source, Love (Eros), in constant strife with each other. Both are equally and alternately appealing and repelling. And both, apparently, originate in his dreams. This study will trace the paradigm of Life and Death in its thematic and narrative development and its pivotal relationship to the dream-visions in each of Shelley's narrative poems from Queen Mab to "The Triumph of Life."

The exploratory device of the dream-vision reveals how Shelley's poetic vision is redemptive and, more importantly, how the Life-Death struggle informs this vision and deepens its complexity and meaning. Through use of the dream-vision the familiar dichotomy between desire and reality gives way to a vision of the competing desires of Eros and Thanatos, the life and death instincts, within the context of a shifting reality. Beyond this fundamental polarity in Shelley's poetry, however, it is possible to discern the subtle dynamics of renunciation and repression as components of the death impulse and the imperative of an emerging Narcissism that detours Death into the service of Eros in human society and in the individual psyche. From the early framing function of Ianthe's dream, with its

sharply drawn polarity between a redemptive Eros and a history throttled by its own destructive institutions, through "The Triumph of Life," which begins to explore Death more subtly as a psychic and social phenomenon, Shelley penetrated not only more intricately into the destructive forces of the death instinct and the precariousness of Life but also into the obstinacy of Life and its power over Death.

¹Northrop Frye, A Study of English Romanticism (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 17.

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INTRODUCTION

Scholars have scrutinized the dream-visions of most romantic poets, notably Coleridge and Keats, but Shelley's penchant for this literary device has scarcely evoked their interest. Shelley's characteristically visionary designs may account for this oversight. Given his restless idealism, which usually obliterates the boundaries between the subjective and the objective worlds, one can easily overlook how often the thrust of his vision is born by dreams. When critics have taken account of the dream content in Shelley's poems they have either commented very generally upon the dream-like quality of Shelley's poetry, or they have searched amid the symbolism and allegory of his most conspicuous dream-visions for idealized truths.¹ Rarely, if ever, have they interpreted the dream-visions in relation to the larger contexts of his poetry. Yet dream-visions

¹G. Wilson Knight in The Starlit Dome (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1960), Newman Ivey White in Shelley (New York: Knopf, 1940), and Graham Hough in The Romantic Poets (New York: Norton, 1964), mention Shelley's dream-visions but scarcely go beyond a general assertion of their significance. See William H. Hildebrand's An Anagogic Interpretation of Shelley's Prometheus Unbound (Western Reserve University, 1967). This sometimes illuminating dissertation contains the most extended statement on Shelley's use of the dream-vision, but the author relies almost exclusively on Queen Mab, Alastor, and the "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" to support his basically Jungian interpretation.

figure significantly in every one of Shelley's narrative poems from Queen Mab to "The Triumph of Life."²

Shelley was doubtless fond of this long accepted metaphor for suspending the limitations of the objective, waking world of reality and ensuring subjective autonomy. His fondness is mirrored in a notable passage from "Mont Blanc":

Some say that gleams of a remoter world
Visit the soul in sleep--that death is slumber,
And that its shapes the busy thoughts outnumber
Of those who wake and live.--I look on High:
Has some unknown omnipotence unfurled
The veil of life and death? or do I lie
In dream and does the mightier world of sleep
Spread far around and inaccessible
Its circles?³

(49-57)

The speaker in the poem is postulating a supersensible perspective in the dream, or even in death, which might give him access to those "gleams of a remoter world" that are otherwise utterly inaccessible. Each of Shelley's dream-visions relies upon this assumption. Dreams seem to point the dreamer, and perhaps the reader, toward some ultimate truth beyond mortal reality.

Besides the advantage in perspective, however, Shelley shaped the dream conventions in every poem to fit

²The Revolt of Islam is an exception. Although there are four brief dream-visions in the poem, they are not central to its thematic development in terms of the present study.

³From The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley, edited by Thomas Hutchinson (London: Oxford University Press, 1961). Subsequent quotations from Shelley's poetry will be from this edition.

the larger thematic and narrative demands of his redemptive vision. This vision informs all of Shelley's narrative poetry. It expresses a desire to reintegrate his existence with Nature, and it therefore exemplifies the Romantic myth of redemption. Corresponding to the ancient myth of the lost paradise of Eden, the Romantic mythos involves what Northrop Frye describes as "a sense of an original identity between the individual man and nature which has been lost."⁴ Whether conservative and reaching backward to resurrect earlier traditional values, as in some Romantics such as Scott, or reaching forward, like Shelley, to create a vision that would overthrow the repressive values which dominate the present, all the Romantics shared this common impulse to reattain their lost sense of identity with Nature. Hence, they varied widely in their attempts:

Romantic redemption myths, especially the revolutionary ones like those of Shelley, throw the emphasis on an eros, or love rooted in the human sexual instinct. Such an eros develops a distinctively human idealism, and for such idealism the redeeming agent is also human centered. The agape or love of God for man creates grace, but what man's love and idealism create is essentially a gnosis, an expanded knowledge or consciousness, and one that is more inclusive and profound than the conscious knowledge of the detached subject.⁵

Borrowing a phrase from the hip vernacular, Frye asserts that "the central theme of Romanticism is that of attaining an expanded consciousness."⁶

⁴Northrop Frye, A Study of English Romanticism (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 17.

⁵Frye, p. 20.

⁶Frye, p. 42.

While correctly identifying the Shelleyan poetic vision as starting from a human eros, Frye's mythos nevertheless falls short of explaining Shelley's "expanded consciousness." Like most interpretations of Shelley, it grapples with the relationship between the subjective consciousness and the objective world in Shelley's poetry from within a predominantly Platonic frame of reference. But at the center of Shelley's "sense of dispossession" lies a more complex motivation than merely the desire to transcend this finite and temporal reality through his visionary eros. For within Shelley's imaginative vision the death instinct is interlocked with the life instinct (Eros) in the never-ending struggle which Freud postulated in his final theory as the ruling principle of all life, including that of the human psyche and its created civilizations. Life versus Death: it is a polarity so general and so fundamental as to seem banal. Yet its dynamics and its topography are as subtly varied as life and art, both in Freudian theory and in Shelley's poetry.

Shelley's preoccupation with death has not gone unnoticed by the critics. As the title of his book suggests, B. P. Kurtz considered death the primary motivation in Shelley's poetry.⁷ His study is not Freudian however, but Platonic. Life in this world of time and space is a dream,

⁷B. P. Kurtz, The Pursuit of Death (London: Oxford University Press, 1933).

an insubstantial shadow, a "painted veil" beyond which lies death and its ideal and eternal world. Interpretations of death in Shelley's poetry invariably share this Platonizing tendency. Neither Shelley's nor Freud's metapsychology limits death in these terms, however, as we shall see.

Love and death, especially the former, have been explored extensively by scholars of Shelley's thought. No one, however, has explored the deeply interwoven dialectic of these contradictory impulses in his poetry. The Eros-Death struggle permeates Shelley's narrative poems. Nowhere does it reveal itself more sharply than in his dream-visions. Because they simulate the desires and wish fulfillments of real dreams, they are invariably leading toward the redemptive vision through Eros. Just as often, however, they are tinged with the much less conspicuous presence of Thanatos.⁸

But it cannot be emphasized too strongly that Shelley's dream-visions are not real dreams and should not and will not be analyzed as such in this study. Nor is Shelley transcribing his own dreams. Like the rest of his poetry, they are literary products of conscious effort, rather than the emissions of a dreaming mind. They are, in short, literary devices attaining to heightened consciousness, not ending it. Literary history is filled with

⁸In his Eros and Civilization (New York: Vintage, 1955), Herbert Marcuse adopts the Greek 'Thanatos.' Death, designating the death instinct, to balance Freud's use of 'Eros' meaning "Love," or the life instinct. I will use all these terms in this study to denote the same meanings.

dream-visions, which writers have used as conscious artistic structures. Macrobius probably influenced British Literature in this respect more than anyone else.⁹ As Walter De La Mare writes:

But it was the "authour that hight Macrobes" who, with his prose commentary on the Dream of Scipio which he borrowed from Cicero, set a literary fashion in the fourth century which has never since ceased to flower--that of ascribing a story to a dream. From the limpid simplicity and beauty of Pearl; from the workday directness of Piers Plowman, by way of The King's Quair and The Golden Targe, to Spenser, and on to Byron, Burns and Tennyson, the tale in verse or allegory or lyric declaring itself to be a dream is so usual a device in English poetry that we question neither its motive nor its justification.¹⁰

Like most critics, however, De La Mare overlooks Shelley's dream-visions. As we will demonstrate, Shelley's dependence on this psychic-literary device, both as a story-frame and as a revelation of imaginative truth, is profound.

Most literary criticism drawing upon Freud's principles limits itself to interpretations which rely exclusively upon his early theories of psychoanalytical and clinical psychology to design roadmaps to some hapless

⁹See William H. Stahl, ed., Macrobius' Commentary on the Dream of Scipio (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952). Macrobius differentiates the five main dream categories in Chapter III as follows: "All dreams may be classified under five main types: there is the enigmatic dream, in Greek oneiros, in Latin somnium; second, there is the prophetic vision, in Greek horama, in Latin visio; third, there is the oracular dream, in Greek chrematismos, in Latin oraculum; there is the nightmare, in Greek enyphion, in Latin insomnium; and last, the apparition, in Greek phantasma, which Cicero, when he has occasion to use the word, calls visum."

¹⁰Walter De La Mare, Behold, This Dreamer! (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1938), pp. 101-102.

author's psyche. Occasionally subjected to psychoanalytical scrutiny, Shelley has been left comparatively unnoticed by the Freudians. But although not numerous, Shelley's Freudian critics have been extravagant. They have concentrated, by and large, upon his psyche and have used his poetry to substantiate their claims about his personality.

An early biographical study by Carpenter and Barnefield maintained that Shelley was at least bisexual, and quite possibly a latent homosexual.¹¹ They rested their evidence on Shelley's somewhat feminine appearance, his male friendships with Hogg and Trelawney, his paranoia (a defence against homosexuality), the bisexual nature of some of his literary characters, his penchant for the Symposium, and his idealization of women. Because Shelley could never identify his love-ideal and therefore never realize it, this failure, it would seem, constituted a repressed homosexual tendency. This entire thesis of sexual deviance relies almost exclusively on very selective biographical information. It draws very little upon the poetry and, of course, attempts no literary evaluation.

In his lengthy apologia for Shelley, Herbert Read, several years later, reached the similar conclusion that the poet was latently homosexual with narcissistic tendencies.¹²

¹¹ Edward Carpenter and George Barnefield, The Psychology of the Poet Shelley (London: Folcroft, 1925).

¹² Herbert Read, "In Defence of Shelley," in The True Voice of Feeling: Studies in English Romantic Poetry (London: Faber and Faber, 1953), pp. 212-287.

He interprets Shelley's lack of objectivity toward the external world as a regressive stage of auto-eroticism, which accounts for his unconscious homosexuality and his narcissism. The Eagle-Serpent passage near the opening of The Revolt of Islam illustrates "most probably some form of castration complex."¹³ And just as cavalierly the dream-maiden in Alastor is cited as evidence of his narcissism. Aside from these and a few other tenuous illustrations, Read relies on speculation to develop his contentions which move toward the conclusion that Shelley's neurosis proves to work to his artistic advantage: "he [Shelley] allowed his feelings and ideas to develop integrally with his neurotic personality; and the plan of that evolution inevitably led to the formulation of a clearer, more conscious social order."¹⁴

A very early study by Eugene C. Taylor did not find Shelley neurotic but measured his poetic growth as the psychic evolution of his libido.¹⁵ The longer poems before Prometheus Unbound trace a quest motif in which the libidinal forces strive unsuccessfully to reunite with the mother but are blocked by the incest barrier. These quests all failed when they resolved themselves in death. The incest

¹³Read, p. 251.

¹⁴Read, p. 263.

¹⁵Eugene C. Taylor, "Shelley as Mythmaker," The Journal of Abnormal Psychology, XIV (April-June, 1919), 64-90.

barrier is finally overcome, symbolically, in Jupiter's downfall. The reunion with Asia, the mother surrogate, in turn, resolves the quest successfully. She embodies the "forward-striving libido of Prometheus" which reunites with and overcomes the "pent up, incestuous, and retrogressive libido" of the unconscious.¹⁶ Asia triumphs and Jupiter falls because, as the author contends, rather obscurely, "unless the subconsciousness has been revealed and the retrogressive libido given progressive expression, the incest barrier must necessarily cease to exist."¹⁷

The most audacious psychoanalytical assault on Shelley's poetry is perhaps, Wormhoudt's analysis of Prometheus Unbound.¹⁸ One of Shelley's idiosyncracies, according to this author, was his breast complex and the poem is replete with evidence: Prometheus is "an infant masochistically attached to the denying mother's breast."¹⁹ Beyond the problems of breast feeding and numerous other complexes, the underlying assumptions can best be summarized as a conflict between negative and positive oedipal demands.²⁰

¹⁶Taylor, pp. 86-87.

¹⁷Taylor, p. 88.

¹⁸Arthur Wormhoudt, The Demon Lover (New York: Books for Libraries, 1949).

¹⁹Wormhoudt, pp. 88-89.

²⁰"Prometheus, as the oedipal son, usurps the privileges of the father, is punished, repents and is forgiven. But the normal course of oedipal justice did not appeal to

Freud himself was much more restrained than his followers in his own occasional analyses of art or literature. Notably, in his study of Leonardo da Vinci, he admitted that because artistic talent relies so intimately upon sublimation, "the nature of artistic attainment is psychoanalytically inaccessible to us."²¹ He drew this conclusion in the face of his own investigations which led him to infer that Leonardo suffered from a strong latent homosexuality. He based his findings in large part upon an analysis of one of Leonardo's childhood fantasies involving a vulture. This evidence, coupled with the recurring smile in several of his paintings, derived, according to Freud, from Leonardo's memories of his mother.

There are two principle tendencies in current Freudian literary theory. One explores "inner meanings"

Shelley. His hatred of the father was seemingly much stronger than that of Aeschylus. It demanded the complete overthrow of Jupiter and the concomitant exoneration of Prometheus for this crime against the father. This exoneration is accomplished by overlaying the positive oedipus with a negative oedipus complex whereby the son represses his hatred for the father and puts himself in the mother's place in order to demonstrate his love in the passive manner. But both the positive and negative oedipus complexes are themselves only defenses against the deeper conflict between the son and the mother." (Wormhoudt, p. 88) Wormhoudt concludes: "The final result of the complicated action of this great poem is to permit the Promethean Shelley to accept the guilt for the lesser crime of the negative oedipus relation and escape that of two greater crimes--masochistic attachment to the pregenital mother and rebellion against the positive oedipal father." (p. 108)

²¹Sigmund Freud, Leonardo da Vinci: A Study in His Psychosexuality (New York: Random House, 1926).

(aside from the form, to which Freud was largely indifferent); the other seeks to explain the artist's temperament as a person through his literature. Most Freudian criticism of Shelley, as we have shown, is preoccupied with the latter. None of these interpretations deals with Shelley's poetry in light of Freud's mature theory, doubtless reflecting the hostility of Freudian theorists toward what they consider an unmitigated fatalism in Freud's eventual position. With very few exceptions, the literary critics have preferred the idealistic modifications involving the "collective unconscious" and "primordial images" of the Jungian theory. Frye is among this group. His eros-centered redemptive vision does not even include the compelling possibility of the countervailing and subverting force of the death instinct. In his closing remarks to his interpretation of Prometheus Unbound he suggests that Shelley's Eros "anticipates the Eros of Freud," but he adds, "Shelley has nothing of Freud's despondent resignation to the tyranny of anxiety."²² Frye probably does not equate this anxiety with the death instinct, and implicitly he seems to be rejecting the full significance of how repression creates anxiety and thereby intensifies the death instinct in Freudian theory. His Romantic mythos chooses the route of philosophical idealism and ignores the deepening shadows of the death instinct in Shelley's poetry.

²²Frye, pp. 123-124.

During the early stages of its development, Freud's theory concentrated on the conflict between the sex (libidinous) instinct and the ego (self-preservation) instinct. With the publication of Beyond the Pleasure Principle in 1920, in which he introduced the death instinct as the real antagonist of Eros, the life instinct, Freud had turned the corner into the latest and final stage of his theoretical development. In place of his earlier instinctual theories grounded in the origin of the mind as an antagonism between sex and ego stood a new metapsychology which explained the life processes in terms of a definite direction. This direction reveals a conservative dynamic, which strives for release from tension, through life and death, a principle somewhat akin to the Second Law of Thermodynamics in Physics. While each instinct strives to attain its goal in a different mode--either sustaining or destroying life--they both exhibit a drive to return to a state of equilibrium, the Nirvana principle, where excitation is kept as low as possible. This principle informs civilization as well as the human psyche. Though it is unclear whether Eros or Death is to be construed as the dominant force, they share a common, perhaps the same source, prior to differentiation. Marcuse poses the central question of the final stage of Freud's theory of his significant study, Eros and Civilization:

Does Eros, in spite of all the evidence, in the last analysis work in the service of the death instinct, and is life really only one long "detour to death?" But the evidence is strong enough, and the detour is long enough to warrant the opposite assumption. Eros is defined as the great unifying force that preserves all life. The ultimate relation between Eros and Thanatos remains obscure.²³

This study will explore the suspense of this relationship in Shelley's narrative poetry.

The basic direction of Eros and of Thanatos always remains the same, but their objective and their manifestations shift with each turn in the thematic and narrative development of the poetry (just as they do in life in relation to the external influences of reality). Thus, the interwoven complexity of the death instinct, which informs the Nirvana principle, with Eros, which informs the pleasure principle, expresses an intricate dynamic that can never be precisely defined or schematized. Freud says of the relationship between the Nirvana principle and pleasure principle:

. . . the effort to reduce, to keep constant or to remove internal tension due to stimuli (the "Nirvana Principle" . . .) . . . finds expression in the pleasure principle; and our recognition of this fact is one of our strongest reasons, for believing in the existence of the death instinct.²⁴

²³ Marcuse, Eros and Civilization, p. 25. More than Freud's own work itself, principally his Beyond the Pleasure Principle (New York: Liveright, 1924) and Civilization and Its Discontents (New York: Norton, 1961), I have relied on Marcuse's philosophical extrapolation of Freudian thought in Eros and Civilization. One of the very few theorists to take Freud's final formulation seriously, he extends Freud's thoughts to the aesthetic dimension with penetrative insight because he retains the theory with its insistence upon the death instinct intact and therefore does not fall into idealizing compromises.

²⁴ Freud, Beyond the Pleasure Principle, p. 76.

Marcuse describes the primacy of the Nirvana principle as "the terrifying convergence of pleasure and death [which] is dissolved as soon as it is established."²⁵ Sometimes the pleasure principle, sometimes the Nirvana principle is in the ascendancy. Often it is impossible to tell which predominates.

Marcuse explains that Freud's original contribution with respect to literature lies in having shown how imagination is governed by its own laws. These laws are connected essentially with the pleasure principle, which, in the phantasy-making process, remain relatively free of the reality principle. Theoretically, therefore, the pleasure principle aligns itself with the redemptive vision that Frye assigns to the romantic mythos; but the pleasure principle in Freudian theory necessarily entails the other side of its coin, the Nirvana principle. The sublimated nature of literary expression does not preclude the thematic and narrative dimensions of death. We have already noted that there is no place in the redemptive mythos for death, as Frye defines it. In light of the Shelleyan mythos, which incorporates death as well as life, Frye's conception requires theoretical revision.

In terms of the Life-Death struggle no single work of Shelley's maturity so essentializes this theme as his virtually ignored Una Favola, which he wrote in Italian in

²⁵Marcuse, Eros and Civilization, p. 24.

1820.²⁶ This parable depicts a youth who is in love simultaneously with two mistresses-Life and Death. In his fifteenth year he is awakened by Love who promises to lead him to "that one whom he had oft-times beheld in his dream's abode awaiting him." The youth joins Love who is accompanied by a troop of very sensually appealing but veiled female forms on their way through a "gloomy valley" and into a labyrinth of "delight and sadness." The veiled figures lavish the youth with attention and respond to his every whim, except one--they will not unveil themselves. One of them, however, complies. Life reveals herself to him. She is "tall of person and beautiful"; but when he loves her, she proves to be "more false than any Siren." Thus led astray, he is abandoned by Love who returns "to her third heaven." Scarcely has Love departed when the forms unveil themselves and haunt the woeful youth with their loathsome presence. Eventually, the tormented youth finds his way "to the grot of the Sister of Life, herself an enchantress." This sister is Death, who comforts him. He in turn falls in love with her and forgets the tormenting forms and even Life herself. But Death spurns him when she realizes he loves her: "'If thou lovedst me not, perchance might I love thee--beloved by thee, I hate thee and I fly thee.'" Although rebuffed, the youth goes off

²⁶David Lee Clark, ed., Shelley's Prose (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1954), pp. 359-361.

in quest of Death. During his vain pursuit he encounters another lady who pities him. So he falls in love with her and begins to hate Death. Hated, Death returns to reproach and reclaim him. There is a confrontation between Death and this new paramour, who, as it transpires, is Life herself, the "twin sister" of Death. The fable breaks off, appropriately, at this high point, with the poor youth torn between the two sisters.

Critics have scarcely noticed this fable. When they have, they, like White, have seen its allegory as a polarity of "false and true loves."²⁷ White goes on to equate Life with imperfection and Death with perfection. Yet, clearly Shelley gave equal weight to the two figures and left the outcome of their contention in suspense. Even in traditional Platonic terms, White's equations may be wrong. For as Marcuse says in placing Freud in the mainstream of Western philosophy:

His metapsychology, attempting to define the essence of being, defines it as Eros--in contrast to its traditional definition as Logos. The death instinct affirms the principle of nonbeing (the negation of being) against Eros (the principle of being). The ubiquitous fusion of the two principles in Freud's conception corresponds to the traditional metaphysical fusion of being and non-being. To be sure, Freud's conception of Eros refers only to organic life. However, inorganic matter is, as the "end" of the death instinct, so inherently linked to organic matter that (as suggested above) it seems permissible to give his conception a general ontological meaning.²⁸

²⁷Newman I. White, Shelley, Vol. II (New York: Knopf, 1940), p. 262.

²⁸Marcuse, Eros and Civilization, pp. 113-114.

Had Shelley been a Freudian he could not have contrived a more uncanny allegory than Una Favola to exemplify Freud's theory of the Life-Death struggle. The story is full of subtle dynamics, but basically, here are Life and Death, "twin sisters" and therefore sprung from a common source, Love (Eros), in constant strife with each other. Both are equally and alternately appealing and repelling. And both apparently, originate in his dreams. This study will trace the paradigm of Eros and Death in its thematic and narrative development and its pivotal relationship to the dream-visions in each of Shelley's narrative poems from Queen Mab to "The Triumph of Life."²⁹

²⁹See note 2 above.

QUEEN MAB

At the time he wrote Queen Mab, Shelley avoided the objective limitations of reality by embodying his entire, youthful vision of redemption in a dream. Perhaps he felt he could live uncompromisingly by the truth of his imagination within a dream framework while not confusing his vision with the principles that govern reality. Furthermore, the redemptive vision in Queen Mab projects itself futuristically--beyond the limitations that might constrain its utopian hypotheses in any other form than a dream-vision.

In this schema Ianthe is little more than a recessive spectator to Mab's revelations and prophecies. Presumably any other mortal as lovely and as virtuous would have served Mab's purpose as well. Ianthe's relationship to her dream is therefore unlike that of Shelley's later dreamers whose symbolic and psychological identities are integral to their dream-visions. It is not even clear whether the dream centers in Ianthe's mind. For at the opening of the poem the narrator comments from both inside and outside her mind. As he admires her sleeping beauty he begins to remark upon the approach of Mab's chariot. And from this point on, although the dreamer's traditional loss of personal consciousness and entry to the dream are absent, the dream-vision unfolds.

With its perspective outside space and time the vision fits Shelley's suprahistorical design for reviewing the past, present, and future. Although Shelley was probably unaware of it, Queen Mab conforms closely to what Macrobius terms the "oracular dream." This pattern relies upon a revered guide, often supernatural, who "clearly reveals what will or will not transpire, and what action to take or avoid."¹ From her vantage point outside time and space Mab espouses the principle of Necessity that will inevitably liberate all mankind and nature from oppression, cruelty, and pain. Necessity, or the 'Spirit of Nature,' Mab predicts, will overthrow the repressive system of aristocratic, religious, and commercial interests which dominate men's existence. In their stead, Mab predicts an order that affirms the ideal of man's redemption through reintegration with nature.

Redemption, as we have already observed, entails man's reintegration with nature. Frye describes it as "a sense of an original identity between the individual man and nature which has been lost. . . . The Romantic redemption myth then becomes a recovery of the original identity."² As it finally evolves in section VIII and IX of Queen Mab, this myth imaginatively projects a non-repressive, objective world that liberates sensuousness (Eros) from reason,

¹Stahl, p. 90.

²Frye, pp. 17-18.

transforms toil into play, and conquers the destructive effects of time. Frye is never very specific about how the redemptive vision is fulfilled in terms of its eventual realization. Marcuse's conception of the future of the aesthetic dimension, however, fills out this Eros along lines of the three criteria just mentioned. It is the vision of Narcissus expressed in the Nirvana principle, not as death but as life. But in Queen Mab this vision only begins to assume the outlines of Narcissism; not until the poems coming after Queen Mab does the Nirvana principle underlying Narcissism emerge sharply with its struggle between Eros and the death instinct. Nevertheless, the flat, sweeping contrasts between the future Mab promises and the earthly realities of dead and dying civilizations in the past and in the present are broadly suggestive of this eventual direction.

Mab's presence is symbolically pervasive from the agitated moment of her approach in Ianthe's dream. Shelley signals her arrival in a rush of wind and refracted light, suggestive of the inspirational desires and divine powers often associated with his poetry:

'Tis softer than the west winds' sigh;
 'Tis wilder than the unmeasured notes
 Of that strange lyre breezes sweep:
 Those lines of rainbow light
 Are like the moonbeams when they fall
 Through some cathedral window, but the tints
 Are such as may not find
 Comparison on earth.

(I, 50-58)

Mab's supernatural origin and power in this opening section are strongly marked by her accompanying celestial imagery, while Ianthe, for all her earthly loveliness, is clearly of terrestrial origin. This contrast of associations between celestial and terrestrial elements holds for most of Shelley's poetry. In Queen Mab it reinforces symbolically the entire development of Mab's redemptive Eros throughout the poem.³ For set against the deathly past and the destructive present of the terrestrial world are the limitless possibilities of the future, and the celestial imagery associated with Mab underscores this promise. Mab descends into center stage, and the narrative viewpoint shifts to her commanding perspective. As Mab's chariot appears, pulled by her "celestial coursers," the scene is suffused with light imagery. Her celestial power, it is clear, outshines all elemental perceptions:

Those who had looked upon the sight,
 Passing all human glory,
 Saw not the yellow moon,
 Saw not the mortal scene,

³According to Donald Reiman, Shelley's imagery functions along precopernican lines. His general observations of Shelley's imagery in his introduction to Shelley's "Triumph of Life" sketch out some of the broader implications and connotations in Shelley's imagery and concludes: "The celestial symbols remain relatively consistent in their associations throughout Shelley's poetry, as do many of the terrestrial symbols. Each individual poem, however, develops its particular symbolic universe, drawing nuances and associations from specific traditions." Shelley's "The Triumph of Life": A Critical Study (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1965), p. 17.

Heard not the night wind's rush,
 Heard not an earthly sound,
 Saw but the heavenly strains'
 That filled the lovely dwelling.
 (I, 85-93)

Preparatory to releasing Ianthe's soul, Mab arrests the elemental forces of terrestrial nature by summoning her heavenly powers, "Stars! your balmiest influence shed / Elements! your wrath suspend (I, 114-115). The powers of earth, ocean, and air are cast asleep (I, 116 passim); whereupon, Ianthe's soul is commanded to stand forth, "all beautiful in naked purity" (I, 132). Stripped of her earthliness, Ianthe's soul does more than merely betray a lapse from materialism into incipient Platonism. There lingers about her naked form the narrator's preoccupation with her sensual beauty expressed in the opening lines of the poem. This early sensuality evolves, of course, into a complex Eros that is central to Shelley's aesthetic in his later poetry, as we shall see.

Ianthe's dream accumulates all of the young dreamer's earlier anticipations and now seems reality:

Each day dream of her mortal life,
 Each frenzied vision of the slumbers
 That closed each well spent day,
 Seemed now to meet reality.
 (I, 195-198)

Then in another profusion of light imagery Mab and her charge ascend through the magnified reaches of the universe, ever enlarging the contrast with that diminutive "smallest light" of earth. Their journey culminates in

their arrival at the 'Hall of Spells' that enshrines the 'Spirit of Nature.' From this ultimate precipice the narrator symbolically underscores the gap between man's conceptions and the earthly limitations of his perceptions:

Yet not the golden islands
 Gleaming in yon flood of light,
 Nor the feathery curtains
 Stretching o'er the sun's bright couch
 Nor the burnished Ocean waves
 Paving that gorgeous dome,
 So fair, so wonderful a sight
 As Mab's aethereal palace could afford
 (II, 22-28)

The celestial influence as Ianthe and all other mortals had viewed it is necessarily refracted and diffused in its transmission to earth.⁴ Aside from the scientific accuracy of its astronomical description, this ascent to a supra-universal perspective is in the mainstream of dream-vision tradition. Like Chaucer's guides in "The House of Fame" and "The Parliament of Foules" and other earlier and later hierophants of dream-visions, Mab exercises her oracular powers from a limitless promontory.

Although their vantage outside time-space permits Mab and her pupil to survey the entire range of human existence, Mab's "celestial palace" is not a cloister to evade the will of Necessity:

⁴Explaining this phenomenon in his first note to Queen Mab Shelley wrote: "Beyond our atmosphere the sun would appear a rayless orb of fire in the midst of a black concave. The equal diffusion of its light on earth is owing to the refraction of the rays by the atmosphere, and their reflection from other bodies." Poems, p. 800.

But were it virtue's only meed, to dwell
 In a celestial palace, all resigned
 To pleasurable impulses, immured
 Within the prison of itself, the will
 Of changeless nature would be unfulfilled
 (II, 54-63)

Mab's instruction discourages escapist self-indulgence,
 for as she expounds,

How Wonderful! that even
 The passions, prejudices, interests
 That sway the meanest being, the weak touch
 That moves the finest nerve,
 And in one human brain
 Causes the faintest thought, becomes a link
 In the great chain of Nature.
 (II, 102-108)

Man's existence and eventual liberation, we are reminded,
 is rooted in the terrestrial world. And as Mab will eventually demonstrate, man will redeem himself through an expanded psychic response to nature, under the governance of Necessity.

Having prepared her listener with the promise to review the lessons of the past, the present, and the secrets of the future, Mab begins her discourse on the past. Whatever physical grandeur past civilizations could boast, traceable principally in their crumbling architecture, Mab's eye is always on the price paid in human suffering for the benefit of a powerful few. The glories of Palmyra, the Pyramids, and old Salem were merely the vanities of monarchs, warriors, and priests in league against mankind and therefore obstacles to his redemption. However glorious, civilizations eventually destroy themselves. Hence,

the popular sic transit theme of the Romantics is here subordinated to the spirit of freedom breathed by such great thinkers as Socrates, whose memory reminds us of man's alienation from his lost ideal for humanity:

The long and lonely colonnades
Through which the ghost of Freedom stalks,
Seem like a well known tune,
Which in some dear scene we have loved to hear.
Remembered now in sadness.

But, oh! how much more changed,
How gloomier is the contrast
Of human nature there!
Where Socrates expired, a tyrant's slave,
A coward and a fool, spreads death around--
Then, shuddering, meets his own.
Where Cicero and Antoninus lived,
A cowed and hypocritical monk
Prays, curses and deceives.

(II, 168-181)

For Shelley this sense of dispossession belongs to an order of feeling that Frye refers to as the "lost paradise [which] becomes an unborn world, a pre-existent ideal" in romantic poetry.⁵ It is in this spirit that Mab recalls "Metropolis of the western continent" (II, 188) which "wealth, that curse of man / Blighted (II, 204-205), destroying "virtue and wisdom, truth and liberty" (II, 206). In resurrecting these lost ideals, as Frye would observe, the myth of redemption involves recovery of an original identity. But it is an identity heavy with the memory of men's destructive exploitation of each other. It is only a momentary exhumation at this point, for Mab has more to reveal before

⁵Frye, p. 18.

she discloses her ultimate vision of the future. Precisely what form this new world must take, however, Mab is not ready to disclose. As the second section reaches a close, she stresses the pervasive continuity of nature's law in a series of contrasting microcosmic and macrocosmic images that express what Blake meant by seeing a world in a grain of sand (II, 211, passim).

Following her revelation of the corrupt past and an incipient, future redemption, Mab turns her attention to the present in section III and explains why aristocratic power engenders and corrupts itself and its subjects. Basically, men will their own abjectness and subservience, although later Mab will explicitly deny that human nature is latently evil and insist on its determination through custom and precedent. Critics have rehearsed the contradictions between free will and necessity often enough with reference to Queen Mab to the exclusion of the poetry. Let it therefore suffice to say that Mab explains the contradiction when she optimistically affirms that when Reason coincides with Nature's law, liberation must follow. But neither in this section nor any other place in the poem does she reveal how men will win their liberation, or will compel tyrants to relinquish power. In one of her frequent out-of-character outbursts Mab makes an infrequent appeal to violence, but at no time does she espouse its general application. Normally she is the dispassionate declaimer. Here she proclaims:

. . . Not one wretch
 Whose children famish, and whose nuptial bed
 In earth's unpitying bosom rears an arm
 To dash him from his throne!

(III, 103-106)

This statement is more rhetorical passion, however, than dispassionate reason. Shelley was not a revolutionary. Except for occasional lapses, such as that just mentioned, he did not espouse violent struggle or sacrifice as prerequisites to liberation.

Queen Mab is a series of contrasts between repression and redemption. Such a contrast is represented between the "Gorgeous palace" of the monarch surrounded by its "gloomy troops / Of sentinels," (III, 24-25) and its opposite, "the virtuous heart" (III, 74). Monarchy's seemingly impregnable authority not only preserves its domination over men, but it also isolates the sovereign in days of self-surfeit and nights of guilt-ridden dreams. Both sovereign and subject negate freedom because "precedent and custom interpose between a king and virtue" (III, 98-99). Thus, locked into this mutual, destructive hegemony, men glut the grandeur of the king with that very same exploited labor that reduces themselves to privation.

The few critics who have bothered at any length with Queen Mab always note how Shelley condemns authoritarian power; but they never account for the slavish obedience to this power that Shelley equally condemns. Why, he implies, did men not forcibly overthrow Nero? (III, 180, passim) Why, in failing to emulate the peace, harmony and

love of uncorrupted, terrestrial nature does man willingly enslave himself against Nature's design? Why does "out-cast, man" fabricate "the sword which stabs his peace" and cherish "the snakes that gnaw his heart" (III, 200-201)? Shelley himself supplies no clear-cut answer. This perverse ambivalence expresses perhaps the kind of guilt and anxiety associated with rebellion against the primal father (in this case, the king) that Marcuse summarizes as follows:

The consequences are two-fold: they threaten to destroy the life of the group by the removal of the authority which (although in terror) had preserved the group: and, at the time, this removal promises a society without the father--that is, without suppression and domination.⁶

To put it another way, the ruler--whether king, priest, or God,--is a projection of man's alienation from Nature. This interpretation clearly goes beyond Shelley's conscious intent in the present context. The outlines of this alienation are apparent, however, in Jupiter and other figures of tyranny in Shelley's poetry. The section closes characteristically on another high but contradictory note in which Mab predicts that man, in tune with the celestially ordained 'Spirit of Nature' attains his "age of endless peace" (III, 235).

Section IV opens with Mab's softly lyrical paeon to night, lulling earth for the moment with her celestial

⁶Marcuse, Eros and Civilization, p. 60.

influence. Then "The stars are quenched / In darkness" (IV, 35-36), before the impending savagery of war. For the remainder of the section Mab analyzes war's institutionalized function. Its causes do not, as aristocratic and cowardly apologists rationalize, originate in "mans evil nature." No, "From kings and priests and statesmen, war arose" (IV, 80). State and church constitute a ruling class to reinforce each other's power and to further their own mutual privileges. Mab then slips into another metaphor that suggests not only the common interests of these powers but also the necessity of their violent overthrow: "Let the axe / Strike at the root the poison tree will fall" (IV, 82-83). Typically, the arid wasteland of this scene then gives way to a garden of loveliness and plenty, another of those several brief, futuristic visions throughout the poem that foreshadow the fully realized vision of sections VIII and IX.

Mab returns to her argument that it is not nature but the institutionalized repression of "Kings, priests, and statesmen," who control the individual's consciousness, even from childhood, and enslave his mind. Reason itself "sanctifies the sword" through state domination. Because war is sanctioned and glorified by the state, it gains early respectability in the hero-worshipping eyes of a child. His natural instincts toward goodness are further poisoned "by words, law and custom" (IV, 130). "Cursed from its

birth, even from its cradle doomed / To abjectness and bondage" (IV, 137-138), the individual, who is potentially good, is constrained in his high resolve through the repressive domination of the ruling class of the state.

Mab proclaims, in what are probably the poem's most well known lines, "War is the stateman's game, the priests delight / The lawyer's jest, the hired assassin's trade," (IV, 168-169). If the populace's rage opposes this royally sanctioned murder, hired force is its sole response and the sole basis of its revealed legitimacy. And in order to preserve this legitimacy it decks its hired enforcers with "wealth / Honor and power," (IV, 186-187). Law too, "skilled to snare / The feet of Justice" (IV, 196-197) sells the truth out while all self-serving, honorable men "support the system," (IV, 207) and "God, Hell and Heaven" are invoked to preserve the system's moral suasion. Meanwhile, men, by and large, compromise their will to liberate themselves in return for short-term gratification, thereby reinforcing their own repression:

Youth springs, age moulders, Manhood tamely does
His bidding, bribed by short-lived joys to lend
Force to the weakness of his trembling arm.
(IV, 224-226)

Men are therefore responsible for their own suffering, although, as we have also been informed, they are victims of the system.

Mab does not fully delineate the causal relationship, but the dehumanizing effects of "commerce" are central

to her argument in section V. Basically, the maldistribution of labor and therefore wealth corrupts and cripples human relationships. If, as Mab asserts, "wealth should purchase not but want demand / And natural kindness hasten to supply / From the full fountain of its boundless love," (V, 39-40) any commercial advantage of exploitation will poison the possibilities of love and therefore subvert all chance of total liberation. Shelley's notes clarify this point. He condemns the rationalization that defends surplus wealth as a means of giving employment to the poor. Instead of exploiting labor, he advocates the equal redistribution of labor, and hence wealth, as an absolute reform. Only free from excess toil can men, in turn, escape their intellectual and emotional domination and realize their highest potentialities.⁷ Throughout the section this argument, along with faith in man's all-abiding will to liberate himself, is pitted against venality, and the corrupting effect of commercial selfishness. And as always, the outcome is optimistically forecast.

The gloomy pageant of past and present evil profoundly troubles Ianthe's spirit. To reassure her that the passing scenes are only transitory and a prelude to inevitable redemption, Mab spends most of section VI vindicating the cycle of Necessity. However, "wild and miserable the world" is or has been, the eternal world itself contains

⁷Poems, p. 813.

the cure as well as the evil. Although unwittingly close to his own contradictory conception of Necessity, the orthodox, competing explanation of a "Merciful and avenging God" is repudiated as a "prototype of human misrule" (IV, 105). This projection of human fallibility exhibits all the vices of its creator: cruelty, hate, violence. In contrast, of course, Necessity penetrates our grim, sublunary world with its dispassionate promise of redemption.

That Shelley owed his necessarianism to Holbach and Godwin is an assumption generally agreed upon, although critics have disputed the extent of influence in each case. Neither of his predecessors, however, could have embraced Shelley's optimistic faith in a utopian future. Close reading of sections VIII and IX will show that Shelley's millenium is a materialistic one despite the device of a dream-vision to conceptualize it. We will return to this point following consideration of section VII, easily the most provocative in the poem.

"There is no God! (VII, 13) . . . "Is there a God!--ay, an almighty God" (VII, 84). Between these poles of Mab's denial on the one hand and Ahasuerus' bitter affirmation lies the distinction between Shelley's belief in a "pervading spirit co-eternal with the universe"⁸ (Necessity) and mankind's repressive god who demands resignation but inspires rebellion.

⁸Poems, p. 812.

Mab reviles all institutionalized religions as illusory sanctions man erects to evade responsibility for his own ignorance and for crimes against his fellows. But Ahasuerus' narration recalls a personal dimension that lies deeper than the overt facts of institutionalized domination through religion. He does not miss the chance, of course, to inveigh against the repression on earth of the rebellious but virtuous and the enslavement of the obedient but complacent. In his defiance he is a prototype of Prometheus, to whom he is invariably compared. Like Prometheus his existence is predicated on suffering, out of which he defines himself. But unlike the Titan, his rebellion is not tempered with love toward his persecutor. Moreover, like the Alastor Poet, he is committed to the underworld and to death; although again, like Prometheus, he does not die. He also detests the capricious doctrine of the elect as much as Mab (Shelley) detests the analogous authoritarian privileges of the aristocracy.

In assailing Christ, Ahasuerus most significantly resents Christ's transubstantiation following His crucifixion because this act renounces His mission to liberate men on earth and in the flesh:

I stood beside him: on the torturing cross
 No pain assailed His unterrestrial sense;
 And yet he groaned. Indignantly I summed
 The massacres and miseries which His name
 Had sanctioned in my country . . .

(VII, 174-178)

Instead of overthrowing repressive institutions, including religion, and establishing the rule of brotherhood and peace (agape) while taking man's guilt on himself, Christ renounces this expectation. In receiving Christ's curse of permanent life, Ahasuerus, in turn, takes up the rebellion that Christ laid down and with it, man's guilt. This curse keeps Ahasuerus in permanent rebellion, and though it frustrates his precious right to death, it is redemptive; for it enables him to express rather obliquely the life principle of a potentially expansive vision of love:

Yet peaceful, and serene, and self enshrined,
 Mocking my powerless Tyrant's horrible curse
 With stubborn and unalterable wish,
 Even as a giant oak, which Heaven's fierce flame
 Had scathed in the wilderness, to stand
 Yet peacefully and movelessly it braves
 The midnight conflict of the wintry storm,
 As in the sunlight's calm it spreads
 Its worn and withered arms on high
 To meet the guilt of a summer's noon.

(VII, 256-266)

Moving from the desolate past and present to the secrets of the future in sections VIII and IX we enter, with Mab and Ianthé, the full vision of earthly redemption that had been only glimpsed earlier. Man's expanded consciousness, freed of internal as well as external constraints, can reintegrate itself into nature. This transformation entails reformation of both man and nature. Symbolically, earth's environment, "No longer Hell," is permeated with celestial influence, indicating its regeneration, as "all its pulses beat / Symphonious to the planetary spheres"

(VII, 17-18). This fusion of the terrestrial with the celestial is a marked feature of Shelley's imagery in the final two sections: Mab opens section IX by exclaiming, "O Happy Earth! reality of Heaven."

Imperative in Shelley's thinking throughout the narrative and in the notes is the prerequisite to liberate men from material want and the surplus toil to secure their barest physical essentials of life. No longer must man's wants be "but scantily fulfilled" while he suffers "famine, cold, and toil" (VIII, 157-160). Therefore, the wastelands and deserts of earth bloom into abundance and "teem with countless rills and shady woods / Cornfields and pastures" (VIII, 74-75). This garden of fertility includes all the elements--air, earth, and water, plus fire which corresponds to man's reciprocating power of "consentaneous love." Shelley thus preserves the classical elements in their traditional associations to support his vision of the celestial-terrestrial union of man, heaven, and earth (VIII, 101 passim).

This vision eventually incorporates the fundamental transformations Marcuse describes as prerequisite to an aesthetic culture of beauty and freedom. For in his extrapolation from Freudian principles he derives a redemptive Eros contingent upon freedom from the repressive need to labor, and an order of abundance compatible with this freedom; the reconciliation of sensuousness and reason, which

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entails the sensualization of reason; and the conquest of time in so far as it undermines lasting gratification. As we have begun to see, all of these conditions prevail in Mab's redemptive vision. It need not be seen as a transcendentalized exposition but as a realizable objective in the material world. It presupposes, therefore, a total revolution in the way men perceive and feel.

Those old obstacles to man's liberation, the monarchy and its chief support in power, the church, are briefly recalled. Their ruin is rendered in settings of lovely desolation, remembered only for the corruption that sustained them: famine and penury; faith and slavery (IX, 92-113). And just as it has throughout the earlier sections of the poem, the sic transit theme is used to drive home the immorality of those past glories.

The "pure stream of feeling" (VII, 27) released through this future vision not only harmonizes man with his natural environment, as we observed; but it sharpens and purifies his emotions (VIII, 136 passim), purging them of evil passions. Furthermore, "Reason and passion cease to combat there" (VIII, 231). Shelley must have equated reason with the forms of institutionalized oppression in these final sections because he repeats the same sentiments reconciling reason and passion several times. The reconciliation of the liberated life of the emotions with their traditional oppressor issues in a new "morn of love."

Reason in its repressive forms, such as religion, is endowed instead with passion (IX, 38 passim). Even "virtue" (morality), "love" (Eros) and "pleasure" (gratification) are linked in "that sweet bondage which is Freedom's self" (IX, 76). Mab apparently regards love as limitless in its sensual possibilities. It is therefore not confined to sexuality but is closer to Freud's Eros, the life instinct, that, if unrestricted to sexuality through the imposition of institutionalized morality, would embrace "with sensation's softest tie / The kindred sympathies of human souls" (IX, 77-78). Sexuality, however, is central to the life instinct and when "unchecked by dull and selfish chastity," (IX, 84) it liberates the total person. Eventually, perfectly uninhibited love establishes sexual equality between man and woman (an ideal still in advance of its time). Free of alienating toil in a nature of plenty; free of repressive reason in a world of liberated sensuality; only one prerequisite to fulfilling Marcuse's outline for a redemptive aesthetic vision remains to be mentioned: the conquest of time and its corollary, the amelioration of death. Time as Mab discloses, flees before man's liberated will (IX, 23), and death becomes a mild necessity (IX, 57, passim). Death even implies a competing impulse with life, as we shall discuss momentarily.

The future fades, and Mab refocuses on the present and informs Ianthé, "my task is done" (IX, 140). She then

closes her oracular mission by briefly instructing Ianthe on "what action to take or avoid," fulfilling the final criterion of the oracular dream in Macrobius' definition. Her advice to "pursue / The gradual paths of an aspiring change" (IX, 148) is basically the optimistic gradualism inherent in her message of eventual redemption, aside from those occasional, apparent calls to violent liberation. Now, back in time, her message of forbearance reconciles Ianthe to the cycle of birth, life, and death, all of which "tend to perfect happiness" (IX, 151). Given the vision of eventual redemption, even death loses its fearful and forbidding aspect. It promises an entry to "happy regions of eternal hope. . . . The transient gulf dream of a starling sleep" and "no foe to Virtue" (IX, 162, 175, 176). We have now come full circle to the poem's opening lines: "How wonderful is death / Death and his brother sleep!" (I, 1-2) Death shares with Eros an expansive prospect that hints at release from pain and want and therefore a competing impulse of Eros, aside from its overtones of Platonic transcendence. Its presence foreshadows the Nirvana principle, mentioned earlier, that emerges more strongly in Shelley's later poetry. These competing impulses of Eros and death become more sharply defined in Shelley's next narrative poem, Alastor.

ALASTOR

From his first poem of major pretensions, Queen Mab, to his next sustained narrative, Alastor, Shelley had traversed the distance between a mechanical need to avoid the objective limitations of time and space by framing his entire vision in a dream to a dream-vision which is thematically and psychologically integrated into the narrative of the poem. The dream-vision of the Alastor Poet is a personal revelation that is both illuminating and obscure. The visionary maiden's "voice . . . like the voice of his own soul" opens for him the possibility, however illusory, of erotic love with a maiden who embodies symbolically all of his own poetic and philosophical aspirations. This creature does not conduct the Poet-dreamer to a larger ideological perspective, as Mab does Ianthe; she veils her ultimate meaning in ambiguity.

That the dream-vision in Alastor is pivotal to the poem's significance is not disputed by scholars; the import of the veiled maiden, however, remains enigmatic. She eludes definition because she is both 'destroyer' and 'preserver.' As the vision that the poet strives to repossess, she preserves him; as the vision that impels him to deny the world, she destroys him. She has been sent by "the

spirit of sweet human love" (203), we are informed, to punish and destroy the poet for having spurned the choicest gifts of the natural world. She arises, on the other hand, out of his own felt sense of incompleteness, according to the Preface: she therefore issues forth as an object of desire (Eros) in his dream. These contradictory conceptions do not, however, necessitate a resolution in favor of one alternative or the other, for they are not inconsistent in terms of the Life-Death ethos. Indeed, they are precisely consistent with the Freudian view of Eros and the death instinct as the two fundamental impulses of human nature, rooted, quite possibly in a common source: "Eros and the death instinct are now the two basic instincts. But it is of the greatest importance to notice that, in introducing the new conception, Freud is driven to emphasize time and again the common nature of the instincts prior to their differentiation."¹ Redemption in Alastor relies on the dynamics of conflict between the life and death instincts in the Poet's response to his dream-vision. His Eros preserves him only to define his death. For in affirming his imaginative vision (Eros), he also affirms the flaw in himself (Thanatos) and exacts the world's retribution in acting upon his vision. This contradiction informs the balance of the poem following the Poet's awakening.

¹Marcuse, Eros and Civilization, p. 22.

To understand the order of feelings and events that motivate the dream-vision, it is helpful to review their movement up to the Poet's descent into his dream. For although the dream itself and the Poet's response to it determine the subsequent thematic and narrative development of the poem, the dream is also the culminating experience toward which the preceding segment builds. This segment of the poem begins with Shelley's invocation, followed by his account of the poet's youth: his communion with nature, his study of philosophy, and his pilgrimage to the cities of the ancient world. In his invocation Shelley recalls how he had longed to fathom the secrets of Nature's "obstinate questionings / Of thee and thine" (26-27). He concludes that "though ne'er yet / Thou hast unveiled they inmost sanctuary / Enough from incommunicable dream" (37-39), he feels assured of the inspiration that will reintegrate his spirit into the ongoing processes of Nature. Unlike the Poet of his narrative, Shelley is confident of his eventual redemption. Shelley's expressed need for communication and revelation which seems veiled in a realm of dream beyond his reception thematically foreshadows the poet's own dream-vision. A seeker himself, Shelley casts himself in the role of a lyre: solitary, responsive, waiting for the impulses of nature from the air, the forests, and the sea.

Following his sixteen line flashback summary of the young poet's entire progress (50-66) Shelley opens the

narrative proper at line 67 when he describes his protagonist as a visionary and a dreamer: "By solem vision and bright silver dream / His infancy was nurtured" (67-68). As a consequence of these early influences, the Poet, like Shelley, harbors a pagan desire to identify with the innermost forces of nature. And in both cases, the elemental imagery of earth, air and water mark the extent of their temporal rapport with nature. Shelley, the narrator, addresses this tripartite association in the poem's opening line: "Earth ocean, air, beloved brotherhood." But although it is an "unfathomable world" for Shelley, he feels confident of its future penetrability.

Prior to his dream-vision the Poet attempts to bridge the schism between self and nature in order to re-establish the identity between them. He pursues "nature's most secret steps" (81) but only "like her shadow" (82) over the landscape of this earthly world. However far "his wandering step / Obedient to high thoughts" (107-108) leads, he chafes against the restraints of his earthly reality. He pores over "memories / Of the world's youth . . . (121-122) till meaning on his vacant mind / Flashed like strong inspiration and he saw / The thrilling secrets of the birth of time" (126-128). But it is a temporally limited meaning. In the Preface Shelley explains the psychology of his Poet. His perceptions encompass only the "external world" and merely point toward "its infinite and unmeasured capacities."

But these "objects cease to suffice. "His mind is at length suddenly awakened and thirsts for intercourse with an intelligence similar to itself."² But even the possibility of love is circumscribed within the temporal world. The Arab maiden who waits on and dotes on him remains inside this world and outside his world of "innocent dreams." She inhabits the sublunary world of cold, pale moonlight that fades before the celestial promise in the "red morn" that precedes his dream.

As he makes his way to the secluded setting with its cavern and rivulet (characteristic of traditional dream openings as well as Shelley's dream imagery), there hovers about him an anticipation of some profound and impending revelation--something undisclosed, yet known, nevertheless. The vision that emerges is a "dream of hope that never yet / Had flushed his cheek" (150-151) but also of "thoughts most dear to him" (160). These contradictory tendencies heighten the maiden's enigmatic appeal.³ In the dream-vision her "voice of his own soul" (153) harmonizes with his inmost senses and infuses his high thoughts of knowledge, truth, virtue, and liberty with her sensual presence.

²Poems, p. 14.

³In Stahl's Macrobius' Commentary the "enigmatic dream" is defined as "one that conceals with strange shape and veils with ambiguity the true meaning of the information being offered, p. 90. This definition is highly suggestive when read against the poet's dream in Alastor, particularly Macrobius' use of the verb, "veils."

But however profound a revelation it is, her appearance remains a mystery. She plays a "strange symphony" and tells an "ineffable tale." Her brightly lit form itself is veiled as he discovers upon turning to view her.

Shelley's imagery then becomes provocatively involved at line 187, the penultimate moment of his vision, when both the maiden and the poet seem to dissolve in a union symbolic of sexual and spiritual gratification and release. At the same moment the black veil of night replaces the veil of light and woven wind, and the poet is propelled back into the waking world.

Critics have traditionally displaced the erotic impulse of the dream-maiden in transcendently spiritual and intellectual directions. More recently, however, a few have gone to considerable lengths to desanctify this Platonistic purism in favor of a truer recognition of the erotic content in Shelley's women and in his poetry.⁴ But aside from arguing for the reality of this erotic dimension as Shelley's clear intention, they have scarcely probed beneath the human physical basis to its subliminal possibilities. Indeed, in their zeal to puncture Shelley's beautiful idealisms, they tend to overemphasize the maiden's physicality. Not only does the Poet's psychical counterpart in Alastor "unite[s] all of wonderful or wise or

⁴Edward E. Bostetter's Romantic Ventriloquists (Seattle: University of Washington, 1963), and Gerald Enscoe's Eros and the Romantics (The Hague: Mouton, 1967) are two notable efforts.

beautiful which the poet, the philosopher, or the lover could depicture,"⁵ but her sensuous presence weaves itself through the imaginative and ideological content of the dream in a promise of liberation through expanded Eros. This Eros goes beyond sexuality and embraces all levels of the aesthetic response--senses, intellect, and imagination.

As the driving force that originates in Eros, the dream maiden, we observed earlier, expresses the life instinct which preserves the poet. She is also his flaw, however; for in conflict with the objective world she is his death instinct. As Marcuse explains,

The death instinct, is destructiveness not for its own sake, but for the relief of tension. The descent toward death is an unconscious flight from pain and want. It is expression of the eternal struggle against suffering and repression.⁶

The poet's 'descent toward death' begins at the point that the maiden and the poet's dream dissolve together. Marcuse's discussion of the Nirvana principle is suggestive of the Alastor poet's attempt to redeem the dream:

The primacy of the Nirvana principle, the terrifying convergence of pleasure and death, is dissolved as soon as it is established. No matter how universal the regressive inertia of organic life, the instincts strive to attain their objective in fundamentally different modes. The difference is tantamount to that of sustaining and destroying life. Out of the common nature of instinctual life

⁵Poems, p. 14.

⁶Marcuse, Eros and Civilization, p. 27.

develop two antagonistic instincts. The life instincts (Eros) gain ascendance over the death instincts. They continuously counteract and delay the 'descent toward death.'⁷

"Roused by the shock" of being dispossessed of the dream-maiden the Poet awakens to despair. Around him the scene reflects his frame of mind. Instead of the harmonizing imagery of woven breezes and streams and the permeating fire of the maiden's brilliantly illuminated presence, the scene is desolate in the pale, blue light of the moon. The bleak, sublunary world, so different from "The lines of heaven that canopied his bower / Of yesternight" (197-198), evokes the central question of how he can regain this memory of lost gratification: "Does the dark gate of death conduct to thy mysterious paradise / O sleep?" (211-213). That is, can Thanatos reunite him with Eros? But this question cannot be answered this side of the grave. The Poet therefore hesitates in his precarious anxiety between "doubt" and "love" as he undertakes his quest to recover his vision.

Under the impact of his dream, the poet traces his redemption in a liebestod that preserves as it destroys him. The life and the death instincts derive from a common source and the remainder of the poem symbolizes the tension between and convergence of these rival components. The natural imagery so expressive of the poet's struggle with reality therefore also reflects his frame of mind in its

⁷Marcuse, Eros and Civilization, p. 24.

trajectory toward the repose of love in death. Within the aesthetic dimension, as Marcuse has shown, the elusive dichotomy of Eros and Thanatos is reconciled by the myth of Narcissus. It is however, a Narcissus whose Eros is expansive and who promises "the redemption of pleasure, the halt of time, the absorption of death; silence, sleep, night paradise--The Nirvana principle not as death but as life."⁸ This conception of Narcissus diverges significantly from the traditional view of Narcissus as the ego-centric and auto-erotic figure who withdraws into death.

In Marcuse's words:

The love of Narcissus is answered by the echo of nature. To be sure, Narcissus appears as the antagonist of Eros: he spurns love that unites with other human beings, and for that he is punished by Eros. . . . But it is not coldness, asceticism, and self-love that color the images of Narcissus that are preserved in art and literature. His silence is not that of dead rigidity; and when he is contemptuous of the love of hunters and nymphs he rejects one Eros for another. He lives by an Eros of his own, and he does not love himself. (He does not know that the image he admires is his own.) If his erotic attitude is akin to death and brings death, then rest and sleep and death are not painfully separated and distinguished: the Nirvana principle rules throughout all these stages.⁹

This conception is also that of Shelley's poem and his Preface, in spite of Shelley's own reference to the "Poet's self-centered seclusion." The remainder of Shelley's Preface contradicts the assumption that the Poet's seclusion is ultimately self-centered in design, for Shelley's

⁸Marcuse, Eros and Civilization, p. 149.

⁹Marcuse, Eros and Civilization, pp. 151-152.

Poet really 'rejects on Eros for another.' Marcuse's definition of the Nirvana principle matches the culminate description of the Poet's psychology in the Preface: "Among those who attempt to exist without human sympathy, the pure and tender hearted perish, through the intensity and passion of their search after its communities [my emphasis], when the vacancy of their spirit suddenly makes itself felt."¹⁰ Hoffman, who has applied the Narcissus myth to the Poet in Alastor, does not interpret "the love of self and the desire for death" as the antipodes of a single principle. "His [Shelley's] immediate concern has two objectives: the poet's determination to die, as the remaining means of recapturing his vision, and his inability to find any longer, lasting satisfaction in nature."¹¹ This is true enough, as far as it goes. But the expansive thrust of Eros conflicts, of course, with the demand of the death instinct which pervades the remainder of the poem. The segment beginning at line 223 expresses this tension in its provocative and equivocal imagery. The daylight and open sky that allow the poet pause to "keep mute, conference / With his still soul" (224-225), call into association feelings of limitless aspiration and repose. By contrast, the erotic impulse that seems to issue forth at night "like the fierce fiend of a distempered dream"

¹⁰ Poems, p. 15.

¹¹ Harold Leroy Hoffman, An Odyssey of the Soul (New York: Columbia University Press, 1933), pp. 44-45.

(225) shakes him out of his rest; for to allow him to surrender to this darkened scene with its restful promise of death is antithetical to Eros. Paradoxically, however, the same impulse leads "him forth / Into the darkness" (226-227).

Shelley then elaborates on this ambiguity with the simile of the eagle and serpent locked in combat. All the constrictive and poisonous powers of the serpent are wrapped around the eagle, striving to subdue its otherwise limitless possibilities of flight, and precipitating it downward "Through night and day, tempest, and calm, and cloud" (230). The struggle, in other words, is incessant, just like the expansive flight of love, its wings pinioned, fighting its descent into death. Simultaneously, like the erotic command of the poison that spurs its "blind flight / O'er the wide aery wilderness," Eros draws death along under its spell. It might prove instructive to remind ourselves again at this point how uncertain the convergence and divergence of these two instincts are in Marcuse's interpretation of Freudian theory:

Does Eros, in spite of all the evidence, in the last analysis work in the service of the death instinct, and is life really only one long "detour to death?" But the evidence is strong enough and the detour is long enough to warrant the opposite assumption. Eros is defined as the great unifying force that preserves all life. The ultimate relation between Eros and Thanatos remains obscure.¹²

¹²Marcuse, Eros and Civilization, pp. 25-27.

So when Shelley compares the Poet "thus driven by the bright shadow of that lovely dream" (232-233) with the preceding images of the "fierce fiend," "eagle" and "serpent," he is doing more than merely evoking the memory of the visionary maiden. Her identity is that of Eros, expansive in its imaginative incorporation of knowledge, truth, and virtue. But in addition, it is the sensual Eros with all its compulsive and dangerous demands that impress death into its service. This is evident from the next several lines. The desolate, cold glare of the moon that dogs the Poet's tortuous steps "through tangled swamps and steep precipitous dells" (235) reminds us again of his anxious vacancy upon awaking from his dream. Here the tangled swamps and precipitous dells reflect his anxiety. By the time "Red morning dawns upon his flight" his cheek is already etched with death (235-239). The poem is filled with this thematic movement of erotic conflict with death in the larger narrative scheme of eventual redemption.

The dynamics of converging and diverging impulses is mirrored in the Poet's journey as his inner conflict. Dragging his wasted frame cross the vast, arid distances and lost civilizations in search of the visionary maiden, he reaches that point on "the lone Chorasmian shore" (272) where he pauses before embarking on his strange journey by water. This section between his pause and his departure (272-311) marks the Poet's own resolution to "meet lone Death on the drear ocean's waste" (305). Basically his

motivation is "a strong impulse" (274), "a restless impulse" (304) hidden from him, perhaps in "silent death." The beautiful, voyaging swan that lifts its flight beyond his gaze to return to its mate exacerbates the Poet's own sense of dispossession and reminds him that he is an outcast in nature. The unresponsive air, earth, and heaven (288-290) reveal how disjointed his imaginative vision is from its terrestrial and celestial environs. Unlike the swan whose vision of love lifts it heavenward, the Poet's Eros is complicated by the consciousness of death. In contrast to the bird's strong flight, the frail shallop that is to convey the Poet suggests how precarious his psychic journey is and how uncertain his goal promises to be. Nevertheless, under a fair sea and sky but in a threatened spirit (308-310), the Poet embarks.

As he departs on his turbulent journey a key passage that further develops the Nirvana theme occurs in the Poet's first ecstatic projection of the past into the future of his imagination: "'Vision and Love!' / The Poet cried aloud, 'I have beheld / The path of thy departure. Sleep and death / Shall not divide us long!'" (306-309). He thus confirms irrevocably that his vision of love and death are the same goal.

Then in a passage distinctive for its mixture of enormous stress and assuaging calm (307-420), the boat's continuing journey seems to merge the deep of the "unfathomable stream" with the "azure sky." And as it strenuously

mounts on the "ascending stream" the imagery seems to express both the expansive Eros and embracing repose of death:

Seized by the sway of the ascending stream,
With dizzy swiftness, round, and round, and round,
Ridge after ridge the straining boat arose,
Till on the verge of the extremest curve,
Where, through an opening of the rocky bank,
The waters overflow, and a smooth spot
Of glassy quiet mid those battling tides
Is left, the boat paused shuddering.

(387-394)

At this point, the "strong impulse" hanging in his mind like the powerfully illuminating "lightning in a cloud . . . ere the floods / Of night close over it" (417-420) recalls the brightly lit figure of the dream-maiden before night swallowed her up. But here the presence of death is more emphatic.

Beginning at line 420, as Hildebrand proposes, the Poet is probably afoot.¹³ And, as he is "led / By love or dream or god, or mightier Death," (427-428) the unity among the constituents of that strong impulse that drives him on emerges more explicitly. Only the possibility of "god" is new, and its inclusion probably connotes necessity's design. More likely, in light of Shelley's strong hatred of religion, its inclusion was an oversight. Over-riding in its influence at this point, Death impels the Poet to seek out his sepulchre in the forest's dark recesses. Within this dense woodland the trees and other plant life weave

¹³William H. Hildebrand, A Study of Alastor (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1954), p. 51.

an atmosphere of interlocking relationships that express affection, and are, as Hill observes, "spatial and symbiotic."¹⁴ These numerous images, merging to an intense degree, deepen the sensual union of Eros and the longing gloom of the grave. Yet from the "expanding" and "embracing" arms of the giant oak to the spreading wings of some "gorgeous insect" (431-468), the entire passage, penetrated here and there by the noonday sun, is also expansive in its mysterious promise.

Perhaps no passage is more striking for its gothic opposition of light and dark figures than those the Poet glimpses reflected in the fountain (469-592). The poet sees two images. Although they seem to be separate entities, they mirror not only his own countenance but also his innermost frame of mind, "as the human heart / Gazing in dreams over the gloomy grave / Sees its own treacherous likeness there" (472-474). Here the classical myth of Narcissus is most explicit. The Poet again obliquely glimpses the prospect of a "gloomy grave." The dark spirit beside him "clothed in no bright roles / Of shadowy silver or enshrining light" (479-480) momentarily incarnates this prospect. Counterbalancing this deathly presence, to be sure, are the "two starry eyes" beckoning him with their "serene and azure smiles." Both these appeals originate from the same fountain.

¹⁴James L. Hill, "Shelley's Alastor and Epipsychidion: The Implication of the Narrative Climax," an unpublished paper, p. 5.

The much more animated images of the next 23 lines (432-514), concentrate on the rivulet that "images my [the Poet's] life" (505) and therefore "Have each their type in [him]" (508). Water imagery throughout, as critics have usually noticed, reflects the course of the poet's inner search. This explicit recognition combined with the wanton and brightly illumined images along the stream's course promise release into a "measureless ocean." And, ever lingering, is Eros' counterpart, perhaps in some "oozy cavern." This converging and diverging movement in conjunction with the contrasting images of the celestial and terrestrial worlds and their interweaving effects of light and darkness pervades the remainder of the Poet's journey on foot, up to line 601.

Beginning at line 602 is a passage that might appropriately be designated "storm of death" (609). Here, all celestial influences are blotted out, "not a star shone," and the low-hanging moon converges with the ocean preliminary to ravaging scenes of war and death. Shelley's description trenches on the declamatory in these lines, digressing for the moment from his subjective and symbolic evocations of death to scenes explicit of death:

O, storm of death.
Whose sightless speed divides this sullen night:
And thou, colossal Skeleton, that, still
Guiding its irresistible career
In thy devastating omnipotence,
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. A rare and regal prey
 He hath prepared, prowling around the world;
 Glutted with which thou mayst repose, and men
 Go to their graves like flowers or creeping worms,
 Nor ever more offer at thy dark shrine
 The unheeded tribute of a broken heart.

(609-624)

At this suspenseful point, these echoes from Queen Mab seem almost totally obtrusive. Thematically, the passage is consistent with the death motif, but its horrendous atmosphere is totally out of tune with the otherwise hushed quality of the poet's impending death.

When death grips the Poet "on the threshold of the green recess" (625), he is ready. "Hope and despair / The torturer, slept," and free him finally of his sweeping anxiety. Counterpointed against this release, "the two lessening points of light" (654), his final glimpse of the vision fades, and the Poet expires. Gone is the Eros of light and swift movement, time and expansiveness. In its stead is a heaven "Utterly black, . . . An image, silent cold, and motionless" (660-661). Now but a memory to Shelley and his reader the Poet's vision is

. . . 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,
 (666-671)

Viewed from our own retrospect of the Poet's life, as we have argued, his vision preserved as it destroyed him. While he pursued his vision of beauty and truth in

the world it illuminated his being. But simultaneously, its intensity led him, as we have seen, to embrace that counterpart of Eros, his death instinct, Thanatos. This irony is tragic because it transforms his special vision into a flaw. Whatever redemption he wins is sealed in the grave with him.

Shelley drives home this realistic conclusion most explicitly in his epitaph for the Poet, which rules out any optimistic afterthought--either moral or artistic--from which the living might draw comfort:

Art and eloquence,
And all the shows o' the world are frail and vain
To weep a loss that turns their light to shade.
(710-712)

They are left only "pale despair and cold tranquility" (718). Shelley realizes more forthrightly than most of his readers have cared to admit that the aesthetic dimension cannot validate or alter reality.

PROMETHEUS UNBOUND

The conflict between Prometheus and his self-projected antagonist, Jupiter, evokes yet another vision of the struggle of Life against Death. Enacted entirely within the mind of Prometheus, the drama simultaneously depicts mankind's struggle to rid itself of civilization's repression and the individual's psychic struggle against his internalized repression. The power to press this struggle issues from the imagination. Shelley believed that the imagination is the means through which man reshapes and regenerates himself. The mythical hero who stole fire (the symbol of creative power) from the gods and gave it to mankind, Prometheus embodies the kind of creative power Shelley has in mind when he describes him as "the type of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature."¹ Moreover, imagination is the informing power of a perfected moral and intellectual nature because, as Shelley writes in his Defense, "The great instrument of moral good is the imagination."² And because Shelley premises this argument on Eros, "The great secret of morals is love," we see that for Shelley, as for Freud, the

¹Poems, p. 205.

²Clark, Shelley's Prose, p. 283.

imagination derives its strength from Eros.³ It is a redemptive Eros personified in those creative projections of Prometheus' psyche--Asia, Panthea, and Ione.

This Eros generates its dynamic through the activating power of Panthea's dreams; out of these dreams evolves the conflict that culminates in Jupiter's downfall and Prometheus' redemption. In Act II Panthea's remembered dream of Prometheus' love for Asia gives way to her unremembered dream of Asia's love for him. The latter dream, in turn, determines the quest of Asia and Panthea to Demogorgon's cave. The denouement of this Journey is the release of Prometheus and the realization of his redemptive vision.

Jupiter, who is himself endowed with wisdom by Prometheus and is therefore a derivative of the life-instinct (Eros), symbolizes the complementary death instinct which coalesces into institutionalized domination and exploitation of men's minds. But Prometheus' redemptive vision of love finally negates Jupiter's repressive order of self-destructive relationships by revolutionizing men's feelings in the direction of non-repressive and expanded erotic relationships.

Jupiter is realized as internalized repression, but he also grows out of Eros' need to preserve itself. At first Prometheus strives to preserve his identity in a

³Clark, Shelley's Prose, p. 282.

head-on struggle, thus simultaneously repressing Eros as he creates civilization. Then, through the necessity to erect, step-by-step, a new, life-affirming sensibility in opposition to Thanatos that will lead eventually to an expansive universe rooted in Eros, he renounces his curse and thereby activates the quest into the unconscious by way of Panthea's dream-visions. This quest that emerges from Necessity, symbolized in Demogorgon, devises its own direction in transforming Prometheus' self-destructive psyche into a new sensibility couched in the Narcissistic and Orphic world of sensuous play, beauty, and contemplation.

As this ethos evolves out of the Life-Death struggle in Prometheus Unbound it reveals, in its course, an emergent, revolutionary sensibility that refuses to oppose repression aggressively. To react aggressively toward Jupiter by throwing up another Jupiter to oppose him, as Shelley fully realizes, only reenforces the repressive organization of civilization and the internalized repression of the mind. Instead, his lyric phantasy extricates itself from this recurring cycle of repression through an ultimate commitment to Eros. And through Panthea's dream-visions Eros discloses the memory of its promise to deny the descent toward death and affirm life.

The two dreams which Panthea imparts to Asia are of central dramatic and allegorical significance in that they are the only link between Prometheus and his divine consort

prior to his release. They are the fulcrum on which the redemptive Eros pivots. Panthea's first recollection upon her reunion with Asia at the opening of Act II symbolically recalls Prometheus' renunciation of hatred: "his pale, wound worn limbs / Fell from Prometheus" (II, i, 62-63). This image from Panthea's remembered dream reflects his retraction of hatred toward Jupiter early in Act I, when Prometheus recants, "Disdain! Ah No! I pity thee" (I, i, 53). But Prometheus' retracted curse does not, contrary to what most critics maintain, signify his regeneration. Prometheus' conversion does not occur at this point, because as Woodman correctly insists, "the process of Prometheus' regeneration is not complete until the mythological vision of the universe and man comes into focus in the second Act."⁴

This psychic growth, however, involves more than the inevitably Platonic metaphysics that Woodman and most critics ascribe to it. The sister nymphs are not merely children of Prometheus' unfulfilled need. Projections of Prometheus' mind, they have just as much need to identify with him as he has to appropriate them. To interpret them as merely auto-erotic extensions of Prometheus' psyche limits their potential Eros. Their need is loaded with Narcissistic and sensual content and it is limitless in its

⁴Ross Greig Woodman, The Apocalyptic Vision in the Poetry of Shelley (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964), p. 109.

redemptive promise. But critics ignore the Narcissism and sensuality of these three figures, particularly Ione and Panthea, in favor of allegorized and Platonized interpretations that evade their all but palpable erotic content. The present task, in part, is to desubliminate this repressed content; for to restore the poem's sensual connotations frees the poetic experience somewhat from the rational formalism of purely metaphysical interpretation.

Relating her first dream, Panthea recounts how Prometheus' presence had enwrapped her earlier in his promise of live for Asia: "I could hear / His voice, whose accents linger ere they die / Like footsteps of weak melody: they [Asia's] name / Among the many sounds alone I heard / Of what might be articulate" (II, i, 87-91). While this union of Prometheus with Panthea is rendered through the usual related celestial and elemental associations of sun and fire typical of that highest activity of the Shelleyan mind, the creative power of love, it also incorporates erotic overtones, reflecting man's earthly condition, in addition to the divinity of imaginative power:

I lifted them: the overpowering light
 Of that immortal shape was shadowed o'er
 By love; which, from his soft and flowing limbs,
 And passion-parted lips, and keen, faint eyes,
 Streamed forth like vaporous fire; and atmosphere
 Which wrapped me in its all-dissolving power,
 As the warm aether of the morning sun
 Wraps ere it drinks some cloud of wandering dew,
 (II, i, 71-78)

As the conveyer of Prometheus' love for Asia, Panthea herself embodies the dream of the yet-to-be fulfilled love of Prometheus for Asia. She personifies the dream and is inseparable from its content. Prometheus' eventual redemption rests upon its successful transference to the innermost being of Asia.

Their sister nymph, Ione, however, reveals a dimension of Eros that is regressive. Buried in Panthea's arms, she questions love's direction, "I always knew what I desired before / Nor ever found delight to wish in vain. / But now I cannot tell thee what I seek" (II, i, 95-97). Here she seems to signify Eros' aim-inhibited form, scarcely aware of its repressed sensuality. By contrast with Panthea's forward-looking vision, Ione's backward glancing personality expresses that elemental regression compulsion inherent in the life instinct's desire for release from tension. Through her intense and deep rapport with Panthea, Ione shares the enveloping visitation that vitalizes Panthea, but she is unaware that Prometheus instills this life impulse in them both:

But now I cannot tell thee what I seek;
 I know not, something sweet, since it is sweet
 Even to desire; it is thy sport, false sister;
 Thou hast discovered some enchantment old,
 Whose spells have stolen my spirit as I slept
 And mingled it with thine: for when just now
 We kissed, I felt within thy parted lips
 The sweet air that sustained me, and the warmth
 Of the life blood, for loss of which I faint,
 Quivered between our entwining arms.

(II, i, 97-106)

The spells and enchantments that mingle their spirits in this passage also evoke the strongly sensual content of their kiss and intertwining arms. For the sweet air "within Panthea's parted lips" sustains not only Ione's spirit but also the warm "life blood" that quickens both their frames and links them in a single, erotic extension of Prometheus' love.

If Panthea directs the sublimated Eros which Ione cannot discern, Panthea, in turn, is no less dependent upon Ione for her own existence, as she recounts earlier to Asia:

. . . erewhile I slept
Under the glaucous caverns of old Ocean
Within dim bowers of green and purple mass,
Our young Ione's soft and milky arms
Locked then, as now, behind my dark moist hair,
While my shut eyes and cheeks were pressed within
The folded depth of her life breathing bosom
(II, i, 43-49)

Ione's "life breathing bosom" infuses Panthea with a more explicitly sensual impulse than the latter's spiritualized embrace imparts to her. As a consequence, Ione is more concretely realized than Panthea; whereas Panthea goes on immediately to declare, "I am made the wind" (II, i, 50), with all the urgency that metaphor usually conveys as a spiritually informing and transmitting medium in Shelley's poetry.

As the wind, therefore, Panthea cannot pause to answer Ione's question about the power of love that sustains them both. Instead, she hastens to Asia while "the Eastern

Star grew pale" (II, i, 107). This star is Venus, the star closely associated with Asia throughout the poem. Asia describes it in the widening morn prior to Panthea's appearance at the opening of Act II, scene i, and its presence is apparent in Act II, scene ii as Asia and Panthea follow the chanting voice to "the mighty portal" of Demogorgon's cave. As they make their way through the deep forests, intermingled with rocks and caverns, all of the usual sources of elemental guidance--sun, moon, rain, wind--are blotted out. Only "Some star of many a one" (II, ii, 14) can pierce this deeply interwoven gloom to guide them. Their guiding light of mutual desire, the star, connotes their ultimate union in Eros.⁵

Prometheus' strenuous effort to fulfill his love for Asia is everywhere apparent in the initial exchange between Panthea and Asia. Panthea is heavy-winged "with the delight of a remembered dream" (II, i, 35). Moreover, Asia cannot "feel" her spoken account of the dream because the air is an inadequate medium; so she requests to read it directly in Panthea's eyes, where Prometheus had implanted

⁵The image of the lone star (which is always Venus) figures prominently in Shelley's poetry. It symbolizes and guides the loftiest aspirations. When it is blotted out in *Alastor*, "not a star shone," it presages the Poet's imminent death. The Morning Star of the maiden's dream in *The Revolt of Islam*, Canto I, involves a complex sensual appeal and guiding impulse to revolutionary action. The star beckoning from the abode of the eternal in *Adonais* promises an Eros beyond death in Shelley's most well known use of the star.

it. Panthea's words "are as the Air," to Asia, not like the Promethean fire of imagination which, "enwrapped [Panthea] in its all dissolving power" (II, i, 176). Because they are fired by the creative light of Prometheus' imagination, Panthea's starlike eyes are a much surer medium than words for Asia to decipher the dream. But even as Asia peers into the deeply inwoven depths of Panthea's eyes she can only glimpse Prometheus' shadowy form veiled in his own smiles. Then, just as quickly as it is glimpsed, his shadowy form disappears. A rude shape interposes itself between Asia and her dream: "its regard / Is wild and quick, yet tis a thing of air" (II, i, 129). While threatening in its aspect, suggestive perhaps of Jupiter, the destroyer, at the same time the golden dew that gleams through its gray robe and reflects its stars, leads into Panthea's other dream.

When Prometheus withdraws his curse on Jupiter in Act I and pitches his struggle onto the plane of love, his identity begins to foreshadow the Narcissistic-Orphic world that emerges in Act IV. This renunciation of aggression is symbolized in Panthea's first dream; as his limbs fall from him, Prometheus becomes an image of joy and fulfillment. Panthea recounts how his form then glowed radiantly "and his voice fell / Like music which makes giddy the dim brain" (II, i, 65-66). Marcuse distinguishes the Prometheus of classical tradition as the dominant archetypal hero of

Western literature because he symbolizes the repression mankind suffers to create civilization. But he adds,

Orpheus and Narcissus (like Dionysus to whom they are akin: the antagonist of the god who sanctions the logic of domination, the realm of reason) stand for a very different reality. They have not become the culture-heroes of the Western world: theirs is the image of joy and fulfillment; the voice which does not command but sings; the question which offers and receives; the deed which is peace and ends the labor of conquest; the liberation from time which unites man with god, man with nature.⁶

To be precise, beyond the Prometheus-Jupiter struggle an aura of Orphic-Narcissism hovers about Shelley's Prometheus.

Unlike the traditional Prometheus, following his renunciation of hatred, Shelley's Prometheus no longer endures perpetual toil and pain to create civilization. Implied in Prometheus' transformation is the knowledge that civilizations harden around their creator and, in turn, oppress them--the way Jupiter, and all he stands for, oppresses Prometheus. On the psychical plane, the internalized repression embodied in his hatred for Jupiter early in the play is displaced by Love. In addition to his emerging mode of being that substitutes Eros for repression and death, the various personifications--Asia, Panthea, Ione--foreshadow Prometheus' Narcissism. They do not center on him, however, in a narrowly auto-erotic sense. They expand his vision of love and link it to a timeless realm beyond death, which is eternal life. This feeling is the

⁶Marcuse, Eros and Civilization, pp. 156-157.

primary Narcissism which Freud described as a "limitless extension and oneness with the universe."⁷ But in addition to such decidedly Narcissistic content, Prometheus, in Shelley's conception, becomes a type of Orpheus, or the poet as liberator and creator. Marcuse describes Orpheus as the hero who

establishes a higher order in the world--an order without repression. In his person, art and culture are eternally combined. He is the poet of redemption, the god who brings peace and salvation by pacifying man and nature, not through force, but through song.⁸

In anticipation of this redemptive affirmation Asia and Panthea pursue the unremembered dream into the unconscious depths of Prometheus' mind--Demogorgon's cave. Like every other element in the poem, Demogorgon's cave belongs to the topography of Prometheus' psyche. And like caves everywhere else in Shelley's poetry, his cave denotes the deepest recesses of mind. Moreover, its location demands a downward quest.⁹ Only the embodiment of Eros, Panthea and principally Asia, can penetrate these netherregions. Lingered about the Echoes, urging Asia and Panthea to "follow," the dream seems to promise a revelation loaded with deep import. The lyrical evocations from

⁷Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents, p. 14.

⁸Marcuse, Eros and Civilization, pp. 154-155.

⁹Describing the direction of the Romantic quest, Frye states, "In Romanticism the main direction of the quest of identity tends increasingly to be downward and inward, toward a hidden basis or ground of identity between man and nature. p. 33.

these ethereal voices at first describe the caverned recesses filled with a dreamy atmosphere of "darkness deep" and "odour breathing sleep." Then, in the most explicit insight into the significance of Asia's mission up to that point, the Echoes drift nearer, chanting:

In the world unknown
Sleeps a voice unspoken;
By thy step alone
Can its rest be broken;
Child of Ocean!
(II, i, 190-194)

Asia's goal, according to these lines is plainly redemptive, and it awaits her informing presence.

Beyond merely describing the subliminal "gloom divine" that leads to the entrance of Demogorgon's cave, the Spirits and Fauns of Scene ii, who inject their running commentary on the progress of Asia and Panthea, forshadow the effects implicit in Prometheus' release. This realm which allows neither "sun, nor moon, nor wind, nor rain," (II, ii, 5) is nevertheless penetrable by the celestial influence of "some star, of many a one" (II, ii, 14). This isolated star as was suggested earlier, recurs as a reminder of the unifying power of Love symbolized in Venus. Combined with the imagery of fire associated with the creative imagination, music penetrates its voluptuous recesses as well, suggestive of the Orphic underworld of liberation and creative power:

There those enchanted eddies play
 Of echoes, music-tongued, which draw,
 By Demogorgon's mighty law,
 All spirits on that secret way;
 (II, ii, 41-45)

This order of nonrepressive sensuality, presided over by Demogorgon, is identified with Prometheus' release and his vision that will "make the earth / One brotherhood" (II, ii, 94-95).

Atop the pinnacle overlooking "the mighty portal" to Demogorgon's cave, Panthea and Asia pause to reflect on the possible meaning that issues from below them. Symbolically, this promontory offers a lofty overview of the depths of the unconscious world into which they are about to descend. For Panthea, the "oracular vapor" that arises from it is that "maddening wine of life" that intoxicates youth with its promises of "truth, virtue, love, genius, or joy" (II, iii, 6). Its effect is contagious and therefore threatens the world's ruling powers because it transforms youth into "Maenads," whose world centers on the pleasure principle of Eros. The mood of these lines is reminiscent of that revolutionary storm impending in "the bright hair uplifted from the head / Of some fierce Maenad" in the "Ode to the West Wind."

The Song of Spirits which impels Panthea and Asia downward to Demogorgon's cave leads to a dream world beyond sleep "through the cloudy strife / Of death and of Life" (II, iii, 57-58). This dream world in which life is pitted

against death in the most fundamental dynamic of emotions-- "Death, despair, love, sorrow" (II, iii, 69)--explicitly reminds us again of the psychic process of the Life-Death struggle. At its primal source, hidden beyond the "radiance of Heaven" and "the gloom of Earth, . . . there is one pervading, One alone," (II, iii, 79): Demogorgon's remote, primal power which contains within it the potential primacy of either Eros or Thanatos. Panthea and Asia, who symbolize the former, follow the repeated imperative, "Down, Down!" till they reach Demogorgon's cave in the opening of Scene iv.

The dialogue between Asia and Demogorgon in this scene recreates the historical dynamics of the conflict between Prometheus and Jupiter more fully than any other passage and forshadow the inevitable, redemptive Eros of Prometheus' vision. The scene opens with Asia's queries on the origins of the world, and on the psychic origins of man. Demogorgon's automatic response of "God" to all her questions resounds with mechanical orthodoxy. For in the conventional world, an "almighty" but "merciful" god is the creator of "thought, passion, reason, will / Imagination" (II, iv, 10-11). The illusion of a God fills man's need to explain his alienation from nature. Man's reliance upon a projected authority figure, God, hides from man his own creative capacity for overcoming his alienation through a correct understanding of the laws of Necessity. Demogorgon

cannot admit this truth because he represents the present stage in Man's and in Prometheus' development, still under the domination of Jupiter. But Asia, as the countervailing tendency to the present repression, already knows this. When she asks, "who made terror, madness, crime, remorse" which lead men "toward the pit of death" (II, iv, 19-23) Demogorgon can only intone evasively, "He reigns" (II, iv, 28).

Demogorgon cannot articulate Jupiter's identity or that of his possible master because he does not know it consciously. He himself personifies the unconscious and is therefore undiscernible to the conscious mind, except in his effects. Thus he cannot reveal the ultimate cause of evil. Although critics have differed over Demogorgon's meaning, they have been in essential agreement with Mr. Shelley that he is "the Primal power of the world," however one chooses to define that power. In terms of the present thesis, he signifies that terrible convergence of Life and Death--the Nirvana principle. Traditionally, Demogorgon has been interpreted as Necessity, or some similar process such as Destiny or Fate. The Nirvana principle is analogous to these conceptions because, it too, incorporates the fundamental forces of life and death.

Demogorgon does not, strictly speaking, govern the struggle between Prometheus and Jupiter. But his presence, significantly unbeheld, does reflect the entire, ineluctable

pattern of thematic, narrative, and symbolic development in Prometheus Unbound. It is at least clear up to this point that Panthea and Asia had to descend to the subliminal depths of Prometheus' being in Demogorgon's cave to discover the truth that must eventuate in Prometheus' redemption and the downfall of Jupiter. But the degree to which either Prometheus or Demogorgon has actuated their descent is not precisely discernible because the boundaries between Prometheus' will and Demogorgon's necessity are not sharply drawn. Ione and Panthea may be totally actuated by and under the control of Prometheus' will, but Asia, as the ultimately informing power of Eros, is as much an expression of the ineluctible necessity of the Nirvana principle as of Prometheus' will and desire. On the other hand, Prometheus' renunciation of all his destructive (death) impulses is at least as impelling to the entire movement of events as the necessity implicit in Demogorgon's identity. And while Demogorgon symbolizes both the inherent, inevitable overthrow of the old order, represented in Jupiter, and the regeneration of the new order in Prometheus, Asia is the complementary extension of Prometheus' love that guarantees a new order.

According to Asia's lengthy monologue in the cave of Demogorgon, the origin of the struggle between Prometheus and Jupiter lies at the heart of human history. Even before Prometheus endows Jupiter with the strength of wisdom, the

oedipal conflict looms in Saturn's refusal to allow Prometheus and Jupiter the birthright of their being: "Self empire and the majesty of love;" (II, ix, 42). In their divergent response to this repression, Prometheus and Jupiter personify the ambivalence of love and hate which sons, in the Freudian view, feel for the father. On one hand, they venerate him for his protection and the perpetuation of their existence; on the other, he threatens them and deflects them from fulfilling the pleasure principle, which is, of course, impelled by Eros. Inevitably, overthrow of the father is followed by the equally repressive authority of one of the sons. And the struggle, now between the sons, begins anew. Prometheus' suffering thus results from having created the destructive power of Jupiter to overthrow and replace Saturn's repressive authority over Earth. The effects of this projected "dominion of wide Heaven" (II, iv, 46) "are felt by the race of man" in the ever sharpening struggle for existence. In the midst of this ananke of "Famine," "toil," "strife," "fierce wants," "mad disquietudes" and "unreal good" rages "the shape of Death" (II, iv, 63) associated with the awesome and destructive strength of Jupiter. Against privation, toil, and madness, Prometheus arrays the "legioned hopes" of "Love" that envelop death. "Love," in turn, seeks to reunite the "Disunited tendrils of that vine / Which bears the wine of life" (II, iv, 64-65). This expansive

Eros, emanating from the fire of Prometheus' mind, marshalls the arts and sciences to create civilization:

"cities then / Were built" (II, iv, 94-95). But Prometheus pays a price for his creativity. Jupiter his antagonist is emblematic of the internalized repression through which civilization institutionalizes its hegemony over men's minds.

To signal the coming transformation of this hegemony the return of the Spirit of the Hour (probably the star, Venus) with its "dove-like eyes of hope" (II, iv, 160) ascends in a fiery chariot. Its companion, the "ghastly charioteer" that precedes it, mans the vehicle that bears Demogorgon aloft to overthrow Jupiter. These contrasting images foreshadow the impending resolution of tension between Eros and Death, replacing restraint, toil, and repression with pleasure, joy, and absence of repression.

The Spirit of the Hour bearing Asia to her reunion with Prometheus represents the return of the formerly repressed memory of Prometheus' curse upon Jupiter, which first appeared in the form of Jupiter's Phantasm in Act I. By confronting this mirrored image of his own self-destructive hatred in Act I, Prometheus was able finally to recognize the necessity for its renunciation. To do less would have reinforced the repressive domination of the death instinct. Just before the resurrection of the Phantasm, Prometheus' mother, Earth, explains the relationship between Life and Death in terms of the Nirvana

principle: "For know there are two worlds of life and death / One that which thou beholdest, the other is underneath the grave, where do inhabit / The shadows of all forms that think and live / Till death unite them and they part no more" (I, 195-199). Her son is about to attain awareness of how he had suppressed the curse against Jupiter and thereby subjugated himself to suffering within the temporal world. In denying the reality of death, Prometheus allowed it to control him, not Jupiter, "through boundless space and time" (I, 301). By releasing this repressed memory he began to liberate himself. Even as the Phantasm recounted Prometheus' curse, it foreshadowed the Spirit of the Hour fortelling Jupiter's downfall: "let the hour / Come when thou must appear to be / That which thou art internally" (I, 295).

In Act II, v, Asia's presence becomes ever more rarified and transluminous in its radiating promise of redemptive love. Panthea can scarcely endure her sister's transformation, which, in its fiery expansion, enamors the "whole world which seeks [Asia's] sympathy" (II, v, 34). Asia expresses and embodies the commonality of love. She has also become the transcendent power of Eros itself--its "Life of Life." This paeon, sung by the Voice in the Air (Often attributed to Prometheus), praises Asia's regenerative Eros as it expresses its own annihilation of the past under the overwhelming influence of her Love in the

world. Asia echoes this feeling in her responding lyric, "My Soul is an Enchanted Boat." She becomes "like one in slumber bound / Borne to the ocean, I float down, around, / Into a sea profound." And as the instinctive "boat of her desire" ultimately harmonizes earth, it rushes backward in time, seeks to penetrate "Through Death and Birth, to a diviner day" (II, v, 104). To move backward in time recreates the Narcissism which absorbs the death instinct by extinguishing time and suffering and substituting a world of beauty and contemplation.

Awaiting the appearance of Demogorgon at the opening of the third act, Jupiter in Heaven reveals the degree to which his authority rests on internalized repression created through faith and fear. His empire remains secure from insurrection because it is founded on man's "faith and hell's coevil, fear," (III, i, 10). Jupiter carries his inheritance of guilt for having overthrown Saturn, and he cannot divest himself of the fear that he will be overthrown, just as he overthrew Saturn. He therefore relies on faith steeped in fear to keep him in power. Faith allows the preservation of Jupiter's domination which, of course, engenders fear. Fear and faith are mutually reinforcing. Thus, both faith and fear reside in the death instinct and its continuous threat of annihilation.

Confident therefore that his threat of total annihilation will guarantee his hegemony against the dimly

perceived alternative climbing "the crags of life" (III, i, 14), Jupiter cannot appreciate the irony of his having begotten the "fatal child" (III, i, 19) whom he believes will assure this sovereignty. Indeed, though insecure beneath his bravado, Jupiter is unaware that his fulfillment can only be self-annihilation--death; for his every impulse is to deny life. His desire to possess eternally "The dreadful might of ever living limbs" (III, i, 22) can only be a contradiction, for his essential instinct is toward death. Neither Jupiter nor Thetis, his consort, can attain the fire of life for him to assure his eternal supremacy. Heaven's wine is merely "like fire" and Thetis, unlike her counterpart, Asia, "the child of light," is only a "bright image of eternity" and so, as mere image, cannot sustain the "quick flame / The penetrating presence" (III, i, 38-39) of life.

Demogorgon's appearance before Jupiter marks the return of the repressed death impulse. The "Eternity" of death that Demogorgon brings as the "child" of Jupiter does not, as it might at first appear, negate Demogorgon's function as Necessity, the ineluctible generation of historical events. Jupiter has created the conditions for his own downfall, and Demogorgon, as the embodiment of the Nirvana principle, personifies the ascendancy of Eros and therefore the displacement of Death in favor of the pleasure principle. Jupiter's dethronement thus coincides with the life-affirming

reunion of Prometheus and Asia. Demogorgon's function as Necessity has two characteristics: in relation to Jupiter, viewed as a repressive force, generating historical (temporal) causality, he is the temporal effect from the temporal cause--something close to the traditional definition of necessity. In relation to Prometheus, he is an unhistorical, atemporal Necessity. Liberation from suppression, as Shelley expresses it, is an eternal possibility, anywhere, everywhere, always, in the mind.

Having imaginatively displaced the terror of Death and its institutionalized reign, the new sensibility of man harmonizing with Nature emerges. It is committed to "the redemption of pleasure, the halt of time, the absorption of death; silence, sleep, night, paradise--the Nirvana principle not as death but as life."⁹ This new sensibility pervades the balance of the poem and retains the Eros of the dream-vision in its vision of man in final harmony with Nature. It is a sensuous world filled with abundance and therefore free of the repressive necessity imposed by time, toil, and rationality.

As we have seen, Prometheus frees himself when he negates the repressiveness of civilization as personified in Jupiter. But because Shelley's drama remains on the stage of Prometheus' mind, Jupiter remains preeminently Prometheus' own inner antagonist, the death instinct.

⁹Marcuse, Eros and Civilization, p. 149.

Shelley evidently chose the psychic plane to highlight more effectively the struggle between the powers at war in man's psyche.

The new dynamic which supplants the struggle of Eros and Death is very much akin to that wish-fulfillment we associate with dream. The redemptive panorama in Act III, iii and iv and Act IV following Asia's reunion with Prometheus is a world free of time, toil, and rationality--the unconscious world of dream.

At the touch of Prometheus' lips (III, iii, 85 passim) Earth awakens to a sensuous and "immortal youth" and transmits its rejuvenation to mankind and all other forms of life through "happy dreams." And while death's "last embrace" remains a reality, it does not contradict the immortality of youth; for the return to youth implies a return of its pleasures from the unconscious, which excludes awareness of time and therefore excludes its corollary, the awareness of death. When Asia asks Earth, "Cease they to love and speak / Who die?" (III, iii, 101-108), the latter responds: "Death is the veil which those who live call life" (III, iii, 113). This veil need not be interpreted only as a Platonic illusion. In psychical terms, death is a release very much to be desired when considered in light of the Narcissism at the heart of Shelley's redemptive vision. Earth returns to describing the rejuvenation in this world as a consciousness of Love (Asia) filled with new perceptions.

This new sensibility is guided by the child (the counterpart of Jupiter's anticipated "fatal child") whose consciousness is filled "with everlasting love: and therefore is unaware of the old reality of toil, time, and rationality. Prometheus' "lamp," his creative power, merges with Asia's love and leads to "this far goal of Time" (III, iii, 174). Here their human art arises out of a sensuous, playful, and time-free mentality associated with the Orphic and Narcissistic liberation of the aesthetic dimension.¹⁰

Free from the necessity to struggle within his new creation, Prometheus begins to recede into the background in III, iv. As he does so, the rejuvenated Spirit of the Earth assumes central importance in the scene. Knight's comment on the appropriateness of child-like wonder that Panthea and Ione feel as they describe the spirit of the Earth certifies how closely the new sensibility relies upon a "purified consciousness."¹¹ Because, moreover, Asia is now the "mother" of Earth, through her redemptive love, the child, grown wiser, runs to her requesting, as Knight puts it, "the old times again, the old play and happiness."¹²

¹⁰"In the world symbolized by the culture-hero Prometheus it [The Great Refusal] is the negation of all order; but in this negation Orpheus and Narcissus reveal a new reality, with an order of its own, governed by different principles. The Orphic Eros transforms beings: he masters cruelty and death through liberation. His language is song and his work is play. Narcissus' life is that of beauty, and his existence is contemplation. These images refer to the aesthetic dimension as the one in which the reality principle must be sought and validated." Marcuse, Eros and Civilization, p. 156.

¹¹Knight, pp. 215-216.

¹²Knight, p. 216.

Thus, memory, like a dream, looks forward as well as backward in denying the destructive past of humankind in favor of its liberated future.

In the lengthy, closing speech of Act III the Spirit of the Hour announces a "change" that will transform the earth and sky--the entire universe--into a new reality (III, iv, 204). Not only is it a sensuous reality of "love dissolved" but it is "exempt from toil" and free of repressive authority: "thrones were kingless." Without fear people now can speak "the wisdom once they could not think," and look "emotions once they feared to feel" (III, iv, 157-158). Unconscious desires are thus liberated into consciousness in the new dispensation.

Then in the closing speech to Act III (III, iv, 164-204), Shelley makes it quite clear that his transformed reality principle includes all institutions, and it is therefore an all-inclusive societal shift in values, not merely a willed individual change. As "Thrones, alters, judgement seats and prisons" (III, iv, 164) become relegated to the barbarous past, so too do the "Tomes / Of reasoned wrong" (III, iv, 166-167), rationalizations of the monstrous authority and power of those institutions, become part of the ghostly past. Once free of the ruling class of kings, priests and their institutions, man becomes "Equal, unclassed, tribeless, and nationless" (III, iv, 195). Within the new classless and therefore conflict-free society man

becomes "king / Over himself; just gentle, wise" (III, iv, 197). His new sensibility does not imply passionlessness, however, though it does imply a reconciliation of rationality and sensuousness. Additionally, it frees man "from guilt and pain" (III, iv, 198) echoing Prometheus' renunciation of suffering discussed earlier. To remind us that we are not dealing purely with a Platonic millenium, we are informed that "chance, death and mutability" (III, iv, 201) remain real, though under the will's dominion.

The expanded vision of Eros that redeems mankind in Act IV fulfills the promised liberation of the first three acts. And content approximates the world of dream. Indeed there seems to be no point at which Panthea's dream leaves off, while every event that follows its inception grows out of the dream and retains the character of a dream-vision. It is a vision of fulfilled desire and abundance unhindered by the repressive demand of toil, rationality, and time.

Because it grows out of the dream-vision, Eros inevitably retains the character of a dream-vision. Eros now prevails over its aggressor, Thanatos. This expansive and unifying principle harmonizes man and nature and symbolizes its culminating expression in the sensuous, playful, and fulfilling love of moon and Earth.

Again in her role of intermediary, Panthea announces the appearance of Moon and Earth, "Two visions of strange

radiance" (IV, 202). Ione describes the first vision, the moon as "Mother of the months," thereby calling attention to its temporal reality. Although Time has been born to his tomb in Eternity, this descent does not annihilate all time but only the past. Wilson explains that "the death of Time would mean the death of Demogorgon's law, the permanent order of recurrence and pattern which gives meaning to Time. Demogorgon, despite his boast to Jupiter, is eternal only by courtesy and default. The cycles of Demogorgon die with death and Time."¹³ If we regard this annihilation of time from a psychological point of view we need only recall that unconscious desires obliterate all sense of time and death in dream. And while, strictly speaking, we are not dealing with a dream and its freely flowing imagery of desires and fulfillments, we must nevertheless recognize Shelley's intent to recreate the atmosphere of free flowing thought and movement inherent to dream. "The poet dream being awake," as Lamb observed. But his creative purpose designs and informs what he dredges from the subliminal recesses of his being: for as Freud distinguishes dreams from art by insisting that art has a social reference and an element of conscious control, art shares with dream the function of making public the contents of the unconscious.

¹³Milton Wilson, Shelley's Later Poetry (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), p. 208.

The swiftly moving Orphic lyricism "of music, and dance, and shapes of light" (IV, 77) which the choruses of Spirits and Hours feel as "the voice of love in dreams" (IV, 65) paves the way for the nuptial dialogue of Moon and Earth. The sensual setting of "woven caresses" and "Roofed over sculpture and Poesy" sensualizes rationality, and in turn, "Science bedews her Daedal wings" (IV, 113-116) so that "From the depths of the sky and ends of the earth" (IV, 130) Nature and Man are harmonized through the creative love that overpowers death: "And Love, Thought, and Breath / The powers that quell Death / Wherever we soar shall assemble beneath" (IV, 149-151). Hence this background, appropriately, introduces the Eros of Narcissistic contemplation that Moon and Earth share in the controlling image of the final act.

Shrouded in clouds, an image often associated with mental activity in Shelley's poetry, and white light, which together symbolize a newly enlightened frame of mind, the moon is guided by a mysterious infant. This return to the unconsciousness of infancy reflects a similarly guiding unconscious innocence in the now sleeping infant Spirit of Earth, "who talks of what he loves in dream" (IV, 268).

Destruction and death become only memories (IV, 280 passim) in the new union of heaven and earth built upon the Narcissistic reliance of Earth and Moon. The Earth (himself?) revels in the "atmosphere of light" that emanates

from the moon and animates time with "The Joy, the triumph the delight, the madness / The boundless overflowing, bursting, gladness / The vaporous exultation not to be confined" (319-321). The Moon in turn responds to Earth's penetrating spirit in explicitly sexual language. This sensuous exchange of love between Earth and Moon, though explainable by the necessity of gravitational laws, also expresses the harmonizing power of Eros which is at once both expansive and embracing (IV, 392-405) while playful, and free of the necessity to struggle (IV, 404-405). So while "love rules" it is again surrounded by "Orphic song" (IV, 410-415).

After several more such antiphons of nuptial pleasure, Moon and Earth begin to recede; and Ione and Panthea again emerge to announce the mighty re-appearance of Demogorgon. Appropriately, the symbol of the ruling Nirvana principle presides over the drama's conclusion. But Earth and Moon are gripped in a simultaneous release of pleasure: Earth: "I am as a drop of dew that dies" (IV, 523); Moon: "I am a leaf shaken by thee!" (IV, 528). In addition to their symbolically sexual effect on each other the diminutive images of dewdrop and leaf connote the awful power Demogorgon holds over them. Finally, his famous epilogue rounds out the prevailing mood of Eros while reminding us of the ever present capability of Thanatos: "Love" can only retain its "throne of patient power" over "Heaven's

THE WITCH OF ATLAS

More fully than any of his other narrative poems, The Witch of Atlas approximates Shelley's desire to invest his redemptive Eros with beautiful idealisms. And again he relies on the dream-vision. Knight isolates the impulse at the heart of the poem when he describes the Witch as "a dream-projection and, partly, an incarnation of poetry itself."¹ The most rarified and "playful" creature of Shelley's imagination, the Witch embodies the Eros at the center of the creative process, and she is the radiating center from which and toward which all activity in the poem flows. She presides over the thematic and narrative movement of the poem like a female deus ex machina. She incarnates the dream-vision as she contemplates the beauty and wisdom of her cave in trance or manifests her influence on mankind through dreams. Thus she is both the dreamer and the vision itself. In the course of the poem, she redeems pleasure, absorbs death, and halts time--like Narcissus. For like Narcissus, her existence is contemplation and her life is beauty. She is the fullest realization of the Narcissistic impulse in Shelley's poetry.

¹Knight, p. 226.

Unlike her predecessors, the dream-maiden in Alastor, Asia, or even Mab, the Witch is not the counterpart of a single human or personified consciousness. Nor is she a "soul out of my soul," like Emily. Her beauty disorganizes the senses and her voice hints in low tones of love and draws "all living things" toward herself. She attracts and ministers to all creatures both natural and supernatural--from cameleopards and serpents to Silenus and Pan--from kings and satyrs to herdsmen and mountain maidens, who come as aspiring devotees to the shrine of "Her love [which] subdued their wonder and their mirth" (128). She thus personifies the expansive power of Eros, reaching out to unify all life.

The prominent cave-dwelling of the Witch symbolizes the deepest recesses of the mind. It does not, as we might mention however, originate as a significant mind-symbol with the "Witch of Atlas." To withdraw to the caverned recesses of the physical or psychical world as a prerequisite to deep contemplation is a recurrent motif in Shelley. Shelley first used the pattern in Alastor. The poet falls asleep "Beneath the hollow rocks a natural bower" (147) where the containment of the dreamer within a cavern is explicit. In the poems after Alastor, the typical setting of the cavern extends its symbolic circumference to the dream, and even the outer limits of the mind itself. The narrator in Epipsychidion recalls how he encountered

Emily amid "the caves of divine sleep" (194-195). A few lines later cavern and dream merge as he springs "from the caverns of [his] dreaming youth" (217). In its "unremitting interchange" the mind of the speaker in Mont Blanc seeks among the shadows in "the still cave of the witch Poesy" (44) for "some faint image" of that creative power which emanates from the "Ravine of Arve." The cave, like the ravine, is a recess analogous to the mind. And the "witch Poesy" foreshadows that uncanny creativity of the Witch of Atlas. Although caves are not equated explicitly with dreams in Prometheus Unbound, one of Panthea's dreams, as we have seen, leads her and Asia to the deepest limits of Prometheus' psyche in Demogorgon's cave.

The cavern image is elaborately developed in The Witch of Atlas. Reminiscent of old earth mother myths, the Witch's mother, "one of the Atlantides," is impregnated by the redolent sun in a passage involving the cavern as an erotic image: "He kissed her with his beams and made all golden / The chamber of gray rock in which she lay" (62-63). Then like the poet's dream-vision in Alastor, the power of love annihilates consciousness as "She in that dream of joy dissolved away" (64). In the following three stanzas the cave explicitly represents the womb of the Witch's mother, where the Witch, "a dewy splendour hidden / Took shape and motion" (78-79). This post-erotic maternalism associated with the cave then gives way to its more

characteristic function as creative mentality. Sexuality is the physical expression of Eros' creative power. Hence, the mental and physical symbolism of the Witch's cave is consistent with the theme of Eros.

The elaborately wrought carvings of ancient art and learning inside the cave belong to the Witch's consciousness, which assumes the meaning of all that is potentially and actually creative in the symbolic trappings of its walls. Within her cave-dwelling "lay Visions swift and sweet and quaint" (161) filled with "intensest bliss" . . . "and each was at her beck" (164 & 168). Her visionary powers are full of sensual appeal which is regenerative on several levels. Through "odours" which "stir sweet thoughts or sad in destined minds" (176), and through "liquors" which "medicine the sick soul to happy sleep" (178) pleasure is redeemed as it merges with death. In a Narcissistic return to the underworld, the death impulse converges with the pleasure principle. To put it another way, the pleasure principle expresses itself through the Nirvana principle, as "eternal death" is transformed into "a night / Of glorious dream" (179-180). In this stanza Eros and Thanatos are reconciled in the Nirvana principle as life, not death.

Scholars have often equated the Witch's cave with Prometheus' cave of the mind described in his long speech at the opening of III, iii. But the atmosphere of strange

beauty, mystery, and wisdom in the Witch's cave is quite different from the Eden-like setting of Prometheus and Asia. Having attained his utopian vision, Prometheus envisions how he will recline at his ease and watch the new order emerge: ". . . the progeny immortal / Of Painting, Sculpture and rapt Poesy / And arts, the unimagined yet to be" (Prometheus Unbound, III, iii, 54-56). Perhaps because it is set in the narrative present and not an "unimagined" potentiality, the strange but far more credible lore within the Witch's cave holds out the possibility of redemption for man in the real world of his social relationships.

Her cave was stored with scrolls of strange device,
 The works of some Saturnian Archimage,
 Which taught the expiation at Whose price
 Men from the Gods might win that happy age
 Too lightly lost, redeeming native vice;
 And might quench the Earth-consuming rage,
 Of gold and blood--till men should live and move
 Harmonious as the sacred stars above.

(XVIII)

Within these scrolls is the secret of how men can regain the golden age and live harmoniously if they will but rid themselves of their aggressive and destructive desires for "gold and blood." Power over the destructive forces that seem untameable, "Time, earth, and fire--the ocean the wind . . . and man's imperial will" (196-197) are all contained in her cave and subject to the "inmost lore of Love" (199). From these lines we may infer that the redemptive power of eros informing "Wisdom's wizard skill" can master all of the elemental forces of nature in man's behalf.

She absorbs death. When the Witch reveals to the nymphs and naiads (Sts. XXII-XXV) the truth of their mutability, it is not only that "Love and mutability meet in conflict here and mutability must Triumph."² Death does prevail, but it prevails through love expressed in the Nirvana principle. The Witch cannot die, as even nymphs and naiads eventually must, but her Eros informs their deaths: "over me / Your leaves shall glance--the streams, in which ye dwell / Shall be my paths henceforth, and so--farewell!" (239-240). She does not deny the death instinct. Her Eros, like that of Narcissus, is akin to Death and fulfills itself in the Nirvana principle. In her world rest and sleep and dream and death are not painfully separate or differentiated.

Within her conscious dream world "This lady never slept, but lay in trance / All night within the fountain--as in sleep" (265-266). Fittingly, she contemplates her own beauty reflected from the walls of her cave. And in the illuminated glare of her fountain, she reads her scrolls of ancient wisdom. This fountain is rather prominent and deserves comment. Often symbolic of the creative impulse in Shelley's poetry, but not always associated with the dream-vision, the fountain here lights the roof of her cave and enables her to spell out the meaning in

²Harold Bloom, The Visionary Company (New York: Doubleday, 1963), p. 346.

her scrolls of "dread antiquity." The fountain therefore raises to consciousness the truth as well as the beauty which merge in the Witch's being. If the fountain reveals the aesthetic truth of the Witch who, significantly, lies "within the fountain" and therefore draws upon its source in the most immediate sense, elsewhere in Shelley's poetry the symbolic connotations of the fountain function differently. The beckoning impulse of death arising from the "still fountain" in Alastor promises the gazing poet death, which may return him to the arms of his beloved dream-maiden; or just as likely, destroy him utterly. Its inspiration is associated with dream, for in this context the fountain reflects his own death wish in his desire to recapture the dream maiden "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" (471-474). Here too then, the fountain symbolizes a source. It mirrors the very death impulse that has been at the root of his being. Dream-maiden and fountain in The Triumph of Life are linked together in Rousseau's dream similarly to their association in the Witch of Atlas. The dream-maiden appears to Rousseau in "A shape all light," which emanates from the "Floor of the fountain," again the source of imaginative power. But the most memorable use of this image in Shelley's poetry is the creative well-spring of Keats' life, the "burning fountain," to which he returns in "Adonais"--in death.

The following two stanzas revolve on the origin of the boat that the Witch uses for her journey. One legend associates its creation with Vulcan, "She had a boat, which some say Vulcan wrought / For Venus" (289-290); whereas another legend attributes its creation to Venus' "first born Love," the god, Eros. Whichever is the case, the fiery connotations of Vulcan's forge fuse with the playfully erotic associations of Eros in a conjunction of fire and love that is frequent in Shelley's poetry. More intriguing, however, is the legend that the boat "was found too feeble" (291) for the ardent Venus. Yet, as we learn in the following stanza, it was strong enough to circumnavigate the globe under Cupid's direction. Whatever its relative strength and weaknesses with relation to Venus and Cupid, the boat signifies a vehicle of desire and in its present function reinforces the Witch's primary identity as symbolic of Eros. The Witch's Eros, parenthetically, is like Cupid's--playful and whimsical--not the passion-filled and concentrated sensuality usually identified with Venus. This similarity may be why the boat proves useful to her and not to Venus.

She moors the boat upon her fountain which informs the vessel as it has the cave with her "living spirit." When she embarks on her journey it seems to lack a predetermined direction. It can scarcely be called a quest, for no dream or dream-maiden is present to give it its

telos. Dreams as we have already noted in Queen Mab, Alastor, and Prometheus Unbound, motivate the quest, or more precisely, vision forth the motive of the quest. The Witch's self-sufficiency as dreamer and dream, however, would seem to obviate any single direction for her creative Eros.

Before embarking on her journey, she performs her most revealing act in creating Hermaphroditus. That this creature is a "sexless thing" does not mean it is devoid of sexuality but rather, as Shelley goes on to explain, it is free of the defects in both sexes because it combines "all the grace of both / In gentleness and strength" (331-332). Knight accounts for the Homunculus in terms that are precisely apropos our thesis: "It is thus super-sexual rather than asexual, as is the creative consciousness [italics mine] and, perhaps the evolutionary or transcendental goal of mankind."³ This meaning is closer to the plain intent of Shelley's works than false dichotomies such as Grabo's: "The Hermaphrodite then, in Shelley's symbolism, is a natural personification of the two complementary forces of the world, of attraction and repulsion, of love and hate."⁴ Nothing in Shelley's text supports this inference with reference to the Hermaphrodite. As Shelley was aware, hate is a learned response, not an innate one, like love. In

³Knight, p. 228.

⁴Carl Grabo, The Meaning of the Witch of Atlas (Chapel Hill, N. C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1935), p. 60.

terms of our present argument, hate is the outer-directed destructive force of the diverted and socially conditioned death instinct. If anything, Shelley wanted to free the Hermaphrodite of all aggressive connotations that might translate into hate. So he sought to purify his Eros with an image of bisexuality.

Like Marcuse, Knight roots the artistic impulse in Eros, as we just noted above. But it must be a special kind of Eros according to Marcuse--a Narcissistic Eros--which Knight does not deal with. As we have discussed in previous chapters, Narcissus spurns the ordinary Eros, which merely unites human beings, in order to embrace a farther reaching Eros. He strives for a non-repressive erotic attitude toward reality which incorporates all of Nature into itself. It is a redemptive vision in Frye's sense of the term--but only up to a point. While the Narcissistic vision seeks to reintegrate the human psyche with nature, it implies a reconciliation of Eros and Thanatos; for in the Eros-saturated world of the Witch, death is no longer fraught with fear. As we noted earlier, Frye simply does not take death seriously into account in his mythos.

So, like its creator, the Hermaphrodite is governed by a Narcissistic Eros. Symbolically and appropriately, in the early stage of the voyage the Hermaphrodite can repose in sleep and dream:

And ever as she went, the Image lay
 With folded wings and unawakened eyes;
 And o'er its gentle countenance did play
 The busy dreams, as thick as summer flies.
 (361-365)

As their labyrinthine journey becomes steeper and therefore more arduous, his active powers are called upon.

Knight's distinction on this point is useful: "He is therefore now awaked, representing poetry fully conscious."⁵

The Hermaphrodite, in turn, is still totally under the Witch's impetus. She spurs him along, for she herself is possessed so that she cannot restrain her spirit. The Hermaphrodite therefore propels his "storm-outsPEEDING wings" ever faster at her bidding.

The tempestuous journey of the Witch and her Hermaphrodite is filled with passages of light, fire, and storms; and it culminates momentarily with the building of a "windless haven" beyond the reach of, yet still amid the storm. This is not a goal in the sense of a quest-ending, however. This pause functions primarily, and rather importantly, to give free reign to the heart of the Witch's ethos: an Eros that seeks to express itself in play, not struggle. She can play "her many pranks" unhindered by the necessity of time, toil, or death. Whether "circling the image of a shooting star;" (450) or playing "many quips and cranks;" (453) or surrounding herself with "armies of her ministering spirits;" (450) or "like Arion on the

⁵Knight, p. 299.

dolphin's back / Ride singing through the shoreless air;" (484-485) or "following the serpent lightning's winding track;" (486) or running on the "platforms of the wind;" (487) she embodies the spirit of their activity in play. And in this respect she also involves that Orphic spirit which Marcuse links to Narcissus in his analysis of alternative culture heroes to Prometheus implied in an aesthetic based on Freudian principles:

Like Narcissus, he rejects the normal Eros, not for an ascetic ideal, but for a fuller Eros. Like Narcissus, he protests against the repressive order of procreative sexuality. The Orphic and Narcissitic Eros is to the end the negation of this order. . . . The Orphic Eros transforms being: he masters cruelty and death through liberation. His language is song, and his work is play. Narcissus' life is that of beauty, and his existence is contemplation. These images refer to the aesthetic dimension as the one in which their reality principle must be sought and validated.⁶

"But," as she moves back toward her dream-filled world of desire, "her choice sport was, in the hours of sleep / To glide down old Nilus . . ." (497-498) and eventually to preside over the land of mortal dreamers:

With motion like the spirit of that wind
 Whose soft step deepens slumber, her light feet
 Passed through the peopled haunts of humankind,
 Scattering sweet visions from her presence sweet,
 Through fane, and palace--court, and labyrinth mined
 With many a dark and subterranean street
 Under the Nile, through chambers high and deep
 She passed, observing mortals in their sleep.
 (521-528)

⁶Marcuse, Eros and Civilization, pp. 155-156.

All the social evils that would normally have enlisted Shelley's outrage--religious superstition, cruel customs and laws, the persecution of the weak, and war--the Witch assails and subdues.

She is the repressed Eros returned in dream to draw men back into a childlike world of play. She makes her way light-heartedly past sleeping lovers and sleeping old age and soothes "Troubled forms of sleep" with her "holy song" and sees into the dreams of all sleepers to view the "naked beauty" beneath. To the most beautiful she gives a magic drink in "deep sleep," transforming them into men of genius so that death's eternity becomes a pleasure house. There they lived "as if some control / Mightier than life, were in them; and the grave / Of such when death oppressed the weary soul / Was as a green and overarching bower / Lit by the gems of many a starry flower" (596-600). Death is absorbed in their timeless contemplation of beauty. On the brains of the less beautiful she writes "strange dreams" that cause scribes, priests, and kings (Shelley's old enemies) to reverse their customary behavior, with satirical effect. That Shelley could resist all seriousness in satirizing his old foes further testifies to the lightness of his intentions in this poem. Finally, she reunites lovers who consummate their love in dream and discover the reality of its erotic content nine months later.

The erotic innocence of the timid lovers joined outside the boundaries of repressed desire or guilt--in dream--probably depicts the Witch's purest fusion of dream and Eros. Back in waking reality their union attains fruition, which, like the other transformations she has wrought, implies a totally reformed human sensibility, devoted to beauty and contemplation--a Narcissism of all human experience. The Witch's Narcissism thus argues implicitly that dreams must become reality; that the pleasure principle not the reality principle must become dominant "among the cities / Of Mortal Men" (664-665).

EPIPSYCHIDION

Unlike the dream-maiden in Alastor whom the poet-visionary conjures from within his psyche and then pursues to his death, the narrator's epipsyche in Epipsychidion balances elusively between his dreamlike subjectivity and waking reality. Her physical reality promises erotic fulfillment as it symbolizes mystical union with nature. His lengthy invocation in this quintessential song of Romantic love reveals how intensely he strives to penetrate the ambiguity of her appealing though dangerous attraction, and to purify and fix her essence beyond space and time: "Thou living Form / Among the Dead! Thou star above the Storms / Thou Wonder and thou Beauty and thou Terror!" (26-28). As her love draws him toward a promised fulfillment it also threatens to annihilate him. Like a moth, its wings singed in flight, or a dying swan, he is being lured "toward sweet Death" (73). Thus the tightly interwoven appeals of both life and death within his own psyche impel the poet toward an elusive vision of redemption.

In the course of developing his mythopoeic interpretation of the "I-Thou" relationship in Shelley's poetry, Harold Bloom touches upon the life-death struggle in Epipsychidion, but unfortunately, he never develops this

point.¹ Bloom postulates the life and death conflict on the psyche's desire to absorb and thereby control reality, certainly one of the poem's legitimate levels of meaning. His interpretation, moreover, takes into account that the poet's quest for Emily is simultaneously motivated by both Death and Eros. But the narrator-protagonist's desire for death is not solely actuated by "despair in the myth," as Bloom proposes. To accept Bloom's view of the death impulse as pure negation associated with destruction in the poem overly simplifies the thematic possibilities of the death impulse in Epipsychidion. Life and Death, in short, are not divergent but convergent drives. Because of this identity of desire, both Death and Eros are rooted in sensuality as well as timelessness. Aware too that "Epipsychidion is a poem about heterosexual love," Bloom, however, never associates its erotic content with death.² Moreover, none of the other critics who have commented upon the poem's sensual and erotic content ever hint at the

¹"Shelley's myth is an impulse toward life; counter to it is Shelley's antimyth, driving toward death because of despair in the myth. In 'Epipsychidion' the myth and its contrary have intensified to their extremes, and appear side by side. The poem violently alternates between the quest for relationship and the quest for destruction, a sweet mystical annihilation. The two quests are antithetical: the first is rational and poetic; the second is less than rational and attempts to destroy the poem." Harold Bloom, Shelley's Mythmaking (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), p. 211.

²Bloom, Shelley's Mythmaking, p. 208.

fairly evident Freudian dimensions of the poem, in terms of the fundamental struggle of life and death instincts.³

It is fairly evident from the speaker's self-history that his projected love-ideal, or "soul out of my soul," grew out of the access he gained to his own unconscious through his "visioned wanderings." The opening ten lines of his history reveal his expectant and searching frame of mind:

There was a Being whom my spirit oft
Met on its visioned wanderings, far aloft,
In the clear golden prime of my youth's dawn
Upon the fairy isles of sunburnt lawn,
Amid the enchanted mountains, and the caves
Of divine sleep, and on the air-like waves
Of wonder-level dream, whose tremulous floor
Paved her light steps;--on an imagined shore,
Under the gray beak of some promontory
She met me, robed in such exceeding glory
That I beheld her not.

(190-200)

There are no sharply defined boundaries between waking and sleeping here, no clearly defined loss of consciousness; but the narrator is at pains to show that his psychic experience of that "Being" he encountered in the past belonged to the "caves / Of divine sleep," and "air-like waves / Of wonder-level dream." Sleep and dream form the prevailing imaginative context for his meeting with the idealized prefiguration of Emilia. This meeting is rooted in the golden past of "fairy isles" and "enchanted mountains"

³Both Enscoe and Bostetter concentrate upon establishing its sexual dimensions while desanctifying the prevailing platonic interpretations which have dominated criticism of the poem.

of her pre-existence in his dream. Only in yearning for its resurrection in the world of his future "isle under Ionian skies" (422) can he establish his "True love," which he described earlier in his polemic against institutionalized marriage, comparing love with the power of imagination:

"Love is like understanding that grows bright / Gazing on many truths; 'tis like thy light / Imagination!" (162-164). Eros is continuously creative and expansive, over stepping all boundaries, whether expressing itself through Love or through the imagination. It therefore cannot confine itself to "one form" in love or in art. To do so is permanent death, the kind of death that "builds / A sepulchre for its eternity" (172-173).

But death imposed from outside the individual, either through institutions or formal artistic limitations, is very different from the death he must risk, according to the speaker, in order to attain his redemptive Eros. As he realizes that the pursuit of love promises a dangerous fulfillment, impelling him like a "dizzy moth" or "dead leaf" toward the infinitely remote "setting sphere" of Hesperus; at the same time his quest foretokens "A radiant death, a fiery sepulchre" (220-223), redeeming him toward a "fiery martyrdom" (215). And characteristically, this fiery symbolism of his imagination informs his meaning as it drives him on. When he springs "from the caverns of [his] dreamy youth" (217) "as one sandelled with plumes of fire" (218),

not only does the fiery "lodestar" of his desire draw him on, but because she is also the driving force within his imagination, the "burning plumes" that contrast so sharply with "the dreary cone of our life's shade" (228), she inspires him to challenge the grave itself. So the Eros that risks and even embraces death to attain a fulfillment, possibly beyond life itself, is very different from Eros destroyed by the constraint of reality.

The speaker tries at first to project the content of his imaginary Eros in dream but this narcissistic impulse, "this soul out of my soul" has overflowed its origin in his dream and strives forth, filled "with hope and fear," to "find one form resembling hers" (246-254). Hence what started as an egoistic withdrawal into dream has expanded outward in a quest to transform reality into living fulfillment. The nature of this reality is scarcely discernible, however, because his consciousness is almost totally absorbed with his desire for Emily. One cannot be entirely certain at this point in the poem whether the protagonist-speaker has indeed awakened from his dream. Shelley seems to obscure deliberately the boundaries between waking and dream in his use of the habitual narrative with reference to his youthful vision and subsequent pursuance of false shadows "of that ideal of my thought," who seem to belong to the waking world: "One stood on my path who seemed / As like the glorious shape which I had dreamed" (277-278).

In recounting his interlude with this false creature he, like the Knight in "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" is led to a cave where he is "laid asleep" and subjected to her influence in dream: "I wept, and though it be a dream, I weep" (307). Unlike the Knight's ambiguous suffering which remains suspended between regret for his loss of the voluptuous La Belle Dame and the memory of his terrifying experience, Shelley's grief hinges evidently upon his discovery of the maiden's falsity and the consequent necessity to again search out his true epipsyche.

The lack of customary tension between life and death in the passage recounting his disillusioning encounter with the false maiden (267-320) is quite explicit; and taken in conjunction with the narcissistic origin of his quest, the speaker's unresponsiveness to her expresses a renunciation consistent with the Eros that Narcissus seeks. The Narcissus of classical legend rejected the love of ordinary human beings, for which he is punished by Eros. Similarly, Shelley's renunciation of the moon maiden leaves him floating in limbo, "nor alive, nor dead." If his erotic attitude here is akin to sleep, it does not, on the other hand, seek the ultimate union with death, although the contemplation of death as well as life emerges in his dream. The maiden of the moon in his dream reveals to him, for the first time, that Thanatos and Eros are the inseparable though contradictory urges of his desire: "For at her

silver voice came Death and Life / Unmindful each of their accustomed strife / Marked like twin babes, a sister and a brother / The wandering hopes of one abandoned mother" (301-304). The unity of origin and purpose in this passage is not only explicit, but the erotic content is underscored in the implicitly incestuous relationship between Life and Death as personified brother and sister.

If the dream has revealed to him the reality of the Life-Death dynamic, it has also held that struggle in abeyance. By rejecting the love of the moon-maiden in his dream, the poet has chosen to seek Eros in the reality of the waking world. Shelley's "soul out of my soul," from a Freudian standpoint, "engulfs the 'environment,' integrating the narcissistic ego with the objective world,"⁴ as Marcuse describes Narcissism. Freud calls this phenomenon "primary narcissism." It attempts to resurrect an earlier relationship between the ego and reality:

Originally the ego includes everything, later it separates off an extensual world from itself. Our present ego-feeling is, therefore, only a shrunken residue of a much more inclusive--indeed, an all embracing-feeling which corresponded to a more intimate, bond between the ego and the world above it.⁵

When the dreamer is shaken in "the ocean of [his] sleep" (308), he feels the cold, rational light of the moon, "whose pale and waning lips," chill his spirit and reveal

⁴Marcuse, Eros and Civilization, p. 153.

⁵Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents, p. 25.

the guiding death impulse she casts on him: "my being fell / Into a death of ice, immovable" (315-316). From here on the planet imagery of moon and sun, which Carlos Baker, in particular, has analyzed so well, also symbolizes the constituent forces of the Life-Death dichotomy.⁶ The moon and its chilling rationality is basically repressive and induces a deathlike inertia, whereas the sun and its imaginative symbolism is associated basically with a liberating and life-affirming resolve. This juxtaposition is immediately apparent following the entry of the poet's Vision into the obscure forest of his mind because the cold and barren scene that the moon fills with its presence becomes gradually transformed through his encounter with the Vision and with Emily.

As already noted, it is unclear at what point the speaker returns to consciousness (if indeed he awakes at all). Unlike his predecessor in Alastor, at any rate, the poet-visionary seems able to distinguish his idealized Eros from its symbolic representation in Emily. His certainty that he has now encountered her living form hidden from him so many years, suggests an awareness absent from the poem up to this point, line 334. For at the moment of her entrance, the previously barren scene becomes irradiated with her presence; and the speaker's frozen emotions

⁶Carlos Baker, Shelley's Major Poetry: The Fabric of a Vision (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1948), pp. 215-238.

begin to revive. She floats into the "Cavern" of his sleeping mind "Soft as an Incarnation of the Sun" (335), and calls to him, whereupon his

Spirit, and the dreaming clay
Was lifted by the thing that dreamed below
As smoke by fire,

(338-339)

He responds,

I stood, and I felt the dawn of my long night
Was penetrating me with living light
I knew it was the Vision veiled from me
So many years--that it was Emily

(341-344)

Emily who had eluded him in his youthful dreams, seems to belong to the conscious and waking world of the speaker at this point.

Bound by the competing instincts of life and death, symbolized in the "Twin Spheres of light who rule this passive Earth, / This world of love, this me" (345-346), his pursuit of a purified love inevitably expresses the pleasure principle which, in this poem, transcends the limitations imposed by reality upon a complete fulfillment of his desire. And the flight to "an Isle under Ionian Skies" (422) that he projects for Emily and himself in both sensual and imaginative directions is designed to elude all the conventions and restraints of mundane reality. In its return to a natural world in which "till love and life / Be one" he envisions his future with her completely absorbed in mutual gratification.

Then in the final segment of his personal history (345-387), following the entry of Emily into his life, Shelley's use of the contending imagery of moon and sun connotes how Thanatos and Eros, "bright regents with alternate sway / Govern my sphere of being, night and day!" (360-361). Here, as at so many points throughout Shelley's poetry, the alternating sway of life and death expresses again the fundamental dynamic of life against death. Moreover, the libidinal component, symbolized in the "comet beautiful and fierce," which accords with the central impulse of "attraction and repulsion" on a universal scale, also reflects his own state of mind. Although the comet may be equateable with "unruly emotions" or the platonic "appetitive soul," as Baker supposes, it need not, however, as he also argues, be subordinate to the imagination or to rationality. The unruly emotions or appetitive element are rooted in perception. Elevating the conceptualizing imagination above the appetitive perceptions separates the sensual content from imagination, as the critics have often done. This separation results from dichotomizing the rational and sensual content of the aesthetic dimension. The comet's influence over the sun and moon in the poem clearly indicates an equal rather than subordinate function. By incorporating the sensual content of his being into the "azure heaven" that includes the rational and imaginative elements, Shelley assigns the appetitive element a level of

importance equivalent to the rational and imaginative content. It is there "Love's folding-star," or Venus, the goddess who symbolizes the sensuality of Eros as well as its imaginative presence in the aesthetic dimension. Shelley is symbolizing the liberating and strengthening of sensuousness against the tyranny of reason.

In discussing how the aesthetic dimension lost its sensuous content Marcuse explains that:

The term originally designated "pertaining to the senses," with stress on the cognitive function. Under the predominance of rationalism, the cognitive function of sensuousness has been constantly minimized. In line with the repressive concept of reason, cognition becomes the ultimate concern of the "higher," non-sensuous faculties of the mind; aesthetics were absorbed by logic and metaphysics. Sensuousness, as the "lower" and even "lowest" faculty, furnished at best the mere stuff, the raw material, for cognition, to be organized by the higher faculties of the intellect. The content and validity of the aesthetic function were whittled down. Sensuousness retained a measure of philosophical dignity in a subordinate epistemological position; those of its processes that did not fit into the rationalistic epistemology--that is, those that went beyond the passive perception of data--became homeless.⁷

I have quoted the explanation at length to convey a full sense of how Baker and most other critics have tended to isolate Shelley's thought in an abstract and therefore overly-sublimative direction. But as Bostetter very helpfully points out, "The modern critic could not, even if he wanted to, blot out the sexual implications."⁸ And as

⁷Marcuse, Eros and Civilization, pp. 164-165.

⁸Bostetter, p. 201.

he further explains, modern critics have done just this "to protect his [Shelley's] reputation as man, philosopher, and poet against his detractors." Primarily this fear for Shelley's reputation rests, as Bostetter states, on "the sincerity as well as the profundity of Shelley's 'Platonism.'" ⁹ We have seen, however, how the repressive dichotomizing of the rational and sensuous levels in the aesthetic dimension have relegated to sensuous to a 'lower' level in favor of the civilizing and constricting formality that Bloom regards as the "poetic and rational" level. So it is that Shelley's reputation has suffered perhaps more from his supporters than from his detractors in the dogged allegiance of the former to a repressive idealization of Shelley's thought.

The final section of the poem is dominated by the poet-dreamer's projected flight to the "isle under Ionian Skies / Beautiful as a wreck of Paradise" (422-423). It is important for our understanding of the poem's dichotomy between the poet's vision and reality that this flight not be utterly idealized. As Enscoe puts it, "this section is not to be seen as an invitation to flight from the physical world; it is a flight from a physical world dominated by customs, laws, institutions and sects which constantly interfere with and prevent the realization of ideal love in mortal terms." ¹⁰ The driving Eros of this section is also

⁹Bostetter, p. 201.

¹⁰Enscoe, p. 93.

rooted in the sensuous reality of the speaker's libido and expresses itself finally in an ecstatic Liebested in the closing lines:

We shall become the same, we shall be one
 Spirit within two frames, oh! wherefore two?
 One passion in twin-hearts, which grows and grew,
 Till like two meteors of expanding flame,
 Those spheres instinct with it become the same,
 Touch, mingle, are transfigured; ever still
 Burning, yet ever unconsumable:
 In one another's substance finding food,
 Like flames too pure and light and unimbued
 To nourish their bright lives with baser prey,
 Which point to Heaven and cannot pass away;
 One hope within two wills, one will beneath
 Two overshadowing minds, one life, one death,
 One Heaven, one Hell, one immortality,
 and one annihilation. 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--
 I pant, I sink, I tremble, I expire!

(574-591)

This fiery annihilation reminds us again of Shelley's penchant for the imagery of fire to inspire the loftiest vision. At the same time the passage is marked with an undercurrent release of tension. If this sexual enervation is fairly obvious, it must be remarked that critics have usually avoided this content or deliberately understated its import. They have, more often, reinforced the reactionary idealizing of reason against the liberating order of sensuousness so clearly present in the poem. They have not recognized that "Art challenges the prevailing principle of reason: in representing the order of sensuousness, it invokes a tabooed logic--the logic of gratification as against that of repression. Behind the sublimated aesthetic form,

the unsublimated content shows forth: the commitment of art to the pleasure principle;"¹¹

While the failure of Shelley's myth, as Bloom argues, is valid as one probable meaning, this interpretation confines itself to the dichotomy between desire and reality, which most critics have stressed. It therefore tends to divide the life and death instincts between will and individual physical necessity, respectively. But if the unsublimated sensual union beneath the rarified language of "one life, one death / One Heaven, one Hell" is to be fully taken into account, then Eros and Thanatos must be viewed as inseparable and therefore simultaneously both will and necessity in the poet's psyche. Even Shelley's anti-linguistic drift in this final section points to his need to free his desire from the "chains of lead" that fetter his expression of union with Emily in the simultaneous embrace of Eros and Death. Their single annihilation thus seeks release in the direction of both life and death.

Thus the tension in Epipsychidion is not only between desire and reality, as most critics interpret the poem, but between convergent and conflicting desires--Eros and Death. Like an interrupted dream the closing lines of the poet's narrative hold these competing impulses in suspension. This unresolved tension at the conclusion

¹¹Marcuse, Eros and Civilization, p. 168.

of Epipsychidion differs therefore from the endings in his previous narrative poems. With the exception of Alastor, in which death ultimately determines the direction of Eros, all of the other poems--Queen Mab, Prometheus Unbound, and The Witch of Atlas--affirm the eventual dominance, however qualified, of Eros. In Epipsychidion Shelley has chosen--one may say realistically--to leave the tension between Eros and Death unabated.

HELLAS

Thematically and narratively, the entire development of Hellas hinges upon the long awaited revelation of Mahmud's dream. Upon awaking from his dream Mahmud expresses vague but strong apprehensions for the stability and future of his rule. These fears deepen at the ominous reports which his messengers bring from the battlefields. So at the urging of his close adviser, Hassan, he summons the Wandering Jew, Ahasuerus, to decipher his dream. This seer is the former, defiant outcast of Queen Mab, now grown older and self-assured. Not until "the ghost of [his] forgotten dream" is recalled at line 843 is the future demise of his empire revealed. His dead father, the Phantasm of Mahomet the Second, appears to him in the dream and prophesies the fall of Islam and Mahmud's descent to a "world of darkness." This demise fulfills Mahmud's earlier premonitions, which were present from the moment he awoke early in the play. Ahasuerus unfolds the content of Mahmud's dream, which confirms the latter's worst fears--the overthrow of his own tyranny is imminent and the redemption of "another Hellas" is at hand.

To a far greater degree than any of the narrative poems discussed thus far, Hellas envisages human redemption

in a social context. In part, this shift in emphasis is due to Shelley's own long-standing convictions favoring universal human freedom. It derives, furthermore, from the use of a protagonist who would ordinarily fill an antagonist role in Shelley's poetry. Shelley always develops his poems from the protagonist's point of view. Because Mahmud speaks for the repressive structure of authoritarianism, however, he lacks the Eros-centered consciousness of the protagonists in the poems already discussed.

Mahmud's ordeal grows out of his historical commitment to domination and to the preservation of an imperial social order. In Hellas the redemptive vision, under the guiding impulse of Eros, is expressed in the choruses of the Greek Captive Women and is counterposed to the main narrative which, as we shall see, is guided by Mahmud's death impulse. The desire to dominate history, even if it means total annihilation of his realm and himself, characterizes his death impulse. Beginning with their subtly stated hope at the opening of the play that the sleeping Mahmud remain permanently asleep, their desires are clearly subversive of the prevailing order of Mahmud's empire. And it is a subversive intent rooted in Eros.

Gathering up the motif that "Freedom wakes as tyrants sleep" (30), their litany over Mahmud's sleeping form is filled with the burning optimism of Eros' redemptive power.

Life may change, but it may fly not;
 Hope may vanish, but can die not
 Truth be veiled, but still it burneth;
 Love repulsed-but it returneth!

(34-37)

This eventual redemption, however, is not easily won:

Yet were life a charnel where
 Hope lay confined with Despair;
 Yet were truth a sacred lie,
 love were lust--
 If Liberty,
 Lent not life its soul of light,
 Hope its iris of delight,
 Truth its prophet's robe to wear,
 Love its power to give and bear.

(38-46)

In Hellas more than in his earlier narrative poetry, love derives its power from the ever-expanding struggle for human liberation in the social dimension of history. These choruses culminate in one of Shelley's finest lyrics to Freedom beginning, "In the great morning of the world" (46). Freedom moves forward in the van of historical necessity as the chorus recounts some of the high moments of freedom's struggle throughout the world's history from Thermopylae to the Greek revolution of Shelley's time. It closes, appropriately, on a note of uncompromising demand: "Let Freedom leave-where'er she flies / A desert or a Paradise / Let the beautiful and the brave / Share her glory, or a grave" (89-92). This motif is carried forward in the short, lyrical semi-choruses that lead up to Mahmud's awaking. Their attentive, hovering invocations of "resurrection" or "annihilation" over Mahmud center the dramatic interest on the import of Mahmud's dream, as he awakes to exclaim, "The truth of day light upon my dream" (122).

Because of the public hope and concern that rest on the eventual revelation of Mahmud's dream, its function is that of the "public dream" as Macrobius defined it.¹ This public interest remains centered from that point onward between the rising expectations of the main narrative and those of the Greek choruses later in the play. The main narrative revolves upon Mahmud's growing fear for the continued hegemony of his empire. Besides his role as sultan and the embodiment of repressive authority, he is the spokesman for the welfare of the empire, represented principally in Hassan and the messengers who inform and advise him on the trend of events. The Greek choruses, on the other hand, juxtapose their redemptive vision against Mahmud's gloomy preoccupation.

Haunted by his troubling dream on three occasions, Mahmud feels compelled to seek release from his vague and threatening visions through the interpretive offices of Ahasuerus, the Wandering Jew: "'tis said his tribe / Dream, and are wise interpreters of dreams" (134-135). Hassan dwells on Ahasuerus' capacity to discern "The Present, and the Past, and the To Come" (148). Cursed with immortality, the aged seer "has survived / Cycles of generation and of ruin" (154), according to legend. His power

¹A sub-classification of the "enigmatic dream," the public dream forecasts "some misfortune or benefit [that] has befallen the city, forum, theater, public walls, or other public enterprise." Stahl, Macrobius' Commentary, p. 90.

or prophesy is marked by sacrifice and renunciation, as

Hassan explains:

The sage, in truth, by dreadful abstinence
And conquering penance of the mutinous flesh,
Deep contemplation, and unwearied study,
In years outstretched beyond the date of man,
May have attained to sovereignty and science
Over those strong and secret things and thoughts
Which others fear and know not. (155-161)

Mahmud's expectations rise at the prospect of meeting this Jew, but they are tempered with despair: "Kings are like stars-they rise and set, they have / The worship of the world, but no repose" (195-196). Domination thus exacts insecurity from rulers who must ever stand guard to maintain their authority. Inevitably, they are also subject to decline, no matter how high their stars may rise. This distinctively un-Shelleyan association of star imagery with decline and mutability originates largely in the point of view of his protagonist. Like a star which must set, Mahmud regards the decline of his rule and his own death as final. But elsewhere in Shelley's poetry, notably in "Adonais," the star denotes immutable life. In "Adonais" it beckons from the abode of the eternal. And even in Hellas, when regarded from the perspective of the Greek choruses, Hesperus assumes its more characteristic meanings of Eros and freedom, ideas of enduring and transcendent value.

The theme of cyclical inevitability woven into the Chorus of the Greek captives, beginning "Worlds on Worlds" and, following the despairing Mahmud's lament, moves beyond

his individualized preoccupation with death to the prospect of immortality. Reminiscent of the lyric, "My Soul is an Enchanted Boat" from Prometheus Unbound, the chorus promises that:

They are immortal
Who through birth's orient portal
And death's dark chasm hurrying to and fro
Clothe their unceasing flight
In the brief dust and light
Gathered around their chariots as they go.
(201-206)

In both lyrics immortality lies beyond life and death. The redemptive potential in the chorus quoted above, aligns itself with the Christian vision of Eros at this point in the poem. Creative at the price of suffering like a "Promethean conqueror" of the classical tradition, "he [Christ] trod / The thorns of death and shame" (213-214). Shelley, however, does not really believe in redemption that relies upon renunciation and suffering, as exemplified in the Christian ethos. That Shelley himself distrusts this motivation is evident from his note explaining this chorus:

Let it not be supposed that I mean to dogmatise upon a subject, concerning which all men are equally ignorant, or that I think the Gordian knot of the origin of evil can be disentangled by that or any similar assertions. The received hypothesis of a Being resembling men in the moral attributes of His nature, having called us out of non-existence, and after inflicting on us the misery of the commission of error, should superadd that of the punishment and the privations consequent upon it, still would remain inexplicable and incredible. That there is a true solution of the riddle, and that in our present state that solution is unattainable by us, are propositions which may be regarded as equally

certain: meanwhile, as it is the province of the poet to attach himself to those ideas which exalt and ennoble humanity, let him be permitted to have conjectured the condition of that futurity towards which we are all impelled by an inextinguishable thirst for immortality.²

Shelley's "inextinguishable thirst for immortality" emerges in the choruses that close the play. It anticipates a qualitatively different redemption from that expressed in the "Worlds on Worlds" lyric just under discussion. Replacing the death and shame of renunciation is a vision which fuses Death with Eros by reaffirming the continuity of the past's redemptive love of freedom in the present for the sake of the future in this world rather than some future state after death.

Balanced against the Christian acceptance of suffering and renunciation are Mahmud's desperate pleas to his minions to prevail by means of destruction even as he tries to hope for some kind of salvation:

Ruin above, and anarchy below,
Terror without, and treachery within
The Chalice of destruction full, and all
Thirsting to drink; and who among us dares
To dash it from his lips? and where is hope?
(269-272)

Cynicism that runs this deep can find no logic affirming life, so it must court its destruction. Despite Hassan's long speeches intended to encourage Mahmud that his domination remains firm, "We have one God, one King, one Hope, one Law / But many headed Insurrection stands / Divided in

²Poems, p. 478.

itself, and soon must fall" (333-335), Mahmud remains skeptical. The crescent moon and blood red air before his sight are heavily symbolic of ultimate annihilation. The moon becomes a "Wan emblem of an empire fading now" (346). Rising above this scene of death is the single Shelleyan star often associated with his redemptive vision. In this instance, and unlike Mahmud's earlier star simile, it is "insolent and victorious," in keeping with the revolutionary necessity of the time. Mahmud fears this revolutionary spirit most: "The Spirit that lifts the Slave before his lord / Stalks through the capitals of armed kings" (351-352).

From this point until the announcement of Ahasuerus' arrival, Mahmud's pessimism underscores the accounts of the shifting fortunes of both sides, as recounted in Hassan's long speeches and the accounts of the messengers. And this pessimism becomes further steeped in premonitions of death:

Death is awake! Repulse is on the waters
 They own no more the thunder-bearing banner
 Of Mahmud; but like the hounds of a base breed
 Gorge from a stranger's hand, and rend their master.
 (466-469)

At the announcement of the Wandering Jew's arrival, Mahmud's spirit lifts slightly, though he continues fatalistic:

We gaze on danger through the mist of fear,
 And multiply upon our shattered hopes
 The images of ruin. Come what will;
 To-morrow and to-morrow are as lamps

Set in our path to light us to the edge
 Through rough and smooth, nor can we suffer-aught
 Which he inflicts not in whose hand we are.³
 (641-647)

Before Ahasuerus' appearance, however, several intervening semichoruses reaffirm the necessity of eventual redemption through Eros. This anticipated resurrection evokes Greece's golden age. Its realization, nevertheless, relies on the creative impulse of imagination that grows out of the tempestuous struggle for liberty in the present. The first semichorus draws heavily on the combination of images and the subjunctive mood of the "Ode to the West Wind:"

Semichorus I

Would I were the winged cloud
 Of a tempest swift and loud!
 I would scorn
 The smile of morn
 And the wave where the moonrise if born
 I would leave
 The spirits of eve
 A shroud for the corpse of the day to weave
 From other threads than mine!
 Bask in the deep blue noon divine.
 (648-657)

The chorus's impulse of creative power refuses to accept the temporal and spatial limitations of earth and sky. The following antiphony between the two semichoruses reaffirms the higher value of the mind, embodied in Greece's golden age, over the cyclical reversals that characterize history up to the present:

³The strong echo from Macbeth significantly underscores Mahmud's motivations. Perhaps Shelley saw in Shakespeare's homily on power politics the same self-destructive repression at work in Macbeth.

Semichorus I

Temples, and towers,
 Citadels and marts, and they
 Who live and die there, have been ours,
 And may be thine, and must decay;
 But Greece and her fountains are
 Built below the tide of war,
 Based on the crystalline sea
 Of thought and its eternity;
 Her citizens, imperial spirits,
 Rule the present from the past,
 On all this world of men inherits
 Their seal is set.

(692-703)

The continuity of ancient Greece's eternal spirit reaches forward out of the past and into the present to create the future. And in the future an "Orphic thunder" of liberation through song promises to replace the hitherto impervious powers of natural law embedded in the "Titanean walls" of history. The supplanting of the Titanic by the Orphic is perfectly consistent with the Narcissistic tendency that replaces the Promethean mythos that we noted earlier in Prometheus Unbound. This Orphic message rises above the crush of faith and the fall of empires to a new and renovating harmony. In keeping with its emergent, transforming harmony, men must abandon the motive of "Revenge and Wrong" which, governing through guilt and despair, thereby perpetuate the history of self-destruction. Men must liberate themselves, as the closing semichorus of this passage affirms, through the fulfillment of Eros in themselves rather than through dependence upon the higher authority of an unknown deity:

In sacred Athens, near the fane
 Of Wisdom, Pity's altar stood:
 Serve not the unknown God in vain,
 But pay that broken shrine again,
 Love for hate and tears for blood.
 (733-737)

Ahasuerus arrives. But his long awaited appearance proves disappointing to Mahmud. The aged seer does not purport to reveal the future in the present. He is "no interpreter of dreams" (757), but he tries to get Mahmud to see the immutable design beneath

. . . this Whole
 Of suns, and worlds, and men, and beasts, and flowers,
 With all the silent or tempestuous workings
 By which they have been, are, or cease to be,
 Is but a vision;-all that it inherits
 Are motes of a sick eye, bubbles and dreams.
 (776-780)

According to Ahasuerus, that life present to the senses is merely an illusion, a waking dream, and therefore evanescent. So Mahmud must divest himself of all hopes for his own future and that of his empire. They are perishable. Instead, he should recognize that "Thought / Alone, and its quick elements, Will, Passion, / Reason, Imagination, cannot die" (795-797). This creative capacity eludes death through a new, liberating consciousness that can overcome the repressive cycle of reality bound by time and place. "What has thought / To do with time, or place or circumstance?" (801-802), Ahasuerus asks.

But Mahmud is so obsessed with the immediate future he does not grasp the cyclical design of historical necessity that Ahasuerus espouses. So Ahasuerus grants his

desire: "Wouldst thou behold the Future?-ask and have! / Knock and it shall be opened--look and lo! / The coming age is shadowed on the Past / As on a glass" (803-806).

Ahasuerus does not possess supernatural agency, but he has apparently mesmerized his interrogator.⁴ He enables Mahmud to relieve his vision of war and imperial conquest through "the ghost of Mahmud's forgotten dream" that was "born in Blood" and must therefore die in blood. In this respect Ahasuerus closely resembles Demogorgon in Act II of Prometheus Unbound. Both reveal truth by making others see for themselves. It is, he intones, "The Past which now stands before thee like an Incarnation / Of the To Come" (852-854). Crowned with death, the vision fulfills Mahmud's worst, earlier premonitions in forecasting his downfall and that of his empire. When the Phantom of Mahomet the Second appears in Mahmud's resurrected dream-vision to explain the inevitable course of Islam's overthrow and the downfall of Mahmud, he counsels acceptance: "Islam must

⁴Shelley is concerned with establishing Ahasuerus' psychological credibility within the larger context of historical necessity operating in the poem: "The manner of the invocation of the spirit of Mahomet the Second will be censured as over subtle. I could easily have made the Jew a regular conjuror, and the Phantom an ordinary ghost. I have preferred to represent the Jew as disclaiming all pretension, or even belief, in supernatural agency, and as tempting Mahmud to that state of mind in which ideas may be supposed to assume the force of sensations through the confusion of thought with the objects of thought and the excess of passion animating the creations of imagination." Poems of Shelley, p. 497.

fall, but we will reign together / Over its ruins in the world of death" (887-888). Like Thanatos, their realm is death; for the present rebellion of Greece against the authority of Islam promises "the autumn of a greener faith" (Christianity) than that which Mahmud inherited from his father. And in its coming the power of Islam will be laid waste:

The storm is in its branches, and the frost
Is on its leaves, and the blank deep expects
Oblivion on oblivion, spoil on spoil
Ruin on ruin . . .

(875-878)

The recollection of his dream thus raises to consciousness Mahmud's earlier fear of total annihilation, expressed upon awaking near the opening of the drama: "One spark may mix in reconciling ruin / The conqueror and the conquered" (119-120). Besides foreshadowing the latent content of his dream, this reaction also previsions Mahmud's response to Mahomet's revelation. For if his own loss of empire and his own death are to come, then, Mahmud responds, let them encompass everyone:

Spirit, woe to all!
Woe to the wronged and the avenger! Woe
To the destroyer and to the destroyed!
Woe to the dupe, and woe to the deceiver!
Woe to the oppressed, and woe to the oppressor!
Woe to those that suffer and inflict!
Those who are born and those who die!

(893-899)

Mahmud's own death impulse totally denies Eros as this passage reveals.

Mahmud is not merely resigned to his fate, as critics usually maintain. Milton Wilson is representative of the prevailing view that "Mahmud feels no pity of love; he does not expand beyond the prison of his self-love. He is simply able to look at the cycles of history in which he is involved and accept the inevitable downfall of his empire with resignation."⁵ Not only does this view limit its psychology to an imprisoning "self-love" but furthermore it misconstrues Mahmud's response as "resignation" when clearly he is motivated by an active drive toward self destruction that threatens to spill over to engulf everyone and civilization with it if he cannot preserve himself and his empire. As the oppressor, Mahmud cannot desert his vested interest in domination, no matter how much it jeopardizes himself. Domination thus identifies with death itself, for it seeks to preserve its control so absolutely that only the perfect inertia of death itself can guarantee it.

Unsatisfied with his new knowledge that his own destruction and that of his empire lie within the mainstream of historical necessity, Mahmud further demands of Mahomet that he reveal the precise hour when "Destruction must accomplish / Her consummation" (901-902). But the Phantom advises that this "cold pale Hour / Rich in reversion of impending death" (903-904) cannot reveal itself

⁵Wilson, p. 190.

any more than old age can recapture youth and renew its lost joys. The Phantom speaks here in the imagery of individual reversion to death to show that the shaping forces of history operate through repression, both internal and external. Mahmud thus relives the universal fate of mankind in the awareness that he, for all his power, cannot circumvent his own history.

Mahmud awakes from his "mighty trance" at the cries of "Victory" and delivers a final speech which expresses a limited conversion to his realization that in themselves earthly phenomena have no value. Their value lies in what they can give or teach him: "for nought we see or dream / Possess, or lose, or grasp at, can be worth / More than it gives or teaches" (921-923). But although he now rejects the delusion of victory which can lead only to despair, he pursues no Eros-centered vision of redemption. Recognizing his utter finality in the inevitable future become the past, Mahmud exits from the drama.

The alternative vision, "wrought upon the curtain of future," according to Shelley's Preface, emerges in the final choruses. The "final triumph of the Greek cause" is not so unambiguously forecast in these choruses as Shelley's Preface would lead us to believe. Not only does the Voice Without "Shout in the jubilee of death" (931) and repeat this death motif several times, but the choruses themselves are full of ominous undercurrents of annihilation. At the

same time, they are intended to convey an ultimately prevailing optimism rooted in Eros. The first semichorus denies the authority of death announced by the Voice Without, though "ghastly as a tyrant's dream" (942), and envisions a regenerated earth beneath the "pyramid of night" (943). The semichoruses which follow and conclude the poem reassert the dominant motif of a new golden age beneath the dark, brooding imagery of imminent desolation.

This narcissistic world of beauty and contemplation is characteristically filled with the sensuous promise that marks Shelley's Eros. First, Greece is recalled as she was formerly: "Greece was as a hermit child / Whose fairest thought and limbs were built / To woman's growth, by dreams so mild / She knew not pain or guilt" (996-999). Beauty reveals itself, through dream, free of the repressive reality that motivates people through pain and guilt. Sensuousness then merges, fittingly, with the dominant light and star imagery that permeates this redemptive promise:

And, like loveliness panting with wild desire
 While it trembles with fear and delight,
 Hesperus flies from awakening night,
 And pants in its beauty and speed with light
 Fast-flashing, soft, and bright.
 Thou beacon of love! thou lamp of the free!
 (1036-1041)

Earlier the "insolent star" of revolution, Hesperus here links beauty and love together in freedom. This illuminated vision will be realized beyond a dream world of the present in the fragrant and music-filled world that "Burst[s] like

morning on dream or like Heaven on death / Through the walls
of our prison / And Greece, which was dead, is arisen!"

(1057-1059). Milton Wilson correctly observes with reference to this passage that "Whether the dream we awake from is Time, whether the Heaven is simply metaphorical, whether the rising of Greece is out of time or within the cycles of Time, Shelley does not say. The Greek slaves, it seems, look to the rebirth of Greece both in and out of Time, the second if not the first."⁶ For Shelley the dream bridges, imaginatively, the distinction between the temporal and atemporal.

The redemptive vision is not entirely other-worldly in design by any means. Nor is the memorable final chorus merely metaphysics. Here too, Eros is contending against Thanatos. Balanced against the first two optimistic stanzas promising that "The world's great age begins anew" (1060) and a "brighter Hellas rears its mountains" (1066) are the two following stanzas which forecast another cycle of struggle, peril and death. The return of the "golden years" reminds us of "death's scroll," even as the chorus repudiates its. And even as "Another Athens shall arise," in the fifth stanza, it is a sunset vision which must be caught at "The splendor of its prime." Finally, the last two stanzas invoke a return to the Saturnian age of "Love," while striving to thrust back the return of "hate and death." But to fulfill the promise of a return to the golden age, sacrifice

⁶Wilson, p. 193.

and struggle must give way to "votive tears and symbol flowers," or else die.

As we have seen, the redemptive Eros in Hellas emerges, not from the consciousness of a single individual, but from the collective response of an entire, oppressed nation, represented by the choruses of Greek captive women. Coincident with their vision of redemption, Mahmud's authoritarianism is rooted in eventual self-destruction. But his empire and his rule must give way to the forces of freedom, as his dream discloses. Under Ahasuerus' spell his recovered dream-vision reveals the cycle of historical necessity running against him. History favors Eros.

THE TRIUMPH OF LIFE

Relying upon the dream-vision more than previous poems, "The Triumph of Life" reflects a deepening consciousness of the elemental life and death struggle within the human psyche and in human society. Balanced against the death-in-life pageant of the poet's "waking dream," Rousseau's dreams express the primacy of death through the Nirvana principle. In addition to his characteristic reliance upon dream-visions for personal revelation, Shelley has moved toward revealing symbolically the social dimensions in which Life and Death strive against each other. Shelley was as interested in regenerating society (notably in Hellas) as he was in his own vision of personal redemption. His poem thus becomes both a commentary on human society and on his own psyche. Basically, his use of inwardly expanding, concentric dream-visions involves a quest in the human world for an Eros like that which obtains in Nature.

The opening forty lines of the poem are steeped in a sublime anticipation of apocalyptic dimensions: "the deep / Was at my feet; and Heaven above my head" (27-28). The Sun springs forth, full of warm, beneficently paternal influence. The elements of sea, and earth, and air respond

in turn, to "their father" with prayerful affirmation. So harmonious is the rapport between sun and revolving world that the struggle for existence is gratefully shared among all the forces of nature:

Isle, ocean, and all things that in them wear
The form and character of mortal mould,
Rise as the Sun their father rose, to bear

Their portion of the toil, which he of old
Took as his own, and imposed on them.¹
(16-20)

The entire movement of feeling up to the onset of the poet's "strange trance" is permeated with the well-being emerging from a perfect balance throughout Nature.

Only the poet remains wakefully apart and out of tune with this natural harmony. His all-night vigil derives from Chaucer, and beyond, from classical antiquity. Traditionally, and for Shelley, the poet's unusual wakefulness and attentiveness prepare him and the reader for the advent of his dream. The waking trance that slowly descends over his consciousness is "not slumber." It remains suspended and partly under the poet's rational control. Because he is not entirely passive, his relationship to the vision is akin to that of Mahmud's recollected vision in Hellas, as Shelley explains it in describing Ahasuerus' function. If one were to codify his dream according to the ancient criteria of Macrobius, it would probably be

¹The text is that newly edited from Shelley's manuscript by Donald H. Reiman, in Shelley's "The Triumph of Life": A Critical Study (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1965).

considered an apparition.² Shelley was trying evidently to ground his poet's dream-vision in both natural psychology and tradition.

The grim pageant which emerges as his "Vision" takes hold seems to sweep all mankind into its streaming train. The "terrific 'Dance of Death,'" as Hazlitt renamed the poem in his review of it, is nowhere as pervasive as in this section preceding the dreamer's encounter with Rousseau.³ The poet does not understand its meaning, and this heightens its terrifying effect. While each of the multitude is hastened onward, powerlessly, into one undifferentiated mass like dust, or gnats, or leaves, unaware of "Whither he went, or whence he came or why / He made one of the multitude" (48-49), each of them is responding to the ultimate necessity of death. And their responses differ. According to Marcuse, class conflicts determine the direction of the death instinct as it manifests itself in the innumerable forms of human exploitation. Rendered in terms of Shelley's social-dynamics, there are those who suffer exploitation, "flying from the thing they feared" (54), and those who

²"The apparition (phantasm or visum) comes upon one in the moment between wakefulness and slumber, in the so-called first cloud of sleep. In this drowsy condition he thinks he is still fully awake and imagines he sees specters rushing at him or wandering vaguely about differing from natural creatures in size and shape, and hosts of diverse things, either delightful or disturbing." Stahl, Macrobius' Commentary, p. 89.

³P. P. Howe, ed., The Complete Works of William Hazlitt (London and Toronto: Dent, 1930-1935), 16, p. 274.

exploit others, "Seeking the object of another's fear" (55). But more explicitly evident of the death impulse, there are those who are attracted "towards the tomb" fascinated with the prospect of death. Others brood obsessively on death so that it projects itself before them in their own shadows. Still others flee, however vainly, its frightening eventuality. But most, as the poet discovers, prefer not to face death's reality. Not that they are indifferent or unaware of it. They have repressed it from their consciousness in their frantic, competitive striving against each other. But they have not eluded it. Their deep alienation from human society and from nature reveal how severely driven they are by the death instinct; they channel its demands toward each other in an ever intensifying aggressiveness and self-destruction.

The Life-affirming elements in Nature that normally symbolize the loftiest aspirations of the imagination in Shelley's poetry stand in vivid contrast to the vanity of the human scene. Unlike the rapt response of the speaker in "The Skylark," the crowd is unmindful of the "birds within the noonday ether lost" (64), preferring the straight and deathly "path where flowers never grew" (55). Caught up in the "vain toil" of trying to outstrive each other, men faint for thirst while oblivious to the Life-informing powers of the fountain forever bursting melodiously from deep mossy cells beside the path. They are insensitive to

the breeze that should inspire as it sweeps from within the forest, beckoning toward the secret recesses of "overarching elms and caverns cold / And violet banks where sweet dreams brood" (71-72). For "sweet dreams" are the pursuit of poets, not men of the world who must pursue "their serious folly as of old . . ." (73).

Within the more tempestuous gathering of the throng and the intensified glare of icy cold light a more sinister mood takes hold, heralding the approach of the chariot of Life. The ruling imagery of cold light at this point has been thoroughly commented upon by scholars. As Bloom has stated, "The chariot's glare is the light of life; the sun's of nature; the star's the visionary light of imagination and poetry."⁴ This equation with reference to the sun and stars generally obtains elsewhere in Shelley's poetry--though not exactly or rigidly. In Epipsychidion, as we noted, the light of moon and sun are equated with rationality and imagination, respectively. Along this line Reiman adds, "The cold, fascinating light of the moon-like car suggests mere reason."⁵ Thus the light emanating from the car connotes the repressive rationality that can rule and corrupt life, giving way to death.

The Shape in the car "Crouching within the shadow of a tomb" (90), personifies one form of Death. Commanding

⁴Bloom, The Visionary Company, p. 37.

⁵Reiman, p. 31.

and dramatic, the image is consistent with the prevailing death motif in this passage. The blind charioteer of Destiny, or Necessity, who guides the chariot so erratically and spares virtually no one, first appeared very briefly in Hellas: "The world's eyeless charioteer, / Destiny is hurrying by!" (711-712). The blindness of Necessity symbolized by the charioteer's four blindfolded faces departs sharply from Shelley's earlier, optimistic historical determinism. And whereas even as early as *Mab*, Necessity is closely identified with the redemptive future of Eros, here its arbitrary power derives from the shape of Death herself, huddled within the car of Life.

But Necessity is not inherently blind. The blindfold symbolizes unnatural barriers to true understanding of Necessity. These barriers may be interpreted as man's repressive institutions as well as the deeply rooted internalized repressions that inhibit man from acting in his own best interests as an agent of Necessity. Once freed of these inhibitions and institutions which suppress his desires and divert them into self-destructive pursuits, man can pursue finally his own redemptive Eros. The chariot of Life and the charioteer would then become transformed. They would probably resemble the chariot and Spirit of the Hour who pilots Asia to her reunion with Prometheus.

Still in his trance, the poet rises aghast at the spectacle of the charioteer and the grimly splendoured car

around which rage "the million with fierce song and maniac dance" (110), virtually all of mankind, in a jubilee filled with erotic overtones that are explicitly realized in the procession several stanzas later. Behind the chariot follows a "captive multitude" which includes those people whose extraordinary talent or power endowed them either with fame or infamy. Only the exceptional, "sacred few who could not tame / Their spirits to the conqueror" (128-129), and presumably were not corrupted by Life attained a spiritual after-life or an immortal presence akin to Keats' death at the conclusion of "Adonias." Critics unanimously cite Socrates and Christ ("of Athens and Jerusalem") as clear-cut instances of the "sacred few" to whom the poet alludes. Socrates (and Jesus, to be sure) was not compromised by "earthly thrones and gems" (133); Jesus, moreover, died young and fled back like an eagle into death. Both Socrates and Christ chose a death which each considered redemptive because it was motivated by love.

The company of captives that next appear in the procession fall into two groups. Those in the vanguard are the young, mutually "attracted and repelled" in a sado-masochistic orgy. The passage, graphically explicit in its Dionysian intoxication, needs quotation at length for subsequent analysis:

Or fled before..Now swift, fierce and obscene
 The wild dance maddens in the van, and those
 Who lead it, fleet as shadows on the green,

Outspeed the chariot and without repose
 Mix with each other in tempestuous measure
 To savage music...Wilder as it grows,

They, tortured by the agonizing pleasure,
 Convulsed and on the rapid whirlwinds spun
 Of that fierce spirit, whose unholy leisure

Was soothed by mischief since the world begun,
 Throw back their heads and loose their streaming hair,
 And in their dance round her who dims the Sun

Maidens and youths fling their wild arms in air
 As their feet twinkle; they recede, and now
 Bending within each other's atmosphere

Kindle invisibly; and as they glow
 Like moths by light attracted and repelled,
 Oft to new bright destruction come and go.

Till like clouds into one vale impelled
 That shake the mountains when their lightings mingle
 And die in rain,--the fiery band which held

Their natures, snaps...ere the shock cease to tingle
 One falls then another in the path
 Senseless, nor is the desolation single,
 (137-160)

Swept along in the tempestuous dance and convulsed with
 "agonizing pleasure," the "maidens and youths" give themselves up wholly to that "fierce spirit," Life, in a blend of eroticism and self-annihilation that demands more precise analysis than the heavily moralistic criticism which equates sexuality with "the slavery of the lustful," which, as Reiman assumes, "not only corrupts the soul itself but also saps the energy that could effectively operate in the great world at large,"⁶ or equates the sexuality in the passage with a destructive "failure of love."⁷ This

⁶Bloom, The Visionary Company, p. 373.

⁷Bloom, Shelley's Mythmaking, p. 351.

traditional morality does not account for the prolixity in the lines "Like Moths by light attracted and repelled / Oft to their bright destruction come and go" (153-154). Why "repelled" as well as "attracted" to their destruction? The antagonism of Eros and Death, as Freud formulated it in the sexual context, explains the contradiction precisely.

The two kinds of instinct (Eros and Death) seldom--perhaps never--appear in isolation from each other, but are alloyed with each other in varying and very different proportions and so become unrecognizable to our judgement. In sadism, long since known to us as a component instinct of sexuality, we should have before us a particularly strong alloy of this kind between trends of love and the destructive instinct; while its counterpart, masochism, would be a union between destructiveness directed inwards and sexuality--a union which makes what is otherwise an imperceptible trend into a conspicuous and tangible one.⁸

This underlying tension described by Freud informs the mood of "agonizing pleasure" that mingles the young revelers in one repetitive and compulsive whirl of intense attraction and repulsion. Freud's description thus transfers the traditional love-lust antithesis to a psychological framework of sado-masochistic impulses intertwined in a Love-Death dance.

At the rear of the procession the "Old men, and women foully dissarrayed" (165) strive impatiently to imitate the obscene dance of the youthful vanguard. But Life, having swept over them with its churning wheels, moves forward, ever more inaccessibly. The more desperately they

⁸Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents, p. 66.

strive to draw abreast of the chariot the "Farther behind and deeper in the shade" (169) of Death they are left. Bloom is more correct perhaps than he realizes here: "their lust is toward being juggernauted."⁹ They can, in other words, only fulfill themselves in death as they strive to attain Eros. The death motif thus still prevails as the dominant motif in the ongoing struggle between the two contending instincts.

The poet's sympathies are touched at the sight of "this sad pagentry," which evokes two questions: "Half to myself I said 'And what is this? / Whose shape is that within the car?'" (177-178). The single response to either or both of these overheard questions is "Life." No other answer could have been more ironic or dramatic, because, as we have observed, Death has dominated the entire pageant.

As the poet is startled to learn, his respondent, the grotesquely distorted root growing from the hillside behind him, is a remnant of humanity corrupted by Life. It is all that remains "Of what was once Rousseau" (204). He is not, it need scarcely be said, the prototypical, revered guide of dream-vision tradition. For it is apparent that this deathly figure is himself "One of that deluded crew" (184), a victim of Life's passage. He does, however, identify and describe the captives in the triumph passing before them. In this respect, he functions traditionally.

⁹Bloom, Shelley's Mythmaking, p. 251.

As one who has "feared, loved, hated, suffered, did, and died" (200), in the awful triumph himself, Rousseau can interpret with authority what the gazing poet has only viewed and not understood: "in the battle Life and they did wage / She remained conqueror" (239-240). Death's triumph in life thus carries forward from the poet's opening vision as the primary theme in Rousseau's discourse upon all those "who wore / Mitres and helms and crowns, or wreathes of light . . . mighty phantoms of an elder day--" (209-210 & 253). The 'phantoms' Rousseau describes at length are the "mighty captives" (135) chained to the chariot and merely mentioned earlier in the poet's vision. For all their might, however, they "Could not repress the mutiny within" (213). In every instance they are led to self-destruction. Whether aggressively striving to exert physical power over the "giant world" like Napoleon, or like other powerful 'hoary anarchs' who though powerful, avail themselves only of the power to destroy, all are themselves destroyed. Frederick the Great of Prussia, Catherine the Great of Russia, and Leopold II of the Holy Roman Empire are all 'spoilers spoiled,' suffering from the destructive ends to which they used their power. The demagogic Voltaire and even the sage Kant, presumably unable to exercise their potential for good, because they lacked the power, find themselves among this group. Life's destructive power exempts no favorites.

While Rousseau attempts to set himself apart from life's conquest of other notable figures by asserting, "I was overcome / By my own heart alone" (240-241), his distinction does not hold. The "mutiny within" which enabled Life to destroy the others he identifies is no different essentially for Rousseau. Their desires, though qualitatively different from his no doubt were just as limitless, and more important, just as self-destructive in the struggle with Life. He too had once been driven along in the procession, as he later discloses:

Borne onward.--I among the multitude
Was swept; me sweetest flowers delayed not long,
Me not the shadow nor the solitude,

Me not the falling stream's Lethean song,
Me, not the phantom of that early form
Which moved upon its motion,--but among

The thickest billows of the living storm
I plunged, and bared my bosom to the clime
Of that cold light, whose air too soon deform.
(460-469)

In his chronological review of man's destructive past Rousseau goes back in time beyond the era of Napoleon and even beyond the age of Enlightenment to the Hellenic period to illustrate how the destructive passions rule men's lives. Plato's star that ruled his doom (256) alludes to the philosopher-poet's love for the Greek youth, Aster. Unlike the star of Keats' eternal redemption beyond death in "Adonais," Plato's star denotes the destructive capacity of Eros: "Life where long that flower of Heaven grew not / Conquered the heart by love" (256-257). Eros is explicitly

self-destructive here but not because sensuality corrupts, as many critics imply. Eros contains within itself the destructive potential of the death instinct irrespective of the distinction between mundane desire and metaphysical design. The destructive capacities of Alexander and his tutor Aristotle, on the other hand, are misdirected toward power and dominion over others. The 'Dominion' of this 'twain' had repressed men through physical conquest and dogmatic rationalism. Alexander strove to unite the world through force. Aristotle strove to dominate men's minds through intellectual systems. Unlike Jesus and Socrates who did not codify their visions, Aristotle was probably a more destructive influence than Alexander because his systems dominated men's minds for so many succeeding ages, until Bacon opened the way to scientific inquiry.

Carrying forward his chronological summary through the destruction of the Roman Republic by Caesar, which eventually set the stage for Constantine's inauguration of Christianity as the state religion of Rome, Rousseau concludes that this consolidation of ecclesiastical with political power "was given / But to destroy" (292-293). This pattern of destruction set the precedent for subsequent "Anarches" who founded the European dynasties to follow throughout Europe. At this point Rousseau's reflection, significantly, prompts him to recall that the creative investment of his own endeavors may have been "but a world

of agony" (295). This introspective pause gives the poet an opening to inject his own question: "'Whence camest thou and whither goest thou? / How did thy course begin,' I said, 'and why?'" (296-297): whereupon the poem-fragment involves his attempts to answer only two of the questions, for as he explains,

Whence I come, partly I seem to know,
And how and by what paths I have been brought
To this pass, methinks even thou mayst guess;
Why this should be my mind can compass not;

Whither the conqueror hurries me still less.
(300-304)

Rousseau thereupon begins his personal narrative with a recitation of his own dream-vision, which in its inception resembles the poet's initiation into his own dream. Setting and time are again natural and conventional. He mentions the traditional spring season, "In April prime" and describes a natural setting replete with Shelleyan imagery:

With kindling green, touched by the azure clime
Of the young years, I found myself asleep
Under a mountain which from unknown time
Had yawned into a cavern high and deep,
And from it came a gentle rivulet.
(310-314)

Imagery of cavern, mountain and rivulet ordinarily evoke associations of the mind's inspirational and creative powers in Shelley's poetry, as we have seen. Their use here conforms to the Shelleyan pattern. They not only help fill out the scene, but they strongly suggest a descent into the inner recesses of Rousseau's mind.

Rousseau's dream suspends "All pleasure and all pain, all hate and love / Which they had known before that hour of rest" (319). A telescopic extension of the poet's dream, it suggests a movement into another plane of consciousness. After falling asleep Rousseau awakes into a dream world to the growing awareness of approaching light. But unlike the vision of the poet, it is not the repressively cold glare of the deathly Shape of Life within the chariot. It is a light "diviner than the common sun" (338), suffused with melody and the harmony of Nature emanating from all its elements, as "the Sun's image radiantly intense / Burned on the waters of the well that glowed / Like gold, and threaded all the forest maze / With winding paths of emerald fire" (345-347). The dream-maiden, Iris, who emerges from this conjunction of Sun with the elements symbolizes that earlier harmony in Nature which the poet admired at the opening of the poem before the onset of his dream. Coupled with her sensual appeal, her presence further symbolizes the union of Nature with Eros and thus previsions the characteristically Shelleyan vision of redemption.

But she is not entirely free of countervailing tendencies. She is imbued with a sinister aura. A "Bright omnipresence" heralds the coming "shape all light," the counter-vision to the tomb-shadowed "Shape" of the poet's dream. Her reflected dependence upon the sun as she threads her way through the "forest maze," or vibrates on the "Floor

of the fountain," or casts her "many coloured scarf of the dusky dawn" signifies the spiritually informing power she draws from the sun even as it suggests her ephemerality. The glass she carries "Mantling with bright Nepenthe" (359), a drug inducing total forgetfulness, coupled with the imagery of "the fierce splendour" (359) that falls from her further suggests her sinister side. That she is therefore a fatal female motivated to betray Rousseau is, of course, a compelling interpretation. But like the Alastor maiden and "La Belle Dame," her presence and its consequences are too ambiguous to admit only of this singularity. Nor does she merely draw the poet into a sensually appealing "lotus land of escape," as some critics assume.¹⁰ Whatever redemptive possibilities she contains, Rousseau's idealization of her is premature, as is apparent when she tramples out his thoughts, one by one, "into the dust of death" (388). Whatever sinister or threatening connotations she contains are attributable to Rousseau's own narrowness of vision. She is potentially his unfulfilled Eros. Her trampling of his thoughts therefore represents her own rejection of Rousseau's misapprehension of his presence. Filled with consternation, Rousseau echoes Shelley's earlier questions to him as he asks the dream-maiden "Show whence I come and why" (398), and implores her to "Pass not away upon the passing stream" (399).

¹⁰Bostetter, p. 187.

As subsequent events show, she is not going to allow Rousseau to remain within "this valley of perpetual dream" (397) because she plans to initiate him into another vision. At her command to "Arise and quench thy thirst" (400), Rousseau obeys, and he is instantly thrust into his second dream-vision. His brain runs to sand, as "on [his] sight / Burst a new vision never seen before" (410-411). With the advent of this new vision "the fair shape" of Iris his dream maiden, begins to wane. The thematic conflict of Eros and Death emerges into sharper yet enigmatic relief at this point in the poem. Because Iris has herself induced the alternate vision, she is not, for this reason, yet another Asia figure, as many critics have supposed. She is both redemptive and sinister. She is a contradiction, Life, in all its possibilities: Eros, measuring itself against Death. Obliquely sensuous, "As veil by veil the silent splendour drops" (412), she lingers in Rousseau's awareness like a sweet scent or a caress, accompanying him imperceptibly as he moves along the wilderness, "More dimly than a day appearing dream / The ghost of a forgotten form of sleep" (427-428). Her presence therefore does not merely fade before the "new Vision," but fades, like the morning and evening star, Lucifer, in daylight, before the more brilliant light of Life's onrushing chariot. Her presence remains felt, however, although no longer seen: "So did that shape its obscure tenour keep / Beside my path, as

silent as a ghost" (432-433), Rousseau recalls. Simultaneously, Rousseau feels compelled to admit that his vision of Iris in her potential, purified form transcending all the corrupting influences of the natural world must remain "forever sought, forever lost" (431).

Rousseau's "new Vision" gathers force through the remainder of the poem so that the redemptive Eros gives way till it is scarcely discernible by the time the poet finally interrupts his narrative at the end of the poem. Led by the "cold bright car," with its accompanying savage and stunning music, the procession resembles a triumphal march in its return from "some dread war." The mythos of death thus reemerges to remind Rousseau of Life's precarious limits. Iris is still present, against the back-drop of vaulted sky: "a moving arch of victory the vermillion / And green and azure plumes of Iris has / Built high over her windwinged pavilion" (439-441). Gradually however,

. . . underneath aetherial glory clad
The wilderness, and far before her flew
The tempest of the splendour which forbade

Shadow to fall from leaf to stone;
(442-445)

This blending of Death's intensifying counterpresence with Life, whereby Life measures its finiteness, becomes transformed finally into the grotesque and macabre "dance of death," as Hazlitt described it. Unlike the earlier vision of the poet, no one is exempted from this procession.

Whether preoccupied with the beauties of the natural world

and therefore "Forgetful of the chariot's swift advance" (450), or striving to outspeed Life's advance and its certain consequence--Death--everyone is drawn precariously into it "like bubbles on an eddying flood" (458). Rousseau admits that he too was swept into the pursuit of life's challenge. He left his solitude, even spurned the strong appeal of Lethean oblivion, to plunge into that "living storm," exposing his innermost being to "that cold light." So compelling was the impulse, Rousseau seems to imply, it was the inavoidable effect of Necessity.

The elaborate compliment paid to Dante at this point in the poem, while a digression from the narrative, is nevertheless consistent with the theme of the Life-Death struggle. It denotes an alternative to joining the macabre procession of Life leading to Death. It presupposes, however, having descended to the innermost reaches of Death in order to measure the eternally enduring capacity of love, like Dante, "who returned to tell / The worlds of hate and awe; the wonderous story / How all things are transfigured except Love" (474-476). It follows therefore that since neither Rousseau nor the poet has been deeply initiated into Death's mystery, neither of them can grasp the fullest dimension of Life's informing power, Love. Thus even this digression devoted to Dante incorporates its meaning into the overarching theme we have traced in the poem.

Following this tribute the scene darkens, and the grotesque horde of captives pass in frenetic review before Rousseau's memory. Devoid even of the faded majesty that may have marked their former appearance in the poet's waking trance, they seem more a stream of asylum-house derelicts. The air around their heads is peopled with phantoms--elves, apes, vultures--which swarm "about the brow / Of lawyer, statesman, priest and theorist" (509-510). Whatever redemptive qualities the lives of others possess--beauty, strength, freshness, youth--these degenerate:

From every firmest limb and fairest face
The strength and freshness fell like dust, and left
The action and the shape without the grace

of life . . .

(520-524)

They are then reduced to mere shadows, "numerous as the dead leave's blown / In autumn evening from a poplar tree--" (528-529). Blighted by the transforming power of the "car's creative ray"--a paradoxically creative destructiveness--but still alive, these followers of Life's chariot are stripped of their final illusions, revealing the corruption beneath as "mask after mask fell from the countenance / And form of all" (536-537). With this revelation, resembling an awakening from the oblivious valley of sleep, joy dies. So as the poem reaches its fragmentary finish, Rousseau and others like him whose strength and beauty have passed, fall by the wayside. This account disappoints

the poet's expectations. His final question, "Then what is life?" bursts forth with an urgency Rousseau doubtless cannot satisfy. The lines retrieved by Garnett and included in Reiman's text seem to lead toward a meretricious consolation although this conjecture probably does Shelley an injustice. The poem-fragment, as it stands, holds the outcome in suspense and expresses the primacy of the Nirvana principle: Eros serves the death instinct in its long detour to death.

In its incomplete form the poem depicts how the death instinct governs the life of the individual psyche and of human society. If Shelley had attempted to answer the question, "What is Life?" he would doubtless have tried to resolve it, just as he did in his previous narrative poems, in the direction of Eros. The redemptive promise of Iris in Rousseau's dream would have re-emerged in the figure of another, less ambiguous, female figure to balance off the sad pageantry of Shelley's vision. Yet such a resolution would still have entailed recognizing the ongoing dialectic of Life and Death, with only a shift in emphasis. As it stands, the poem is fully satisfying in that it recognizes and deepens respect for the forces of death in society and in the psyche even as it poises ready to affirm life.

CONCLUSION

The dream-visions which pervade Shelley's narrative poetry are critical to the fundamental dynamics of his redemptive vision. Informed by the unrelenting contest between the life and death instincts in both the human psyche and in civilization, with varying emphases in narrative design and thematic purpose, each of the poems from Queen Mab to "The Triumph of Life" develops this dynamic in terms that Shelley rendered explicitly in his brief allegory, Una Favola. Both in this essential tale and in the other works discussed, Eros and Death emerge not merely as separate or alternative tendencies leading toward a metaphysical or platonic truth. Rather, they converge and diverge, interlacing their competing impulses so that one, then the other, is dominant but always inseparable from its antagonist. Usually Shelley tries to resolve the tension in favor of Eros. But sometimes the tension between Eros and Death, as exemplified in Una Favola, remains unresolved--most notably in Epipsychidion and "The Triumph of Life." Eros seeks its release through the pleasure principle--gratification free from time and toil. This release however is akin to the release which the death instinct seeks through the Nirvana principle--regression into perfect

inertia. Underlying both the Nirvana and pleasure principles in Shelley's poetry is a Narcisstic Eros that projects a redemptive vision of beauty and contemplation.

The dream framework upon which Mab stretches past, present and future in Queen Mab obviates the demands of objective, waking reality. From her atemporal and aspatial perspective she is able to instruct the lovely dreamer, Ianthe (and the reader) on how the evils of the past and the present must inevitably give way to total regeneration of all mankind. Shelley's passion for reforming the world is more explicit in Queen Mab than in any of the narrative poems which followed it. For Mab's oracular vision of redemption is attained primarily in the context of a regenerated society which, in turn, enables men to regain their own lost ties with nature.

In sections VIII and IX this new dispensation, which had only been hinted at in the earlier sections of the poem, emerges. Displacing the corrupt, dead and dying civilizations of past and present, the redemptive Eros of these final two sections reveals itself free from the repressive need to labor, within an order of abundance compatible with this freedom; it also envisions the reconciliation of sensuousness and reason, which entails the sensualization of reason and the conquest of time, insofar as it undermines lasting gratification. This vision is not merely transcendentalized exposition. It presupposes a total

revolution in the ways men perceive and feel in order to achieve it in the material world, where Shelley at this stage of his growth clearly believed it could happen.

The pivotal significance of the Alastor poet's dream-vision has eluded final definition by critics because the dream-maiden herself is both the poet's destroyer and preserver. But it is precisely in the dialectic involving these competing impulses, equatable with Freud's life instinct and death instinct, that the poet pursues his redemptive vision. As we have seen, Eros, or love, preserves him only to define the ultimate direction of his death. By trying to affirm his imaginative vision (Eros) in the real world, he also affirms the flaw in himself (Thanatos), and exacts the world's retribution.

The poet's desire to redeem his dream upon awaking activates the Nirvana principle which finally fulfills itself through a Narcissistic release into death. This liebestod is full of the voluptuous promise of a reunion that can be attained, the poet believes, only through ultimate regression into death. Unlike Mab's vision of a regenerated society, which includes all of humankind, the Alastor poet's desire is very private and individualistic. The incidents and scenery of the surrounding world thus reflect and illuminate only his inner struggle.

Gradually, the forces of death predominate in this struggle. The eagle plummeting to its death while locked

in the serpent's coils; the poet's turbulent journey by water; his own compelling but forewarning image in the fountain--all reveal the mastering impulse of death. While he pursued his vision of beauty and truth in the world, it illuminated his being. But at the same time it led him to embrace Eros' counterpart, Death. His quest is tragic because it transforms his special vision into a flaw.

Prometheus' multi-dimensional Eros--Asia, Panthea and Ione--initiate the most complex redemptive vision in all of Shelley's poetry via the medium of Panthea's dream-visions. The sole communion between Prometheus and Asia, Panthea's dreams, generates the quest which eventuates in Jupiter's downfall as it redeems Prometheus. In Act II Panthea's second and unremembered dream of Asia's love for Prometheus emerges following her first dream expressing his love for Asia. It is Panthea's second dream which must be followed to the inner reaches of Prometheus' psyche, Demogorgon's cave, before Asia can reunite with Prometheus and before Demogorgon can ascend to overthrow Jupiter, the death instinct expressing itself through individual and institutionalized domination of men's minds.

Jupiter's overthrow, moreover, is as much the inevitable effect of Prometheus' love (Eros) as it is the result of historical necessity. Instead of opposing Jupiter aggressively and thereby reenforcing the repressive organization of civilization and the internalized repression of

the mind, Prometheus liberates himself and mankind through his total commitment to Eros. This commitment grows out of Eros' need to preserve itself. So he renounces his curse upon Jupiter and therefore his traditional Promethean identity of perpetual struggle and renunciation of pleasure; no longer can he repress Eros, thereby strengthening Jupiter's power in order to create suppressive civilization. His renunciation of his curse displaces his earlier renunciation of pleasure and activates the quest into the subliminal realm of Demogorgon's cave by way of Panthea's dream-visions. Under the guiding impulse of Demogorgon, the embodiment of the Nirvana principle, Prometheus wills the direction of his new sensibility toward a Narcissistic and Orphic world of sensuous play, beauty, and contemplation--the Nirvana principle not as death but as life.

In The Witch of Atlas Shelley attains the fullest realization of the Narcissism implicit in his redemptive vision. The incarnation of a dream-vision herself, the Witch redeems pleasure, absorbs death and halts time, like Narcissus. Her world involves no unresolved tension between Eros and Death. Contemplating the art and learning on the walls of her cave which are an extension of her own consciousness, the Witch embodies the Eros at the heart of the imagination, the creative process. Her Eros, like that of Narcissus, is akin to Death and fulfills itself through the Nirvana principle as it informs the deaths of naiads

and nymphs. Death is not threatening because it is perfectly integrated with Eros. Her creation of the Hermaphrodite symbolizes a sexuality purified of all repressive tendencies. Finally, presiding over the world of mortal dreamers, she beckons them back into a childlike world of play. In so doing she reforms men so that death's eternity becomes a Narcissism of all human experience.

In Epipsychidion Shelley returns to the intensely private vision of the Alastor poet. The narrator of Epipsychidion single-mindedly pursues his projected love-ideal or "soul out of my soul" as a personal redemption. Unlike Queen Mab and The Witch of Atlas whose redemptive Eros extends to all humankind, Shelley's epipsyche expands outwardly, beyond his anticipated erotic union with Emily to an individual and mystical reintegration into nature. His search for Emily, like the Alastor poet's quest to recover his dream-maiden, lures him "toward sweet death" and thereby threatens to annihilate as it promises to redeem him. But because she originates somewhere between dream and the filmy, rarified atmosphere that passes for reality in the poem, Emily's presence blurs the sharp distinction critics like to draw between the subjective world of the narrator's desire and the harsh limitations of reality.

It is therefore overly facile to insist upon the failure of the poet's desire because of reality's limitations. It is more fruitful to recognize that the narrator's

entire vision is permeated with the tension between the competing claims of Eros and Thanatos as embodied in his desire for Emily. So, like an interrupted dream, the poet's vision remains suspended between Death and Eros in its penultimate, closing lines: "one life, one death / One Heaven, One Hell." And it is precisely because the boundaries between subjectivity and objectivity remain indeterminate and Emily apparently belongs to both worlds, that the tension between Eros and Death, unlike the earlier poems, remains unresolved.

The dream-vision in Hellas, as in all the preceding narrative poems under discussion, is an important motive force. But unlike the other dream-visions it is not potentially redemptive for the dreamer, Mahmud. Instead, because he is a tyrant, it foretokens his own eventual downfall and the demise of his empire, along with the coincident redemption of those whom he would oppress and destroy. This redemptive counterforce is represented by the Greek chorus of women captives. Throughout the poem they embody its subversive Eros that promises to redeem Greece, and by extension, all mankind. In Hellas, Eros is so consistently associated with social regeneration that the poem becomes a firmer statement of the necessity for universal redemption than Queen Mab or The Witch of Atlas. Mahmud's dream, ironically for him, vindicates the Greek chorus. His unremembered dream (like Panthea's) when revealed, augurs his

own destruction, a self-destruction rooted in his own obsessive authoritarianism.

Like Jupiter, Mahmud might be said to embody the death instinct. His every impulse is to repress and destroy his enemies in order to preserve his law and his order. His dream also echoes the redemption of mankind as expressed by the Greek choruses. As Ahasuerus enables Mahmud to understand in recalling his dream, Mahmud's empire and his rule must give way to a larger freedom than his own, a freedom that liberates all men. The redemptive Eros in Hellas emerges therefore not from the consciousness of a single individual but from the collective response of an entire, oppressed people.

The inwardly expanding, concentric dream-visions of "The Triumph of Life" reflect Shelley's deepening consciousness of the elemental life and death struggle in the human psyche and in human society. Balanced against the death-in-life pageantry of the poet's "waking dream," Rousseau's dreams express the primacy of death. Death is the dominant impulse throughout most of the poem. Although driven by the blindfolded charioteer of Necessity, Life's chariot is under the control of Death. And all its captives, however great their station was in the world, are Death's captives. Only Socrates and Christ died deaths which were redemptive, because they were governed by Eros.

Rousseau admits to Shelley that he too has been a victim of Life's destructive impulses. Like the other

captives in Life's train, whatever Eros he possesses is repressed by Death. He reveals how this happened in his personal history. The dream-maiden, Iris, who visited him full of redemptive promise, was also like Emily, and the dream-maiden in Alastor in that she possessed a sinister side. Her sinister connotations may be attributable to Rousseau's failure perhaps to respond correctly to her potentially redemptive promise.

Evidently Shelley intended to answer his own question, "what is life?" on a redemptive note that affirms Eros. This would have meant the re-emergence of Iris or another less ambiguous female figure to guide him and reveal to him the possibilities of a personal regeneration rooted in Eros. As the poem stands, it remains like its prototype, Una Favola, an unresolved tension between the competing impulses of Life and Death.

From the early framing function of Ianthe's dream, with its sharply drawn polarity between a redemptive Eros and a history throttled by its own destructive institutions, through "The Triumph of Life," which begins to explore Death more subtly as a psychic and social phenomenon, Shelley penetrated not only more intricately into the destructive forces of the death instinct and the precariousness of Life but also into the obstinacy of Life and its power over Death. Mab awes Ianthe with her vision of eventual redemption for mankind, just as she had impressed her

earlier with the immensely destructive capacities of man and his institutions. As the Alastor poet becomes increasingly obsessed with death, his life becomes increasingly imperiled, and he deludes himself into death in the belief that he will embrace Love by affirming Death. For Prometheus, his life can only be fulfilled by measuring not toward death (Jupiter), like the Alastor poet, but from death and toward life, in all its extraordinary ramifications, as personified by Ione, Panthea and Asia. The Witch, on the other hand, never feels threatened by Death, as Prometheus did prior to renouncing his curse, nor by the precariousness of Life. She, after all, embodies Eros and therefore absorbs death in a perfect Narcissism. But whereas the Witch can confidently affirm Eros, Shelley's narrator in Epipsychidion, like the Alastor poet, must risk death to attain Eros, although he is acutely aware of the "Hell" involved in affirming Eros. And while he is "Love's" his desire remains suspended between Eros and Death at the conclusion of the poem. Mahmud in Hellas is akin to the Alastor poet and Jupiter in his preoccupation with the precariousness of life because he is obsessed with death. And unlike the Witch, who would redeem all men because she embodies Eros, Mahmud's death impulse would engulf all men. Life's victims in "The Triumph of Life," unlike the Eros informing the Greek chorus in Hellas, hurtle themselves toward Death in the belief that Death is

Life. Shelley, however, and Rousseau presumably need to move away from Death so they can affirm Life.

Thus the exploratory device of the dream-vision reveals how Shelley's poetic vision is redemptive and, more importantly, how the Life-Death struggle informs this vision and deepens its complexity and meaning. Through use of the dream-vision, the familiar dichotomy between desire and reality gives way to a vision of the competing desires of Eros and Thanatos within the context of a shifting reality. Beyond this fundamental polarity in Shelley's poetry, however, it is possible to discern, with the aid of Marcuse and Freud, the subtler dynamics of renunciation and repression as components of the death impulse and the imperative of an emerging Narcissism that expresses both the pleasure principle and the Nirvana principle in human society and in the individual psyche.

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