

FROM MYTHOGRAPHY TO MYTHOPOESIS:
THE POLITICS OF ROMANTIC
MYTHMAKING

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation seeks to expand the way we approach myth in Romantic literature, regarding it not just as classical content but as a process by which authors—including modern ones—are able to universalize and disseminate specific political, poetic, and religious agendas. Mythography is only one aspect of the broader category of mythopoesis, a category that allows us to consider how generic decisions, rhetorical maneuvers, and formal devices can also be used to lend authority and credibility to an author's underlying message. Scholars interested in Romantic uses of myth traditionally explore the religious subversiveness of the Second Generation's pagan subjects or myth's role as a means of reconciling the ideal past and flawed present. While these studies have greatly improved our understanding of the relationship between literary myths and historical concerns, they approach myth only in terms of mythographic content, thereby dismissing Romantic authors' active participation in the mythmaking process.

The dissertation begins with an analysis of the foundational work of conservative rhetoric and mythmaking, Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, but otherwise focuses on poetry composed between 1814 and 1822, the years leading up to and immediately following the Peterloo Massacre. Chapters in the dissertation explore conservative mythmaking, the responsibility Romantic poets assumed of using poetry for civic purposes, radical mythmaking leading up to Peterloo, and the growing intensity of myths produced in the massacre's aftermath.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to David Hopper, who always knew this day would come and, even now, continues to guide me. I love you, Dad.

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INTRODUCTION THE FUNCTION OF MYTH

In his famous *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes defines myth first and foremost as “a system of communication” (109). Signs (words, images, sounds, acts, etc.) have no intrinsic meaning but, rather, are invested with meaning once “readers” establish a connection between a signified (concept) and its signifier (the form that express it). The letters D-O-G, for example, are symbols that have been created that do not possess an essential meaning—there is nothing dog-ish about the letters D-O-G—but they become a sign and gain meaning as a reader associates those letters (the signified) with his or her idea of what a dog is (the signified). This system, according to semiology, is called signification, and it is through this system that language attains meaning. Myth, according to Barthes, is an extension of that signification system, a metalanguage. A myth is created when the sign produced through

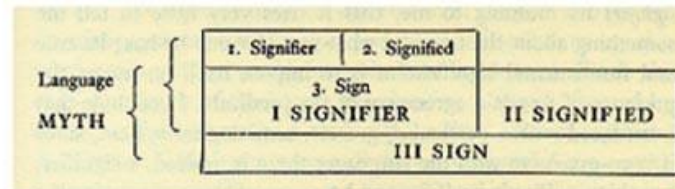


Figure 1. Barthes’s table demonstrating the signification of language and the metasignification of myth. From Barthes’s *Mythologies*.

the initial signification becomes the signifier for another level signification. This metasignification can also be called mythopoesis, and the sign it produces is a myth (see figure 1).

Saussure's famous example of signification is that of a tree: the word "tree" combined with the reader's idea of what a tree is. Barthes, however, uses a poem about a tree by French poet Minou Drouet to demonstrate that the process of signification can be folded in upon itself and continue on to create a different kind of sign—a sign with both a literal and a social meaning. The subject of Drouet's poem "Tree That I Love" is not a tree that a single process of signification could produce:

Tree that I love,
tree in my likeness,
so heavy with music
under the wind's fingers
that turn your pages
like a fairy tale...
echo of wind's grief
and birds' joy
tree undressed by winter
for the first time I watch you. (1-6, 22-25)

As Barthes explains, "A tree is a tree. Yes, of course. But a tree as expressed by Minou Drouet is no longer quite a tree, it is a tree which is decorated, adapted to a certain type of consumption, laden with literary self-indulgence, revolt, images, in short with a type of social *usage* which is added to pure matter" (109). It is this "social usage" that turns language into myth, signification into mythopoesis. The purpose of myth is to give "an historical intention a natural justification...making contingency seem eternal" (Barthes 142). That is, groups or individuals who wish to persuade others to see and believe as they do construct myths in order to make siding with their particular agenda seem natural and essential.

While Barthes's theory of myth is invaluable, it falls short in one significant area: revolution. Barthes explains that myth is a tool of the bourgeoisie, used to maintain the status quo and make existing structures of power appear eternal and support for them

seem necessary. Revolutionary language, according to Barthes, cannot be mythic because revolution works to expose the myths produced by the bourgeoisie: "The bourgeoisie hides the fact that it is the bourgeoisie and thereby produces myth; revolution announces itself opening as revolution and thereby abolishes myth" (146). Barthes composed *Mythologies* in the mid-1950s, a time marked by post-colonial and post-World War II problems for many French citizens yet increasing prosperity for the middle class, so the bourgeoisie is naturally the subject of his political attention. The bourgeoisie, however, is not the only power that relies on myth, nor does the category of myth exclude revolutionary language and movements. Revolutions are not neutral. They possess social and political agendas of their own, and they rely on myths to promote those agendas as well as to undermine the more conservative myths that stand in opposition to them.

In his *Discourse and the Construction of Society*, Bruce Lincoln offers an expansion of Barthes's theory that accounts for revolutionary uses of myth, acknowledging that a movement seeking to expose and supplant existing myths requires myths of its own: "the frequent repetition of the same authoritative story can help maintain society in its regular accustomed forms...but other possibilities exist, ones in which myths can be employed to construct new or unfamiliar social formations" (25). Lincoln relies heavily in *Discourse* on criteria and categories for myth that are based on the abstract concepts of truth claims, credibility, and authority. He explains, however, in *Theorizing Myth*, which he published ten years later, that he adopted this system "with insufficient critical reflection" and acknowledges that myth cannot be so rigidly defined and categorized (xii). Lincoln does not recant, however, what is arguably his most valuable contribution to myth scholarship: his acknowledgement of revolutionary myths. The revised definition of myth Lincoln

articulates in *Theorizing Myth* echoes Barthes's original definition but also takes revolutionary myths into account and avoids the overly restrictive system of categorization Lincoln had previously relied upon. According to Lincoln's revised definition, myth is "ideology in narrative form" (147) and relies upon "the projection of the narrator's ideals [and] desires...into a fictive prehistory that purportedly establishes how things are and must be" (149). It is this understanding of myth that I wish to expand and apply to the literature of the Romantic period.

DEFINING "MYTH"

Historically, literary studies have defined myth as texts that contain references to gods and heroes. Defined so narrowly, myth has become a thing of the past to which authors can allude but which they cannot create themselves. Shakespeare, Milton, and Blake come closer than most to being considered mythmakers in their own right, but even their myths tend to be discussed only as iterations of the older archetypes and sources that influenced them. Northrop Frye, as a literary scholar interested in myth, both acknowledges the traditional, narrow definition of myth but also seeks to move beyond it. He explains in his *Anatomy of Criticism*, that the common use of the term "myth" is "a story about a god" (33) but that myths can also be intertextual archetypes: symbols that function beyond a single text because their meaning is understood and defined by a culture rather than a single author. In this discussion of myth, Frye extends the usual literary definition beyond classical content to include symbols that exist in the collective culture of a society. This social function of myth is as close as literary scholarship gets to the "social usage" of myth Barthes mentions, but it still stops short of exploring myth's function as a rhetorical apparatus, which is key to understanding the relationship between politics and poetics,

particularly in the Romantic period. By applying a more cultural and anthropological definition of myth to Romantic texts, I seek to: 1) demonstrate that myth should be discussed as an ongoing process (mythopoesis) rather than something ancient merely to be referenced (mythography), 2) examine how authors responded to and attempted to influence the current events of their own time with their writings, and 3) reveal the interplay and similarities not only between conservative and radical mythmaking but also between literary and political rhetoric in the Romantic period.

Although “myth” is not a term that can be neatly defined, there are some ways to delineate—at least to some extent—its nature, purpose, and components. I have already explained that myths are narratives or images that naturalize historical agendas, that they can be constructed by conservative and radical movements alike, and that new myths can be used not only to promote a particular agenda but also to expose the underlying agenda of the opposition’s myth(s). While I do not wish to attempt a rigid definition, as Bruce Lincoln once did, of an inherently fluid term, it is necessary to distinguish “myth” from a few other terms—namely, “propaganda” and “allegory”—for the sake of clarity.

In attempting to understand the relationship between propaganda, myth, and allegory, it may be helpful to visualize a Venn diagram that includes circles for each term and scattered dots that represent individual texts. Some dots fall outside the circles altogether, some fall squarely within the perimeter of one circle, and others may fit within multiple circles. What complicates matters is that while the texts themselves do not change and their representative dots do not move, the perimeters of the categorical circles can and do, depending on the individual reader and the historical context of the reading. Barthes’s resolute focus, for example, on the bourgeoisie as defined by that particular moment in

French history prevents the boundaries of his circle from ever expanding to include revolutionary texts, yet Lincoln, who is removed from the class war of Barthes's historical moment, is able to imagine myth with a variety of sources and motives. The circumference of these "myth" and "propaganda" circles can be expanded to include or contracted to exclude certain texts as the reader's perspective changes. They need not even remain circles at all. The outer limit of "myth" might stretch out suddenly to encompass a certain text but veer in sharply and create an irregular shape in order to exclude another similar but significantly different text.

Myth has much in common with propaganda, and, in fact, Barthes's most famous example of myth will register to many readers as propaganda. Simply put, propaganda



Figure 2. *Paris Match* cover #326 (June 25-July 2, 1955).
From Barthes's *Mythologies*.

strives to be mythic but is oversimplified to the point that its motives are too transparent to be trusted or accepted by those it seeks to influence. In rhetorical terms, propaganda lacks the ethos that myth possesses. What complicates matters, however, is that the

existence of that ethos is largely determined by the individual reader and the context in which the text is being read. Barthes's example of myth, a *Paris Match* magazine cover, features a young, black soldier in French military uniform, saluting to something or someone off the page. Barthes explains the cover as a literal system of signs that has been suppressed by the imposition of another, mythic system that promotes the idea "that France is a great Empire, that all her sons, without any colour discrimination, faithfully serve under her flag, and that there is no better answer to the detractors of an alleged colonialism than the zeal shown by this Negro in serving his so-called oppressors" (116). Although the *Paris Match* cover is Barthes's iconic example of a myth, it is likely that Barthes himself, as a careful reader and one whose political views would have naturally made him skeptical of the imperialistic message the cover promotes, would have considered it propaganda.¹

There are a number of factors that can contribute to whether an individual reads a text as myth or propaganda. The historical moment in which the text is read will inevitably affect the reader's perception of it. Someone living in France during the Algerian War, for example, is more likely to read the *Paris Match* cover as myth than someone more removed from 1950s France, but even readers approaching the same text from similar contexts are likely to read and categorize it differently according to their different personal experiences. No two readers will reach identical conclusions about a potentially mythic text because no two readers will associate the same signifieds with the text's signifiers. Additionally, the

¹ The Algerian War for Independence was well underway during the composition of *Mythologies*, and Barthes (along with the rest of France) would have certainly been inundated with myths/propaganda justifying France's occupation of Algeria. Barthes was a staunch opponent of French imperialism and imperialism in general, perhaps made most obvious by the short essay in *Mythologies* entitled "African Grammar," which exposes the hidden imperialistic rhetoric behind the conservative press' purportedly objective journalism.

efficacy of certain ethical and pathetic appeals is also affected by an individual reader's personal experiences. A text that features small children as part of its argument may, for example, strike a mother as mythic but someone without children as propaganda (or vice versa).

The communities with which readers identify (according to their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, etc.) and their political, ethical, religious, and philosophical ideologies can also affect their interpretation of potentially mythic texts. Someone whose ancestors suffered as a result of imperialistic practices might, for instance, be more likely to read the *Paris Match* cover as propaganda than a reader whose family history does not include instances of slavery and subjugation, and a reader whose political beliefs are at odds with the agenda of a particular text might be more likely to read a text as propaganda than someone who already identifies with that agenda. Finally, readerly experience can affect whether someone understands a text as mythic or propagandistic. A reader who initially reads a text as mythic may, upon reading and discerning the meaning of more myths and propaganda, find that same text too simple and restrictive to remain so. Although these are ways to theoretically differentiate the two, the line that divides myth from propaganda is subject to change with every text, reader, and reading.

As with propaganda, myth can sometimes overlap with but is usually distinct from political allegory. Despite the potential for overlap, there are a few ways to distinguish the category of allegory from that of myth. Generally speaking, allegory seeks to relate a universal truth of the human condition by means of a specific narrative. According to Northrop Frye, "We have allegory when the events of a narrative obviously and continuously refer to another simultaneous structure of events or ideas, whether historical

events, moral or philosophical ideas, or natural phenomena” (“Allegory” 12). In allegory, the specific, literal narrative is often sacrificed for the sake of the more universal message the author wishes to express. The purpose of myth, however, is to tell a specific story—to promote a specific agenda—by making it seem like a universal truth. Thus, while the symbolic significance of a myth is emphasized in its composition, the particular agenda behind it is the most important element.

According to such distinctions, stories such as Aesop’s fables are the simplest and purest form of allegory. Aesop presents the somewhat arbitrary figures of the Tortoise and Hare and asks readers to extrapolate a universally applicable lesson from their specific story. The process for constructing meaning from allegory, then, is inductive. Myths, however, ask the opposite of their readers: to reach a specific conclusion based on a universal image or narrative, making the mythic process a deductive one. Dante’s *Divine Comedy* and Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* are two of the most famous examples of allegory, and while they are, in fact, allegories, they both possess mythopoeic elements as well. From an allegorical perspective, the specific journey Dante goes on in *The Divine Comedy* has larger, allegorical implications—generalized lessons about a Christian’s journey toward absolution and eternal life—that it wants to impress upon the reader, but parts of the story work in the opposite, mythic direction. In *The Inferno*, for example, Dante uses hell (a universally recognizable and relevant idea within a Christian context, regardless of the innovativeness of Dante’s underworld) for the specific agenda of critiquing the people and politics of medieval Florence. This portion of the allegorical text is mythic. Similarly, in Book 1 of *The Faerie Queene*, Red Cross Knight’s travels and battles teach allegorical lessons about humankind’s path to Holiness, but Red Cross’s dependence upon Una in his

fight with the dragon at the end of the book makes a mythic argument for the virtue and importance of the Anglican Church in overcoming evil. Spenser's epic is as much myth to promote English Protestantism as it is the guide to morality he claimed it was (which is not to say that readers, especially those removed from the religious tension of Elizabethan England, cannot and do not read it as a heavy-handed attempt at myth that is ultimately propagandistic).

While allegory tends to rely on a one-to-one correspondence between the signs of the text and those of the real (or ideal) world, myth tends to avoid such direct identification. If an allegory's parallels become inconsistent at any point, it ceases to be an allegory and is merely "allegorical" instead (Frye, "Allegory" 12), but myth need not adhere to such a rigid structure. As myths are, at their core, tools of persuasion, they are better understood in Aristotle's terms of logos, pathos, and ethos. While myths can contain logical appeals, ethical and pathetic ones play a larger role in making a text mythopoeic. Part of what prevents a myth from being seen as propaganda is its credibility. Aristotle explains that one way of establishing credibility in rhetorical situations is to provide witnesses who can confirm your argument and that the "most credible of all are the ancient witnesses, since there is no possibility of corrupting them" (82-83). Dead poets and ancient proverbs were used in Aristotle's day to establish ethos because their words had already stood the test of time and were perceived as true regardless of specific circumstances. Myths strive for a similar ethos in order to convince their readers. As Aristotle explains, "people are delighted when he [a speaker] succeeds in expressing as a general truth the opinions they entertain about special cases" (153-54). Myths also rely on pathos to ensure that readers have a powerful emotional response (positive and/or negative, depending on the purpose

of the myth) to the narrative or image because “we give very different decisions under the sway of pain or joy, and liking or hatred” (Aristotle 9).

These ethical and emotional appeals are accomplished via a combination of five rhetorical maneuvers, which I refer to as mythic modes or mythopoeic strategies. These modes are used in various permutations and need not all be present at one time, but effective myths often employ a combination of these techniques. The first (1) mode consists of masking the historically situated political agenda of the narrative. Myth, above all things, is the presentation of a political ideal or message under the guise of something else. The second (2) mode is ascribing a greater, often religious, significance to the subject of the narrative. While some myths operate by disguising an issue of great importance behind an innocent message, others do just the opposite by applying a higher meaning and dire consequences to the issue. The third (3) mode involves particulars being removed to create a more universally applicable narrative. This occurs when figures and events in a story, for example, are removed from their specific context to function instead as symbols. The fourth (4) mode occurs when a particular theory or narrative conducive to the creator’s political agenda is posited as inviolable truth. Myths often spur people to action by putting forward possible scenarios as inevitable ones, creating positions that are not representative of the actual politics, and leading readers to make false choices. Finally, the fifth (5) mode uses mythography to make a political statement.

It is worth noting at this point the difference between mythology (a body of myths belonging to a particular culture), mythography (the representation or depiction of such mythology in art), and mythopoesis. Mythopoesis, or the construction and influence of societal myths, has historically been the focus of anthropological and cultural studies

rather than literary studies, but approaching literary texts through the lens of mythopoesis leads to new readings of old texts and an increased understanding of the relationship between contemporary politics and literature. Significantly, my expanded definition of myth does not negate the work of those who have worked to illuminate the role of mythography in Romantic literature but, rather, extends that work to allow not only for mythopoeic readings of non-mythographic texts but new interpretations of texts whose mythographic content has already been studied.

MYTHIC MODES IN ACTION

While “myth” can refer to mythology, mythography, or mythopoesis, literary scholarship tends to focus on the first two: ancient stories about gods and references to those stories in subsequent literature. Romantic uses of mythography have been explored at length for many years by scholars such as Douglas Bush, Marilyn Butler, Anthony Harding, and Earl Wasserman. Their work has proved immensely valuable in understanding Romantic uses of mythographic content and its relevance to contemporary politics. Douglas Bush, for example, summarizes different Romantic uses of myth in the Preface to his 1969 edition of *Mythology and the Romantic Tradition in English Poetry*:

The most central facts are that Coleridge nostalgically deplored the extinction of myth by “the faith of reason,” that Wordsworth, whatever his Christian consciousness of pagan error, could revivify Greek myths in a spirit akin to his own religion of nature, and that the younger Keats and Shelley could make them vehicles for their most personal and exalted visions of nature and man and poetry. (vii)

He unites these varied approaches to myth by arguing that Romantic poets reconciled the contrast between the actual present and the ideal past by using preexisting narratives to

speak to nineteenth-century issues: “investing ancient myths with modern significance” (xx).

Other prominent Romanticism scholars such as Marilyn Butler and Anthony Harding address the political ends toward which the Romantics apply their appropriations of myth. In *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries*, Butler points to the second generation’s use of pagan references as a means of making political statements: “The younger poets proclaimed their rejection of the political ideology of the older poets primarily via their challenge to religious orthodoxy” (136). Butler argues that mythological references by poets such as Shelley, Byron, and Keats were not only a challenge to the poetic orthodoxy of accessibility established by the first generation but “a challenge also to an institutionalized Christianity that was part of the apparatus of state” (136). Simply put, the second generation authors used mythic content to make radical poetic, religious, and political statements. Harding echoes both Bush and Butler in his *Reception of Myth in English Romanticism* by pointing out myth’s power to “subvert the complacent acceptance of orthodox religious belief” and its usefulness to the “skeptical poet who, seeing the present corrupt state of society, determines to use his poetry to show humankind the possibility that a new age may be imminent” (163).

Each of these critics—along with the larger group of Romanticism scholars I am using them to represent—are correct in their assessment of the political (often subversive) power of myth and its ability to instill hope for a better world.² As they suggest, mythological references can inspire change, but if the allusions are all to preexisting myths,

² See also Ian Fletcher’s *Romantic Mythologies*, Paul Cantor’s *Creature and Creator: Myth-Making and English Romanticism*, and Linda M. Lewis’s *The Promethean Politics of Milton, Blake, and Shelley*.

then any subsequent attempts at progress will be founded on the long-dead past.

Mythologizing the figures and events of the present, however, and creating new myths that reveal alternatives to contemporary evils, can offer hope for a better and attainable future, and it is precisely this process of transforming nineteenth-century history and politics into myth that has been overlooked by recent scholarship.

Earl Wasserman, in "Shelley's Use of Myth," argues that Shelley, believing myths to be "more truly real than the sensory world that man falsely believes to reside outside his mind," saw all myths as equally valid attempts to communicate truth (525). According to this understanding of myth, all myths, regardless of origin, are available to the poet to use and revise as he attempts to communicate more truths, and it is the poet's responsibility "to reform erroneous, misshapen myths" (527). In his discussion of "reformed myths," Wasserman argues that Shelley is a mythmaker, but this statement is limited by his belief that myths can only be revised, not created: "inasmuch as he is creative, he is a mythopoeist, not by inventing myths, but by reconstituting the imperfect ones that already exist" (530).³ By embracing such a restrictive definition of myth, Wasserman and other Romanticism scholars have drastically underestimated the prevalence and significance of myth in the Romantic period.

Shelley's "England in 1819," for example, steeped in the upheaval surrounding the English government's attack on its own citizens at St. Peter's Field, is mythopoeic despite its lack of mythographic content. Shelley uses the poem to undermine the authority and

³ "For it is Shelley's assumption that if all creeds, or their mythic embodiments, were shaped into the highest form they admit, they would be precisely translatable into each other. Despite his modest disclaimer—'Far from me is such an attempt'—the syncretism of his 'great work' is at the heart of *Prometheus Unbound*" (Wasserman, "Shelley's Use of Myth" 526).

credibility of political conservatives, to expose the myths they use to promote their agendas, and to promote his own agenda of resistance. Those holding political office during the civil unrest of the years surrounding the Peterloo Massacre worked fervently to convince their populace that the government was a benevolent force instituting order and structure, much as Shelley's sonnet, which seems, at first glance, to follow a certain formal structure and tradition. England's leaders wished to disseminate the myth that the government was acting in the people's best interest and that England was a safe and stable nation, but both the form and content of Shelley's poem undermine that conservative myth. "England in 1819" is out of order because England in 1819 was out of order. Shelley's strange sonnet is made up of the 14 lines of iambic pentameter usually associated with sonnets, but both its structure and rhyme scheme are unusual. The poem consists of an octave and a sestet, like an Italian sonnet (the most traditional version of an already antiquated form), but Shelley inverts their positions so that the sestet comes before the octave, creating a sense that the sonnet is upside down. Similarly, the rhyme scheme uses only four sounds, like many Italian sonnets, but it does so in a Shakespeare-esque but also unprecedented sequence of ABABAB CDCDCCDD.

Shelley uses the several mythic modes—including disguising the poem's agenda, removing historical markers, and ascribing a greater significance to the text—to create a myth that promotes his own agenda of resistance to oppression and the conservative myths that reinforce it. "England in 1819" looks like a sonnet—a poetic form that is, by definition, concerned with romantic rather than political issues—but offers a pointed critique of England that belies the seemingly simplistic and innocent form. "England in 1819" is not a love poem—unless it is a poem written out of love for England's oppressed

citizens. The sonnet form is not enough to entirely disguise the overt historical agenda of the poem, but it does, even if only momentarily, lead the reader to believe the poem will be about something other than politics.

Shelley's references to "An old, mad, blind, despised, and dying king" and princes, who "leech-like to their fainting country cling" (1-2) are a far cry from the lovely romantic sentiments one would expect to find in a sonnet, and they work toward the mythic mode of removing particulars to create a more universally recognizable and relevant text. Although Shelley certainly has King George III and politicians such as Castlereagh and Sidmouth (whom he and Byron explicitly attack in other texts) in mind, these more opaque references give the poem a relevance beyond Shelley's historical moment and impress upon the reader the fact that England's citizens are victims in a larger, timeless system of tyranny that it is their duty to resist. Similarly, the image of "people starved and stabbed in the untilled field" (7) is specific enough to evoke the Peterloo Massacre but veiled enough to pass as a reference to brutality and injustice in general. There is a significant difference, I should clarify, between omitting specifics to universalize a narrative and simply being vague in one's descriptions. The imagery in "England in 1819," for example, is not vague. The sonnet is full of adjectives describing the country's king, "princes," and citizens, imagery that almost ekphrastically presents a vivid scene representing England in 1819. The specifics that Shelley and other mythopoeists omit are not details but, rather, historicizing information that would tie the narrative to a particular place and time.

Finally, Shelley attaches a moral and emotional significance to "England in 1819" that gives it a mythic weight. The imagery raises the stakes presented in the poem, making it about more than corrupt politicians and poor citizens. The politicians are leeches

threatening not only the quality but the very livelihood of their country and citizens. The image of the politician-leeches, glutted and falling from the country, bleeds, so to speak, into that of England's citizens dropping dead in St. Peter's field. In a Miltonic maneuver, Shelley uses the same line, "Till they drop, blind in blood, without a blow" (6), to refer to both the leeches from the previous line and the massacred reformers in the following one. Shelley's poem emphasizes the threat of extinction, not just for England's citizens but for its liberty and Christianity as well: "An army which liberticide and prey / Makes as a two-edged sword to all who wield,— / Golden and sanguine laws which tempt and slay; / Religion Christless, Godless, a book sealed" (8-11). Whereas some authors map a religious significance onto their text in order to appeal to their readers' emotional and ethical sympathies, Shelley makes a similar appeal in "England in 1819" by presenting readers with the possibility that the religion, nation, freedom, and even life his readers cherish depend upon their response to the government's injustice.

Shelley, by improving and adapting a traditional form to better suit his context and purpose, executes a kind of formalistic revisionism that echoes Wasserman's discussion of revising myth. That is not to say, however, that that "England in 1819" validates Wasserman's claim that myths (or forms, in this case) can only be revised, not created. Because the poem contains no mythography, Wasserman and other literary critics would not classify it as mythic to begin with. However, as my discussion shows, Shelley's revision of the sonnet form, which incorporates several mythic modes, creates a new mythopoeic text out of non-mythic elements.

Unlike "England in 1819," Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* is one of the most iconic and mythographic texts of the Romantic period. As one of Shelley's most complex and fully

realized poems and one that centers on a mythic figure considered by many to be the epitome of the Romantic artist, it is no wonder that Shelley's lyric drama has become the focal point for studies of Romantic mythography. Shelley's revision of the Prometheus myth—his recasting of the characters, motives, and events—serves a number of political functions that have been explored by several scholars.⁴ Those scholars, however, focus on two things: what changes Shelley makes to the classical mythology and what purpose (literary, social, political, personal, etc.) those revisions serve. By examining texts through the lens of mythopoesis, however, these analyses can be expanded to reveal the literary, social, and political implications of textual elements other than mythography. Considering texts as mythopoeic artifacts exposes significant similarities between the literary and political rhetoric of the same historical period, allowing for a more thorough and sophisticated understanding of literature's relationship to politics and history.

Wasserman, who offers the most comprehensive and respected examinations of Shelley's uses of myth, explores Shelley's decision to assign Asia (rather than the original myth's Hesione) as Prometheus's wife, his introduction of Demogorgon to the story, and his alterations to Prometheus's character to demonstrate the complex process by which Shelley is able to "reform" and reassemble imperfect myths to make a better, more complete variation. Shelley's mythic process, however, is more complicated than merely collecting and revising existing myths, and the result is not simply a better version of the myth(s) but a new myth altogether that borrows authority and credibility from the original and advances Shelley's historical agenda more effectively than the original myth could.

⁴ To name a few: Paul Cantor's *Creature and Creator: Myth-Making and English Romanticism*, Linda M. Lewis's *The Promethean Politics of Milton, Blake, and Shelley*, and James Cousins's *The Work Promethean; Interpretations and Applications of Shelley's Poetry*.

While studies of Shelley's inclusion and revision of particular elements of the original myth have proven valuable in understanding the complexities and political implications of *Prometheus Unbound*, mythographic content is only one piece of the larger mythopoeic context surrounding the poem.

As stories that have been told and retold for thousands of years, mythologies speak to a human condition that is not limited by time or place, establishing both credibility and authority. By merely gesturing toward the classical myth of Prometheus, Shelley evokes a timeless tale of rebellious youth defying ancient authority for the sake of humankind, and despite the sometimes substantial alterations Shelley makes to the myth, relying on an ancient story lends universality to the historical commentary offered in *Prometheus Unbound*. Mythographic content, in short, can help to establish the ethos required for mythopoesis.

Another means by which Shelley bolsters the credibility of *Prometheus Unbound*, adding to its mythopoeic status, is by disguising the text's agenda. It is necessary for mythmakers to disguise the purpose of the historical agenda of their myths because readers can dismiss myths as mere propaganda if they sense that the author is attempting to manipulate their thoughts and emotions. Myths that take the form of poems and fictional narratives inherently disguise their agendas, to some extent, under the cover of aesthetic pleasure. For example, the aforementioned *Paris Match* cover and Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (which will be discussed in Chapter 1 and has its own means of disguising its purpose) are, as nonfiction texts, more likely to be read as propaganda and subsequently dismissed by readers than *Prometheus Unbound* and Keats's

Isabella, whose aesthetic and poetic value disguise their more practical purpose. The most successful myths are those that the reader does not recognize as such.

Mythic modes can overlap when certain elements of a text accomplish two different rhetorical maneuvers. One of the ways Shelley is able to disguise *Prometheus Unbound's* historical agenda, for example, is by avoiding references to specific places, people, or events, but this removal of particulars also works toward the mythic mode of giving the poem a symbolic, universal relevance. Because Shelley avoids specifics that would give away his historical intention, his readers are not presented with a didactic text that can only be read as an attempt to tell them how to act or feel (although they can guess at his purpose and read contemporary politics into *Prometheus Unbound* should they wish to). At the same time, by eschewing historical markers in the narrative, Shelley gives his narrative another mythic characteristic: universality. The lack of particulars and subsequent symbolic nature of the poem ensure that the story will remain relevant even after the historical moment has passed. *Prometheus Unbound*, in other words, possesses the same timeless authority and relevance that the original Prometheus myth grants Shelley's poem.

Jupiter and Prometheus are consistent with the oppression and rebellion Shelley was facing in his own time, but their lack of historical names or characteristics allows them to operate as political types, as tyrant and rebel. Prometheus is the godlike benefactor of humankind, but he is also representative of humanity's flaws, virtues, spirit, and hope, modeling the passive resistance that Shelley promoted. Shelley removes many specifics from the original myth, making the story more archetypal and, subsequently, universal: Shelley replaces Prometheus's wife, Hesione, with Asia, a personification of Love; he leaves Prometheus's brother, Epimetheus, out of the story; and he omits the wedding feast trick

Prometheus plays on Jupiter, convincing him to accept the worst part of the animal for sacrifice. Jupiter, on the other hand, embodies the oppression Shelley witnessed in the early nineteenth-century, but despite the more immediate function of the myth, Jupiter's hatred, violence, and intolerance embody that of all tyrants regardless of time, place, or circumstance.

Another mythic mode involves imbuing a narrative with a greater significance than it actually carries—making the reader feel as though the elements of the story invoke associations and consequences outside the narrative. Whereas the aforementioned mythic modes work toward establishing the ethos of a myth, this extra level of significance works toward creating pathos. The most common kind of significance used to turn a narrative or image into a myth is religious in nature since religious beliefs often reach people on an existential and emotional level, so much that even atheistic Shelley relies on religious imagery to sway his largely Christian audience in 1820. By associating Prometheus with Christ (despite his claim in the poem's preface that Prometheus shares many qualities with Milton's Satan) and Jupiter with the serpent, Shelley prompts his readers to experience a moral and emotional response to the narrative.

Even before Shelley's retreatment of the story, Prometheus's and Christ's stories had much in common: both are sacrificial figures who are bound and subjected by unjust authority to immense suffering as punishment for helping humankind. Shelley, however, makes the connection between the two even more explicit by bringing Christ into the narrative. Panthea witnesses the crucifixion of Christ and describes him to the other characters as "a youth / With patient looks nailed to a crucifix" (1.584-85) while

Prometheus, similarly, speaks of himself as being “nailed” to the mountain (1.20) and deeply sympathizes with the tortured figure (1.598-602).

Conversely, the hellish and serpentine imagery associated with Jupiter extends throughout the poem as well. In Act One, Hermes comes on behalf of Jupiter to extract the prophecy from Prometheus and is described as carrying a “serpent-tinctured wand” (1.324). This reference may be incidental as Mercury sympathizes more with Prometheus than with Jupiter and is often represented in classical art carrying a staff in the shape of winding serpents. Immediately following Mercury, however, are Jupiter’s “tempest-walking hounds” (1.331) who, Panthea explains, usually pull Jupiter’s chariot and are described as having “hydra tresses / And iron wings” (1. 326-27). Prometheus tells the Fury torturing him later, “Thy words are like a cloud of winged snakes” (1.632), and he compares Jupiter’s attempts to hold “the tyranny of heaven” in Act Three to “the destiny / Of trodden worms to writhe till they are dead” (3.1.59-60). Demogorgon eventually concludes the drama with an acknowledgement that “The serpent that would clasp her [Eternity] with his length” may, in fact, return one day and need to be struck down again. This image is the final articulation of Jupiter’s tyranny (and tyranny in general): the coiled, cyclical nature of the snake encircling Eternity. By associating the rebel Prometheus with Christ, the Christian symbol of goodness, and the authoritarian Jupiter with the serpent, the epitome of Christian evil, Shelley encourages his readers to make similar (conscious or subconscious) associations in the real world.

Finally, there is the mythic mode of offering possible scenarios as inevitable truth . Shelley offers a number of these “truths” in *Prometheus Unbound*, invoking even more pathos by convincing readers that good or bad consequences will unavoidably follow

certain actions and that they, as readers, must think or act a certain way as a result. Not all of the truths that Shelley offers, however, are as objective as he makes them out to be. *Prometheus Unbound* is built around the idea that any authority is, by its very nature, tyrannical and that it is one's moral responsibility to resist it. This claim is based on a radical philosophical ideology, not hard fact. Although most people would agree that some system of power is necessary and that not all governments or rulers are tyrannical, Shelley leaves no room for any good to come from anyone remaining in a position of power. Other potential truths that Shelley offers as universal ones include the belief that it is impossible to replace a tyrant without becoming one, that passive rebellion is the best way to resist oppression, and that anarchy will lead to a period of peace and prosperity.

A MYTHIC PLAN OF STUDY

Prometheus Unbound is already considered an iconic mythic text of the Romantic period, but the mythopoeic strategies mentioned above reveal political and rhetorical implications not addressed by an analysis of the poem's mythographic content. Focusing on this web of mythopoeic strategies instead of just mythography provides a more thorough and complex picture of how authors shaped their texts in response to historical and political events. The corpus of texts this dissertation will explore includes other mythographic and non-mythographic poems produced between the years 1817 and 1822. The limited timeframe allows for a focused examination of a manageable number of texts and of their relationship to the social and political situations surrounding their composition. As the *annus mirabilis* of both Shelley and Keats and the year of the Peterloo Massacre, 1819 was a year marked by a number of remarkable works being produced under particularly tense political circumstances. With this in mind, I have chosen to focus

on the years leading up to and immediately following the unrest that erupted at St. Peter's Field in August of 1819. I do not mean to suggest that these texts are relevant only within the context of the events going on around their composition, but since my framework for discussing myth is political, familiarity with the issues and individuals the authors were reacting against in their writings is essential to understanding the mythic status of the texts.

The primary focus of the dissertation will be revolutionary myths, but it begins with conservative ones. Chapter 1 focuses first and foremost on Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, which sets the standard not only for conservative mythmakers in the Romantic period but for radical ones as well. In his *Reflections*, which has come to define English conservatism in the late-eighteenth century and the early-nineteenth centuries, Burke uses the aforementioned mythic modes to create the myth that revolutions such as the one in France are unnatural and, moreover, stand in direct opposition to one's civil, religious, and moral duties. Burke's employment of these modes in *Reflections* gives it a mythic status that not only lent authority to the counter-revolutionary efforts of the day but that also established a standard for mythic discourse among Romantic-era conservative writers who wished to maintain a state of stasis amid an ever-growing movement for change. The rest of the chapter concentrates on the iterations of the mythic modes as they appear in the works of the Romantic period's two Poet Laureates, William Wordsworth and Robert Southey, both of whom rely on myth to promote their respective conservative agendas. In "Laodamia" and Book 4 of *The Excursion*, Wordsworth uses myth to promote obedience to king and country and to defend Christianity against an Enlightenment skepticism that threatened to make it irrelevant, while Southey makes his *Vision of*

Judgement into a myth in an attempt to restore the tarnished reputation of the late King George III. Chapter 1 both establishes the conservative foundation that the later, more radical mythmakers reacted against and exposes a rather remarkable continuity between conservative mythmaking and the radical myths discussed in the ensuing chapters.

More radical in their politics than Burke, Wordsworth, and Southey, the authors discussed in Chapter 2 reveal a desire to elevate Romantic poetry to mythic significance, even in less overtly political poems. These texts—Shelley’s “Ode to the West Wind” and *Adonais*, Keats’s *Hyperion* fragments, and Hemans’s *Modern Greece*—articulate each author’s conception of art’s relationship to life, or to put it in Barthes’s terms, art’s potential to embody a social usage in addition to its aesthetic one. To discuss Romantic poetry through the context of mythopoesis is to assume that Romantic authors had historically situated political agendas that they wished to naturalize by means of their poetry. These poems by Shelley, Keats, and Hemans contain within them articulations of the social responsibility and power of poets, poetry, and art in general, suggesting that they believed poetry could incite change in the real world. Although this chapter is necessarily limited to only a few authors, these associations between art and societal change are not limited to Shelley, Keats, and Hemans, as readings of other authors later in the dissertation will demonstrate. In addition to demonstrating that Romantic authors envisioned a connection between poetry and civic engagement, the poems in this chapter are also mythopoeic in their own right. That is, rather than merely justifying later mythopoeic readings of texts, each of these poems can be read as a myth in and of itself. The authors rely on mythic modes to establish poetry’s immense power and its potential influence on society, a power they can then use to promote particular social and political agendas.

The mythic modes continue to appear in the texts presented in the final two chapters, both of which center on radical political uses of myth but are divided by one significant event: the Peterloo Massacre. Chapter 3 focuses on Romantic myths produced prior to August of 1819, including Keats's *Isabella, or the Pot of Basil*, Shelley's *Laon and Cythna*, and Peacock's *Rhododaphne*. These revolutionary myths—which Lincoln's approach to myth allows for but Barthes's deems a contradiction of terms—work to expose tyranny in social, political, and romantic contexts and to undermine such abuses of power. *Isabella* calls the economic and filial systems surrounding the titular character into question, exposing oppressive systems that would have been all too familiar (though admittedly exaggerated) to a readership in the throes of the Industrial Revolution. *Laon and Cythna* and *Rhododaphne* both focus on what Bryan Burns describes as “the power of love to overcome the forces of disorder” (79). *Laon and Cythna* emphasizes the tyranny of an unjust government, the seeming impossibility of resisting oppression, and the necessity of doing just that. Peacock's poem is less political than Shelley's but is still very much concerned with resisting sources of immense power and authority—namely, the enchantress, Rhododaphne. The poems in this chapter not only confirm that revolutionary myths are possible but also that they are constructed and used in much the same way as conservative ones.

The poems in Chapter 3 are serious in tone but less severe than those of Chapter 4, which were composed after the English cavalry injured hundreds and killed seventeen of its own unarmed citizens in St. Peter's Field. Peterloo was a breaking point, politically and poetically, after which England's people became outraged and its government began to come down even harder on reform in an effort to prevent full-scale revolution. Poets

responded with piercing poetic attacks, including Shelley's "Mask of Anarchy," Hemans's *Dartmoor*, and Byron's *Vision of Judgment*. Although, of these, only "The Mask of Anarchy" directly addresses the Peterloo Massacre, I contend that the atmosphere in England and sense of betrayal following that event led radical mythmakers to produce these more determined attacks against conservative rhetoric, as these poems not only undermine the authority of those in power but the authority of the myths they used to remain in power. Shelley, Hemans, and Byron incorporate myths put forth by England's political leaders into their texts, but they do so ironically. "The Mask of Anarchy" uses the rhetoric of the politicians, down to the use of the term "anarchy," to expose the hypocrisy of their rhetoric; Hemans applies pressure to the romanticized ideal of England as a great and imperial power by highlighting the dark side of imperialism that the conservative, nationalistic myths ignore; Byron's *Vision of Judgment* responds directly to Southey's *Vision of Judgment* (from Chapter 1), exposing the incongruity of Southey's representation of King George III and defending the Satanic school from Southey's attacks.

To conclude the dissertation I will attempt to extend the theories and readings of the dissertation's chapters to a non-English context—specifically, to Greece. As the cornerstone of democracy and so much of Western mythology, Greece was already a topic of interest for the Romantics, but Byron and Shelley in particular were drawn to Greece's cause as it struggled for independence from the Ottoman Empire. The final pages of the dissertation will explore Byron's emergence as a myth in his own right. Byron moved to Greece in 1823 and began to strategize with Greek politicians and military leaders (despite having no military background) before falling ill in February of 1824 and eventually dying in April. Although he never actually stepped foot on the battlefield, Byron provided

Greece's campaign with much-needed monetary support, medical supplies, publicity, and hope, and he remains a hero of Greece's fight for independence.

This dissertation by no means includes every mythopoeic poem from the Romantic period, nor is this mythopoesis limited to poetry. I hope, however, that this sampling of authors and texts, some more canonical than others, demonstrates a sense of the rhetorical similarities that span a period composed of vastly different poetic and political ideologies, as well as the value of regarding myth as more than merely "stories about gods."

CHAPTER ONE CONSERVATIVE ROMANTIC MYTHMAKING

Although this dissertation will focus primarily on radical myths, it is necessary to begin with a few conservative ones. Examining myths constructed by the period's leaders in conservative thought reveals the ideological positions and rhetorical techniques that unify conservative mythopoesis and positions it in relation to the radical opposition detailed in later chapters. To fully appreciate the arguments and strategies of revolutionary mythmaking, one must first be familiar with the movement against which it is reacting. I have selected texts by three authors whose writings pervaded the literary and political spheres immediately surrounding the chaos of England in 1819 and whose texts reveal a variety of agendas conservative myths at the time strove to promote.

Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* works to counter socially and politically revolutionary sentiments; Robert Southey's *Vision of Judgement* seeks to restore the fallen reputation of King George III after his death; William Wordsworth's "Laodamia" and Book 4 of *The Excursion* attempt to protect Christianity from the perceived threat of religious radicalism and skepticism. Burke, Southey, and Wordsworth used their position and writings to promote conservative ideals, and each of their texts responds—some more directly than others—by means of mythopoesis to the threat posed by the French Revolution.

BURKE'S REFLECTIONS ON THE REVOLUTION IN FRANCE

Burke seems the logical place to begin a conversation on conservative uses of myth, as his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* includes many examples of mythopoesis and is the conservative standard by which other Romantic conservative texts are judged.

Although Burke's pamphlet differs generically from the poems of Southey and Wordsworth, they can all be classified as myth because "myth" refers not to a genre but to a complex rhetorical strategy that expresses ideology. Barthes assures us that "Myth is not defined by the object of its message, but by the way in which it utters this message...since myth is a type of speech, everything can be a myth provided it is conveyed by a discourse" (109). Despite its focus on real people and historical situations, *Reflections* is a carefully constructed mythic narrative, specifically contrived to villainize the rebels in France and to quell any desire for a similar revolt in England.

Burke's politics are conservative but not ultra-conservative; he acknowledges the occasional need for gradual reform but believes that any radical changes to government or social order will necessarily be followed by anarchy, tyranny, and international conflict. In 1791 (a year after the publication of *Reflections*), Burke published a letter, "An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs," whose opening lines reveal his willingness to rely on propagandistic and/or mythic methods of discussing politics: "Political problems do not primarily concern truth and falsehood. They relate to good or evil. What in the result is likely to produce evil, is politically false: that which is productive of good politically true" (462). As Michael Freeman explains in *Edmund Burke and the Critique of Political Radicalism*, Burke was "more concerned with moral utility than truth in politics" (48). Burke affords himself an enormous amount of freedom in addressing political matters.

Essentially, he can claim anything—construct any kind of narrative or myth he wishes—and remain righteous in doing so as long as his narrative produces what he considers politically good.

To start at the beginning of *Reflections* is to start with its composition. In 1789, a young Frenchman who had visited the Burke family in England a few years before wrote to Burke to ask for his impressions of France's revolution. Burke responded to Charles-Jean-François Depont with two letters, and the second, longer letter was published in 1790 as *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Burke employs the mythic mode of concealing his true purpose from the audience (or presenting a particular narrative disguised as something different) by publishing a pamphlet for an English audience disguised as a letter to a Frenchman. While it is true that *Reflections* began as such a letter, its intended audience and purpose changed upon its publication for English readers.

This change in audience contributes to the text's mythic status because English readers would have read the pamphlet, to some extent at least, as though it was not intended for them. Burke repeatedly addresses his French correspondent throughout *Reflections*, which would give his readers the impression that they are eavesdropping on a conversation that is relevant to but not meant for them. By disguising the audience and, subsequently, the purpose of his pamphlet, Burke attempts to influence his English readers' sentiments regarding the Revolution. Rather than overtly addressing the English people and telling them how they should feel about France's revolution—a rather obtuse method that the English public could have easily seen through and rejected—Burke addresses Depont instead, sounding like an authority without directly telling readers what to think or how to act.

Because *Reflections* is technically addressed to Depont, Burke can intimidate radical individuals and groups who sympathize with the Revolution or plan to bring such rebellion to England without directly threatening anyone in his audience. Burke relies repeatedly on the pronoun “we,” for example, to suggest a unified state of mind among all English citizens: “We shall never be such fools as to call in an enemy to the substance of any system to remove its corruptions, to supply its defects, or to perfect its construction...We are resolved to keep an established church, an established monarchy, an established aristocracy, and an established democracy, each in the degree it exists, and in no greater” (255-56). He emphasizes a few pages later that England’s resolve to maintain the government as it stands is so unified that he cannot distinguish his thoughts on the subject from other citizens’: “I assure you I do not aim at singularity. I give you opinions which have been accepted among us, from very early times to this moment, with a continued and general approbation, and which indeed are so worked into my mind, that I am unable to distinguish what I have learned from others from the results of my own meditation” (263). Burke does not tell the English people how they *should* feel but, rather, how they *do* feel. He gives them no choice on the matter and hopes to persuade those who feel torn on the subject of the Revolution by definitively outlining the position of a good English citizen.

Burke leaves very little room for opinions that dissent from his unified English voice, but he does address them. He claims at one point that “those amongst us who have wished to pledge the societies in Paris in the cup of their abominations have been disappointed” and scared off by the scale and shamelessness of France’s efforts:

The robbery of your church has proved a security to the possessions of ours. It has roused the people. They see with horror and alarm that enormous and shameless act of proscription. It has opened, and will more and more open their eyes upon the selfish enlargement of mind, and the narrow liberality of sentiment of insidious men. (269-70)

Burke's use of the terms "mind" and "sentiment" signal the Enlightenment philosophy of emphasizing the individual and rationality above all else. He strengthens his ethos by causally alluding to this popular, progressive brand of rationalism and dismissing it as both selfish and counterproductive. According to Burke, even those who once supported the ideals of the Revolution have since rejected its execution, a point that serves to further convince English readers to abandon any support for France's rebellion. The only other viewpoint Burke mentions that dissents from England's unified rejection of the Revolution is a handful of "cabals here who take a sort of share in your transactions" (253). This is Burke's only acknowledgement that any English citizens still support France's efforts, and he is careful to point out that these few would "accomplish their own destruction" at the hands of the obedient masses if they attempted to imitate France's rebellion (253). Those who do not agree with Burke and his articulation of England's sentiments have two options, according to him: to be disappointed into joining the majority or to be destroyed by it.

One of Burke's more conservative ideas is that of the divinely established social order that underpinned the traditional political ideology of pre-Revolution Europe. He fears the political and social disorder a revolution would bring to England and, in an attempt to keep such a revolution from taking place, ascribes religious significance to the preexisting philosophy of the social contract. Social contract theory consists of several variations famously outlined by Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau

and centers on the premise that a nation's citizens surrender—explicitly or implicitly—some freedoms to the government in exchange for the protection of other inalienable ones. In an example of the second mythic mode, Burke ascribes a religious significance to this theory and speaks repeatedly of the obligation Christian societies have to follow this template of perfect social order that he claims is ordained by God. Burke uses religion to situate the established order and authority of Europe as something that cannot be altered without serious, eternal consequences. James Conniff in his *The Useful Cobbler: Edmund Burke and the Politics of Progress* explains: “Burke’s argument was the very traditional claim that there exists a cosmic, divine natural order, which creates binding moral obligations on man. In the past, he continued, the English succeeded by adhering to that order, but the French are destined to fail because they violate it” (219). By adding religion to the contract theory, Burke establishes France’s rebellion as not only a crime but also an act against God.

The religious significance Burke adds to the issue of the French Revolution is mythic because it attempts to naturalize the constructed social order of England and the rest of Europe. He extrapolates from his own temporal society an eternal and divine template and claims that all Christian societies are obliged to adhere to it: “He Who gave our nature to be perfected by our virtue willed also the necessary means of its perfection. He willed, therefore, the state—He willed its connection with the source and original archetype of all perfection” (*Reflections* 262). To overthrow this divinely established order is more than treason against the government; according to Burke, it is a sin against God: “Each contract of each particular state is but a clause in the great primaeval contract of eternal society, linking the lower with the higher natures, connecting the visible and invisible world,

according to a fixed compact sanctioned by the inviolable oath which holds all physical and all moral natures, each in their appointed place” (261). Burke’s claim that late eighteenth-century England and France are individual iterations of a divine and eternal model is a perfect example of mythopoesis’s overall aim of essentializing and universalizing historically situated messages.

Another means by which Burke increases the significance and stakes of the Revolution is his emphasis on the threat France’s rebellion poses to Europe and to Christianity. Because pre-Revolution Europe “constituted a commonwealth with a common basis of religion, laws, and manners” (Freeman 148), many feared that France’s revolution would spread to nearby nations and play out in those nations in exactly the same fashion. A revolution in any European state would worry conservatives like Burke, but one in France was particularly troubling: “Europe, on the Eve of the French Revolution, was flourishing. Its condition owed much to France” (Freeman 149).⁵ France had been the centerpiece to that point of Europe’s success, and many felt its fall endangered the stability of the entire continent’s social and political and religious structure. Conservatives’ fight against the French Revolution was about more than restoring order to France or maintaining order in England: it was, according to Michael Freeman, “a war in defense of civilization...the course was that of Christian Europe against the Empire of anarchy and religion” (149). Burke claims that France’s rebellion cannot spread to England, but the tone and very composition of *Reflections* indicates a fear that it will do just that.

⁵ Burke explains in *Reflections*: “Europe, undoubtedly, taken in a mass, was in a flourishing condition the day on which your Revolution was compleated...France has always more or less influenced manners in England; and when your fountain is choaked up and polluted, the stream will not run long, or not run clear with us, or perhaps with any nation. This gives all Europe, in my opinion, but too close and connected a concern what is done in France” (241-43).

The third mythic mode is the removal of details to create a more universal and symbolic narrative. *Reflections* includes several instances of this mode, but one of its best-known arguments is Burke's critique of precisely this kind of mythmaking in the revolutionary manifesto. He warns against fighting on behalf of ideals and abstractions that are not grounded in tangible, attainable goals: "What is the use of discussing a man's abstract right to food or to medicine? The question is upon the method of procuring and administering them. In that deliberation I shall always advise to call in the aid of the farmer and the physician, rather than the professor of metaphysics" (220). Burke argues that abstractions such as "freedom" and "the rights of man" can be manipulated to justify almost any political agenda. Instead, he calls for reform founded upon concrete rights that cannot then be absorbed by other (potentially dangerous and oppressive) ideologies. Burke's argument reveals how the Revolution's rhetoric relies upon the gravitas of abstract terms rather than specific, calculated goals, and in doing so, he exposes the Revolution's use of the third mythic mode. As I have already mentioned, the process of mythopoesis includes constructing narratives that not only support your own agenda but also tear down the opposition's.

Despite his critique of the revolution's use of it, Burke utilizes the third mythic mode himself in several ways. First, there is Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette's symbolic representation of France. The king and queen *are* France, and their deposition is the destruction of everything good in the State. That Burke situates the king and queen of France as personifications of the nation is not novel, but it is mythic. Their role as symbolic embodiments is part of Burke's exaggeration, his mythic recasting of France's monarchy as something even greater than itself and the revolt as something even worse. Burke

accomplishes this the same way the *Paris Match* cover creates its myth: removing the particulars of the situation so that the image and/or narrative is more universally applicable. The boy on the magazine cover is not an individual child with a name and a family: he is all French soldiers and all French blacks, representing unity between conflicting groups. He is the image of nationalistic loyalty that France wishes all of her citizens to possess. Burke works to promote the same loyalty in his *Reflections* by emphasizing the symbolic status of the monarchy and dismissing the specific details and concerns of the revolutionary forces.

Enlightenment thinking proposed that reason made all humans equal regardless of their social position, but Burke rejects such liberalism and maintains that certain figures—namely the monarchy and clergy—are more important than others: “On this scheme of things, a king is but a man; a queen is but a woman; a woman is but an animal...The murder of a king, or a queen, or a bishop, or a father, are only common homicide” (*Reflections* 240). Burke mocks the rationalism of his own age for thinking of a king, as a symbol of the State, and a priest, as a symbol of the Faith, as merely men. Even fathers, as the symbolic head of household, possess a privileged status. For Burke, the king and queen are not individuals but France itself, a bishop or priest is not a person but Christianity, fathers are a symbol of the family structure, and an attack against any of them is an attack against the institution they represent. The monarchy embodies everything good France has to offer, and its fall is the fall of the nation itself: “Their resistance was made to concession; their revolt was from protection; their blow was aimed at a hand holding out graces, favours, and immunities. They have found their punishment in their success...everything human and divine sacrificed to the idol of public credit, and national bankruptcy the consequence”

(*Reflections* 191). In addition to removing particulars via the repetition of the non-specific pronouns “their” and “they,” Burke also elevates the significance of the monarchs and the stakes of the revolution in an example of the third mode of myth.

Burke continues in this mode by giving the rebels a symbolic role to play as well. He portrays the French monarchs as “mild and lawful” (190) parent figures, while their ungrateful and bloodthirsty children needlessly harm them and, subsequently, the country itself: “The king, to say no more of him, and this queen, and their infant children (who once would have been the pride and hope of a great and generous people) were then forced to abandon the sanctuary of the most splendid palace in the world, which they left swimming in blood, polluted by massacre, and strewed with scattered limbs and mutilated carcasses” (232-33). Burke hopes to elicit outrage among his English readers by exposing how mercilessly and needlessly the French rebels are attacking this innocent family, the symbol of their nation.

The rebels, on a similar note, are not individuals either. Burke does not portray them as real people with specific needs and desires but, rather, as generalized instruments of anarchy. Their grievances against the state are not historically situated: they are the embodiment of all rebels, all forces of destruction, bent on destroying the very structure that provides for them: “Compute your gains; see what is got by those extravagant and presumptuous speculations which have taught your leaders to despise all their predecessors and all their contemporaries” (189). The French rebels, according to Burke, are the ultimate ungrateful children and have destroyed their guardians and their country simply because they can. They defy reason and ignore counsel out of sheer defiance and spite.

The fourth mythic mode is the presentation of a particular, subjective narrative as absolute and inevitable truth. There are many examples of this mode in *Reflections*, but two of the pamphlet's most iconic "truths" are the necessity of being governed and the importance of privileging nature and tradition over rationality. At one point, Burke compares France's citizens to madmen and criminals who, without the supervision of their government, are now a danger to themselves and others: "Is it because liberty in the abstract may be classed amongst the blessings of mankind, that I am seriously to felicitate a madman, who has escaped from the protecting restraint and wholesome darkness of his cell, on his restoration to the enjoyment of light and liberty? Am I to congratulate an highwayman and murderer, who has broke prison, upon the recovery of his natural rights?" (151). This comparison is stretched, as France's population was not under the leadership of a monarchy as a result of a handicap or crime, but Burke appears to see no difference. He continues this imagery of imprisonment a little later by comparing the French to Maroon slaves "suddenly broke loose" and ill-fit for the liberty they sought (188). Burke's comparison between French citizens and slaves is a dangerous one, as many might agree that an institution that enslaves its people is in need of revolution rather than preservation. Because mythmaking is a partisan affair, myths often skirt the line between making one argument and proving the opposite true. Burke wishes to emphasize the virtues of the controlling nature of government, but since that controlling nature is precisely what the rebels are resisting, his argument comes dangerously close to supporting the opposition's stance as well as his own.

The other "truth" Burke promotes—that following collective tradition is a better course of action than individual rationality—is similarly not as objective as he would have

his readers believe: “All your sophisters cannot produce any thing better adapted to preserve a rational and manly freedom than the course that we have pursued, who have chosen our nature rather than our speculations, our breasts rather than our inventions, for the great conservatories and magazines of our rights and privileges” (185). Burke argues on behalf of nature and tradition because doing so preserves the established political, social, and religious order he wishes to maintain: “We fear God, we look up with awe to kings; with affection to parliaments; with duty to magistrates; with reverence to priests; and with respect to nobility” (250). By this point in *Reflections*, Burke has used a number of arguments to win support for such conservatism, but he relies here on the argument that “it is *natural* to be so affected; because all other feelings are false and spurious, and tend to corrupt our minds, to violate our primary morals, to render us unfit for rational liberty” (251). Note that in arguing on behalf of decision-making based on tradition and feeling, Burke does not dismiss reason entirely. He argues, rather, that “rational liberty” should be founded foremost upon one’s feelings and morals and secondly upon reason.

Finally, mythographic allusions can be used to give a narrative mythic weight. Although mythological allusions are not synonymous with mythopoesis, they can contribute to the mythic gravitas of a narrative. *Reflections* contains only a few such allusions, but they are worth noting as other mythmaking authors of the period use them more extensively. Allusions of any kind operate as a sort of shorthand. By simply dropping a name, an author can evoke an entire narrative and a complex web of associations. More importantly, ancient myths possess a timelessness, a universal authority that—in keeping with this project’s discussion of myth—authors can evoke and apply to their own

politicized message. Burke uses multiple classical allusions to lend authority to his

Reflections, including the story of King Pelias and his daughters:

By this wise prejudice we are taught to look with horror on those children of their country who are prompt rashly to hack that aged parent in pieces, and put him into the kettle of magicians, in hopes that by their poisonous weeds, and wild incantations, they may regenerate the paternal constitution, and renovate their father's life. (260)

Burke aligns the destruction of France's tradition and guardians with the gory image of Pelias's daughters cutting him into pieces and boiling him in a cauldron. The daughters foolishly believed that this ritual would restore youth to their aging father, just as the French, according to Burke, believed they could improve their nation by first destroying it, but the dismemberment and boiling resulted not in renewed youth but gruesome death.

Burke uses this and other allusions to present an ancient (metaphorical) precedent that reveals the tragic consequences of France's decision to overthrow the government. In another example of Burke's mythography, he uses the classical figure Leto to criticize France's recent turn from a landed property system: "They have reversed the Latonian [the adjectival form of Leto] kindness to the landed property of Delos. They have sent theirs to be blown about, like the light fragments of a wreck" (360). Burke distrusts the buying and selling of land and draws a parallel between Delos, the island on which Leto gave birth to the twin gods Apollo and Artemis, and the divinely-appointed security of the previous tradition of landed property. With the mere mention of the word "Delos," Burke evokes images of safety and security, which the island provided for Leto in her time of need, and the subsequent blessings that Leto bestowed upon the land for its hospitality. By establishing a correlation between this idea of a divinely (although pagan and not Burke's brand of Christian divinity) established haven and England's traditional landed property

system, Burke hopes to convince his readers that the landed system is a blessing that England would be foolish to abandon.

Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* is the quintessential critique of the French Revolution and all-around conservative text in the Romantic period, but the mythic modes I have identified are not limited to Burke. These same modes, in various combinations, can also be found in the works of Robert Southey and William Wordsworth, along with many other conservative authors.

SOUTHEY'S VISION OF JUDGEMENT

Despite serving as Great Britain's Poet Laureate from 1813 until his death in 1843, Robert Southey is perhaps best-remembered as the victim of Byron's satire in *The Vision of Judgment*. Geoffrey Carnall suggests that "Southey's reputation has never recovered from Byron's ridicule" (para. 26). Byron's attack, however, was not unprovoked, as Southey's own *Vision of Judgment* and its accompanying preface levied harsh criticism against Byron and the other members of what Southey called the "Satanic School." Southey's poem was written on the occasion of King George III's death in 1820 (seven years after Southey's appointment to the position of Poet Laureate) and commemorates the life and reign of the mad king with a grandiose "vision" of George's triumphant ascent into Heaven. George is met with an angelic celebration, scores of apologies from his staunchest detractors, and praise from thousands of years' worth of famous English figures.

The goal of Southey's poem appears to be to repair George III's reputation post-mortem, but his efforts are heavy-handed and propagandistic because he makes almost no attempt to disguise his purpose. Without some deployment of the first mode, his myth is ineffective in influencing readers who would see through his agenda and reject such an

overstated attempt to persuade them. The transparency, however, that makes the poem ineffective as a myth also makes it an excellent example to study.

Southey labors in the opening section to situate himself and *A Vision of Judgement* in the tradition of great poetry. Structurally, the poem is divided into twelve sections, imitating the book structure of Virgil's *Aeneid* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. This format, together with the poem's premise as a Chaucer-esque dream vision, demonstrates the poetic weight Southey wishes his *Vision of Judgement* to carry. He further emphasizes the poem's epic status by placing himself alongside epic poets of the past. In the opening lines of the poem, for example, Southey claims to have heard a voice name him the "son of muses," and he invokes them to grant him the power they once gave Dante:

To thy mortal sight shall the Grave unshadow its secrets;
Such as yore the Florentine saw, Hells perilous chambers
He who trod in his strength; and the arduous Mountain of Penance,
And the regions of Paradise, sphere within sphere intercircled. (1.49-55)

By fashioning himself after poets like Virgil, Chaucer, and Dante, Southey diminishes his role as an individual poet and casts himself as a type. His role and voice within the poem have nothing to do with him as an individual and everything to do with establishing him as "the Poet" of the early nineteenth century with a story as heroic and timeless as *The Aeneid* or *The Inferno*.

In addition to making a symbolic figure of himself, Southey also removes many individualizing characteristics from the historical figures he references—both of which are examples of the third mythic mode. Over the course of the poem, King George is greeted and praised by King Alfred, King Richard the Lionheart, Venerable Bede, Geoffrey Chaucer, William Shakespeare, Isaac Newton, Edmund Burke, and John Milton—just to name a few. These figures are embodiments of piety, royalty, and genius, and they represent an

acceptance of George III by all things great and English. Southey hopes that such exaggerated adoration by important figures of English history will convince his audience to think well of the late king. He leads his readers to believe that supporting George III aligns them with the forces of heaven and gives them something in common with history's greatest heroes and thinkers. The historical figures Southey mentions in his *Vision of Judgement*, however, have little in common with their historical counterparts.

The poem's George III, for instance, is a far cry from the actual king. The George of *A Vision of Judgement* is an ideal king: patient, forgiving, humble, and, most importantly, lucid. He is who Southey wants people to think the historical king was. Southey mentions no specifics, no details regarding the king's life, personality, or appearance. One of the lengthier descriptions of the king comes at his introduction in section three and provides no particulars that would set George III apart from any other character:

Then I beheld the King. From a cloud which cover'd the pavement
His revered form uprose: heavenward his face was directed,
Heavenward his eyes were raised, and heavenward his arms were extended.
Lord it is past! he cried; the mist, and the weight, and the darkness;
That long and weary night, that long drear dream of desertion.
Father, to Thee I come!...And then in profound adoration,
Crossing his arms on his breast, he bent and worshipp'd in silence. (3.1-10)

Southey claims to be referring to the king in this passage, but there is nothing in the text to confirm this. The only insight the reader gleans about the person described is that he is devout, which has more to do with what Southey wants readers to associate with the king than historical accuracy. The King's words "Lord it is past!" seem constructed, in fact, to mimic Jesus's final words, "It is finished," in John 19:30 and to implicitly associate King George with God. Without any specific characteristics to bind the character to the real

person, Southey's George III functions not as an individual but as a symbol of a good, pious king.

The other figures who appear in *A Vision of Judgement* are similarly unrepresentative of their historical namesakes. There is nothing to distinguish Shakespeare from Richard the Lionheart from any other figure. Southey's poem is filled with characters named after historical figures with whom they share nothing in common. The poem's George Washington, for example, is in no way representative of the actual man. His name is not mentioned, in fact, until the end of his appearance in the poem, and up to that point there is nothing by which to distinguish him from anyone else. The most specific description of Washington tells the reader, "Silently he had stood, and still unmoved and in silence, / With a steady mien, regarded the face of the Monarch" (6.15-16). Southey includes Washington as a character so that he can function as a symbol. George Washington was the ultimate rebel against George III, but Southey's version of him bows and apologizes before the benevolent and misjudged king. He is the ultimate rebel, modeling repentance for other rebels to imitate. The king and George Washington are two examples of this rhetorical strategy that pervades the poem.

Southey's inclusion of Alfred the Great is especially noteworthy, as the medieval king of Wessex has been a particularly popular and loaded image throughout English history. According to Joanne Parker, author of *"England's Darling:" The Victorian Cult of Alfred the Great*, "The mythologizing that turned Alfred into a hero began in his own lifetime" with the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (46). Stories and references to Alfred the Great occurred and recurred throughout the history of English literature, and though briefly appropriated to promote radical purposes in the 1770s, Alfred remained, for the most part,

what Parker calls “a pattern for princes” (66). It was common for English monarchs—including George III’s father, George II—to invoke Alfred’s name or image in order to associate themselves with the same tradition and greatness as the medieval king. In 1735, George II’s wife, Queen Caroline, commissioned “a series of busts of kings and queens, beginning with Alfred and ending with her husband, for the library at St James’s Palace” (63). In 1789, during George III’s reign, novelist Anne Fuller published *The Son of Ethelwolf* and dedicated it to George, Prince of Wales. The novel tells of Alfred’s coming of age and is an attempt to convince English citizens that the prince, who served as Prince Regent during his father’s long and recurring bouts with illness, would, in fact, prove to be a good king. Southey uses Alfred in *A Vision of Judgement* just as Queen Caroline and Anne Fuller did. Although Alfred fulfills more of a mythographic role than a historical one, Southey’s incorporation of the medieval king is a prime example of how all of the “historical” figures operate in his *Vision*: Alfred and the others (be they poets, scientists, or kings) create a long line of established and indisputable greatness to the end of which Southey attaches George III.

Southey not only creates symbolic figures by removing the details from the real people he represents, he also has those symbolic figures say and do things that directly contradict the words and deeds of their historical counterparts. When faced with King George, Southey’s symbolic version of Washington, for example, admits:

In the course of events, to thee I seemed as a Rebel,
Thou a tyrant to me...And here, this witness I willingly bear thee,—
Here, before Angels and Men, in the awful hour of judgment,—
Thou too didst act with upright heart, as befitted a Sovereign,
True to his sacred trust, to his crown, to his kingdom, and people. (6.27-36)

The great rebel who led America to independence against the taxation policy George III supported did not and would not speak these words. Southey is engaging the fourth mythic mode: offering subjective narratives as objective truths.

Washington's apology is one of many examples of *A Vision of Judgement's* false "truths." The image of Alfred the Great, Martin Luther, and John Milton lining up in support of George III recasts the mad king as a noble ruler who was wrongfully abused by the public during his life. Southey describes Milton as being "Healed, and no longer here to heaven and to Hierarchs hostile, / He was assoil'd from taint of the fatal fruit; and in Eden / Not again to be lost, consorted an equal with Angels" (9.29-31). Ideally, this onslaught of apologies and adoration would accomplish the poem's overall purpose of recovering King George's reputation by presenting readers with a false choice: to follow the example set by Washington and Milton of reconsidering one's opinion of the king and siding with heaven or to fault the king for no reason, keeping company with demons.

Southey relies on religious associations, in addition to the historical references, to give his narrative mythic weight. He applies a religious significance to the secular subject of King George III and his reign in an attempt to persuade readers that their position regarding King George III is a moral and religious issue. He tries to convince the reader to follow his political leanings—that is, to think and speak well of the recently deceased king—by associating the king with the heavens and his detractors with hell. Southey begins these religious associations in the preface by referring to Shelley, Byron, and others as the Satanic School of poetry. He draws comparisons between the poets and Satan's "spirit of pride and audacious impiety" (206). According to the preface, the poets have traits in common with Satan, but in the poem itself, the correlation between radicals and demons

becomes more direct. In the final lines of section three, Southey speaks of “that fierce and restless spirit” that threatens both France and Britain:

Still it deceiveth the weak, and inflameth the rash and the desperate.
Even now, I ween, some dreadful deed is preparing;
For the souls of the Wicked are loose, and the Powers of Evil
Move on the wing alert. (3.50-54)

The “fierce and reckless spirit” Southey speaks of is the same spirit of revolution Burke addressed thirty years prior, as those who called for revolution are the same blasphemers who would speak ill of the king. Southey pushes his initial comparison between the radical poets and Satan further here, declaiming rebels in general as “Wicked” and “Evil.”

Southey continues in this mode by literally demonizing those who would speak against George III, whose mental state in the final ten years of his life left him completely debilitated and incompetent. In section six of the poem, anyone who opposed or criticized George III in life is presented by Southey as a penitent sinner who has seen the error of his ways and retracts all previous criticisms:

Being cleansed from pride, from faction and error deliver'd,
Purged of the film wherewith the eye of the mind is clouded,
They, in their better state, saw all things clear: and discerning
Now in the light of truth what tortuous view had deceived them,
They acknowledged their fault, and own'd the wrong they had offer'd.
(6.7-11)

The only characters in the poem who are, in fact, willing to levy any kind of grievance against the dead king, to express the kind of dissatisfaction that Southey erased from the mouth of Washington (and that Byron later asserts in his own *Vision of Judgment*), are actual demons. When no one else will speak against the king, a troupe of demons enters the heavenly court and levies accusations of “Invaded Rights, Corruption, and War, and Oppression” (5.19). Southey, however, spends far more time bringing judgment against the

accusers than he does explaining their accusations, and even those demons by the end of their testimony are forced to acknowledge that their claims are founded solely on mischief and slander. According to Southey, only the immoral, evil, sinful, and spiteful dislike or speak against the king. Although *A Vision of Judgement* was not very effective in accomplishing Southey's goal of heroicizing King George III, it is nonetheless mythic in its purpose and demonstrates how the modes outlined in the Burke section were employed by conservative authors of the early nineteenth century.

BOOK FOUR OF WORDSWORTH'S *EXCURSION*

Like Robert Southey, William Wordsworth served as Poet Laureate of Great Britain and his politics evolved from liberal to conservative over the course of his poetic career. By the time he published *The Excursion* in 1814 and "Laodamia" in 1815, the French Revolution had failed, the Napoleonic Wars and the War of 1812 were ongoing, and Wordsworth's former enthusiasm for change was being replaced by traditionalism. Kenneth Johnston argues in his *Hidden Wordsworth: Poet, Lover, Rebel, Spy* that Wordsworth's poetry "existed much more within the confines of established social and cultural norms than the traditional romanticizing of his poetical revolution acknowledges" (669), and this conservatism is most evident in his discussions of religion. As William Ulmer explains, "For Wordsworth, in short, the way of the soul was a conservative way" (xi). In the poems I have chosen to examine, Wordsworth responds to two different perceived threats to Christianity: rebellion and Enlightenment skepticism. In "Laodamia," he stresses the importance of temperance and obedience in both the social and religious sphere, while poems such as "The Thorn," "The Stolen Boat," and Book 4 of *The Excursion*

respond to Enlightenment rationalism and skepticism by privileging Christianity over other world mythologies that he considers more primitive attempts to know God.

Book 4 of *The Excursion* promotes a Christian moral by means of pagan material, responding to the threat posed by Enlightenment attempts to dismiss Christianity as one of many superstitions. According to Jeffrey N. Cox in *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School*, there was an Enlightenment “assault on superstition which saw writers such as Voltaire and Hume constructing myth (and by extension religion itself) as a product of the savage mind to be debunked” (108). Afraid that such rationalism would reduce Christianity to one of many naïve superstitions, Christian apologists of the day—including Wordsworth—responded by “offering accounts that tainted ancient myth, deriding it themselves as superstition or uncovering it as a degenerate version of Biblical truth” (Cox 108).

Wordsworth addresses the subject of superstition in several poems and their explanatory notes, but unlike the Enlightenment thinkers who sought to conflate religion and superstition, Wordsworth dismisses primitive religions and superstitions as early and ineffective attempts at what Christianity eventually perfected: a relationship with God. The most famous example of this rhetorical maneuver comes in Book 4 of *The Excursion* (to which I will return on page 52), but Wordsworth’s early poems “The Thorn” and “The Stolen Boat” (from Book 1 of *The Prelude*) also promote the conservative myth of Christianity as something separate from and superior to other religions and “superstitions.”

Perhaps Wordsworth’s most explicit use of the term “superstition” is in his introductory note to “The Thorn” in which he describes the narrator as superstitious and, subsequently, “of slow faculties and deep feelings” and as having an imaginative, “adhesive”

mind bereft of fancy (287). Wordsworth's delineation of the terms "imagination" and "fancy" (along with the aforementioned descriptors) make it clear that superstitious is not an attribute Wordsworth values. He defines imagination, which the superstitious possess, as "the faculty that produces impressive effects out of simple elements," while fancy, which superstitious people lack, is the separate and more admirable "power by which pleasure and surprise are excited by sudden varieties of situation and by accumulated imagery" (287). In short, imagination creates connections and narratives from perceptions, but fancy allows the observer to combine perceptions without unifying them, to consider them without deducing a conclusion from them.

Not only is the narrator of "The Thorn" superstitious, but his perspective is important enough to warrant a 450-word explanatory note by the author, drawing the reader's attention from the poem's sensational content to the narrator's attempts to make sense of the stories and his own observations.⁶ As Donald Priestman points out in his "Superstition and Imagination: Complementary Faculties of Wordsworth's Narrator in 'The Thorn,'" the true subject of the poem has been debated since its publication in the first edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. Wordsworth's dedication to explaining the background of the narrator in a note, however, suggests that the true focus of the poem is not the mystery of Martha Ray's story but the observations of the narrator: "Wordsworth is not asking his readers to solve a crime. He is inviting them to observe how the imagination of a superstitious, credulous, talkative, elderly, retired stranger, possessed of slow faculties and

⁶ Wordsworth added the note to the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads* after the poem was heavily criticized in the first edition of the collection.

deep feelings, operates” (Priestman 198).⁷ Book 4 of *The Excursion* deals with primitive cultures and religions and their relationship to Wordsworth’s Christianity, but “The Thorn” sets the stage for such a discussion, replacing primitive cultures with a single primitive mind and showing the reader the flaws of its operation.

The narrator’s superstition is problematic but not, as one might expect, because it leads him to believe the rumors circulating among the townspeople about Martha Ray. In fact, he repeatedly specifies that the story he is perpetuating is only what “they say” and that he does not necessarily believe the townspeople.⁸ He does, however, allow these rumors—even if he doesn’t believe them intellectually—to influence his emotional perception of his natural surroundings: the thorn and the mound, specifically. He describes the thorn tree, for example, with language reminiscent of both Martha Ray and the lost child. The tree looks “old and grey...a wretched thing forlorn” (4, 9) and is hung with “melancholy” tufts of moss (11), echoing the sadness and weariness of the aging Martha Ray, but in claiming that the tree stands “not higher than a two-year’s child” and that the moss around it appears to be trying “to bury this poor thorn forever” (22), the narrator also prematurely evokes the child who is presumed dead. Wordsworth repeatedly describes the mound as being the size of an infant’s grave, and whether or not it actually is matters less than the fact that the narrator associates a dead child with it. Even though he may not believe the stories about Martha Ray, his descriptions of the mound and even the nearby tree are influenced by them; he has imaginatively, albeit subconsciously, connected the

⁷ Stephen Parrish makes a similar argument in *The Art of the Lyrical Ballads*: The poem “becomes not a poem about a woman but a poem about a man (and a tree); not a tale of horror but a psychological study; not a ballad but a dramatic monologue” (100-101).

⁸ In stanza 16, for example, the narrator explains that he’s heard people swear that the cries that sometimes emanate from the mountain are voices of the dead, but he goes on to clarify that he : “cannot think, whate’er they say, They had to do with Martha Ray” (164-5).

stories to his surroundings. Although there is no religion or mythology referenced in the poem, “The Thorn” is an early example of what Wordsworth considers a primitive mind drawing connections between human actions and feeling and the natural world.

Wordsworth puts stock in fancy and in Christianity, which both stand in opposition to this kind of superstition.

Wordsworth also explores the imagination and superstition of primitive minds in “The Stolen Boat” episode from *The Prelude*. In this poem, another primitive mind—this time a child’s—superstitiously combines the sublimity of a mountain with his own guilt over having stolen a boat, deducing that a super-natural force has come to punish him. He imagines that the growing mountain “towered up between me and the stars, and still, / For so it seemed, with purpose of its own / And measured motion like a living thing, / Strode after me” (1.383-86). The boy immediately returns the boat in order to appease the vengeful god his guilt and imagination have created. In both “The Thorn” and “The Stolen Boat,” Wordsworth chastises primitive attempts to construct narratives and gods, and he privileges Christianity as the superior alternative to them in Book 4 of *The Excursion*.

This particular portion of *The Excursion* focuses on a conversation between Wordsworth’s Wanderer and Solitary. In that conversation, the Wanderer dismisses entire world mythologies in order to privilege Christianity above them. Ancient civilizations and pagan religions are merely early, defective attempts to do what the Wanderer claims only Christianity accomplishes: restore the relationship between God and humankind. The content of their conversation is, then, mythographic, but it contains mythopoeic elements as well.

Wordsworth's use of the first mythic mode in this part of *The Excursion* is similar to Burke's. As I mentioned earlier, the political agenda Burke uses *Reflections* to work toward is masked by the illusion that the reader is eavesdropping on someone else's conversation. Readers are likely to resist a text's attempt to tell them what to do or how to think but are more likely to listen when the message is not directed toward them. Just as *Reflections* is framed as a letter from Burke to a French gentleman, Wordsworth's discussion of myth in *The Excursion* is constructed as a conversation between the Wanderer and the Solitary that the reader is "listening in" on. Wordsworth's goal is to restore Christianity's reputation and save it from the Enlightenment rationality that threatened to dismiss it as mere superstition. His explanation of world mythologies and their relationship to Christianity comes as the Wanderer's attempts to comfort the despondent Solitary, whose generation has rejected the authority of religion in the wake of the French Revolution and the rationality of the Enlightenment. Wordsworth needs to affect his readers, to convince them not to discard Christianity, but to accomplish this, he must direct his message to someone else.

Wordsworth explains myth as "a record of humanity's struggle to know God, a struggle fulfilled by Christianity and betrayed by the French Revolution with its turn to society rather than nature and nature's God" (Cox 107). The Wanderer explains that when humankind was first created, it had immediate access to God:

Men walked; and when and wheresoe'er he moved,
Alone or mated, solitude was not.
He heard, borne on the wind, the articulate voice
Of God...He sate—and talked
With winged Messengers; who daily brought
To his small island in the ethereal deep
Tidings of joy and love. (632-41)

This direct relationship, however, was destroyed when humans fell “from these pure heights...to banishment condemned / That flowing years repealed not” (647-48). And God, despite man’s fall,

By vocal utterance or blaze of light
Or cloud of darkness localised in heaven...on the chosen Race
Showered miracles, and ceased not to dispense
Judgments that filled the land from age to age
With hope, and love, and gratitude, and fear. (653-60).

According to Wordsworth (by means of the Wanderer), God, though not as accessible as he once was, has not abandoned humankind. The myths and rituals of Persia, Babylon, Greece, he claims, are humankind’s attempts post-Fall to communicate with and maintain a relationship with God through personifications of nature.

Wordsworth claims that world mythologies and religions are imperfect variations of Christianity, but the only way he can make that argument is to use the third mode and omit any and all specifics from the world religions he mentions. Even though the religions of the cultures Wordsworth mentions (Persia, Babylon, and Greece, namely) differ greatly from one another and from Christianity, Wordsworth is able to consolidate them under the umbrella of Christianity by ignoring the differences that would ordinarily prevent such a conflation. The Wanderer tells of the Persians “to loftiest heights ascending,” offering “sacrifice to moon and stars, / And to the winds and other elements, / And the whole circle of the heavens, for him /A sensitive existence, and a God” (675-80). And of the Babylonians raising a “tower eight times planted on the top of tower” (686). Wordsworth points to attempts by each culture to reach God spiritually (and in the case of Babylon, physically) but to none of the other tenets or practices of the religion. Wordsworth concludes his discussion of myths with Greece’s turn to nature:

And emanations were perceived; and acts
Of immortality, of in Nature's course,
Exemplified by mysteries, that were felt
As bonds, on grave philosopher imposed
And armed warrior. (739-43)

Again, by omitting the many ways in which Greek mythology and Christianity vastly differ, he is able to focus on the similarities between the two. The Greeks' alignment of deities with natural objects and phenomena has something in common with Wordsworth's argument (as articulated by the Wanderer) that "despondency can be defeated through an imaginative response to nature that points beyond this world to the divine" (Cox 107), so that aspect of Greek myth becomes the object of Wordsworth's focus. He highlights only what the religions have in common and omits any specifics that would work against his effort to string all world myths in a single evolutionary chain concluding with Christianity.

Unlike Burke's *Reflections* and most other myths that incorporate the mythic mode, *The Excursion's* mythography does not reveal a parallel between the ancient world and the contemporary agenda, a precedent for modern audiences to follow. *The Excursion's* references include select details regarding the practice of several world religions but only enough to support Wordsworth's claim that they are attempts, which Christianity will later perfect, to reconnect with God. Rather than drawing parallels between his own agenda and ancient myths, Wordsworth positions the mythography in *The Excursion* opposite his own argument. The ancientness of the myths, rather than establishing timelessness and universality, reveals how outdated and imperfect those religions are compared to Wordsworth's Christianity.

WORDSWORTH'S "LAODAMIA"

"Laodamia," is a rare exception to Wordsworth's well-known anti-pagan poetic philosophy and, like *The Excursion*, is mythographic in addition to being mythopoeic. Cox explains that Wordsworth used its mythography as "a means of combating the disorienting splendors and miseries of the age of revolution" (107-08). In 1814, the Napoleonic Wars and the War of 1812 were still ongoing, and the emotional and political effects of the French-Revolution and Enlightenment ideals were far from over. Through "Laodamia," Wordsworth demonstrates his sympathy for passion and rebellion and, ultimately, his belief in the necessity of restraint and obedience toward a higher power during such a chaotic time.

The poem is a dialogue between the Greek warrior Protesilaus and his wife, for whom the poem is titled. Protesilaus, knowing of a prophecy that promised victory in the Trojan War to the side with the first casualty, purposefully reached the Trojan shore first and sacrificed himself to Trojan forces to ensure Greece's victory. The poem is less about Protesilaus, however, and more about Laodamia's grief and her final meeting with her husband's ghost. The god Hermes tells Laodamia that the grace which accompanies her prayers has persuaded Zeus to allow her three hours with her husband before he enters the underworld. It is her grief that earns the god's favor and brings Protesilaus's ghost to her, but that same emotion becomes the poem's source of conflict by the end. Both Protesilaus and Hermes warn Laodamia that the gods are growing impatient with her now excessive grief and that she will be punished if she does not curb her passion, but she can do no such thing and eventually dies for her disobedience.

Death is, no doubt, a harsh punishment for excessive grief, and Wordsworth's apparent support of Zeus's judgment makes him seem as or more conservative even than Burke. In the final and most commonly reproduced 1845 version of the poem, Wordsworth speaks of Laodamia's "willful crime" and the "just gods" responsible for her death (159-61), but he took a variety of stances regarding Laodamia's crime and punishment as he revised the poem a number of times between its initial publication in 1815 and the final version in 1845. The revisions suggest that Wordsworth struggled to deal with Laodamia's passionate disobedience, something Judith W. Page explores in "'Judge Her Gently:' Passion and Rebellion in Wordsworth's 'Laodamia.'" The aforementioned 1845 edition is easily the most condemning (and a tentative condemnation at that) of the many versions. In the 1815 version, Laodamia dies "without crime"—a far cry from the "willful crime" in 1845. In 1827, she dies "not without the crime," and in 1840 "from passion desperate to a crime" (Page 34). Wordsworth, Page claims, "in trying to dissociate himself directly from her rebellion...has a difficult time finding a position" (34). The string of revisions Wordsworth made to the poem reflects both the difficult time he had determining his stance toward Laodamia's disobedience and, perhaps, his increasingly conservative ideology.

This subject of rebellion, Page continues, is particularly difficult for Wordsworth because of his pro-revolution stance earlier in his life:

While Wordsworth's distrust of revolutionary violence and uncontrolled passion was well-established by 1814....[his] revisions of crucial passages in 'Laodamia' can be traced to his indecision about how to respond to the fate of a character as passionate as the young William Wordsworth himself had been in the early 1790s. (25)

"Laodamia," in other words, ultimately promotes a conservative agenda but one that seems careful not to judge rebellion too harshly. Wordsworth identifies with Laodamia's passion

and uses her character “to work through his own dilemma as a man who has known rebellion and has struggled to submit to various personal and political losses and has been forced to face the consequences and personal and political excesses in 1814” (Page 27). Wordsworth fully understands the draw of rebellion but knows he must submit to a higher order, just as Protesilaus begs Laodamia to do.

Wordsworth employs another mode, mythography, by choosing to revise an ancient myth. Like Burke’s reference to King Pelias’s daughters in *Reflections*, Laodamia’s story is a model of what not to do, but it would not be able to serve this function if Wordsworth had not made changes to the story. Although he omits a number of details, “Laodamia” is a fairly faithful retelling of the ancient myth up until Laodamia’s death. In Apollodorus’s *The Library*, Laodamia’s death is the result of suicide, not Zeus: “The gods had pity on her, and Hermes brought up Protesilaus from Hades. On seeing him, Laodamia thought it was himself returned from Troy, and she was glad; but when he was carried back to Hades, she stabbed herself to death” (para. 70). This change in the manner of Laodamia’s death is a significant alteration, as Zeus’s say in her death is the lynchpin of the poem’s moral. By making Zeus responsible for Laodamia’s death, Wordsworth creates a direct conflict that does not exist in the original account between her rebellion and heavenly authority: “Thus, all in vain exhorted and reproved, / She perished; and, as for a wilful crime, / By the just Gods whom no weak pity moved, / Was doomed to wear out her appointed time” (157-60). The original myth emphasizes the necessity of emotional restraint, as it is Laodamia’s excessive emotion that leads her to suicide, but Laodamia’s disregard for Zeus’s command in Wordsworth’s poem is what carries the political (anti-revolutionary) resonance. The mythological status of Wordsworth’s source text allows him to use Laodamia as an ancient

precedent, while his revisions make his poem and its moral applicable to the current events and revolutionary tensions of his own time.

Wordsworth also makes use of the mythic mode of disguising the poem's purpose, as "Laodamia" does not initially appear to work toward any political or religious goal. It is the tragic story of one woman's grief over the death of her husband and seems, on the surface, to have no ulterior agenda. The poem, however, is also a warning about the consequences of defying authority. Although Zeus remains "offstage" throughout the poem, the events that take place are according to his command, and as king of the Gods, he represents both divine and monarchical authority. The poem may not appear to advance a particular agenda, but Laodamia's disobedience and subsequent punishment subtly promote a conservative message regarding the importance of obeying both divine and kingly authority.

Wordsworth uses "Laodamia" to align Christianity with pre-Revolution conservatism. Although the poem technically focuses on pagan subjects, Wordsworth presents them through a Christian framework. Despite the polytheism of the Greek pantheon, Zeus is the poem's only authority figure and parallels the monotheism of Christianity. Hermes is the only other god mentioned in the poem, and he acts more like an angelic messenger than a deity in his own right. Much like Burke's and Southey's uses of the second mythic mode in their texts, the religious element of "Laodamia" serves to conflate Christianity and obedience. *Reflections on the Revolution in France* and *A Vision of Judgement* situate rebellion and Christianity as diametrically opposed ideals, and Wordsworth presents his readers with a similar dilemma: Laodamia cannot please God and continue to defy him. By embracing one, she necessarily rejects the other.

The poem succeeds as a cautionary tale because of Wordsworth's use of the third mythic mode: creating symbolic figures by removing particulars. Readers can take Wordsworth's lesson to heart because they are able to identify with Laodamia. On one hand, the story of Laodamia and Protesilaus is a specific one: they have proper names, and Protesilaus's death (and the prophecy leading up to it) is not exactly commonplace. On the other hand, Wordsworth's retelling omits many of the original myth's specifics and succeeds in recasting a story that could happen to anyone anywhere.

The poem begins with Laodamia's concern for her husband who, unbeknownst to her, is already dead. Wordsworth provides no background information on the couple. The reader knows nothing about their personal histories, families, marriage, or life before the war. How did they meet? Where do they live? Do they have children? Wordsworth does not share. We only see Laodamia's reaction to the news of Protesilaus's death and their interaction with one another upon the arrival of his ghost, and there is nothing to distinguish Laodamia from any other woman (or person, even) suffering from the loss of a loved one. Wordsworth also omits the specific circumstances of Protesilaus's death in an attempt to make his and Laodamia's situation seem more universal. Instead of focusing on the prophecy and Protesilaus's sacrifice, which might be difficult for the average reader to identify with, Wordsworth skips the actual battle and begins the poem with Laodamia's grief—something much more universal. Laodamia functions as a symbol or universal image, and because readers can imagine themselves in her situation, Wordsworth is able to use Laodamia's death to impart two lessons to the reader: the real-world necessity of obeying authority and the danger of unrestrained passion.

This necessity of restraint is, in fact, the “truth” Wordsworth promotes in his use of the fourth mythic mode. Much like Burke’s claim that people throwing off their government is analogous to criminals escaping from prison, Wordsworth’s poem encourages restraint. Laodamia is admonished by her husband to temper her passion and grief at the request of the gods: “Be taught, O faithful Consort, to control / Rebellious passion: for the Gods approve / The depth and not the tumult, of the soul; / A fervent, not ungovernable love” (73-76). This is the first of two instances in which Laodamia is referred to as being out of government, which despite less systematic definitions, brings kings and parliament to mind. The second instance occurs in lines 139-40: “And Thou, though strong in love, art all too weak / In reason, in self-government too slow.” Whereas Burke privileged feeling over reason in his *Reflections*, it is Laodamia’s excess of feelings in this case that poses a problem. Wordsworth would seem to argue that the passion and lack of restraint demonstrated by the French revolutionaries is the primary cause for concern—not the cold rationalism that Burke rails against. Protesilaus advises his wife to use the prospect of being reunited in the underworld to allay her grief and to convince her to look to a higher power in her life. He refers several times to the poor manner in which she governs herself, suggesting that she is better off being ruled by someone else.

Laodamia does not, however, stem her passionate cries, thereby rebelling against heaven’s king and judge. By the end of the poem, “Thus all in vain exhorted and reprov’d, / She perished...and, as for a willful crime, / By the just Gods whom no weak pity mov’d” (158-61). Wordsworth advances a subjective truth that restraint and government are necessary, that passions should be tempered in favor of reserved patience and, most importantly, consent. Here, like Burke’s metaphor comparing French citizens to slaves,

Wordsworth is in danger of undoing his own progress. He wants to prove the importance of obedience and restraint but in doing so exposes the cruelty and impatience of Zeus, his figure of authority. On the one hand, Laodamia's death can be read as a lesson on the dangers of defiance, but on the other hand, a radical author could use the same narrative to point out the brutal and tyrannical tendencies of monarchs and other figures of authority.

Although the threats that Wordsworth is responding to in Book 4 of *The Excursion* and "Laodamia" differ, both poems use conservative mythopoesis to defend Christianity against radicalism and skepticism. As the texts in this chapter reveal, the rhetorical techniques Wordsworth uses to promote his agenda have much in common with other Romantic myths that work toward other conservative agendas—including but not exclusive to Burke's counterrevolutionary *Reflections* and Southey's revision of George III's legacy, *A Vision of Judgement*. The consistency with which these authors employ these mythopoeic modes reflects an even more extensive use of them by other conservative authors, but as the next chapter will demonstrate, these modes are not limited to one side of the political spectrum.

CHAPTER TWO POETRY, MYTH, AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Percy Shelley's "Defence of Poetry" outlines his understanding of poets as "institutors of laws and founders of civil society, the inventors of the arts of life" (1073) and famously concludes with his claim that "poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world" (1087). His belief that poets perform an important civic function and that poetry can (and should) possess real-world resonance is well-established. What is perhaps less recognized is that even seemingly apolitical Romantic poets such as John Keats and Felicia Hemans share Shelley's belief that poetry has a social responsibility. In a dissertation that focuses on literary responses to historical circumstances, this chapter explores the Romantics' understanding of the relationship between art and life. If a number of texts in the Romantic period are mythic because they were written to promote particular social and political agendas, it must first be established that the authors believed their writings could produce such an effect.

This chapter will explore the political potential Romantic authors imagined for their poetry and will focus on Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" and *Adonais*, John Keats's *Hyperion* fragments, and Felicia Hemans's *Modern Greece*. I have selected texts by these particular authors because they, despite distinct poetic styles and perspectives, demonstrate the larger Romantic ideology that art should speak to current events and provoke real change. These specific poems are not the most overtly political, but they are

key to uncovering how the second generation Romantics imagined themselves and their works in relation to their own time.

The Romantics believed that poetry (and art in general), unlike the commodities of the Industrial Revolution, performed the important function of enlarging and awakening the mind, creating better citizens: “A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another of many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own. The great instrument of moral good is the imagination; and poetry administers to the effect by acting upon the cause” (Shelley, “Defence” 1076). Although Shelley’s “Defence” is the best-known example of this argument, this chapter will demonstrate that Shelley is not alone in this belief. The second generation Romantics as a whole believed that they, as poets, had a responsibility to improve their society. This chapter will demonstrate that the authors of the Romantic period—represented here by Shelley, Keats, and Hemans—used their poetry to disseminate and universalize their particular social and political agendas, thus taking part in mythopoesis. Romantic authors were immensely invested in the social and political issues of their time and there was an overarching belief throughout the period that art could and should influence real-world events.

SHELLEY’S “ODE TO THE WEST WIND” AND *ADONAI*S

“The man would be very dead to all generous feelings who would rather see pretty pictures and statues than a million free and happy men,” twenty-year-old Shelley wrote in his 1812 “Address to the Irish People” (342). These sentiments, though articulated early in his career, pervade Shelley’s political and poetic efforts from *Queen Mab* to *The Triumph of Life*. Shelley’s political and social activism peaked in the years surrounding the Peterloo

Massacre of 1819, and the concurrence of England's upheaval and Shelley's *annus mirabilis* is no coincidence. While he ultimately privileged morality over art, his hope was to use one to bring about the other.

"Ode to the West Wind" and *Adonais* specifically address the power of poetry and the effect it can have on humanity. The problem, however, is that Shelley struggled to gain a wide audience for his poetry, and the audience he did have seemed largely unaffected by his attempts to move them. According to P.M.S. Dawson in *The Unacknowledged Legislator: Shelley and Politics*, "he was well aware that he would never achieve the popularity gained by Byron...[but] if he coveted such popularity it was for the sake of spreading his moral and political principles. Not having it, he had to find a way of believing in the power of the poet to produce good even without the obvious advantage of a large and responsive audience" (211). Shelley filled his poems with characters and events that echoed those of his own time and continued to take strong moral and political stances with the hope of transforming England into a country full of "free and happy men," but "Ode to the West Wind" reveals his own insecurity about his poetry's power to affect anything. Regardless of its efficacy, however, Shelley's determination to use poetry as means of prompting reform and the rhetorical means by which he articulates his politically charged message render him one of the great mythmakers of the Romantic period. Poems such as "The Mask of Anarchy," "England in 1819," and *Prometheus Unbound* serve as shining examples of Shelley's mythopoesis, but "Ode to the West Wind" and *Adonais* demonstrate the connection Shelley saw between art and life.

The best and most thorough discussion of poetic authority in "Ode to the West Wind" is Edward Duffy's "Where Shelley Wrote and What He Wrote For." Duffy explains

that “Ode to the West Wind” is written from the perspective of “a self-consciously failed writer,” who “turns his failure into the sign that his words might yet be the trumpet of a prophecy” (362). He relates the opening, bleak scene of the poem to “the deplorably chained and bowed state of post-Napoleonic Europe” and the falling leaves to his own poetic endeavors, “falling dead off the printing press and bound for nothing” (Duffy 361). Although “Ode to the West Wind” is not a political poem, I would like to expand upon Duffy’s points to demonstrate the influence Shelley believed poetry could and should have on society.

Although it is, as Duffy claims, “appended like a signature to the first edition of *Prometheus Unbound*” (360), “Ode to the West Wind” functions more like an invocation to Shelley’s muse. It is a recognition of his own limitations as a poet and a request for his words to be strengthened and scattered by the immense power of the West Wind. Whereas a signature shows confidence, authority, and accountability, the ode reveals frailty, failure, and doubt. Its attachment to *Prometheus Unbound*, arguably Shelley’s most fully realized poem and one of the heaviest in terms of political implications, feels more like a plea than anything—a plea that his words not fall on deaf ears.

The imagery in the poem’s opening lines is bleak, reflecting the inability of Shelley’s poetry, his “leaves dead” (2), to affect any sort of change. Shelley is painfully aware—more so in this poem than in any other—of his “failure” as a poet. He is weak and fragile (“I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!” 54), and despite his lofty ambitions, cannot achieve the success he desires as a writer (always in the shadow of Byron’s popularity) or as a reformer: “a heavy weight of hours has chained and bowed / One too like thee: tameless,

and swift, and proud" (55-56). This discrepancy between the poet's potential power and his actual influence is at the heart of much of Shelley's poetry.

After describing the dearth of autumn, Shelley looks ahead to the spring, which "shall blow / Her clarion o'er the dreaming earth/ ...with living hues and odours plain and hill" (10-12). Given his frustration with his own weak voice and ineffectual writings, Shelley must long to similarly sweep over the world with healing words to raise the people of England from their troubles. Whereas Duffy argues that the poem's bleak setting parallels post-Napoleonic Europe, I hesitate to attach such a specific historical association to a poem with such broad implications. The aftermath of Napoleon would be consistent with the poem's images of dearth and gloom, but it seems sufficient to view the setting more generally as a period lacking prosperity, thus allowing for readings that include the aftermath of Napoleon but not restricting the poem such specific circumstances. Generally speaking, if the time in which Shelley (or any poet) has been living and writing is winter or autumn, his writing has no choice but to be ineffective—seeds sown on barren earth. But with the winter comes the promise of spring and the hope for a future that might heed his words and prosper from them.

Shelley begs in the fourth stanza, "make me thy lyre, even as the forest is" (57). This reference echoes not only Coleridge's "Eolian Harp" in which "all of animated nature" is compared to a harp in the hands of God but also a passage from Shelley's own "Essay on Christianity" (composed sometime between 1813 and 1819). In that essay, Shelley explains, "We are not the arbiters of every motion of our own complicated nature; we are not the masters of our own imaginations and moods of mental being. There is a Power by which we are surrounded like the atmosphere in which some motionless lyre is suspended,

which visits with its breath our silent chords at will" (1071). He alludes to an invisible force that "plays" humans like an instrument—replacing Coleridge's harp with the classical lyre—using us for its purposes. In "Ode to the West Wind," Shelley longs, however, not only to be the instrument of the wind but to be joined with it: "Be thou, Spirit fierce, / My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one" (61-62). He wants to be both inspired and a source of inspiration.

Although this talk of invisible forces influencing humankind echoes the "awful shade of some unseen Power.../ visiting this various world with...inconstant wing" (1-3) from "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty," the poem most closely related to Shelley's poetic desires in "Ode to the West Wind" is "To a Skylark." In it, Shelley addresses a "blithe Spirit" rather than a "fierce" one, but his discussion of the bird similarly demonstrates his own desire to serve as a catalyst for human thought, action, and improvement. The skylark soars above the earth "unseen" and is said to be

Like a Poet hidden
In the light of thought,
Singing hymns unbidden,
Till the world is wrought
To sympathy with hopes and fears it heeded not. (36-40)

This description of poets is surely the vision Shelley has in mind for himself but has yet to accomplish in "Ode to the West Wind." He wishes to be a poet with this kind of influence, but expresses anxiety over not having accomplished it by the time these odes were composed in 1819 and 1820.

The correlation between skylark and poet is extended in the final two stanzas of "To a Skylark" as Shelley positions himself between the bird and humankind:

Better than all measures
Of delightful sound,

Better than all treasures
That in books are found
Thy skill to poet were, thou scorner of the ground!

Teach me half the gladness
That thy brain must know,
Such harmonious madness
From my lips would flow
The world should listen then—as I am listening now. (96-105)

Parallels between poets and the skylark are drawn in both passages, but a slight discrepancy exists in that Shelley now requires the help of the skylark to achieve the very influence he defined for poets sixty lines earlier. Shelley longs to possess the “gladness” of the skylark, but he is not asking to simply be happy. The skylark’s gladness holds sway over Shelley and compels him to listen, which is precisely the effect Shelley wishes to have on humankind. The gladness Shelley desires is, in this sense, directly related to authority in that he wishes his voice and writings possessed a quality that would compel others to listen. The temporal adverbs “then” and “now” in the final line of the poem make it clear that he still lacks such authority. To say “The world should listen *then*” (105, emphasis mine) indicates that it is not listening presently. Even the “should” is telling as it both suggests that listening to the poet would be in the world’s best interest and that the world will not necessarily do so.

Shelley’s final request in “Ode to the West Wind” is that the wind “Drive my dead thoughts over the universe / Like withered leaves to quicken new birth!...Scatter, as from an extinguished hearth / Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!” (63-67). He speaks of his leaves, or pages, as decaying matter that will enrich the soil and promote new leaf-producing trees and asks the Wind to scatter them so that his extinguished fire, like the ashes and sparks he mentions, might ignite new ones across the land. Shelley prays that his

ineffectual words have not only been the result of an impenetrable winter but that they will also be the sign of and the impetuous for an inevitable spring for both his poetry and his country.

If “Ode to the West Wind” is Shelley’s invocation of poetic power and authority, *Adonais* is his realization of that power. Written two years later and on the occasion of Keats’s death, *Adonais* addresses many of the same poetic issues but with more control and confidence. The poem is extraordinarily complex, relying on many of the mythopoeic modes discussed in the previous chapter to communicate its message about the power of poetry. *Adonais* is the mythic fulfillment of the wish articulated in “Ode to the West Wind.”

Adonais relies on many of the same mythic modes I outlined in Chapter 1 to promote Shelley’s image of himself as a poet with the power to influence the public. Because of the complexity of *Adonais*, I will discuss it on two separate but ultimately overlapping mythopoeic levels. The first is Shelley’s elevation of Keats to a mythic status, and the second is his elevation of himself over Keats. In its most basic sense, *Adonais* is an elegy that celebrates and commemorates the life and works of John Keats. By the end, Keats, or *Adonais*, is a mythic figure whose spirit has become one with Nature and whose influence can be felt even in death. Shelley is able to place Keats in this mythic role via the mythic modes of alluding to the mythography of Adonis and replacing the historical figure of John Keats with the symbolic *Adonais*, whose death and influence are greatly romanticized.

The specifics of Adonis’s myth vary from source to source, but all accounts agree that Adonis was a handsome object of Venus’s affection who was killed by a boar while

hunting.⁹ Two different elements of Adonis's myth associate him with rebirth and situate him as what scholars of myth and archetypes such as James Frazer and Carl Jung call a "resurrection deity." Although Venus is the deity most commonly associated with the fair youth, Proserpine was also taken with his beauty, and the goddesses entered a bitter feud over "custody" of Adonis, a dispute Jupiter eventually settled by having the mortal divide his time between the upperworld with Venus and the underworld with Proserpine. Within a relatively short time, however, Adonis was killed by the boar. Upon hearing of his death and finding his body, Venus mixed Adonis's blood with nectar, creating the red anemone flower.¹⁰ Both the alternating between the upper and under worlds and Venus's creation of the anemone from Adonis's spilled blood establish a cycle of life arising from death—a cycle that is echoed in *Adonais* and the elegiac mode in general.

Shelley achieves mythopoesis on the first level of his poem (the level that constructs the mythic image of Keats) first by relying on this mythography of Adonis. Shelley's use of the name *Adonais* is, of course, an allusion to Adonis, although Shelley's variation of the name remains one of the great mysteries of his poetry. A number of theories—all of which carry different associations—have been posited over the years, the most commonly accepted being Earl Wasserman's. In *Shelley: A Critical Reading*, Wasserman supposes as a conflation, or telescoping, as he calls it, of the name "Adonis" and a Hebrew word for "Lord," "adonai," often used to refer to the Hebrew God.¹¹ Such a connection between the

⁹ The most popular and detailed account of the Adonis myth occurs in Book 10 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Venus falls in love with Adonis as a result of an accidental prick of Cupid's arrow. In Ovid, the incident with the boar is merely unfortunate, but in other accounts, either Diana, Mars, or Apollo (or their Greek counterparts) sends (or transforms into) the boar to kill Adonis and exact revenge upon Aphrodite for various reasons.

¹⁰ Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, 10.722-739.

¹¹ For a more in-depth explanation, see Wasserman's *Shelley: A Critical Reading* (464-65).

poem's subject and the Hebrew God would give the poem—and Keats—an additional, religious level of significance. Kelvin Everest offers another interpretation of Shelley's name for Keats in his "Shelley's *Adonais* and John Keats," arguing that the necessary positioning of Keats as Jehovah that a derivation from "adonai" would entail is not supported by the poem and that the more likely and consistent explanation is a conflation of "Adonis" and the Greek word for "nightingale," *αηδών* or "aedon" (258). This etymological connection to "nightingale" seems relevant given that Shelley alludes to "Ode to a Nightingale" and other Keats poems in *Adonais*, but unlike "adonai," *αηδών* does not account for the "a" that has been added in the antepenultimate position of "Adonis." In his 2011 essay "The 'ai' in 'Adonais,'" H.J. Jackson offers another theory: that the name "Adonais" is a combination of "Adonis" and the Greek exclamation for suffering "ai" (similar to the English "alas"), an argument made all the more likely by Shelley's use of the term in his recently completed, classically inspired *Prometheus Unbound*.¹² Whereas "adonai" attaches a religious importance, "ai" simultaneously denotes suffering (appropriate for an elegy) and establishes a classical significance to the poem. Both Wasserman's and Jackson's readings have their merits, and both support the mythic function of elevating the significance of the subject/narrative.

Whatever the additional associations of the name "Adonais," the connection to Adonis is well-established etymologically and thematically. Shelley does not include specific allusions to the aforementioned Adonis myth so much as he draws parallels between the circumstances of Adonis's and Adonais's deaths. That is, *Adonais* does not

¹² Jupiter exclaims as he falls, "Ai! Ai! / The elements obey me not . . . mine enemy above/ Darkens my fall with victory! Ai! Ai!" (3.1.29-83).

directly mention boars or anemones, but it does situate Keats, like Adonis, as a heroic figure whose beauty is taken from the world prematurely.¹³ Everest eloquently describes the parallels Shelley draws between his contemporary and the classical figure:

The fertility myth of a boy loved by a goddess, killed by a savage beast, and sleeping or waking with the seasonal life of Nature, parallels the fate of Keats, loved by the Muse, killed by a Tory reviewer, but whose body is reabsorbed into the vitality of Nature and whose spirit lives on with the “enduring dead.” (239)

The connection between Adonis and Keats/Adonais, however, is strengthened even further by the “immortality” granted to the figures after their deaths. In addition to being used to create the red anemone, Adonis’s blood is also, according to legend, the source of the Adonis River’s (now known as the Nahr Ibrahim in Lebanon) red appearance each spring. Mystery cults of ancient Greece commemorated the youth’s death once a year with loud wailing and hysterical grief. It is according to such models that Shelley constructs the subject of his poem: a mortal who will always be lamented and whose presence, even in death, continues to be felt. Shelley grants Keats a timeless and all-encompassing spirit and makes him a symbol of inspiration and rebirth.

In addition to mythography, Shelley also relies on the mythic modes of removing particulars to make Keats more of a symbolic figure and attributing a greater significance to Keats’s life and death—both of which work together to elevate Keats from mere human to mythic status. *Adonais* is an elegy for Keats in the vein of Milton’s “Lycidas,” and just as Milton replaces his colleague Edward King in the poem with a shepherd, Shelley replaces Keats in the elegy with a symbolic, mythographic figure. Shelley makes a myth of Keats, not

¹³ Shelley has a dragon kill Adonais, in fact, instead of a boar. And while the names Venus and Aphrodite do not appear in the poem, Shelley’s figure of Urania not only calls to mind Milton’s muse but is also an epithet of Aphrodite.

only by connecting his story with that of Adonis but also by fusing Adonis and Keats into the figure of Adonais and establishing him as a symbol of the inspiration and poetic influence Shelley longed to possess in “Ode to the West Wind.”

As Adonais, Keats is able not only to transcend the human boundaries of time and place and exist in a more universal, mythic dimension but also to overcome death. Because the subject of the poem is not John Keats but Adonais, Shelley is able to turn his grief in the opening stanzas into hope by having Adonais’s spirit be absorbed into Nature. This conflation between the mythic figure and Nature grants Adonais a symbolic status by further removing the particulars of Keats, but it also adds a greater significance to Keats’s life and death since, as Nature, his influence is limitless. By the end of the poem, Keats has been transformed into Adonais, Adonais has been united with Nature, and Nature is reaching out to everything. The young poet is not dead but “a portion of the loveliness / Which once he made more lovely” (379-80), and his immortal spirit lives on:

He is made one with Nature: there is heard
His voice in all her music...
He is a presence to be felt and known
In darkness and in light, from herb and stone,
Spreading itself where’er that Power may move
Which has withdrawn his being to its own. (370-77)

Adonais’s influence is everywhere. Unlike the poet of “West Wind,” who was merely human and easily ignored, Adonais’s influence knows no bounds.

For the conservative authors mentioned in the previous chapter, the greater significance they chose to apply to their narratives was almost always a religious (specifically Christian) one, but Shelley—radical in more ways than one—chooses to add to Keats’s poetic significance. Romantic poets (except Byron) were struggling for relevance in an increasingly commodity-driven market. Since Keats was only beginning to gain

popularity at the time of his death, it seems unlikely that he would have had any significant influence on authors or readers at that point, much less the kind of influence Shelley suggests via the unification of Adonais with all-encompassing Nature. All of this may seem to indicate that Shelley sees Keats as having succeeded where he himself lamented failing in "Ode to the West Wind," and this may, in fact, be the case, but only on one of the poem's levels.

If Adonais is powerful, Shelley is even more so. In the opening lines to his aforementioned article, Kelvin Everest claims that "*Adonais* differs from other English elegies in celebrating its subject throughout as a more important poet than the author, which is what Shelley really judged Keats to be" (237). When Everest claims that Shelley is breaking the elegiac mold by privileging Keats over himself, he is no doubt thinking of the standard set by John Milton, whose elegy to Edward King is more about himself than his deceased colleague. The problem with Everest's claim, however, is that Shelley does no such thing. *Adonais* does lament Keats's death, and Shelley does offer high praise of Keats in the poem's preface, but there is another level to the poem that Everest has overlooked. His reading of the poem is based entirely on the first level of mythopoesis that I have already discussed and overlooks the second level that ultimately results in the emergence of Shelley, not Adonais, as the poem's true symbol of poetic power. Just as Shelley relied on the mythic modes to construct a mythic figure out of Keats, he applies the same process (using some of the same modes and some additional ones) to make a myth of himself as well. Simply put, Adonais is the mythographic basis of Shelley's myth, just as Adonis was the basis of Adonais's.

Part of the reason Everest overlooks the additional level of mythopoesis is because Shelley relies on the mythic mode of disguising his purpose. Although Shelley's ultimate goal is to privilege himself, the elegiac form of the poem leads the reader to believe that the poem will be about Keats (Everest uses Milton as an example of an English elegiac tradition that privileges the author over the supposed subject, but elegies, historically, focus on the deceased). The genre and occasion of the poem prepare the reader for a celebration and praising of Keats and lead them to read it as such even though Shelley is doing a lot more with Keats/Adonais than simply praising.

As Shelley constructs his mythic narrative of Adonais, he simultaneously uses it as the foundation for yet another myth: Shelley as Poet. The first level of mythopoesis relies on the mythography of Adonis to establish Keats as a mythic figure in his own right, a symbol for Shelley's message that poetry touches everything. The second level uses that very myth to situate Shelley as a poet capable of mythopoesis in the first place, as he is able to transform Keats into the all-encompassing influence that emerges at the end of the poem. This transformation that demonstrates Shelley's power, however, is only possible if Keats begins as something weak and in need of being raised by Shelley. Shelley needs Adonais to emerge as a powerful and influential figure for the purposes of the first level of myth, but for the second level, he needs Adonais to have begun as something frail. The myth that Shelley ultimately wants to emerge by the final lines of the poem is that *he* is capable of making myths, and his transformation of the weak and fragile Keats into the powerful and mythic Adonais is the embodiment of that mythmaking power.

The form of the elegiac genre lends itself perfectly to this kind of transformation, as elegies tend to begin with the mourning of death and move toward a hopeful celebration of

afterlife (both spiritual and literary in the case of *Adonais*). This structure allows Shelley to mourn the death of the very mortal Keats for the first half of the poem and then to devote his poetic powers to the creation of the immortal Adonais in the second half (though he refers to both aspects by the one name). Every celebration of the influence and power of Adonais is simultaneously a celebration of Shelley, who was able to mold such a figure from the stuff of fragile Keats. Although readers' expectations going into the poem may cause them to dismiss references to weakness on the part of Keats as admiration of his sensitivity and beauty, they are actually carefully planted references that serve to make Adonais's mythic status at the end of the poem an extraordinary poetic achievement.

Shelley employs the mythic mode of presenting falsehoods as truths by perpetuating the story (both in his life and his poetry) that Keats's consumption was triggered by *The Quarterly Review's* brutal treatment of *Endymion*. In "Adonais: Shelley's Consumption of Keats," James Heffernan addresses Shelley's blaming of the *Quarterly Review* critic for Keats's death and argues that there is no evidence to suggest that Shelley had any reason to connect the scathing review of *Endymion* with Keats's illness and subsequent death. Despite the review's publication in 1818, Shelley himself makes no connection between the two until an unsent letter from October 1820 to the editor of the journal. In the letter, Shelley rails against *The Quarterly Review* for attacking him and for making Keats sick.¹⁴ Although there is no guarantee that we have access to all of Shelley's correspondence on the subject of Keats and his illness, the evidence we do have suggests that Shelley initially connected Keats's sickness and the bad review as a matter of convenience—a means of

¹⁴ For a more detailed account of Shelley's interaction with Keats between the time of the review and his death (and Shelley's relationship with *The Quarterly Review*), see Heffernan's "Adonais: Shelley's Consumption of Keats" (297-302).

getting back at Robert Southey and the other reviewers at the *Quarterly*—and its inclusion in *Adonais* seems to have an alternative agenda as well.

My discussion of this second mythic level of *Adonais* is, admittedly, much indebted to Heffernan's essay, which explores what he calls Shelley's "consumption" of Keats: the loss of Keats's identity in the poem and Shelley's forging of a new one for him. In addition to Shelley's story about the cause of Keats's death, Heffernan also focuses on Shelley's use of the Adonis myth and his ultimate dismissal and subsequent appropriation of Keats's epic-making power. It is my hope that rearticulating these points—along with my own refinements and expansions—in a mythic conversation will demonstrate both the usefulness of viewing Romantic poetry through the lens of mythopoesis and the ease with which discussions of mythopoesis can be combined with pre-existing interpretations. That is, mythopoeic readings do not disrupt or undo traditional or standard close readings but, rather, complement them and expose new intricacies that might otherwise be overlooked.

For the young poet's life to match up to the aforementioned tragedy of Adonis, Shelley needed to present a Keats who was fragile enough to be killed by bad press. Shelley seems to have selected the Adonis myth for Keats's elegy precisely because it allows him to position himself above the necessarily weak Keats. As Heffernan argues

Shelley's celebration of Keats required a poet weak enough to have been killed by the words of a reviewer so that he might be resurrected by the words of Shelley, whose elegy would be a sublime *re-viewing*, a visionary transformation of the pastoral dreamer into a Miltonic genius, and hence a demonstration of Shelley's own power. (303)

The Adonis myth is the perfect vehicle for Shelley, as it allows him to celebrate Keats's life, to honor his works, and to adhere to the Miltonic tradition of privileging himself and his own poetic power over the subject of the elegy. The greater *Adonais*'s influence at the end

of the poem, the more impressive Shelley becomes for having raised the fragile Keats to such a mythic status.

Even the version of the Adonis myth Shelley incorporates into the poem creates an image of Keats as little more than helpless victim. Adonis, by ancient accounts, is young but strong and dies while out hunting. Adonais, on the other hand, is described like a lost child, straying from the path with neither shield nor weapon to protect him:

O gentle child, beautiful as thou wert,
Why didst thou leave the trodden paths of men
Too soon, and with weak hands though mighty heart
Dare the unpastured dragon in his den?
Defenceless as thou wert, oh where was then
Wisdom the mirrored shield, or scorn the spear? (235-40)

Despite the ancient precedent and many modern adaptations of the myth (even in the context of elegies) that portray Adonis as an armed and capable hunter, Shelley's Adonais could not be more helpless.¹⁵

While Everest uses Shelley's preface to *Adonais* as an indicator of the poet's deep respect for his colleague and as proof that Shelley believed Keats to have been a better poet than himself, I would like to use the same preface to claim just the opposite. Everest uses Shelley's statement that he considered *Hyperion* "second to nothing that was ever produced by a writer of the same years" as evidence that Shelley judges Keats to be more important than himself. It seems unlikely, however, that Shelley would believe—much less state publicly—that a younger, greener poet was more important than himself, and the phrase

¹⁵ Bion's "Lament for Adonis," Moschus' "Lament for Bion," Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*, and Spenser's "Astrophel" all use the Adonis myth and portray the youth in varying degrees of strength and prowess, and as all but Shakespeare's are elegies, Shelley could have easily used any of the adaptations (or Bion's original) without straying from the elegiac tradition, but his image of Adonais is the weakest and most "defenceless" of all.

“by a writer of the same years” indicates that Shelley, indeed, refrained from taking that leap.¹⁶ Shelley may have liked what he read of *Hyperion* a great deal, but he does not praise its poet to the extent Everest believes he does. What Shelley’s preface does do, however, is rehearse the aforementioned false connection between the unfavorable review of *Endymion* and Keats’s death and mention Keats’s “delicate and fragile” genius, his “susceptible mind,” his heart made of “penetrable stuff,” “poor Keats,” “his sensitive spirit,” and “the poor fellow” (512-13). Even in the preface, Shelley is already priming the reader to read Keats/*Adonais* as a frail and helpless victim in need of Shelley’s saving.

When Shelley introduces himself in stanza thirty-one of *Adonais* (just after the midpoint), the poem has not yet made its turn from grief to hope. The images of *Adonais*’s triumphant rebirth and immortality have not appeared. Even within the poem, Shelley’s presence is required to begin the transformation. Perhaps Heffernan’s strongest piece of evidence for Shelley’s “consumption” of his rival poet is Shelley’s omission of Keats’s epic-making capabilities and what appears to be a positioning of himself as an epic poet/hero in the poem’s final stanzas. Although Shelley mentions Keats’s epic fragment *Hyperion* in the opening paragraph of the preface, it does not come up again. *Adonais* contains several fairly specific and recognizable allusions to other Keats poems, including *Isabella, or the Pot of Basil*, “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” “Ode to a Nightingale,” but makes no mention of Keats’s epic, the one poem Shelley liked better than any of Keats’s works, or the power that would have necessarily have accompanied creating it.¹⁷ As Heffernan explains, “As pure victim, as weak

¹⁶ Shelley said of Keats in an October 29, 1820 letter to Marianne Hunt, “I am aware indeed that I am nourishing a rival who will far surpass me and this is an additional motive & will be an added pleasure.” He certainly recognized something in Keats and *Hyperion*, but even this bold statement indicates that Keats has not yet reached Shelley’s level.

¹⁷ “Like a pale flower by some sad maiden cherished, / And fed with true-love tears, instead of dew” (48-49) mirrors *Isabella*’s watering of her pot of basil with tears. In lines 91-92, a figure from a “lucid urn” comes to

and immature child, Adonais embodies the very antithesis of that epic-making power which Keats demonstrated in *Hyperion* and for which Shelley salutes him in the Preface” (305).

Instead, Shelley takes on the role of epic poet himself with Adonais both as his hero and his muse. By using the mythic mode of removing particulars, he positions himself within the poem not as Shelley the mortal poet but as Poet. So as not to have Keats overshadow him, Shelley situates himself in the same timeless, mythic context in which he has already placed Adonais, only Shelley retains his status as Poet, whereas Adonais—having been made one with Nature—is only a figure of influence, not creation. As the mourners of the poem weep for Adonais, Shelley emerges first as “a frail form” (271), then as “a Power girt round with weakness” (281-82), and finally as what Heffernan calls “the epic voyager” (Heffernan 313), guided by the beacon of Adonais and other “Eternals” (presumably Milton, Sidney, and the other poets Shelley mentions Keats joining the company of in stanza 45). Shelley puts himself through an abbreviated version of Adonais’s transformation—from weak to strong—and despite all of the power and influence he associates with Adonais by the end of the poem, he attaches even more to himself. It is Shelley who fills the role of Poet in the final stanzas, feeling but ultimately absorbing Adonais’s influence into his own being: “The breath whose might I have invoked in song/ Descends on me...The soul of Adonais, like a star, / Beacons from the abode where the Eternal are” (487-95). Shelley celebrates Adonais by making him part muse and part hero

mourn Keats, and “Thy spirit’s sister, the lorn nightingale / Mourns not her mate with such melodious pain”(145)— references to Keats’s “Ode on a Grecian Urn” and “Ode to a Nightingale.” Heffernan also claims that Endymion “furnishes some of the imagery used in the description of the hovering Dreams” in lines 73-108 of *Adonais* (306), but that allusion is less direct than the others.

of his mythic, epic narrative, but the ultimate position of power and privilege for the man who bemoaned his own failings so intently in "Ode to the West Wind" is that of Poet, and he can be sure that it is he, not Keats, who will be forever remembered and associated with *Adonais*.

Shelley relies on a number of mythic modes to construct his myth of Keats/*Adonais* and then uses even more as he applies the myth he has just constructed to the purpose of creating a mythic image of himself. Two conflicting but ultimately complementary levels exist in *Adonais*, regardless of whether they are called mythopoeic. What an attention to the mythopoesis lends to such a poem, though, is a structure through which the reader can approach and make sense of the web of rhetorical and poetic strategies. Although he does not mention mythopoesis, Heffernan grasps both layers of the myth in *Adonais*, while Everest latches onto the first but misses the second, leading him to believe that Shelley sought to situate Keats as a better and more significant poet than himself. The question that remains is: does the fact that some scholars have overlooked this second level of myth mean that it fails in achieving its purpose? That is, if Everest believes that Shelley exalted Keats above himself, does that, in fact, make Keats the poem's more powerful figure? The advantage of mythopoesis is that the audience need not be cognizant of the myth-making process in order for it to be effective. Those who read Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* did not need to be aware of the mythic modes at work in order to be persuaded by them. Even if from an analytical point of view scholars such as Everest believe that Shelley is celebrating Keats as a more important author than himself, they undoubtedly walk away from *Adonais* thinking about the poetic prowess of Shelley: proof of the success of his mythopoesis.

KEATS'S *HYPERION* FRAGMENTS

By the end of *Adonais*, Shelley has drawn a hard line between himself and Keats, and it is a line that has been respected. If there's one thing Romanticism scholars can agree on, it is that Keats is not Shelley, or Byron, for that matter. The relationship between history and Keats's poetry has been the subject of much debate in the last thirty years, but the fact remains that his poems mostly lack the explicit political statements that pervade the writings of his more outspoken contemporaries. Keats may have avoided overt political statements in an attempt to distance himself from the politics of Leigh Hunt, whose friendship and influence on the young poet resulted in numerous attacks against Keats in literary journals, but to say that his poetry eschews politics altogether is an oversimplification.¹⁸ Of the "Big Six" Romantic poets, Keats probably includes the fewest direct references to nineteenth-century history and politics in his poetry, but his canon nonetheless reveals an investment in the politics of poetry itself.

For many years, Keats criticism as a whole viewed his poems either as proof that Keats was simply not interested in mixing politics and poetics or as a purposeful reaction against the politically charged poetry of authors such as Byron and Shelley. The best-known of these arguments for a lack of politics in Keats's poetry is Jerome McGann's "Keats

¹⁸ John Gipson Lockhart, in his 1818 attack against the Cockney School in *Blackwood's Magazine*, "This [Hunt's] precocious adulation confirmed the wavering apprentice [Keats] in his desire to quit the gallipots, and at the same time excited in his too susceptible mind a fatal admiration for the character and talents of the most worthless and affected of all the versifiers of our time" (519). Also in 1818, *The Quarterly Review* published John Wilson Crocker's infamous review of *Endymion* in which Crocker claims, "This author is a copyist of Mr. Hunt; but he is more unintelligible, almost as rugged, twice as diffuse, and ten times more tiresome and absurd than his prototype, who, though he impudently presumed to seat himself in the chair of criticism, and to measure his own poetry by his own standard, yet generally had a meaning. But Mr. Keats had advanced no dogmas which he was bound to support by examples; his nonsense therefore is quite gratuitous; he writes it for its own sake, and, being bitten by Mr. Leigh Hunt's insane criticism, more than rivals the insanity of his poetry" (204).

and the Historical Method in Literary Criticism:" "The whole point of Keats's great and (politically) reactionary book was not to enlist poetry in the service of social and political causes...but to dissolve social and political conflicts in the meditations of art and beauty" (1017).

McGann's argument sparked a long-standing debate between scholars regarding the role of politics in Keats's poems. Paul Fry's "History, Existence, and "To Autumn"" is the most direct response to McGann's article, but Andrew Bennett's and Nicholas Roe's subsequent arguments better address the issue at hand: they argue that Keats is, in fact, invested in the social concerns of his own time and that his poetry is more political than it may initially seem. Bennett argues in *Keats, Narrative, and Audience* that the "perfected language of pastoral description is invaded by political questions of lawful exchange, agricultural boundaries and labour relations" (162-64), while Roe, in "Keats's Commonwealth," argues that traces of the recent tragedy of The Peterloo Massacre exist in the poem and can be found in the images of the "reaping hook," the "last ooziings" of the "cyder-press," the "soft-dying day," and the "rosy hue" of the "stubble-plains." Roe argues that in these details "the apocalyptic harvest of the fields of St. Peter is quietly acknowledged, even as it is subdued in the slow gathering of the season and the poem itself towards a close" (207). Although Bennett's and Roe's arguments focus specifically on "To Autumn," their larger point, that Keats is neither blind to nor avoiding political discourse, is applicable to Keats's poetry in general and would seem to be confirmed by the emphasis Keats repeatedly places on poets and their relation to human affairs.

Many scholars who hold that Keats's poetry is, in fact, political justify their position by considering his poems in conjunction with the letters he composed around the same

time. Just a few days after writing “To Autumn,” for example, Keats expressed to Charles Wentworth Dilke a desire “to put a Mite of help to the Liberal side of the Question before I die” and that he was “much pleas’d with the present public proceedings” in reference to the reformers’ reaction to the recent Peterloo Massacre (*LJK* 385). Around that same time, he wrote to George and Georgiana Keats,

The present struggle in England of the people is to destroy this superstition [against innovation and improvement]. What has rous’d them to do it is their distresses—Perhaps on this account the present distresses of this nation are a fortunate thing—though so horrid in their experience....This is no contest between whig and tory—but between right and wrong. (*LJK* 399)

Keats’s letters reveal an investment in contemporary politics and sympathies toward the liberal cause, so it seems unlikely that he would purposefully shy away in his poetry from offering the very help he wished to contribute.

Keats’s fragmentary poems *Hyperion* and *The Fall of Hyperion* are his two grandest poetic efforts. Both poems focus on the decline of the Titans and the ascension of the Olympian pantheon, and both emphasize the relationship between poets and the rest of humankind. *Hyperion* is as much about Apollo’s coming into his power as it is about Hyperion losing his, and while Apollo’s most obvious role within the poem is as the new deity of the sun, his status as the god of poetry is as or even more important. Keats could have chosen to focus on the fall and rise of Oceanus and Poseidon or of Saturn and Zeus, but by following the exchange of power between Hyperion and Apollo, he is able to use Apollo’s status as “the Father of all verse” to outline, much like Shelley does in his “Defence,” what Stuart Sperry calls in *Keats the Poet*, “the poet and his function with relation to some of the major intellectual, political, and historical movements of the age” (155).

Several scholars who, like Fry, Andrews, and Roe, seek to prove that Keats's poems do not exist in a historical and political vacuum have argued that the fading Saturn and Hyperion are meant to represent specific historical figures. Morris Dickstein argues, for example, in his "Keats and Politics" that the "last days of George III, so biting evoked by Shelley in his 'Sonnet: England in 1819,' [and] the dethronement of Saturn could hardly be described without some political resonance" (180). Vincent Newey draws parallels between the Titans and Napoleon as "sunset figures," while Alan J. Bewell claims that both the Titans and Apollo have parallels to Napoleon.¹⁹ Such comparisons make for overtly political readings of the poem but ultimately feel too reductive for Keats, who consistently avoids direct allegories and clear-cut distinctions between good and evil, right and wrong. The aforementioned readings do not, for example, take into account what Richard Cronin refers to in "Keats and the Politics of Cockney Style" as "the pathos with which Keats invests the downfall of the Titans" (795).

Hyperion, even according to the least historically grounded of interpretations, remains political, as it addresses the problematic nature of power structures that do not evolve. As the declining Titans gather together and Hyperion's bright presence reveals just how far they have fallen, Oceanus attempts to comfort his companions by explaining that their fall is part of a larger cycle: "We fall by course of Nature's law, not for / Of thunder, or of Jove...as though was not the first of powers, / So art thou not the last; it cannot be: / Thou art not the beginning nor the end" (2.188-90). The Titans were never meant to rule

¹⁹ Vincent Newey claims in "*Hyperion, The Fall of Hyperion, and Keats's Epic Ambitions*" that the fallen Titans are reminiscent of Napoleon and his "escape from Elba, the Hundred Days of his restored reign, and his downfall at Waterloo in 1815" (71). Alan J. Bewell argues in "The Political Implications of Keats's Classicist Aesthetics" that Keats associates his Titans with the art of Egypt and that the action of the poem evokes associations with Napoleon's Egyptian campaign (224-25).

forever, but they were “blind from sheer supremacy” and forgot the natural, cyclical order of things. Oceanus’s explanation of the illusion the Titans have been living under closely resembles Barthes’s model of myth. According to Barthes, myth has the task of “making contingency appear eternal” (142). Oceanus explains that the Titans were only ever meant to rule for a limited amount of time, but they began to believe in their own myth—that their position of power was a permanent, natural one. Apollo, then, is the radical myth: the image that comes along to expose the artificiality of the existing structure and bring about a revolution.

Oceanus’s speech is ineffective in the sense that the Titans find little consolation in it, but his explanation of the nature of power and the necessity of progress within systems of power is highly effective as an expression of Keats’s politics. As Keats wrote to his brother, George in the aforementioned September 1819 letter, “all civilized countries become gradually more enlightened and there should be a continual change for the better” (*LJK* 398). Keats, like Shelley, recognizes the danger inherent in a system built to resist change at all costs, including monarchies, and Oceanus’s words echo his own. Apollo and the other Olympian gods are the necessary change that must also one day be replaced.

Keats uses Oceanus to express his own thoughts, and while he does not allude to a specific historical figure or event, his critique of an entire philosophy of power—one including the present monarchy, no less—is as or perhaps even more political than poems by Shelley and Byron that contain more topical references. Shelley and Byron’s poems are labeled as political because of their historical referents, but Keats’s is a broader critique of an entire political system. Oceanus’s explanation and Apollo’s enactment of the necessary evolution of power also demonstrates the connection Keats imagined between poetry and

politics. McGann argues that Keats isolated his poetry from politics, but *Hyperion* reveals that Keats not only addressed political systems and their specific incarnations, he dramatized in epic fashion that art and human affairs are inextricably intertwined.

After following Hyperion and the other Titans for two books, Keats turns in the unfinished third book to Apollo, who has not yet come into the power destined for him. The god-to-be is melancholy, not unlike the poets he represents, and explains his despair to Mnemosyne, mother of the Muses. In a particularly revealing line, Apollo claims that he is sad despite the fact that “the liegeless air yields to [his] step aspirant” (3.92-93). The elements are no longer under the control of Hyperion and are prepared to bend to Apollo’s will, but he has not uncovered the power to command them. It is only after he looks into Mnemosyne’s eyes that he achieves his status as a god, and what he gains from her is knowledge of “names, deeds, grey legends, dire events, rebellions, / Majesties, sovrain voices, agonies, / Creations and destroyings” (3.114-16). He has had the potential to become the god of the sun, poetry, music, and medicine, but he only achieves that potential once he connects to and understands the successes and failures, the joys and the sufferings that comprise human existence. This engagement with human affairs “deifies” him, and he is only called a “god” once this epiphany takes place, symbolizing the similar realization human poets must have.

While *Hyperion* (and *The Fall of Hyperion*) is mythographic, it is mythopoeic as well. For example, Keats’s letters indicate that he felt strongly about the responsibility of poets in general to their societies and specifically of his own responsibility to the state of England. He drives this point home in *Hyperion* via the mythographic figures of Apollo and Mnemosyne who dramatize the connection between poet and society in a mythic context.

Apollo and Mnemosyne serve as an ancient, symbolic precedent for the relationship Keats wishes to establish between poets and their audience: Apollo gains his power as a poet and his inspiration by accessing the history of human triumph and suffering via the muse just as poets should be inspired by the human events taking place around them. If mythopoesis is the process of promoting a specific agenda through what appears to be a universal medium, we can be convinced of Keats's participation in this process by his use of mythography. That is, the mythographic figure of Apollo represents not only a changing of the guard but the mythopoeic effect Keats believes all poets, himself included, should have on the real world. In this regard, the god's ascension is consistent with the aforementioned mission for poets Shelley outlines in his "Defence" ("he must put himself in the place of another of many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own" 1076). Those aspiring to be poets cannot become true poets unless they are sensitive to and seek to ease the woes of their fellow humans.

The idea of true and false poets becomes a focus of both *The Fall of Hyperion* and "Sleep and Poetry." Keats's discussion in "Sleep and Poetry" of the necessity of sympathy among poets and of the false poets who work against the proper goal of poetry sets the stage for Keats's later, more thorough interrogation in *The Fall of Hyperion*. Although Keats begins "Sleep and Poetry" by enumerating the joys his imagination accesses through sleep and dreams—"an eternal book / Whence I may copy many a lovely saying" (64-65)—he soon rejects this careless use of the imagination. At line 122, the poet asks himself, "And can I ever bid these joys farewell? / Yes, I must pass them for a nobler life, / Where I may find the agonies, the strife / Of human hearts" (122-25). The only noble pursuit for the poet's imaginative gifts is to seek to ease the burdens of his fellow man. To cement this

idea, Keats summons the image of a charioteer, later identified as Apollo. As the sun god moves across the sky, “most awfully intent / The driver of those steeds is forward bent, / And seem to listen: O that I might know / All that he writes with such a hurrying glow” (151-54). Apollo pulls the sun across the sky and strains to hear the human voices below so that he, as the god of poetry, can respond to and help them. As the symbol of poetry and paragon of poets, Apollo does not write of the joys that visit him in his dreams—the joys Keats describes at the beginning of the poem—but, rather, applies his imagination and skill to a more pathetic cause.

Keats draws a great deal of attention in “Sleep and Poetry” to the distinction between two kinds of poets. On the one hand, he points to “the foppery and barbarism” that made “great Apollo blush for this land” (183) and “blasphemed the bright Lyrist to his face” (202). These poets who “with a puling infant’s force.../ Swayed about on a rocking horse, / And thought it Pegasus” are far from understanding Apollo’s poetry, yet they attempt to mimic his flight all the same and are “thought wise” by most for it (184-87). Later in the poem, the poet longs for an idyllic time and place in which those “who simply tell the most heart-easing things,” those who help the world with their poetry, are regarded as “poet kings” instead the foppish ones presently revered. Above all, Keats maintains, “the great end / of poesy, that it should be a friend / To sooth the cares, and lift the thoughts of man” (245-47).

The Fall of Hyperion, in a sense, combines many of the themes presented in both *Hyperion* and *Sleep and Poetry*.” Keats turns, for instance, from the symbolic representation of poets in *Hyperion* to a literal one in *The Fall*. As Geraldine Friedman explains in *The*

Insistence of History: Revolution in Burke, Wordsworth, Keats, and Baudelaire, “The ‘dead,’ ‘unsceptered,’ ‘right hand’ of the god [Hyperion] in *Hyperion* becomes the writing hand, the ‘warm scribe’ of the mortal speaker in *The Fall*” (113). Whereas the exchange of power in *Hyperion* takes place between Hyperion and Apollo, it is a human poet who fills Apollo’s role in *The Fall*; Keats now uses a poet instead of a god to represent poets. As similarly articulated by Newey, “the birth of poetic power that had been rendered in *Hyperion* as the agony of Apollo is now recast as the human poet-dreamer’s trial by agony...Apollo’s orgasmic transformation is now a human poet’s entry into a new order of perception, taking him upwards from the earthly to the divine plane” (79-80). This ascension from earthly to divine Newey speaks of is articulated in *The Fall’s* delineation of poets and dreamers, or true poets and false ones.

The poet-protagonist struggles to ascend the steps to a temple, and the mysterious figure of Moneta informs him, “None can usurp this height.../ But those to whom the miseries of the world / Are misery, and will not let them rest” (1.148-49). The poet-protagonist inquires why there are not more like himself present—those “Who feel the giant agony of the world...[and] Labour for mortal good” (1.156-59). What he discovers is that those who do direct and concrete good for humanity “have no thought to come—And thou art here, for thou art less than they” (1.165-66).

Throughout his conversation with Moneta, the poet-protagonist is required to justify his existence, which can be easily read as a commentary on the value and nature of poetry. Initially, he is categorized with the dreamers, who are distinct from those who *act* on behalf of humanity. Eventually, however, Moneta clarifies that there is a distinction to be made between dreamers who “thoughtless sleep away their days” (151) and poets: “the

poet and the dreamer are distinct, / Diverse, sheer opposite, antipodes, / The one pours out a balm upon the World, / The other vexes it" (1.199-202). Because of the confusing nature of Keats's terminology, scholars tend to refer to the thoughtless dreamers as false poets and the poet dreamers as true poets. Simply put, Keats is in an in-between state: he is neither one of the false poets Moneta describes "rot[ing] on the pavement" before the temple nor a humanitarian actively working for good.

In April of 1818, Keats wrote to John Taylor, "I find there is no worthy pursuit but the idea of doing some good for the world...there is but one way for me—the road lies through application, study and thought" (*LJK* 120-21). The challenge for the poet-protagonist, as with Keats, is to use his imagination to bring about greater good, sacrificing his own joy for this responsibility. The poet, like Apollo in *Hyperion*, cannot reach his potential without understanding the "misery" of human suffering, and this time he experiences it through Moneta, who gives over her memories, saying: "the scenes / Still swooning vivid through my globed brain / With an electral changing misery / Thou shalt with those dull mortal eyes behold" (1.244-47). This transformation marks what David Perkins calls "sympathetic comprehension of reality" (1197). This exchange with Moneta (whose name is etymologically linked to the verb "to admonish") allows the poet-protagonist to avoid the pitfalls of becoming a selfish dreamer or false poet, which the fact that he half-rotted on the "pavement of trial" seems to indicate he was in danger of becoming. Keats uses Moneta's pointed interrogation and the protagonist's defense of himself as a poet to carve out a definition and mission of true poetry.

"Sleep and Poetry" and the *Hyperions* articulate a poet's manifesto not only for himself but for the profession. Keats's poems and letters reflect a consistent vision: he

defines poetry according to its ability to ease suffering, criticizes “poets” who ignore or misrepresent this purpose, emphasizes the effect poetry can and should have on the world around it, and is “ambitious of doing the world some good” (*LJK* 211). A poet is not a true poet, according to Keats, unless he works to improve the world in which he lives, and as Porscha Fermanis explains in *Keats and the Ideas of the Enlightenment*:

By defining the “true” poet as one who is able to progress beyond his own self-referential visions towards a more humane, sympathetic and cultivated understanding, he...defends poetry and visionary understating more generally from claims that it is not a socially significant or responsible act. (121)

Keats’s repeated connections between poets and their connection to the human condition demonstrate that he is, despite McGann’s argument to the contrary, more than a little concerned with his (and his poetry’s) role in the bigger historical picture.

HEMANS’S MODERN GREECE

Whereas Shelley and Keats extol the influence of poets by means of fairly abstract imagery—the reach of the West Wind, Adonais’s unification with Nature, and a symbolic changing of the poetic guard—Felicia Hemans concretizes these abstractions by focusing on the influence of specific pieces of art. Two of Hemans’s earliest poems, *Restoration of the Works of Art to Italy* and *Modern Greece*, address the effect art can have on those that come into contact with it, and while her approach is more specifically focused than Shelley’s and Keats’s more generalized celebrations of poetic power, Hemans’s vision of art’s relationship to the world is consistent with those articulated in “Ode to the West Wind,” *Adonais*, and the *Hyperions*. Stephen Behrendt explains in *British Women Poets and the Romantic Writing Community*:

The poem [*Modern Greece*] participates in a larger conversation about art and society...The ramifications of this issue are as much political as they are aesthetic, for reasons that are apparent both in Hemans's poem and in Shelley's prose. Specifically, art (including both its production and cultivation) is a visible indicator of moral and spiritual qualities that contribute to any nation's status. (162-63)

Like Shelley, Hemans draws a connection between art and morality, believing that a society's production of art is not only an indicator of its progress as a nation but also a means of developing its ethics and politics.

The myths Shelley and Keats promote in their poems center around the figure of the poet, elevating their own profession to a mythic calling and granting the art of poetry almost limitless influence on the world. Hemans's poetry does not focus on the power of the poet or artist to affect society but, rather, on the power of the art itself. As a poem about the relocation of the Elgin Marbles, ancient sculptures removed from the Acropolis, *Modern Greece* is about the marbles themselves—their place within the society that produced them and their potential to affect the society acquiring them—not the power of the artist(s) who produced them. That is not to say, however, that Hemans does not use her poetic authority to influence her readers. If the Elgin Marbles, as art, have the ability to influence and elevate England, so too does Hemans's poetry.

Modern Greece is one of several poems published between 1810 and 1820 on the subject of the Earl of Elgin's removal of marble sculptures from the Acropolis to England during the Ottoman occupation of Greece. Other poems about the marbles include Byron's "Curse of Minerva" and Keats's "On Seeing the Elgin Marbles."²⁰ Byron vehemently opposed

²⁰ Byron also address the relocation of marbles in Canto 2 of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*:

*Dull is the eye that will not weep to see
Thy walls defaced, thy mouldering shrines removed
By British hands, which it had best behoved*

removing the marbles from their historic site, but Keats seems happy enough to have access to them in the British Museum in London. Hemans's *Modern Greece* is an endorsement of the enormously controversial relocation. Like all myths, *Modern Greece* promotes a historically situated agenda: maintaining possession of the Elgin Marbles. Simply put, Hemans attempts to influence public opinion so that the marbles will remain in England and subsequently improve the nation via their influence.²¹

Despite writing them within a year of one another, Hemans's *Restoration of the Works of Art to Italy* and *Modern Greece* reflect seemingly opposite stances on the subject of physically removing art from its historical context. *Restoration* celebrates Italy's reacquisition of some 5,000 pieces of art that Napoleon acquired over the course of his conquests. Such a stance might lead one to expect Hemans to oppose Elgin's removal of the marbles from Greece, but Hemans advocates their extraction to London in *Modern Greece*. Although Hemans's stances in these poems seem to—and in many ways do—contradict one another, the title *Modern Greece* does present a way in which to view them as consistent. The modern Greece of Hemans's title does not refer to modern-day Greece but to a future England that, with the help of the marbles, will emerge as the modern equivalent of ancient Greece. By this logic, to move the marbles from an Ottoman-occupied Greece—which no longer resembles its older, free, and prosperous self—to an England that approximates

*To guard those relics ne'er to be restored,
Curst be the hour when from their isle they roved,
And once again thy hapless bosom gored,
And snatch'd thy shrinking gods to northern climes abhorred!* (2.15.3-9)

²¹ Although Parliament had already debated and agreed to purchase the marbles from Lord Elgin by the time Hemans published *Modern Greece* in 1817, many were still attempting to have the decision reversed and to return the marbles to Greece (a movement still alive today).

ancient Greece is to place them in their appropriate cultural context and to give England an opportunity to thrive artistically as Greece once did.

Modern Greece is one of Hemans's many ekphrastic poems, and its ekphrasis is integral to the efficacy of Hemans's mythmaking. Although she does not provide a particularly lengthy or vivid description of the Elgin Marbles (likely because she had not seen them), the poem is considered ekphrastic because of its vivid (but relatively short) description of the Acropolis and, more specifically, the Parthenon. The Greek verb *ἐκφράζειν* (ekphrazein) originally meant "to express, tell a story through images" but eventually came to mean "to express ornately." *ἐκφρασις* (ekphrasis) first appeared as a noun in early Greek rhetoric handbooks, which defined it as a particularly detailed description that serves to focus and amplify the emotions of the listener. True ekphrasis produces *ἐνάργεια* (enargeia), the effect of "penetrating the visual imagination of the listener and involving him in the subject of the speech" (Webb and Weller 409).

Hemans's powerful representation of the bygone beauty and majesty of the marbles' original home reveals the potential Hemans sees for England as modern Greece. Hemans presents the Acropolis, not as it stands now but as it did in Greece's height.²² She describes it as a crown on "yon hill" and as "Light palaces, in shadowy glory drest, / Enchanted groves, and temples, and arcades, / Gleaming and floating on the ocean's breast" (73.6-8), but the most vivid imagery in the poem focuses specifically on the Parthenon:

And lovely o'er thee sleeps the sunny glow,
When morn and eve in tranquil splendor reign,

²² Although ekphrasis in its most narrow sense refers to a representation of visual art through verbal art, the scholarship in the mid-1990s of W.J.T. Mitchell, James Heffernan, and Tamar Yacobi broadened discussions of ekphrasis to include "verbal representations of visual representations" not exclusive to art. See Mitchell's *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*, Heffernan's *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery*, and Yacobi's "Pictorial Models and Narrative Ekphrasis."

And on thy sculptures, as they smile, bestow
Hues that the pencil emulates in vain.
Then the fair forms by Phidias wrought, unfold
Each latent grace, developing in light,
Catch from soft clouds of purple and of gold,
Each tint that passes, tremulously bright." (75.1-8)

Hemans brings the Parthenon to life in *Modern Greece* with hopes of inspiring English citizens to revive the spirit of ancient Greece within themselves. As Grant F. Scott explains, "the marbles are represented as noble survivors that have prevailed through time to kindle the flame of 'future glory,'" and "it is England rather than Greece that will be the beneficiary of the remaining fragments" (41). The poem's ekphrastic description of the marbles' original site evokes a desire in Hemans's English readers for the beauty and glory of ancient Greece, while the mythic modes employed throughout the rest of the poem work to convince them of the importance and likelihood of such a transition taking place.

The agenda of *Modern Greece*, then, is to keep the Elgin Marbles in England and to encourage English citizens to view the relocation in a positive light. Hemans promotes this agenda by establishing: 1) the notion that cultures are cyclical or interchangeable, so to speak; 2) more specifically, that modern England is comparable to ancient Greece and that relocating the marbles to England will make it even more so; 3) the harm and injustice of leaving the marbles in occupied Greece; and 4) the importance (for the marbles and the people) of moving them to England. Hemans works to accomplish these logical steps through a sequence of the same mythic modes that have combined to create all of the myths discussed thus far. She removes the particulars of both societies so as to eliminate any specifics that might stand in the way of direct parallels being drawn between the two, ascribes an exaggerated significance to the physical location of the marbles, and posits potentialities as inevitabilities.

In *Hyperion*, Oceanus explains the radical notion that power structures are temporary, that even the greatest figures eventually fall victim to time and change, and so it is with civilizations in *Modern Greece*. Ancient Greece burned bright in its golden age, advancing in the areas of science and mathematics and producing a wealth of great art and literature all under an enormously progressive democracy. These are the characteristics that influenced the creation of the Elgin Marbles, but no civilization can flourish—at least to that extent—forever. Just as the Titans fell from their heights, the golden age of Greece ended and the banner of prosperity has been taken up by subsequent civilizations. Although ancient Greece and nineteenth-century England differ in a great number of ways, Hemans seeks to establish them as interchangeable in the sense that they serve similar functions within their own time periods, as beacons of liberty and intellectual achievement.

Hemans manages to situate the two civilizations as interchangeable by speaking of them symbolically, focusing on Greece's decline and England's rise and ignoring the specifics of each culture that would emphasize the differences between them. Greece, not the marbles, is the primary subject of the poem, but rather than focusing on the specifics of the ancient nation's history (which might highlight the connection between the marbles and Greece, working against Hemans's purpose), Hemans repeatedly stresses the lamentable state of Greece and emphasizes that the best parts of the ancient civilization have been passed on to other nations. The first specific reference to Greece in the poem excellently demonstrates the balance Hemans strikes between emphasizing Greece's decline and its afterlife in other societies:

Such grief is theirs, who, fixed on foreign shore,
Such for the spirit of their native gales,
As pines the seaman, midst the ocean's roar,
For the green earth, with all its woods and vales.

Thus feels thy child, whose memory dwells with thee,
Loved Greece! All sunk and blighted as thou art:
Though thought and step in western wilds be free,
Yet thine are still the day-dreams of his heart;
The deserts spread between, the billows foam,
Thou, distant and in chains, art yet his spirit's home. (18.1-9)

The refrain of the poem—that Greece is no longer what it once was²³—is significant but only as it allows Hemans to demonstrate that the spirit of ancient Greece lives on in other incarnations, other civilizations. The “western wilds,” so influenced by ancient Greece, mourn the state of their ancestor, and these newer nations are closer to ancient Greece than modern Greece is: “The children of her sons inherit but their name” (52.10).

The talk of nations—whether Greece or western—in *Modern Greece* is all symbolic. Hemans is not interested in (nor does she want the reader to be interested in) the specifics of Greece’s climate, beaches, language, even history—all of which would highlight the differences between Greece and other nations. All the reader needs to know is that the liberty that once flourished there has been replaced by slavery at the hands of the Ottoman Empire. This oppression allows Hemans to argue not only that the physical and symbolic integrity of the marbles are in danger but also that Greece is no longer the same civilization that produced the marbles, negating their claim to them. As Noah Comet explains in “Felicia Hemans and the ‘Exquisite Remains’ of *Modern Greece*,” “She [Hemans] scatters Greece’s intractably local symbolic value into less quantifiable and more generic ideas equally applicable to Italy or any number of other places” (109). Ancient Greece is boiled down to

²³ The alexandrines of Hemans’s 10-line stanzas touch repeatedly on the death of the ancient civilization. Stanza twenty, for example, mentions “a star that sets to rise no more” (200), while “Fiction’s gods have fled from fountain, grot, and bower” (260) and “all that yet is fair / Seems only spared to tell how much hath perish’d there” (299-300) in stanzas twenty-six and thirty—just to name a few.

an essence, a combination of characteristics—liberty, intellectualism, a stable economy—that other nations can possess even if modern Greece no longer does.

Hemans begins with a broad claim: that a number of nations might better embody this Grecian essence than Greece itself does. This is the first step, but the fact that any nation might be a modern Greece is not enough for Hemans to convince her audience that the Elgin Marbles belong in England; she must push further to make a case for England specifically. Comet continues, “Once Greece is envisioned as something so ubiquitous as a breeze or mossy hill, it is easy to ‘naturalize’ it anywhere—including, as the poem makes clear, in England” (110). Hemans delays mentioning England specifically as Greece’s successor until the poem’s final three stanzas, and just as the details of ancient Greece were omitted in favor of constructing a symbolic Greece, so too are the details of England. The fact that ancient Greece operated as a direct democracy and that England is a constitutional monarchy is never mentioned because it would destroy the illusion of interchangeability. England’s weather, its wars, its foundational myth, and its literature would draw attention to the differences between it and Greece, so Hemans focuses instead on the fact that England is “Land, in all but art alone” (101.1). According to Hemans, England is already superior to other nations in all areas except art, and acquiring the Elgin Marbles would inspire a cultivation of art, cementing its status as the modern equivalent to ancient Greece:

And who can tell how pure, how bright a flame,
Caught from these models, may illumine the west?
What British Angelo may rise to fame,
On the free isle what beams of art may rest?...
No! Thou hast power to be what Athens e'er hath been. (99.1-10)

The poem's final stanzas posit England as the closest approximation to Greece, and with a renaissance inspired by the Elgin Marbles, it will soon equally the majesty and supremacy of its ancient ancestor.

The final way in which Hemans symbolically connects the two civilizations is through their declines. Having already emphasized the necessity of nations rising and falling, Hemans uses this idea to her advantage by looking ahead to England's decline: another way in which England compares to ancient Greece. Although the poem's final image of England in ruins seems bleak, Hemans uses it as a message of hope. She does mourn the inevitable death of England but celebrates its enduring legacy:

So, should dark ages o'er thy glory sweep,
Should thine e'er be as now are Grecian plains,
Nations unborn shall track thine own blue deep,
To hail thy shore, to worship thy remains;
Thy mighty monuments with reverence trace,
And cry, "This ancient soil hath nursed a glorious race! (101.5-10)

England will be remembered, like ancient Greece, as a "glorious" nation but, more importantly, will live on in the nations that succeed it. This image of England's ruins not only maintains the cyclical nature of civilizations that Hemans's premise of England as modern Greece is founded on but also creates one final parallel between the two cultures: even England's fall will mirror Greece's.²⁴

²⁴ It is worth noting that Hemans appears to contradict herself within the poem regarding the circumstances of Greece's fall. She refers in stanza six to "the lonely realm of ruins and chains" and the marbles themselves being removed from the ruins of the Acropolis, but in stanza fifty-six, she laments that Greece fell into chains instead of ruins:

*Hadst thou but perish'd with the free, nor known
A second race, when Glory's noon went by,
Then had thy name in single brightness shone
A watch-word on the helm of liberty!...
But slowly set thy star midst clouds of shame,
And tyrants rose amidst thy falling fanes. (56.1-8)*

Another way Hemans constructs the myth of England as modern Greece is by demonstrating both the harm and injustice of leaving the marbles in a state marked by oppression and the benefit of relocating them to England. If she can convince her readers that the location of the Elgin Marbles somehow affects their well-being and integrity, she can convince them of the necessity of moving them. And if England is now a better home for them than Greece, then her argument that England has replaced Greece becomes easier to swallow. The way in which Hemans is able to establish the importance of relocating the marbles is through a combination of two mythic modes: exaggerating the significance of the subject—in this case, the marbles—and positing potential outcomes as inevitable ones.

At several points in the poem, Hemans mentions the decline of art, music, literature, and science in Greece, the result of the Ottoman occupation. In stanza thirty-two, for example, Turkey, Islam, slavery, and intellectual desolation are all conflated into a single image: “Still, where that column of the mosque aspires, / Landmark of slavery, towering o’er the waste, / There Science droops, the Muses hush their lyres” (32.1-3).²⁵ This description explains that art is no longer being produced as it once was as a result of Greece’s occupation, but it does not necessarily reveal a threat to pre-existing art (i.e. the marbles). Later in the poem, however, Hemans speaks more specifically of the harm the Turks will do to the remaining relics of ancient Greece: “No patriot feeling binds them [the Turks] to the soil, / Whose tombs and shrines their fathers have not rear’d, / Their glance is cold indifference, and their toil / But to destroy what ages have revered” (87.5-8). This

²⁵ A similar description occurs in stanza eighty-one as well: “Fall’n are thy fabrics, that so oft have rung / To choral melodies, and tragic lore; / Now is the lyre of Sophocles unstrung, / The song that hail’d harmonius peals no more...” (81.1-4).

agency on the part of the Ottoman occupiers poses a threat to the marbles, as does the physical and symbolic disintegration Hemans describes in stanza thirty:

Such there the ruin Time and Fate have wrought,
So changed the bright, the splendid, the sublime!
There the proud monuments of Valour's name,
The mighty works Ambition piled on high...
Blend in decay; while all that yet is fair
Seems only spared to tell how much hath perish'd there! (30.1-10)

Greece's monuments—including the marbles—are threatened by the Ottomans and tarnished by remaining in a place that is antithetical to the characteristics that they symbolize. By staying in Greece, Hemans argues paradoxically, Grecian art has been removed from its historical context, diminishing both its ability to influence and its intrinsic value. Thus, relocating Greece's art to a country such as England, according to Hemans's logic, would actually constitute returning it to its native soil.

In all actuality, the location of the Elgin Marbles affects the statues themselves very little. The only danger Greece posed to them is physical damage from exposure had they been left at their original site. Hemans, however, elevates the significance of the marbles and offers an account of the potential harm that might come to them in order to convince her readers of the necessity of relocating them. She continues her employment of those mythic modes in order to similarly convince her reader that England should be Greece's replacement in the cycle and the appropriate home for the Elgin Marbles.

After establishing the danger—physically and symbolically—the marbles are in, Hemans poses the question: "Who may grieve that, rescued from their hands, / Spoilers of excellence and foes to art, / Thy relics, Athens! Borne to other lands, / Claim homage still to thee from every heart?" (88.1-4). As ancient Greece's symbolic successor, England will not only protect but also benefit from the marbles. The influential power Hemans ascribes to

the Elgin Marbles is enormous, as she believes that they alone can spark a cultural renaissance in England: “Each hallow’d stone, from rapine’s fury borne, / Shall wake bright dreams of thee in ages yet unborn” (90.10). As Gary Kelley argues, “Hemans implies that state acquisition and public exhibition of the Elgin marbles would place the artistic expression of Athenian republican greatness at the centre of modern British culture, thereby enabling the reconstruction of Britain as a modern Athens” (25). This scenario is optimistic—and certainly Romantic—but not the inevitability Hemans makes it out to be. It is the truth she wants and leads her readers to believe.

Like all myths, *Modern Greece* has a historically grounded agenda. Just as Southey wished to redeem George III’s reputation and Shelley sought to establish his own poetic authority in their respective poems, Hemans hoped to gain support for Lord Elgin and his relocation of the marbles via her own poem, whose myth lies in its title. Hemans combines the mythic modes of removing particulars and ascribing a greater level of significance in order to create the mythic image of England as modern Greece and the rightful home of the Elgin Marbles.

Although Shelley, Keats, and Hemans did not operate within the same literary circles, their writings have a number of things in common that typify the radical strain of Romanticism emerging in the years leading up to 1819. Through poems such as “The Mask of Anarchy,” *Isabella*, and *Dartmoor*, these (and other) authors seek to use their poetry to promote their particular social and political agendas, but the poems discussed in this chapter are essential in establishing their ability to do so. By elevating these poems about the power of art to mythic status, Shelley, Keats, and Hemans demonstrate their own desire and capacity to make a difference in their own societies.

CHAPTER THREE PRE-PETERLOO RADICAL MYTHMAKING

The poems discussed in Chapter 2 demonstrate a unity of aesthetics and ideology and confirm the Romantic philosophy that art (and artists) had not only the ability but also the responsibility to engage with the public on civic issues. The three poems in this chapter are romances composed in 1817 and 1818 and focus specifically on civic issues leading up to the Peterloo Massacre of 1819. Although Peterloo was in many ways the breaking point for both sides of the political spectrum, the social and political tensions were already mounting years before. In 1815, the same year Napoleon was finally defeated at Waterloo, Luddite protests (which began in 1812) continued in response to the abysmal state in which Manchester's laborers found themselves in the wake of increased industrialization, and Britain passed the Corn Laws, which artificially raised the price of corn for the specific purpose of profiting English landowners. The next few years saw increased taxes on periodical publications (the preferred medium of radical opinions), the suspension of Habeas Corpus, and the implementation of the Seditious Meetings Act of 1819 (which restricted meetings of any kind to no more than fifty people). Increasing unrest among the citizens led to increasingly determined attempts by the government to control citizens, which, unsurprisingly, led to even more unrest. This cycle created a political environment that grew more polarized by the day and produced the politically charged narratives of this chapter: Shelley's *Laon and Cythna*, Keats's *Isabella, or the Pot of Basil*, and Peacock's *Rhododaphne*.

These texts would not be considered myths according to Barthes's definition of the term because he sees myth and revolution as antithetical, mutually exclusive endeavors: the former as an artifice employed by those in power and the latter as the force that exposes artifice. Revolutionaries can, in fact, expose such artifices, but often the very tool they use to do so is a myth of their own making. Myths can undermine the opposition's agenda and simultaneously promote an entirely separate one. For every Burke and Southey who works to quell rebellious sentiments and heroicize monarchs, there is a Shelley, Keats, or Peacock working toward an equally radical goal. Shelley's portrayal of authority and his martyrdom of the young lovers in *Laon and Cythna*, for example, is just as mythic as Burke's representation of the Revolution in *Reflections*. *Laon and Cythna* does not merely expose the rhetoric and artifice of those in political power but also vilifies such figures the same way conservative authors vilified dissenting figures in their myths.

The prevalence of mythopoeic romances in the Romantic period in general is not coincidental. Medieval romances were originally, according to Raymond Williams, "verse-tales of adventure, chivalry, or love," while later prose variations "were widely seen as sentimental and extravagant, but also as characterized by freedom of imagination" (Williams 275). It is no surprise that many Romantic authors gravitated toward a genre that allows for the heroism and the "individuality and passion" that defined post-Enlightenment writing (Williams 275). Eschewing the strict order and forms of classical literature, popular in the first half of the eighteenth century, many Romantic authors filled their poetry and prose with traces of medieval themes and narratives. Despite their deviation from the form of the verse romance (a ballad in octosyllabic meter with alternate lines in assonance), Romantic poetry is saturated in medievalisms and in the physical and

emotional journeys that comprise traditional romances, while the sentimentality and extravagance of prose romances is manifest in Gothic novels such as Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* and Radcliffe's *Romance of the Forest*.

Using three texts unified by their generic and historical associations, this chapter demonstrates the Romantics' frustration with their society and leaders as expressed in their poetry, and it exposes the revolutionary potential of the mythopoeic strategies they implemented. In *Laon and Cythna*, Shelley has the young revolutionaries act as martyrs, positioning them as the champions of his non-violent brand of rebellion and as victims of ruthless tyrannical power. The lovers of Keats's *Isabella* are similarly sacrificed but this time by the agents of a violent and self-serving economic system. And although Peacock's *Rhododaphne* is less overtly political, Anthemion and Calliope are torn apart by the titular enchantress, the embodiment of absolute and seemingly insurmountable power that their love must—and eventually does—overcome. In each case, the authors use the mythopoeic strategies originally employed by their conservative predecessors in order to create narratives that encourage readers to see beyond the myths and rhetoric put forth by the social and political leaders of the early nineteenth century.

SHELLEY'S *LAON AND CYTHNA*

Laon and Cythna begins with the two lovers being torn apart by the tyrant Othman's soldiers. Laon is sent to prison, where he goes mad before being freed by a kind old man who tends to him for seven years. Laon, upon recovering his senses, leads the already mutinous citizens of the Golden City against the slavery and abuse imposed by Othman. Cythna is similarly imprisoned and driven to madness after giving birth to a child that Othman takes from her. After an earthquake shifts her underground cell and allows for her

escape, she joins Laon and the other revolutionaries, but both lovers are captured and eventually burned at the stake. As their bodies are engulfed by the flames, however, they undergo an extraordinary transformation that gives hope and resolve to the remaining rebel force.

In his preface to the *Laon and Cythna*, which would later be revised into *The Revolt of Islam*,²⁶ Shelley explains his purpose in writing the poem:

I have sought to enlist...all those elements which essentially compose a Poem, in the cause of a liberal and comprehensive morality and in the view of kindling within the bosoms of my readers a virtuous enthusiasm for those doctrines of liberty and justice, that faith and hope in something good, which neither violence nor misrepresentation nor prejudice can ever totally extinguish among mankind. (113)

In a rather direct statement, Shelley articulates as clearly as ever the relationship he imagines between poetry and civics, attributing a significant amount of power and influence to literature. Although he was notoriously frustrated by the lack of effect his poetry had, Shelley remained consistent in his belief that poetry could and should inspire people on a personal and civic level.

Whereas Carlos Baker and Stuart Curran argue that the poem is an allegory with Laon and Othman representing ideal Good and ideal Evil, many critics have focused on situating *Laon and Cythna* within its proper historical context.²⁷ In his "Censorship,

²⁶ Only a few copies of *Laon and Cythna* were published in 1817 before publishers Charles and James Ollier required the incest and controversial religious statements to be removed. Shelley made the necessary changes and republished the text in 1818 under the title *The Revolt of Islam*. I have chosen to use *Laon and Cythna* rather than *The Revolt of Islam* as my source text because the timing of its composition connects it more closely to the historical moment that influenced it.

²⁷ For Baker and Curran's allegorically focused arguments, see their respective books *Shelley's Major Poetry: The Fabric of a Vision* and *Shelley Annus Mirabilis*. More historical analyses include: Donald H. Reiman's "The Composition and Publication of *The Revolt of Islam*," Michael Scrivener's *Radical Shelley: The Philosophical Anarchism and Utopian Thought of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, and J. Andrew Hubbell's "*Laon and Cythna*: A Vision of Regency Romanticism."

Violence, and Political Rhetoric," Kyle Grimes combines these historically minded and formalistic approaches, explaining that *Laon and Cythna* "is "an allegorical parallel to the censorship that suppressed radical discourse in 1817" (100).²⁸ Grimes works to connect the content of Shelley's poem with the government's efforts to restrict radical speech at the time, demonstrating that "the poem, in short, is not only intended as a piece of oppositional political rhetoric; it also describes how such rhetoric circulates through society and the effects such rhetoric can have on an audience" (100).

The historical contextualization offered by Grimes and his predecessors is helpful, but *Laon and Cythna* is more than "oppositional rhetoric" and even more than the allegory that Grimes and Curran characterize it as. If the poem represented in literary form the abstract relationship between writing and politics, it would be an allegory, but even Grimes acknowledges that Shelley "allegorizes the relations between writing and politics *as they stood in 1817*" (100, emphasis mine). *Laon and Cythna*, in other words, is not an allegory that uses specific characters to represent an abstract system or relationship but a myth that uses symbolic characters to represent a specific historically situated moment and agenda. Moreover, Grimes wishes to situate the poem within an accurate political and historical context, but I want to situate it within its proper rhetorical context. It is one thing to say *Laon and Cythna* describes "the effects...rhetoric can have on an audience" (Grimes 100); I want to demonstrate how the poem creates those effects and how those strategies fit within the larger tradition of Romantic mythmaking. *Laon and Cythna* does more than demonstrate how rhetoric circulates but it, significantly, offers a counternarrative to

²⁸ The suspension of Habeas Corpus and the "Gagging Acts" passed that year made for an intense political climate that would have necessarily be on Shelley's mind as he composed his longest and most arguably most incendiary poem.

conservative myths that paradoxically relies on the same rhetorical techniques as those myths.

Since public discourse was regulated by the government, the reading public was left with little to read except narratives that supported the established order. *Laon and Cythna* is Shelley's response to such narratives, but whether for practical or philosophical reasons, Shelley uses the myth not to offer a specific ideology of his own but rather to undermine the conservative myths of the day and encourage readers to think critically about the myths and propaganda around them. Shelley's poems often reflect his non-violent approach to political revolution—from Laon and Cythna's martyrdom to Hope's sacrifice in "The Mask of Anarchy"—exposing the tyrannical tendencies of authoritarian groups and mythically modeling for readers the civic action he wishes them to take against oppression. The poem serves exactly the radical role Barthes cannot conceive myth playing by undermining nineteenth-century power structures and promoting a radical message.

As a myth, the poem's primary agenda is to undermine the artifice and rhetoric of the tyrants Othman epitomizes, and like so many Romantic authors, Shelley uses his poetry to disguise his political ideals: "*The Revolt* couches Shelley's thought into a narrative form intended...to appeal to a popular audience through familiar fictional devices: plot, scene, and character" (Grimes 100). *Laon and Cythna's* subtitle, *The Revolution of the Golden City: A Vision of the Nineteenth Century*, ensures that readers will understand the text, despite its fictional status, as a historically inspired narrative. Like "The Mask of Anarchy" and *Prometheus Unbound*, *Laon and Cythna* "was an episode in Shelley's continuing struggle to find a discursive form that would allow him both to broadcast his revolutionary political vision to a popular reading audience and (simultaneously) to shield himself from the legal

dangers attendant upon such radical political activity” (Grimes 100). Shelley’s poetry is both his means of disseminating his radical ideas and the means by which he protects himself against retribution for those same ideas.

In addition to disguising his socio-political agenda, Shelley also employs the mythopoeic strategy of removing specifics from the historical figures and events that inspired the poem, making his narrative more universally applicable. Laon and Othman function as symbols of different ideologies and, subsequently, contribute to the mythopoeic nature of *Laon and Cythna*. The “Nineteenth-Century” of the subtitle suggests that Shelley had historical references such as England’s civil unrest and the government’s increasing intolerance toward dissenting points of view in mind while composing the poem, but he avoids directly referencing any specific people or events of his own time: “Shelley dramatizes in microcosm the conflict between the ‘eloquent accents’ of revolutionary, utopian poetry and the ‘secret steel’ of violence upon which the hegemony of the church and monarchy is founded” (Grimes 104). Othman simultaneously symbolizes tradition, age, authority, government, tyranny, and conservatism while Laon stands for change, youth, rebellion, democracy, freedom, and liberalism. They enact on a mythic stage the symbolic conflict between these very different but very real ideologies that Shelley saw himself faced with in the early nineteenth century.

One of the specific ways in which Shelley creates characters who are able to act as such symbols is to highlight their status as personifications of youth and age. As J. Andrew Hubbell explains, “Shelley identifies youth with the pure ideals and inspired vision of revolution, and age with corruption, avarice, and blindness” (191). Laon and the “warriors young” (11.166) are part of this younger revolutionary generation, as is, one would

imagine, Shelley. Hubbell argues that *Laon and Cythna* can be read as Shelley's response to Wordsworth's *Excursion* in which the younger poet positions himself as the radical alternative to Wordsworth's conservatism. Old age in the poem is conflated with obduracy, corruption, and stasis. Laon tells Othman, "Ye cannot change, since ye are old and grey; / And ye have chosen your lot" (11.182-83). On the one hand, Othman and his regime are not willing to change because they are old and, subsequently, set in their ways; on the other hand, Laon's statement that they have chosen their fate also implies that their growing old is a consequence of being unwilling to change.

Although Shelley and Burke have little in common philosophically, they share a mutual respect for the power of words and a mutual understanding that words can be manipulated to serve agendas the speakers never intended. It took the rise and fall of Napoleon for Shelley to recognize what Burke explained in 1789: that words and ideals can be turned into the very thing they oppose. This is the danger that lies with Laon and his enslaving "word weapons." Even as he uses his rhetoric for good, the potential for those words to be reified into a tyrannical philosophy remains a threat. Rather than simply positing Laon as a symbol of good and Othman as one of evil, Shelley situates the figures as two parallel and potentially tyrannical forces with opposing ideologies. Othman is cruel and violent, enslaving the people of the Golden City, but Laon is similarly dangerous, claiming, "I drew / Words which were weapons" (2.175) and "all things became / slaves to my holy and heroic verse" (2.268). We, as readers, would like Laon to be a force for ideal Good, but the potentially enslaving and violent nature of his rhetoric resists such a reading. Shelley's mention of slavery in this context cannot be a coincidence given the physical slavery Othman has enforced on the city's people, and it suggests (as is consistent with

Shelley's social theory that iconoclasts eventually become the authority they resist) that Shelley wishes readers to understand Laon not as a savior or a champion of the "correct" ideology but merely as an alternative to Othman and, at best, a source of temporary relief for the people of the Golden City.

Shelley also uses the mythopoeic strategy of removing particulars in order to symbolically depict—this time with Laon and Cythna—the domestic revolution that he sees as a necessary step to political revolution. In Canto 2, Laon comes to the realization that "Never will peace and human nature meet / Till free and equal man and woman greet / Domestic peace" (2.328-30). In the preface, Shelley explains that he wishes to kindle "virtuous enthusiasm for those doctrines of liberty and justice" (113), yet he chooses to do so through what is, for all intents and purposes, a failed fictional revolution. Laon and Cythna emerge triumphant, so to speak, at the end of the narrative, but the reader is left wondering what practical effect their sacrifice and transformation has had on the rest of the Golden City. Laon and Cythna's relationship and their own personal revolution are the true successes of the poem. Just as Laon and Othman embody age/tradition and youth/revolution, Laon and Cythna symbolize man and woman, modeling in a broad sense the cooperative and equal domestic partnership Shelley believes is integral to the political and social change he desires.²⁹

The final mythic mode Shelley employs in *Laon and Cythna*—in addition to disguising his purpose and removing particulars—is elevating the gravitas of the narrative. In other parts of the dissertation, I have shown how authors have used religious, historical, and mythological imagery to give their particular agenda more authority or significance,

²⁹ For more information on the "domestic revolution" in *Laon and Cythna*, See Hubbell pp. 185-90.

but in the case of *Laon and Cythna*, Shelley uses the poem's form to elevate the narrative to a mythic status. The poem is framed as a romance, a form rife with elevated language, moral quandaries, and symbolic characters. By writing the poem in this form, Shelley places *Laon and Cythna* within the same literary tradition of the weighty—in more ways than one—*Morte D'arthur* and *The Faerie Queene*.

Romances are lengthy, serious in tone, and full of high-stakes scenarios—a literary and historical significance to which Shelley further contributes by composing the poem in Spenserian stanzas. This formal connection to Spenser associates *Laon and Cythna* not only to Romances in general but also to *The Faerie Queene* specifically. Spenser's romance, though regarded as an allegory, is mythic in many ways, especially in the way symbolic characters promote a historically situated agenda regarding English Protestantism.³⁰ By situating *Laon and Cythna* within a larger tradition of elevated and potentially mythic narratives, Shelley encourages readers to place the same kind of literary and moral significance to the issues he presents in his nineteenth-century myth *Laon and Cythna*.

In composing *Laon and Cythna*, Shelley not only enlists "all those elements which essentially compose a Poem" but the elements that compose a myth as well. He is no stranger to incorporating historically situated social and political messages, using both the form and content of *Laon and Cythna* to mythologize the tensions of his own time and advance his own revolutionary agenda. Shelley uses the same rhetoric techniques employed by conservatives to offer exactly the kind of counternarrative the government worked so hard to suppress in 1817. The poem is not an allegory that illustrates the

³⁰ See dissertation introduction page x.

universal relationship between politics and poetry but a myth that makes the relationship between the political and poetical in 1817 feel universal.

KEATS'S ISABELLA, OR THE POT OF BASIL

As with Shelley's *Laon and Cythna*, Keats elevates the significance of *Isabella* via its status as a romance. Instead of imbuing the narrative with religious content like authors such as Burke, Southey, and Wordsworth often did, Keats elevates the stakes and significance of his agenda by establishing a formal/poetic significance similar to Southey's use of epic in his *Vision of Judgement*. Southey situates *Vision* as a manifestation of the ancient epic tradition, a narrative in the well-established and –respected vein of Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, while Keats places *Isabella* in the longer tradition of romances such as *Romance of the Rose*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and *The Faerie Queene*. While I am not suggesting that Keats's sole purpose in composing *Isabella* as a romance was to elevate its poetic gravitas, literary and political implications of the genre would not have been lost on Keats. As Michael Sider explains in *Dialogic Keats: Time and History in the Major Poems*, Keats "inherits a genre that has historically been considered to promote an elite vision, only to infuse the form with a class politics that revises its ideological nature" (11). Keats, like Shelley, adopts a traditional form for his radical message, appropriating not only the rhetoric of conservative mythmakers but the formal elements as well.

Isabella follows the star-crossed plight of the orphaned Isabella and her affair with Lorenzo, a factory worker employed by Isabella's two older brothers. Hoping to further increase their revenue by marrying Isabella off to a wealthy gentleman, the brothers disapprove of her attachment to working-class Lorenzo and upon finding out about the affair, murder Lorenzo in the night and feign ignorance when he is nowhere to be found.

Prompted by a vision of Lorenzo's ghost, Isabella learns of his murder, discovers his body, and, curiously, decapitates his corpse and buries his head in a pot of basil that she obsessively tends to as a means of mourning. The brothers eventually grow curious about the pot of basil their sister has become so attached to, discover the head buried at the bottom, and dispose once and for all of the pot's contents. Isabella, bereft of her Lorenzo now for a second time, finally succumbs to her grief and dies.

Nineteenth-century criticism regarded Keats's poetry as largely ahistorical, an opinion epitomized by Oscar Wilde's estimation of Keats as the emblem of a "true artist" who does not mix politics and aesthetics:

There is indeed a political attitude to be adopted towards all things, but all things are not fit subjects for poetry. Into the secure and sacred house of Beauty the true artist will admit nothing that is harsh or disturbing, nothing that gives pain, nothing that is debatable, nothing about which men argue. He can steep himself, if he wishes, in the discussion of all the social problems of his day...but when he writes on these subjects it will be, as Milton nobly expressed it, with his left hand, in prose and not in verse, in a pamphlet and not in a lyric. This exquisite spirit of choice was not in Byron: Wordsworth had it not...But in Keats it seemed to have been incarnate. (459)

Even twentieth-century scholars such as E.P. Thompson have understood Keats's poems as attempts to escape "the poverty of everyday experience" (11), but Isabella is commonly seen as the exception to this apolitical/ahistorical understanding of the poet. As George Bernard Shaw famously stated in a memorial volume on Keats, "if Karl Marx can be imagined as writing a poem instead of a treatise on Capital, he would have written *Isabella*" (175). But even contemporary readings that account for the poem's political underpinnings tend to criticize Keats's "caricaturized" representations of the lovers and of Isabella's brothers especially. John Scott's review of *Isabella* in *London Magazine*, for example, criticizes the poem for "caricaturing the brothers" and blames Keats's representation of

trade and traders on “boyish petulance,” “insulting bravado,” and “dissenting and altercating prejudices and opinions” (220, 222).

More recent scholars—including Martin Aske, Kelvin Everest, and Michael Sider—have worked not only to historicize *Isabella* but to read Keats’s affected and often criticized representations of the poem’s characters as calculated decisions rather than aesthetic errors. Aske argues that it is John Scott’s review and not Keats’s poem that is “too convenient and facile” because Scott fails to consider that the exaggerated envy of the brothers (which he regards as caricaturizing) “is not the cause but rather the *object* of Keats’s critique” (56). Everest reminds readers that the exaggerated characters cannot be oversights but are, rather, careful and consistent deviations from the original Boccaccio tale that are only “embarrassments” if we assume that we must take them “straight” and understand the poem on a strictly literal level (111). Sider, similarly, emphasizes that *Isabella*’s brothers (and even, arguably, *Isabella* herself at the end of the poem) are not exaggerated for the sake of sentimentality, as many scholars assume, but as a means toward a larger end of critiquing the self-absorption that characterizes the poem’s characters (81-86).

One of the most distinctive and compelling commentaries on *Isabella* is Billy T. Boyar’s “Keats’s ‘*Isabella*’: Shakespeare’s *Venus and Adonis* and the Venus-Adonis Myth.” In it, he uses the evidence that Keats kept the first few stanzas of his *Isabella* draft in a volume of Shakespeare as the impetus to explore the textual connections between *Isabella* and Shakespeare’s *Venus and Adonis* (and the Venus-Adonis myth in general). Although the premise, on first glance, may seem stretched, Boyars cites numerous parallels between the two sets of figures—including the imagery surrounding them, their diction, *Isabella* and

Venus's maternal instincts, and Lorenzo and Adonis's roles as hunters—that quickly become difficult to deny. Boyar suggests that Keats drew these parallels to the fertility myth of Adonis's death "to evince ironically the moral desolation of his age" (169).

Although Boyar is perhaps the only scholar to explore the role of myth in the seemingly non-mythographic *Isabella*, the conclusion he reaches as to why Keats would connect his poem to the Venus-Adonis myth is representative of most critical responses to mythography in Romantic texts. His theory that Keats's evocation of myth's "language of love and life" (169) highlights, by contrast, the moral wasteland of nineteenth-century England and echoes the sentiments of Douglas Bush and Anthony Harding, who argue that poets, seeing the corruption of their own time, often use mythic content "to show humankind the possibility that a new age may be imminent" (Harding 163). I would like, however, to offer the additional (deceptively simple) theory that Keats modeled his poem after a mythic narrative because he wanted readers to interpret *Isabella* as a myth in its own right. By framing the narrative as a romance, modeling it on an almost five-hundred-year-old story from Boccaccio's *Decameron*, and drawing parallels to an ancient Greek myth, Keats attaches a literary gravitas to *Isabella* that all but requires readers to take the poem and its message seriously. *Isabella* is not only politically grounded, as other scholars have indicated, but is mythic in its ahistorical presentation of historically situated issues and its systematic utilization of the rhetorical strategies employed by other mythmakers of the day.

Supported by George Bernard Shaw's commentary, scholars commonly read *Isabella* as a critique of the selfishness and brutality inherent to capitalist ideology and practices. Put simply by Greg Kucich in "Keats and Historiographical Invention," Keats invokes "the

predatory commercialism of earlier periods...for the purpose of condemning the dehumanizing forms of capitalism also pervasive in modern life” (244). I do not wish to refute this interpretation, as industrialization and its dehumanizing effects are certainly foregrounded in the poem, but to add to such readings in order to show that *Isabella* promotes a more complex political message than many realize by means of the same mythopoeic strategies being used in the nineteenth century by radicals and conservatives alike.

Keats’s agenda is situated historically in the socio-political crucible that prompted the Luddite attacks and Blanketeers march of the 1810s, but by framing his critique of industrialism as a revision of a tale from Boccaccio’s *Decameron*, he ensures that readers will understand the violence and greed that accompany such “progress” as a universal and all the more pervasive problem.³¹ The brothers in *The Decameron* account (Day 4, Tale 5) do not own a factory like those in Keats’s version, but they are, like Keats’s merchants, motivated to violence by capitalist greed. Keats’s narrative, as a revision of Boccaccio’s that has been updated for a contemporary purpose, reads not as a new story about a new problem but a modern manifestation of a problem that has existed for hundreds of years, giving the myth narrative credibility and readers a reason to trust and heed its message.

Although industrialization plays no role in the myth of Venus and Adonis (whether Shakespeare’s version or an ancient account), the arc and relationship of *Isabella*’s lovers resonates with the reader as a significant narrative partially because it follows the existing

³¹ Sider connects Keats’s indictment of *Isabella*’s brothers to *The Examiner’s* (Leigh Hunt’s magazine) coverage of political events in the months during which Keats was composing the poem—including issues such as “noisy factories” (108), mistreating slaves in Ceylon (113-4), turning a blind eye to such exploitation (119-20). pp. 71-73.

framework of the myth. If Isabella and Lorenzo were merely characters in a story of Keats's invention, readers would have little reason to read their story and the subsequent message against industrialization as anything more than fanciful fiction, but the more readers are reminded of mythic/ancient stories they already know, the more likely they are to understand the poem itself as a myth with a lesson to teach them. By eliminating the supernatural elements of the myth (which might place unwanted distance between a modern reader and the poem's agenda) but retaining echoes of the Venus-Adonis story, Keats uses an ancient myth to create one of his own.

In addition to these extended associations with *The Decameron* and the Venus-Adonis myth, Keats includes a few mythographic references to classical sources. In stanzas 12 and 13, for example, he alludes to Theseus's wife, Phaedra, and to Dido, both of whom commit suicide as a result of their romantic passion. He also invokes Perseus's decapitation of Medusa, appropriately, just as Isabella is removing Lorenzo's head from his corpse. The reference to Perseus's heroic feat contrasts with the monstrosity of the Gorgon with the loveliness of Lorenzo: "With duller steel than the Persean sword / They cut away no formless monster's head / But one whose gentleness did well accord / With death, as life" (393-96). Despite the tragic nature of the narrative, the association of Isabella and the old nurse (who together serve as a foil to the relationship between Lorenzo and Isabella's brothers) with Perseus encourages the reader to think of Isabella as a hero of sorts in her own epic/myth. Although she is ultimately a victim whose excessive grief is questionable, in this particular moment she takes matters into her own hands, performing a seemingly impossible feat out of a sense of commitment and necessity.

This idea of Isabella as the hero in a mythic narrative is perpetuated by Keats's rhetoric in stanzas 12 and 13, in which he admonishes readers for mourning ill-fated lovers, generally speaking, instead of celebrating the joy and passion they were able to experience before their deaths:

Too many tears for lovers have been shed,
Too many sighs give we to them in fee,
Too much of pity after they are dead,
Too many doleful stories do we see,
Whose matter in bright gold were best be red;
Except in such a page where Theseus's spouse
Over the pathless waves towards him bows. (90-96)

Keats encourages readers to think of tragic lovers not as failures or objects of pity but as triumphant figures who were able, albeit fleetingly, to experience a joy and passion to which others can only aspire. Theseus and Phaedra, whose relationship was tarnished even before Phaedra's suicide by her love for her stepson, is the exception to this rule, but even as he sets Theseus and Phaedra apart from other mythological lovers, Keats encourages associations between the poem's lovers and Dido and Aeneas:

But, for the general award of love,
The little sweet doth kill much bitterness
Though Dido silent is in under-grove
And Isabella's was a great distress,
Though young Lorenzo in warn Indian clove
Was not embalm'd, this truth is not the less—
Even bees, the little almsmen of spring-bowers,
Know there is richest juice in poison-flowers. (97-104)

Whether distancing Isabella from Phaedra or associating her with Dido, the mythography in these two stanzas works together to situate Keats's lovers in a larger tradition of mythological pairs, furthering the mythic framework and feel of the poem.

The mythopoeic strategies in *Isabella* begin to overlap one another as the aforementioned mythography both adds to the gravitas of the narrative and allows the

characters to function as archetypes that have relevance outside of one set of historical circumstances. Although such symbolic characters and events are usually the result of removing particulars from a historically situated narrative, the mythological associations Keats establishes are what truly encourage readers to understand Isabella and Lorenzo as symbols, or as one manifestation of a larger archetype that transcends time and place. Like Aeneas and Dido, Protesilaus and Laodamia, and Romeo and Juliet, Lorenzo and Isabella face an initial obstacle that makes their union difficult and, having overcome it, are then destroyed by tragedy and ensuing grief.

What description there is of Isabella and Lorenzo serves to connect them to Venus and Adonis, which only contributes further to their symbolic status in the narrative. Isabella is described as being maternal, airy, and consumed by her love, all of which Boyar uses as evidence of her association with Venus but which, by association, links her with any number of mythological females (divine or human): Laodamia, Alcestis, Calypso, Dido, etc.³² Lorenzo's ghostly return to Isabella, in fact, has much in common with the Laodamia myth Wordsworth revised in 1815. Similarly, Lorenzo is described as being childish, innocent, and beautiful, all of which connect him with youths loved by goddesses such as Tithonus, Endymion, and Paris.³³

Although Keats leaves particulars in his descriptions of the lovers that will connect them to their mythological counterparts, he removes any defining particulars from Isabella's capitalistic brothers, who function more as generalized instruments of evil than

³² Isabella's cheek is described as being "thin as a young mother's, who doth seek / By every lull to cool her infant's pain" (5.3-4), and later is "as swift / As bird on wing to breast its eggs again" (59.5-6). Both lovers seem "to tread upon the air" (10.1), and Keats mentions later that Lorenzo often listens for (though it is unclear as to whether or not he ever hears) "the light whisper of her footstep soft" (25.2-4)

³³ Boyar points out that Keats refers to Lorenzo as a "youngster" (22.4) and indicates that he lacks a "man's beard" (22.127-8). He is perpetually the infantile object of Isabella's maternal affections (161).

actual characters. Interestingly, Keats's representation of the brothers revises one of the mythopoeic strategies employed by Burke in *Reflections*. Burke represents the bond between his sympathetic monarchs and ungrateful citizens in terms of venerable parents and petulant children, and Keats, similarly, represents the two sides of his scenario with filial bonds. In both texts, those in power are the paternal figures while those without are the dependents, but Keats manages to use the intrinsic power that comes with being older and male as a means of vilifying Isabella's brothers (and, subsequently, Isabella's vulnerability as a means of generating sympathy for her) while the "parents" of Burke's narrative are in the right. The corruption and greed Keats wished to expose are almost caricaturized in the irredeemably evil symbols of greed, corruption, and violence, of Isabella's brothers: "And for them many a weary hand did swelt / In torched mines and noisy factories, / And many once proud-quiver'd loins did melt / In blood from stinging whip" (14.3-6). Their only role in the story is to 1) disapprove of the relationship on monetary grounds, 2) kill Lorenzo, and 3) discover the pot's contents and remove it from Isabella's possession. Isabella's brothers have no function except to stand in the way of the lovers and to exploit the laborers they employ.

Keats provides no physical description of the brothers but chooses, rather, to describe the terrible working conditions of their laborers in mythic, hellish terms. In the passage Shaw famously praised as an attack against capitalistic "profiteers and exploiters," the toil and suffering of the factory workers is represented as a Dante-esque torture:

For them the Ceylon diver held his breath,
And went all naked to the hungry shark;
For them his ears gush'd blood; for them in death
The seal on the cold ice with piteous bark
Lay full of darts; for them alone did seethe

A thousand men in troubles wide and dark:
Half-ignorant, they turn'd an easy wheel,
That set sharp racks at work, to pinch and peel. (15.113-20)

If Isabella and Lorenzo are archetypal lovers, Isabella's brothers are archetypal villains—historically displaced and non-specific so that Keats's critique of nineteenth-century industrialization will read as more than just a critique of nineteenth-century industrialization. *Isabella* is uncharacteristically reductive for Keats, however, in terms of establishing a clear dichotomy between good and bad characters, which may lead some readers to understand the poem as propaganda instead of a myth. Whereas *Lamia*, for example, presents a fraught relationship between Apollonius and Lycius and/or Lamia in which there is no clear answer to whose ideology is right or wrong, the removal of particulars with regard to the brothers appears to create a stereotypical characterization of evil and necessitate that readers identify and sympathize with Isabella and Lorenzo.

Although *Isabella* is less nuanced than some of Keats's other narrative poems, it still largely succeeds as a myth (and not propaganda) by offering a symbolic representation of a historical anxiety that avoids overt moralizing. That is, the poem promotes the specific agenda of exposing the exploitative nature of capitalistically motivated industrialization without oversimplifying the issue. Even the seemingly straightforward and stereotypical characters are more nuanced than they initially seem. Isabella is certainly an object of pity, and her brothers are undeniably villainous, but Keats refrains from attaching an explicit moral statement to the poem that would reduce the complex historical problem of industrialism down a simple conclusion or solution. Furthermore, while Isabella's excessive grief is pitiable, it is not necessarily admirable, nor is her relationship with Lorenzo particularly developed. Although her brothers are responsible for Lorenzo's death

and Isabella's subsequent misery, a portion of the blame for Isabella's fate is implicitly placed, like *Lamia's* Lycius, on her inability to reconcile her dream world with reality and, like Wordsworth's Laodamia, on her immoderate emotional response. Everest even goes as far as to offer a reading that posits "the destructive agency of the brothers" as "an extended dramatic form for the working out of flaws in the relationship of the lovers" (120).

Readings such as Everest's, which complicate but do not necessarily contradict the primary agenda of the poem, would not be possible in a merely propagandistic representation of evil capitalism versus ideal love.

PEACOCK'S *RHODODAPHNE, OR THE THESSALIAN SPELL*

Thomas Love Peacock's *Rhododaphne*, also a romance, focuses on the plight of two lovers and the force that threatens to drive them apart—in this case, the enchantress Rhododaphne. Anthemion meets her when he goes to pray and offer sacrifice on behalf of his sick love, Calliroe, and Rhododaphne uses her magic to trick the young lover and to subsequently curse Calliroe, seemingly killing her. Anthemion, believing Calliroe dead, attempts to run away from his guilt and from Rhododaphne but encounters the enchantress again and is placed under her spell. The narrative's resolution comes only when the personification of Uranian, or heavenly Love, shoots Rhododaphne with an arrow. Upon the enchantress's death, Anthemion is reunited with the now revived Calliroe, who, understanding the powerful allure of Rhododaphne, forgives her love for his affair with the enchantress.

In his 1927 analysis of Peacock's life and works, J. B. Priestly summarizes the general feeling toward *Rhododaphne* for the previous hundred years:

[*Rhododaphne*] was very greatly admired in its own day and received the praises of Shelley, Byron, and Poe. Since that day it has perhaps been somewhat neglected and underestimated. But we cannot in strict justice complain that it has been very unfairly neglected nor grossly underestimated, for though it would appear to lack very little...the little it does lack is all important. (117)

Priestly goes on to explain that the poem fails to charm readers with “great moments” and lacks the “suggestiveness” that would—were it present—make readers feel as though they were experiencing the world of the poem instead of merely observing from an outsider’s perspective. More recent scholarship has recovered *Rhododaphne*’s reputation to some extent, but the poem—despite being Peacock’s longest and most ambitious poetic work—remains largely unremarked upon. Those modern scholars who have elected to write on it have primarily focused on the poem’s relationship with its classical sources and with Keats’s *Lamia*.³⁴

Renowned Romanticism and myth scholar Marilyn Butler offers two separate but related analyses of *Rhododaphne* in her 1979 book *Peacock Displayed: A Satirist in his Context* and her later article “Myth and Mythmaking in the Shelley Circle.” In her famous book on myth in Romanticism, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries*, one of Butler’s primary arguments is that the second generation Romantics used the paganism of their writings as a means of rebelling against the conservative Christianity of the First Generation—a model that her interpretation of *Rhododaphne* fits but not without some significant resistance from the poem. Butler does identify a number of rhetorical strategies that the poem incorporates, which she argues work toward the religiously subversive agendas of undermining Christianity and taboo culture. In actuality, Butler’s reading is hindered by

³⁴ See, for example, William E. Harrold’s “Keats’s ‘Lamia’ and Peacock’s ‘Rhododaphne’” and Marilyn Butler’s “Myth and Mythmaking in the Shelley Circle.”

her determination to read *Rhododaphne* in terms of Keats's *Lamia*, and the mythopoeic strategies she identifies work toward the poem's true agenda of exposing the threat posed by oppressive forces and championing the power of sincerity and love.

In "Myth and Mythmaking" and *Peacock Displayed*, Butler highlights many of Peacock's mythopoeic strategies but ultimately concludes that the poem is merely mythographic, not mythopoeic, because its purpose is only to criticize an existing agenda and not to promote one of its own. Butler understands ancient narratives as myths because they were a means of accessing the gods, but she does not consider modern—and particularly Romantic—narratives mythic because they focus on the relationship between the reader and the poet rather than the reader and god(s): "From Prometheus the Sun God, attention has shifted to the Modern Prometheus, who is an artist" ("Myth and Mythmaking" 71). But undermining a powerful system is, of course, a mythopoeic agenda in and of itself, regardless of whether the poem offers an alternative to replace it, and to limit myths to narratives that advance a religious message severely underestimates the influence myths have in all cultural arenas.

The larger problem with Butler's argument is the conclusion she reaches regarding Peacock's specific purpose in writing the poem. Butler does understand the poem as promoting its own religious agenda, but she does believe the poem is an attempt "to charge dualistic moral systems like Christianity with negativism" and to suggest "that sexual taboos have a deadly effect on man's relationship with his body, with his fellow man and woman, and with his environment" (*Peacock Displayed* 108). The two agendas Butler infers are related in that they both hinge upon the premise that Peacock was promoting a *Lamia*-like message that the mystery and power embodied by the enchantress are not inherently

evil and that Rhododaphne's death should be understood as tragic and undesirable. Scholars' long-standing preoccupation with the relationship between Peacock's poem and Keats's *Lamia* leads Butler to draw conclusions regarding *Rhododaphne* that the text does not support. Butler uses the poem's mythopoeic strategies of a disguised agenda, elevated significance, mythography, and symbolic figures to explain why the reader should understand Rhododaphne's death as an unfortunate missed opportunity for religious and sexual liberation, but Rhododaphne is not Lamia, and a re-analysis of the *Rhododaphne's* mythopoeic strategies demonstrates that Peacock's poem has much more in common thematically with the romances of Shelley than the characteristic ambiguity of Keats's style.³⁵

When *Rhododaphne* is divorced from the thematic and political concerns of *Lamia*, the agenda that emerges—disguised by both the poem's genre and its character's symbolic functions—is one that privileges the innocence and purity of Calliope over Rhododaphne. As Bryan Burns explains, the poem is about “the power of love to overcome the forces of disorder” (79). Burns acknowledges that *Rhododaphne* is in some ways similar to *Lamia* but also clarifies that the ending is more straightforward, clearly favoring “innocent love over wild passion” (80). Burns offers two interpretations that are equally correct depending on the specific associations of the characters. Calliope and Rhododaphne can be embodiments of two different kinds of love or of innocence and deceit or, in Shelleyan fashion, love and tyranny. I do not wish to push too strongly on the connections between *Rhododaphne* and *Laon and Cythna* even as I indicate the problems of doing the same with

³⁵ Earlier scholars such as Bryan Burns pointed out such similarities but such readings appear to have been dismissed in lieu of more “complicated” and fluid readings such as Butler's. See Burns's *The Novels of Thomas Love Peacock* (80).

Lamia, but I will stress that, as literary connections go for *Rhododaphne*—which concludes with a divine being enacting the violence that the protagonists need but cannot, physically or morally, enact—*Laon and Cythna* seems the closer and more productive point of reference.

Like the other poems discussed in this chapter, *Rhododaphne* possesses a literary gravitas that is due largely in part to its status as a romance, an ancient genre that encompasses lengthy tales about important figures and serious themes. Peacock further elevates the social, moral, and literary implications of the poem by introducing *Rhododaphne* with a fairly lengthy preface that outlines, in what Butler calls a “documentary spirit” (“Myth and Mythmaking” 62), the historical background of classical and post-classical religious practices—including that Love was the principal deity of the poem’s setting, Thespia; how and when festivals in honor of Love took place; and which ancient historians have provided documentation of such information (ix). Peacock is clearly invested in providing an authentic context for *Rhododaphne*—ensuring that readers know the poem is consistent with the workings of the ancient world and that the conflict Peacock presents is a deeply rooted and universal one.

In order to play out that universal conflict, Peacock omits enough particulars from the narrative’s characters to allow them to fill greater, symbolic roles. Butler correctly notes that Rhododaphne and Calliope function as archetypes. Calliope “is always associated with lightness, springtime, the pleasant natural world and its produce” (“Myth and Mythmaking” 65), while Rhododaphne is associated with the darkness of the woods and the hull of the ship Anthemion attempts to escape her aboard. Butler, however, attempts to complicate this dichotomy and cast shadows on the seemingly pure Calliope by

demonstrating that she, like Rhododaphne, is associated with the underworld and dies: “in some sense, then, Calliroe is identical with Rhododaphne, whom we see queening it in the Underworld” (“Myth and Mythmaking” 65).

Both women do, for all intents and purposes, die, but this is hardly a similarity when the larger context is taken into account. Calliroe is already sick before Anthemion’s first encounter with Rhododaphne, but it is the enchantress’s kiss (and Anthemion’s subsequent transmission of the curse from his lips to Calliroe’s) that “kills” her. Rhododaphne causes Calliroe’s death, and it is only her death at the end that restores Calliroe to life. The presence of one necessitates the absence of the other, which would seem to cement their status as opposites rather than indicate any conflation of characteristics.

Similarly, the etymology of Calliroe’s name, “beautiful pomegranate,”³⁶ does not, as Butler suggests, necessarily associate her with Persephone, queen of the underworld, and, subsequently, Rhododaphne. Butler acknowledges the pomegranate’s status as an ancient symbol of fertility (which is consistent with the aforementioned associations of Calliroe with life and nature) and reminds her readers of the pomegranate’s role in the Persephone myth, but to so easily equate Calliroe with darkness and death is unwise, especially because other elements of that particular myth that are consistent with the already well-established elements of Calliroe’s character. Because Persephone consumed several pomegranate seeds in the underworld, she is forced to inhabit the underworld for several months out of the year (the specific number of months varies depending on the classical account). Her mother, Demeter’s, sadness each year at her daughter’s departure brings about the dearth

³⁶ Marilyn Butler attributes this knowledge to J. F. Newton’s May 1812 article published in *Monthly Magazine* (“Myth and Mythmaking” 65).

of autumn and winter while Persephone's return prompts the spring and summer seasons. The pomegranate then, already a symbol of fertility as it is composed almost entirely of seeds, is also the catalyst of sorts for the cycle of the seasons and the rebirth associated with spring, which is, again, in keeping with her "innocent" status as a symbol of light/life/nature.

Butler seeks to recover Rhododaphne as a redeemable figure by viewing her death as a tragic event that symbolizes the problem with socially constructed systems and taboos. She argues that Urania's execution of the enchantress actually originates with Anthemion's false belief that "love must be restricted to one object:" "Because Anthemion believes that Rhododaphne's love is illicit, and purely sensual, it does indeed incur the vengeance of the excluded, affronted spiritual aspect of love" (*Peacock Displayed* 107). By placing the agency on Anthemion, Butler transforms Peacock's poem into a fable demonstrating how "arbitrary man-made fears and taboos" destroyed what could have been a "beautiful love idyll" (*Peacock Displayed* 106).

This reading, however, is undermined by the text at multiple points and is the result of relying too heavily on the potential historical and biographical connections between *Rhododaphne* and *Lamia*. The conclusion to Keats's poem leaves the reader unsure as to whether Apollonius's attack and Lamia's ensuing banishment was in Lycius's best interest. The possibility that Lamia and Lycius could have shared a happy life together seems as likely as the possibility that Lamia was only working to deceive and eventually harm the Corinthian youth. Those scholars who insist on the parallels between *Lamia* and *Rhododaphne* seek a similar ambiguity in Peacock's poem, but while the titular females in both poems are enchantresses who lure their fair youths under false pretenses, their

subsequent magical energies are spent on vastly different endeavors. Lamia uses her powers to transform herself and to create a love palace, while Rhododaphne's intentions are consistently malicious and harmful to those around her. Furthermore, Rhododaphne is destroyed not by human hatred, as Lamia is, but by a divine force, which is, by definition, not subject to human influence—not to mention that the revival of the innocent Calliroe and the happy reunion she and Anthemion share is the direct result of Rhododaphne's death.

The three texts discussed in this chapter have much in common. In addition to being romances that promote radical political agendas, they each do so by appropriating the mythopoeic strategies of Chapters 1 and 2 that were used to promote conservative and/or non-political agendas. Shelley, Keats, and Peacock use the same rhetorical maneuvers as their conservative counterparts to expose the hypocrisy and tyranny of the social and political institutions supported by conservatives, but this is all in the years leading up to the defining moment of Romantic political landscape. After Peterloo, political radicals continued to rely on these mythopoeic techniques but in texts that are even more focused, more determined, and more personal.

CHAPTER FOUR RADICAL MYTHS AFTER PETERLOO

The Peterloo Massacre was, according to many historians, one of the defining moments of its age. Many of England's citizens, including its authors, already resented and resisted England's increasingly violent and restrictive means of maintaining "order," but Peterloo became the tipping point after which the disgruntled populace and its literary representatives began to charge their efforts at reform with more audacity and spite than ever before. August 16, 1819, approximately 70,000 English citizens, organized by the Manchester Patriotic Union and led by Henry Hunt, gathered in St. Peter's Field to discuss the necessity of Parliamentary reform. At the time, England—and Manchester in particular—was a melting pot of social and political anxieties, including famine, unemployment, poverty, poor living conditions, a general lack of suffrage, and misrepresentation in Parliament. Such concerns traced back to long-standing but ever-growing sources: 1) the economic depression following the Napoleonic Wars, 2) the mechanization of labor and subsequent cutting of wages, 3) the passage of certain legislation—namely the Corn Laws, which were designed to benefit wealthy landowners at the expense of the lower class—and 4) the outdated constituency boundaries, which gave too many electorates per capita to some Parliamentary boroughs and too few to others. Shortly after the meeting began, military authorities were summoned by local magistrates and were ordered to disperse the crowd and arrest its leaders. A cavalry unit armed with

sabres charged into a crowd of defenseless citizens, and in the hysteria that followed, 17 people died and more than 650 were injured.³⁷

Peterloo was one of the defining moments of its age largely due to the outrage it incited among the general populace. Poole notes, however, that the meeting and subsequent disaster were entirely unsuccessful in prompting any type of reform and, in fact, only encouraged the government to come down even harder on those seeking even the most gradual Parliamentary reform.³⁸ The primary effect the massacre had was to prompt the already radical authors of the early nineteenth century to offer even more direct attacks against England's political figures and institutions. Bruce Lincoln's anthropologically focused update of Barthes's myth theory in *Discourse and the Construction of Society* explains that radical authors/artists/activists can create subversive myths by adopting and revising existing dominant myths; the authors in this chapter do just that. Whereas the texts in Chapter 3 appropriate conservative mythopoeic strategies for radical agendas, the texts in this chapter go a step further: appropriating and inverting conservative myths altogether.

In his "Mask of Anarchy," for example, Percy Shelley prominently incorporates the contemporary catchword "anarchy," which the conservative press had been equating with

³⁷ Poole explains that "the widely quoted conservative estimate is 11 dead and over 400 injured" but that Michael Bush, authoritatively revised these figures in *The Casualties of Peterloo*.

³⁸ After Peterloo, the British government instituted legislation that became known as the Six Acts, which identified any meeting that convened for the purpose of radical reform as "an overt act of treasonable conspiracy." The Six Acts were: 1) The Training Prevention Act, which ensured that only government-approved group could receive military training of any kind; 2) The Seizure of Arms Act, which allowed local authorities to search private property, seize any weapons, and arrest the owners; 3) The Misdemeanours Act, which eliminated many opportunities for bail and allowed the court to rush accused parties through the court process; 4) The Seditious Meetings Prevention Act, which necessitated the presence of a law officer at any meeting consisting of more than 50 people; 5) The Blasphemous and Seditious Libels Act, which increased the severity of sentences for authors of seditious writings; 6) The Newspaper and Stamp Duties Act, which raised taxes on periodicals and held publishers monetary liable for the content of their publications.

the reformist movement and subsequently using to justify the oppressive legislation being passed by the government. Felicia Hemans's *Dartmoor* incorporates the widely accepted version of Britain's national identity but uses it to draw attention to the bloodier aspects of the nation's history that those in power would rather ignore. Finally, Lord Byron appropriates Robert Southey's *Vision of Judgement*—title and all—placing the Poet Laureate within his revised version and using Southey's own framework and characters to reverse the infamous eulogization of King George the Third. Although "The Mask of Anarchy" is the only one of these texts to explicitly address the Peterloo Massacre, I have elected to discuss them together in this post-Peterloo chapter because they all address, on some level, the government's excessive attempts to control and manipulate its citizens and the subsequent backlash of such measures—all of which came to a head in August of 1819. The Peterloo Massacre served as a catalyst for renewed attempts at reform, strengthened attempts to prevent it, and prompted a wealth of pointed attacks by some of the period's best poets.

SHELLEY'S "MASK OF ANARCHY"

Shelley had already left for Italy—where he lived from 1818 until his death in 1822—when Peterloo took place and did not hear of the tragedy until he received copies of the August 22 and 29 *Examiners*, sent by Thomas Love Peacock, on September 5th. Shelley's immediate and candid response is documented in a letter he sent to publisher Charles Ollier on September 6: "the torrent of my indignation has not yet done boiling in my veins. I wait anxiously [to] hear how the country will express its sense of this bloody murderous oppression of its destroyers. 'Something must be done...What yet I know not'" (*LPBS* 117). While he claims that he will wait to hear what retribution the populace will demand, he

immediately gets to work on his own poetic response. Shelley's poetics are famously political and, more importantly, he is invested in practical politics with real applications rather than merely theoretical or speculative politics:

Before we aspire after theoretical perfection in the amelioration of our political state, it is necessary that we possess those advantages we have been cheated of...our present business is with the difficult and unbending realities of actual life, and when we have drawn inspiration from the great object of our hopes, it becomes us with patience and resolution to apply ourselves to accommodating our theories to immediate practice. ("A Philosophical View of Reform" 240-45)

By November 1, Shelley had completed the nearly 400-line "Mask of Anarchy: Written on the Occasion of the Massacre at Manchester"—his attempt to use his poetic gifts to remedy "the difficult and unbending realities of actual life." Shelley sent the poem to Leigh Hunt, editor of *The Examiner*, but Hunt, largely due to the dangerous political climate of 1819 and the government's strict regulations on the radical press, chose not to print it. In 1832, ten years after Shelley's death, Hunt eventually published the poem, explaining in the preface, "I thought the public at large had not become sufficiently discerning to do justice to the sincerity and kind-heartedness of the spirit that walked in this flaming robe of verse" (3). Although "The Mask of Anarchy" did not reach Shelley's intended audience of 1819, what he produced in those weeks following Peterloo is one of his most direct and scathing attacks on the English government. Shelley's "flaming robe of verse" is a dramatic, symbolic recasting of the Peterloo Massacre, implicating specific politicians, manipulative rhetoric, and even the victimized English citizens who Shelley does not feel are properly outraged.

Although a number of scholars read "The Mask of Anarchy" as a political allegory, it is, rhetorically speaking, not allegory but myth. In *Reinventing Allegory*, Theresa Kelley

explains that “The Mask of Anarchy’s” brand of allegory, which she and other scholars often cite as an example of nineteenth-century political allegory is atypical:

What makes Shelley’s figures unusual is his insistence that Murder is a man who, like his bloodhounds, is fat with gore’ that Fraud is Lord Eldon, whose tears turn to millstones. Hypocrisy is Sidmouth, who rides by on a crocodile and an allegory. In an era when allegory was so often charged with abstraction, this particularity humanizes abstraction with something like figural vengeance” (147).³⁹

What Kelley describes, however, is not a different kind of allegory but just the opposite. Her reading focuses on the particularization of the abstract figures of Murder and Fraud when Shelley is actually transforming the specific, historical figures of Castlereagh, Eldon, and Sidmouth into abstract figures. Allegory occurs when an author uses a specific narrative and characters to express a universal message, but using generalized characters to communicate a historically specific agenda, as Shelley does, is mythopoesis.

Like Kelley, Richard Cronin argues in *Shelley’s Poetic Thoughts* that “one of the strengths of the ballad is its refusal of generalization in favor of concrete detail...’Fraud’ ceases to be an empty personification and becomes a being on the same plan of reality as ‘Eldon’” (45). Cronin claims that the allegory succeeds by humanizing the abstract figures, but it is actually the myth that succeeds by exaggerating and universalizing the human Eldon (and Castlereagh and Sidmouth). When Shelley (or “the persona of the balladeer,” which I will discuss later) says “Murder wore a mask like Castlereagh” (5), he is not commenting on Murder but on Castlereagh. The point of using masks in the form of the

³⁹ Kelley is also the author of “Romanticism’s Errant Allegory” in *The Cambridge Companion to Allegory*, “Life and Biographies” in *The Cambridge Companion to Shelley*, and “Postmodernism, Romanticism, and John Clare” in *Lessons in Romanticism: A Critical Companion*, all of which cite “The Mask of Anarchy” as an iconic example of nineteenth-century political allegory. For more discussions of the allegorical nature of “The Mask of Anarchy,” see Marc Redfield’s *The Politics of Aesthetics: Nationalism, Gender, Romanticism* and Nancy Moore Goslee’s *Shelley’s Visual Imagination*.

historical figures is not to critique the personified sins wearing them but the sources of the masks. This seems a simple enough point, but analyses that read “The Mask of Anarchy” as an allegory necessitate reading Murder, Fraud, and Hypocrisy as the primary focus of Shelley’s critique when there is no motive or practical political use for attacking abstract vices.

The phrase “Murder wore a mask like Castlereagh” operates on at least three layers of meaning: 1) if we understand the “like” to mean “like Castlereagh does,” the line implies that just as the villainous Murder is assuming a seemingly innocent disguise, so too does the historical figure of Castlereagh; 2) if we take the “like” to mean “that looked like” (and I see no reason why both readings cannot be simultaneously correct), it suggests that Castlereagh and company are actually the true villains that Murder, Fraud, and Hypocrisy can only pretend to be; 3) that same reading of “like” also allows for a reading in which—and this is why I argue that the historical figures are the primary focus of the poem—Castlereagh, Eldon, and Sidmouth are, in real life, Murder, Fraud, and Hypocrisy in disguise, making the abstractions and the humans one in the same. If this is the case, then every mention of Sidmouth-clad Hypocrisy is actually a reference to the man English citizens simply know as Sidmouth. Murder’s “gory hounds” are the seven nations in Castlereagh’s pact to continue the slave trade. Fraud not only looks like Eldon, whom Shelley loathed for his refusal to grant Shelley the custody of his children, but, also like Eldon, harms the children he claims to want to help:

His big tears, for he wept well,
Turned to mill-stones as they fell;
And the little children, who
Round his feet played to and fro,
Thinking every tear a gem,
Had their brains knocked out by them. (15-20)

These biographical (however exaggerated) touches encourage readers to conflate the abstractions and their human counterparts and to understand Murder, Fraud, and Hypocrisy as figures that are interchangeable with their historical counterparts/masks. Shelley's goal—made apparent by the historical reference in the subtitle—is to mythologize the contemporary figures and politics of England in 1819.

In his effort to create not just a narrative but a myth, Shelley generalizes not only the figures behind the Peterloo Massacre but the actual massacre itself. He restages the original meeting as a decorous procession, or masquerade, that English citizens have eagerly come to witness, but this seemingly respectable event will also end in a bloodbath. The agents of the massacre, the cavalry sent by the magistrates, have been replaced in the poem by specific politicians who stand in for the corrupt government as a whole. The scene has been relocated from a field in Manchester, the center of English industrialization and labor, to London, the political, financial, and symbolic capital of England. London functions as a synecdoche for England in general, and relocating the action to the capital allows Shelley to reach out to the specific audience that could most easily and directly influence English politics. Although much of the country was outraged by news of Peterloo, Shelley knew all too well that there is a significant gap between outrage and action. Londoners who might have otherwise disregarded the violence in Manchester as something that did not affect them directly would find it difficult to ignore even a fictional account of a massacre in which Londoners are the victims. Finally, Shelley shifts the victims of the massacre from protesters to even more innocent and “everyman” citizens who have gathered to observe the regal procession. Each of these changes is an example of Shelley starting with a historical narrative but altering it in order to give it a mythic significance. In addition to

adopting and revising the existing myth, Lincoln explains that subversive myths can also be created by imbuing a historical narrative with a greater, more symbolic significance: “they [radical mythmakers] can attempt to invest a history, legend, or even a fable with authority and credibility, thus elevating it to the status of myth and thereby make it an instrument with which to construct novel social forms” (25). Shelley’s procession contains just a hint of history—indicated by the subtitle and the gore the scene eventually descends into—but is otherwise a mythic reimagining of Peterloo.

Shelley promotes his own agenda of criticizing the government and inspiring a response from English citizens, and part of the way he accomplishes this agenda is by directly referencing and perverting the agenda of the conservative press. From August 5, 1819 (just 11 days before Peterloo) to September 6 (the day of Shelley’s outraged letter to Charles Ollier), *The Morning Post* alone included seven references to the “anarchy” with which reformers were threatening the country.⁴⁰ *The Morning Post* was a well-established, London-based conservative daily newspaper, known for its conservative position on most issues and staunch support of Tory politics. It began circulating the propagandistic message (in order to justify the government’s increasing limitations on “free speech”) that

⁴⁰ *August 5, 1819*: A write-up entitled “London” praises the local magistrates for upholding the law and preserving the country from “pillage and anarchy” and claims that the “Radical Reformers” wish to “overthrow, and not reform” the government, bringing about immediate “anarchy and bloodshed.” *August 10, 1819*: “The Fox and the Bees,” an original poem, tells the story of a deceitful fox tricks a hive of hard working bees into abandoning their home and social order/work ethic for the sake of “freedom.” The bees die of exposure, and the fox loots the hive “while the tumult of anarchy rose in the air.” *August 14, 1819*: In the “Seditious Meetings” column, reformers are referred to as “a danger that would overwhelm us in anarchy and confusion.” *August 16, 1819*: the “London” article calls reformers “base demagogues who would involve this much-envied land in one common scene of anarchy and bloodshed.” *August 25, 1819*: “Provencial Loyal” wonders at “the career of anarchy which [Henry] Hunt and his guilt compeers have been permitted to run.” *September 2, 1819*: An article entitled “The Present and Alarming Crisis” asks readers to appreciate “the positive benefits which the absence of anarchy confers.” *September 6, 1819*: The “Cheshire Assizes” column claims that the reformers wish “to accomplish the overthrow of our rights and liberties, and in their stead set up a system of anarchy and riot.”

anarchy was imminent if reformers such as Henry Hunt and his followers were allowed to continue without intervention. The irony that Shelley highlights in his poem, of course, is that the government, not the reformers, brought anarchy to St. Peter's Field. In titling his poem "The Mask of Anarchy" and prominently featuring a character called Anarchy, Shelley adopts the negative term that had been applied to reformers and applies it to the murderous government. "Anarchy" in Shelley's poem is not the absence of government but the chaos than can be created by a government that goes unchecked.⁴¹ What Shelley does with this appropriation of the term "anarchy" is to take the propaganda being disseminated by the government and conservative press (that their censorship and oppressive legislation were a necessary means of keeping dangerous revolutionaries from bringing anarchy and hysteria to England) and undermine it even as he promotes his own subversive myth.

Interestingly, in a poem about wearing masks, Shelley does almost nothing to conceal his historically situated agenda. Of all of Shelley's political poems, "The Mask of Anarchy" employs the thinnest disguise. The only strategies preventing it from being perceived (had it actually been published in its historical moment) as sedition or treason are 1) the fact that the politicians being attacked are only "masks" in the poem (which I have already explained does little to keep readers from conflating them with their corresponding vices) and 2) the "naïve balladeer" persona through which Shelley relates the action. Mary Shelley noted that "the poem was written for the people, and is therefore

⁴¹ Morton Paley, in his "Apocalitics: Allusion and Structure in Shelley's 'Mask of Anarchy,'" points out the similarities between Shelley's use of "anarchy" to describe "the governing institutions of society" and Byron's mention in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* of "Imperial anarchs, doubling human woes" (92). Similarly, Henry Hunt, in a January 25, 1819 letter responding to the 7th dragoon attacking "unarmed and peaceable citizens" at a theatre riot, warns the King, "If these wanton violators of the public peace be not immediately brought to justice, the day of anarchy is arrived in this country," while a September 3, 1819 article printed in *The Morning Post* recounts an assembly in Westminster in which reformist politician Sir Francis Burnett claims that the current "application of violence and bloodshed can only end in anarchy and despotism."

in a more popular tone than usual: portions strike as abrupt and unpolished, but many stanzas are all his own" (286). Richard Cronin refines this observation, distinguishing between "the voice of the naïve balladeer, and the voice of the sophisticated poet who makes capital from the balladeer's innocence and clumsiness" (*Shelley's Poetic* 43). Cronin points out the differences in vocabulary and syntax and the moments in which "the naïveté of the balladeer" allows Shelley to imply more than he says:

The balladeer mentions Castlereagh's pets: Seven blood-hounds followed him. From his point of view this is only a scrupulous notation of fact, the kind of irrelevantly precise detail characteristic of the popular ballad. But to the politically aware reader the reference is precise... 'the seven nations that in 1815 agreed with Britain to put off the abolition of the universal slave trade. (44)

Shelley's use of the balladeer persona allows him to draw attention to the problems he sees with the masque (and, by association, the government) without appearing to have an ulterior motive.

Shelley's formal decisions also create a divide between elevated and popular. On the one hand, the poem is a ballad largely written, as Mary Shelley indicates, in a lower register than is standard for Percy Shelley in order to appeal to the average citizen. Conversely, the event described in the poem is a masque, an ornate procession attended, in this case, by the lower class but featuring the elite of society. Both conventions, despite their differences, allow Shelley to employ the mythopoeic strategy of elevating the poem's significance. The masque element gives the poem a grandiose feel, and although ballads are a popular, low-brow form, they date back in the English tradition to the thirteenth century and offer a long-standing literary tradition for Shelley include his poem within. Even more significant to Shelley's mythic purpose is the ballad's role as an anonymous embodiment of the people's voice. Since one of Shelley's goals is to inspire English citizens to recognize the

failings of the government, he uses the ballad form to reach them. Shelley attempts to place his outrage in their terms, making it easier for ordinary citizens not only to access but also to adopt as their own philosophy. Even though he himself is a member of the upper class, Shelley uses the ballad form to attempt to incite reform from the bottom up.

Shelley also elevates the significance of his narrative, in a maneuver that overlaps with the mythopoeic strategy of offering an alternate version of the truth, by promoting a version of events that exaggerates the historical circumstances. The historical associations of “The Mask of Anarchy” give the narrative credibility and relevance, but Shelley simultaneously alters the history that he is presenting so that he presents the story he wants readers to remember instead of being burdened with what actually happened. Shelley’s revised account of Peterloo allows him to present his side of the story, to expose the specific threats behind the nameless militiamen and show the rest of England what Castlereagh, Eldon, and Sidmouth are like underneath the masks they wear before the public. Although Shelley would certainly argue that his narrative was true to the spirit of Peterloo, “The Mask of Anarchy” presents an alternate and exaggerated version of events. Ideally, readers would leave Shelley’s poem not focusing on the factual events of Peterloo but the events of the masque and, more importantly, associate the historical massacre directly with the politicians Shelley singles out in his poem.

The final method by which Shelley elevates his poetic narrative to a mythic significance overlaps with the mythopoeic strategy of including mythographic content. Shelley, like Southey in his *Vision of Judgement*, ascribes a religious significance to the poem; Shelley’s supernatural system, however, is apocalyptic as opposed to Southey’s heavenly one. Whereas Southey tried to associate George III with positive religious imagery

to rehabilitate his damaged reputation, Shelley attempts to villainize the English government by drawing parallels between specific politicians and the nightmarish imagery of Revelation. The most obvious Biblical allusion is Anarchy's entrance in which "he rode / On a white horse, splashed with blood; / He was pale even to the lips, / Like Death in the Apocalypse" (30-33). Shelley makes a rather obvious reference here to the image in Revelation of Death riding a pale mare, but Morton Paley explains several other instances of Biblical mythography in his "Apocapolitics: Allusion and Structure in Shelley's 'Mask of Anarchy.'" Paley accurately describes the poem as "a rewriting of the book of Revelation in terms of the politics of England in 1819" (92). Although Murder, Fraud, and Hypocrisy precede Anarchy in the poem, they serve as the 1819 substitutions for the horsemen of War, Pestilence, and Famine.

Interestingly, Anarchy bears a mark on his forehead that echoes the messianic rider from Revelations. Revelation 19:16 states, "And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS," while Shelley's Anarchy bears the inscription on his brow, "I AM GOD AND KING AND LAW" (36-37). As Paley explains, "Anarchy combines elements conventionally associated with the divine with others conventionally associated with the Satanic into a single subversive configuration" (96). Paley's article focuses on the sometimes uncomfortable juxtaposition of what he calls apocalypse and millennium, and he views the paradoxically messianic and Satanic descriptions of the 1819 "horsemen" as pieces within that devastating but ultimately hopeful schema. Although I agree that "The Mask of Anarchy" is split between two tones, there is another, simpler explanation for why the imagery surrounding Anarchy, Murder, Fraud, and Hypocrisy is so mixed. First, the poem, as I have discussed, is torn between two

poetic registers, but it is also torn between two agendas: Shelley is attempting simultaneously to criticize the government and to inspire the citizens, a dual aim that necessitates a certain amount of both terrible and hopeful imagery. Secondly, the constant switching between positive and negative imagery seems like another (in addition to the use of masks) manifestation of the duplicity of politicians. Anarchy's forehead bears the messianic-like message because the politicians/government he represents see (and want the rest of the world to see) them as a savior to the nation. It is only the blood he is covered in that exposes him as something dangerous. The personifications in the poem, like England's politicians, present themselves as one thing, but their actions reveal their true nature.

In lines 18-21 when the children are clinging close to Fraud/Eldon, we see another politician presenting himself as a benevolent savior figure reminiscent of Christ himself being surrounded by eager and loving children, but then his seeming concern for the children kills them as his tears of sympathy turn to millstones that crush them. In this moment, Shelley inverts a scripture from Matthew 18:6 (and Mark 9:42 and Luke 17:2) in which millstones are used as a threat against those who would do harm to children: "But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea." By revising this scripture, Shelley sends a message about England in 1819: the punishment that should come to a government abusing its power and oppressing the people it swore to protect is exacted instead upon the innocent and already victimized citizens.

Shelley's use of mythography both illustrates the hypocrisy he accuses the politicians and government of and gives him a mythic framework within which to situate

his own myth. He is able to use Biblical parallels as larger-than-life precedents for the evil England is being subjected to in the Peterloo era. Shelley puts the villainy of such oppression in a “popular” form that his readers will be able to access, but he further ensures that his narrative will be understood and well-received by imbuing the poem with a religious significance. The largely Christian English populace would recognize Shelley’s narrative as familiar (despite its revisions) and, ideally, feel compelled to take a stand against the problematic practices of the government because of the religious and moral associations attached to the poem.

“The Mask of Anarchy” has occupied an interesting place among modern Shelley scholarship. As Paley indicates, “it was been praised as uncharacteristic of Shelley’s work by F.R. Leavis, admired for its political content by Richard Holmes, and ignored by Harold Bloom and Earl Wasserman in their influential studies” (91). It certainly stands out, for better or worse, from Shelley’s canon as one of his most directly political and unapologetically vicious poems. Because Shelley does so little to disguise his agenda, the poem straddles the subjective line between myth and propaganda, making it even easier to recognize the mythopoeic strategies at play within it. Although it is frequently cited as an allegory, to read “The Mask of Anarchy” as such is to disregard the historically situated agenda driving the poem. Shelley uses symbolic characters and events to transform his poem into a myth that he hopes will instruct and inspire his readers. His appropriation of the term “anarchy” and incorporation of both Satanic and messianic imagery serve to undermine conservatives’ attacks against the reformist movement and highlight the government’s role in inciting the anarchy it accuses reformers of inciting.

HEMANS'S *DARTMOOR*

The events at St. Peter's Field affected not only the social and political climate of England in the autumn of 1819 but for months and years to come. As James Chandler explains in *England in 1819*, a detailed account of the year's politics and literary production, "'Peterloo'—like 'The French Revolution' on a higher scale or perhaps even 'Romanticism,' itself on scale yet higher still—names an event of indeterminate duration that marks a major transformation in the practices of modern literary and political representation, one understood in its moment to have revolutionary potential" (18). The conflict between liberals and conservatives manifested not only in literary attacks and increased legislation but also in the very narratives by which both sides came to identify themselves and their nation. Chandler argues that "the modes and means of national self-representation itself were contested in the most fundamental ways in these struggles over the rights of assembly and publication" (19); Felicia Hemans's poem *Dartmoor* embodies the tension between differing narratives of self-representation and national identity.

Dartmoor is a far more complex poem than its simple title, overall brevity, and succinct compositional history would suggest. Hemans wrote it in response to a contest sponsored by the Royal Society of Literature in 1820 and was awarded the cash prize for the best poem on the contest's theme of "Dartmoor," but the story Hemans relates of the moorlands is more than a little contradictory. On the one hand, it is a specific (somewhat invented) history of Dartmoor's evolution from a place of primitive rituals to the home of war prisoners to the projected grounds for a "great national school-house" (Hemans

141n).⁴² On the other hand, it is a commentary on the contradiction between Britain's perceived/projected history and Dartmoor's seemingly inexplicable "desolation," which suggests a darkness for which Britain's myth of national identity does not account.

In her section on Felicia Hemans in *At the Limits of Romanticism*, Nanora Sweet argues that "Hemans alternates history's bloodletting with its productivity, thickening her historical consciousness into the site for new institutions—ones safely beyond the imperial cycle of rise and fall" (179). As the most in-depth modern treatment of *Dartmoor*, Sweet's reading is enormously helpful, but as less than three pages in a larger section on Hemans in a larger volume on Romanticism in general, it lacks the specifics necessary for a full analysis. Sweet argues, for example, that Hemans frames her subject of Dartmoor's evolving history "by registering the death of Napoleon, opposing the Promethean politics of Byron and Shelley, and responding, however covertly, to the massacre at Peterloo" (180), but she only mentions Napoleon and Byron in passing and never follows up on her references to Shelley or Peterloo.⁴³ Ultimately, Sweet's conclusion is that Hemans uses the discontinuity of Dartmoor (and of *Dartmoor*) to comment on the nature of history and progress and to advocate for a turn from violent traditions to domestic institutions and from a "monolithic" view of history to a more dynamic and displaced one (181). Although the final lines of the poem certainly confirm Hemans's fondness for the new, bloodless plan for Dartmoor, I argue that the discontinuity of the poem is, in fact, a commentary on the discrepancy

⁴² In 1809, construction began on a prison in Dartmoor for and by French prisoners of the Napoleonic Wars. Completed in 1812, the facility was also used for American prisoners of the War of 1812. By 1815, however, both wars had ended, and the prison was abandoned. When Hemans was composing "Dartmoor" in 1820, plans were underway to build a school in Dartmoor for the children of domestic convicts, but the school was never built.

⁴³ Additionally, the Prometheuses and politics of Byron and Shelley are so different, lumping them together seems problematic, which might explain why Sweet mentions "Byronic Titan-worship" (181) and leaves Shelley out of the discussion.

between the positive history of Dartmoor/Britain being promoting by the nation and the true history. The repeated juxtaposition of bloodshed with talk of either a lack of “carnage” or of the proud smiles and joyous cries of the land suggests an attempt on Hemans’s part to destabilize the pervading nationalistic myth that Britain is somehow “immune from history” (Sweet 180). As a dominant imperialistic power still in the throes of conquest and slavery, Britain is anything but immune from history. Although Sweet sets Hemans in opposition to Shelley and Byron, the constant shifting in *Dartmoor* between positive and negative imagery serves the “Mask of Anarchy”-esque function of exposing the gap between public perception and reality. In short, Hemans’s appropriation of the nationalistic rhetoric of Britain does not reveal the “discontinuity at the heart of Britain” (Sweet 180) but the discontinuity between Britain’s “official” history and the lived experience of the nation, as represented most recently by Peterloo. Reading *Dartmoor* as a direct response to the massacre would be difficult to justify and would unnecessarily limit the poem’s larger relevance, but it can easily and productively be understood as a response to the conflict of national identity produced by the political climate of the Peterloo era.

Hemans begins the poem with a statement about “the peopled and the regal isle” of Britain, “whose values, rejoicing in their beauty, smile; / whose cities, fearless of the spoiler, tower, / and send on every breeze a voice of power” (1-4). The vales and cities synecdochically represent the British people, who are proud of their status as a dominant world power and feel secure as such but do not see or know the imperialist practices that have led to such confidence. The first of many mood shifts occurs in line 5 when the voice of the poet explains that, despite Britain’s nationalistic pride and seemingly favorable history, “Desolation hath reared herself a throne / and mark’d a pathless region for her

own” in Dartmoor (5-6). In a literal sense, the “Desolation” Hemans describes is the moor’s barrenness (“For thee in vain descend the dews of heaven, / In vain the sunbeam and shower are given” 15-16). More figuratively, however, the Desolation, the poet surmises, is the product of a dark past not documented in the written histories and collective consciousness of Britain. On the one hand, Hemans is speaking specifically of Dartmoor, a dark, dead spot surrounded by the larger beauty and triumph of the British Isles: “a dark cloud on summer’s clear blue sky, / A mourner, circled with festivity! / For all beyond is life! (19-21). On the other hand, Hemans is using Dartmoor to represent Britain’s history as a whole. By focusing on a specific geographic location with Britain instead of the country as a whole, Hemans is able to veil her broader commentary to some degree. The Desolation is the problematic imperialistic tactics employed in order to gain and maintain the nation’s power and stability, and it is surrounded by the larger myth of Britain as a relatively innocent historical entity.

In the lines that follow, Hemans articulates the first of several references to “red,” “bloody,” or “stained” nature: “Yes! Though thy turf no stain of carnage wore / When bled the noble hearts of many a shore; / Though not a hostile step thy heath-flowers bent / When empires totter’d and the earth was rent” (7-10). Perhaps Sweet’s claim that *Dartmoor* alludes to Peterloo is in reference to the repeated imagery of fields stained with blood.⁴⁴ Such a reading is plausible and, moreover, consistent with Hemans’s larger agenda of exposing the violence that England’s officials would rather omit from the nation’s history books. What seems initially like a lack of carnage in this passage is actually a displacement

⁴⁴ Other references to blood in the poem include “the red combat of the mountain-plain (78), “the crimson stains / Left by dark rites of blood” (90-91), rock and turf growing “deeply, darkly red” (117), and the multiple instances of “red” and “blood” in lines 127-136 (excerpted later in this paragraph).

of carnage. The fact that the blood is not being shed on the moors does not mean blood is not being shed, and it certainly does not excuse Britain from the bloody history outlined in these lines. Later, Hemans similarly juxtaposes the pride and triumph of England with the violence that people do not immediately witness:

But ages rolled away: and England stood
With her proud banner streaming o'er the flood;
And with a lofty calmness in her eye,
And regal in collected majesty,
To breast the storm of battle. Every breeze
Bore sounds of triumph o'er her own blue seas;
And other lands, redeem'd and joyous, drank
The life-blood of her heroes, as they sank
On the red fields they won;
Whose wild flowers wave
Now in luxuriant beauty o'er their grave. (127-36)

Furthering the idea that Dartmoor does, despite what the history book say, have a bloody past is a connection between the wild flowers waving in beauty over the graves of British soldiers overseas and the "heath-flowers" that mark the fields of Dartmoor, and twice now, the nationalistic rhetoric of success and security is positioned against the gory images of the blood of England's own soldiers staining the fields of enemy nations. While the specific nature of the flood in line 128 is not clear, the references to "life-blood of her heroes" and "red fields" in the lines immediately following suggest that England is proudly bearing her banner of victory through a flood of blood. Such a reading, in fact, creates a parallel with the scene from Shelley's "Mask of Anarchy" in which the nation is calmly and regally moving forward "ankle-deep in blood" (Shelley 127). The difference is that there are no civilian witnesses to the violence described in *Dartmoor*. The English people celebrate because they know only the "sounds of triumph" born over the sea, but most of them do not see the price their own country pays for such success.

Traditionally, when authors use the mythopoeic strategy of offering an alternate truth, the truth they put forth is a subjective one that counteracts the similarly subjective account presented by the opposition's myth. In Hemans's case, she offers two kinds of alternate truths. The first is actually much more objective than mythopoeic "truths" tend to be. Although it is not overly factual or specific, she provides a more accurate and realistic understanding of history that stands in contrast to the idealized version being internalized by Britain and its citizens. The second kind of alternate truth Hemans offers, however, is an entirely imagined ancient "history" of the land. Although Hemans is largely using Dartmoor to represent the larger history of Britain, Dartmoor has its own history. No fighting took place there during the Napoleonic Wars or the War of 1812, but something has cursed the land anyway, according to Hemans, with infertility. She appears to have two explanations for this curse: 1) using the cairns that scatter the field of Dartmoor as inspiration, Hemans narrates an ancient, hypothetical ritual of human sacrifice that, like the later oversea battles, leaves "crimson stains" from "dark rites of blood" (90-91); 2) Dartmoor, despite the lack of bloodshed, remains implicated in the violence of the war because of its status as a holding ground for prisoners of war.

Hemans uses this imagined history to increase the significance of Dartmoor and the poem. It establishes Dartmoor as a location with more history than it initially appears to have (like Britain in the opening lines) and as a symbolically significant location (justifying, perhaps, Hemans's use of Dartmoor as a symbol for the nation). It also serves to provide a "historical" example of the kind of violence that can go undocumented—the kind of violence Hemans has been drawing attention to throughout the poem. *Dartmoor* does not contain any mythographic content, but the invented history functions similarly to the way

mythography does in most mythopoeic narratives: providing an ancient precedent for the contemporary issue the author is addressing. Just as Burke, who warned against being deceived by abstract rhetoric, used as a precedent the ancient story of King Pelias's daughters being tricked into killing rather than healing him, Hemans's inclusion of the sacrificial ritual that may or may not have taken place upon the cairns of Dartmoor shows how easy it is for someone or something to possess a secret history that has either been overlooked or purposely suppressed.

Finally, the overall vagueness of Hemans's references in the poem serves the mythopoeic function of universalizing the narrative. Although full of references to what can easily be understood as the Napoleonic War, Napoleon's death, and the plans for the national school, the poem does not mention any specifics. The descriptions of warfare are all generalized; Napoleon is referenced only as the fallen "master-power of strife" (225); and the school is only alluded to as a vague reason for Dartmoor to finally be able to celebrate in earnest. Hemans sees the move from "bloodletting," as Sweet calls it, to education as significant progress with the potential to remove Dartmoor's curse of barrenness:

Thou, whose sole records of existence mark
The scene of barbarous rites in ages dark,
And of some nameless combat; hope's bright eye
Beams o'er thee in the light of prophecy!
Yet shalt thou smile, by busy culture drest,
And the rich harvest wave upon my breast! (261-66)

By keeping the historical associations generalized, Hemans creates a poem and an agenda that operate on multiple levels. The lack of specific references makes the narrative feel more universal. Even though the poem is about Dartmoor and England, the fact that it is historically unattached allows the reader to apply Hemans's lessons about history and the

perception of history to a broader context. The bloodshed (both ritualistic and militaristic) is generalized and the recent progress is not pinned down to a specific source, which makes the poem feel more significant, reliable, and mythic. There is the potential with any institution/society to idealize and subsequently disregard the problematic elements, but there is also the chance, as Hemans's hopeful conclusion suggests, for the institution to recover from that problematic history.

Although *Dartmoor* is not often studied and in many ways could not be more different from Shelley's "Mask of Anarchy," understanding texts from the nineteenth century as historically situated myths with their own agendas allows us to read a poem as well-studied and overtly political as "Mask of Anarchy" with one like *Dartmoor*, noting similarities in their rhetorical structure that would otherwise go unnoticed because of their different forms and content. Both poems appropriate widely accepted myths in order to promote their own agendas and highlight the violence of the Peterloo era that Britain would rather go unexposed.

BYRON'S VISION OF JUDGMENT

Byron's *Vision of Judgment* is perhaps the best example of a Romantic mythmaker appropriating an existing myth in order to promote his/her own counter myth. Robert Southey could not have known—though perhaps he should have—when he published his *Vision of Judgement* in 1821 with its famous preface abusing Byron and the "Satanic School" exactly how masterfully and mercilessly Byron would exact his revenge. Southey even taunted Byron directly in his published "Letter to the Courier" on January 5, 1822: "One word of advice to Lord Byron before I conclude. When he attacks me again, let it be in rhyme" (qtd. in Fuess 191). Unbeknownst to Southey, Byron had already submitted his

rejoinder—a harsh revision of Southey's myth, expressed in the best ottava rima Byron would use—to John Murray three months before. Murray delayed the publication until Byron finally requested in July 1822 that Murray pass the poem over to John Hunt, who printed it in the first issue of *The Liberal*. As Claude Fuess explains, the punishment Hunt suffered as a result of publishing Byron's *Vision* justify Murray's hesitancy: John Hunt was prosecuted by the Constitutional Association, and on July 19, 1824, only three days after Byron's body had been buried in the church of Hucknull Torkard, was convicted, fined one hundred pounds, and compelled to enter into securities for five years" (192). Such was the power of Byron's *Vision*.

Fuess goes on to explain that Byron had at least four objectives in writing the poem:

He wished to ridicule Southey's poem by burlesquing many of its absurd elements; he aimed to proceed more directly against Southey by exposing the weak points in his character and career; he desired to present a true picture of George III in contrast to Southey's idealized portrait; and he intended to make a general indictment of all illiberal government and particularly of the policy then being pursued by the English Tory party. (192)

For each of these agendas, Byron includes elements from Southey's poem but parodies them in a grotesque inversion of the original's grandiose register: "Through a style purposely grotesque and colloquial, he turned Southey's pompous rhetoric into absurdity; by touches of realism and caricature he made solemn angels and demons laughable" (Fuess 192). Byron's *Vision of Judgment* is the quintessential example of turning an existing myth on its head in order to expose it as a myth and promote an opposing agenda. Byron even places Southey within his poem in order to diminish the Poet Laureate's credibility and to create a counter narrative that both accounts for Southey's version of events and entirely perverts it.

Byron's *Vision* is significantly shorter than Southey's and to great effect. Whereas Southey's epic buries itself in self-indulgent and moralizing musings, Byron's focuses on revising only a small portion of the original and does so in a narrative full of action and dialogue. Byron's poem begins with survey of Heaven in which the angels have nothing to do because—as we discover later—the world has grown so bad, there is nothing heaven or hell can do to make it better or worse (324-28). The only heavenly beings with anything to do are the “recording angel” and his clerks who cannot document quickly enough the evils occurring on Earth:

Terrestrial business filled nought in the sky
Save the recoding angel's black bureau;
Who found, indeed, the facts to multiply
With such rapidity of vice and woe,
That he had stripped off both his wings in quills,
And yet was in arrear of human ills. (19-24)

Byron then jumps to heaven's gate where George III's death has not even garnered St. Peter's attention among the surplus of deaths occurring daily. Satan arrives and proceeds to argue with the Archangel Michael for the monarch's soul, calling several of the same historical witnesses Southey included in his poem. Byron's *Vision of Judgment* ends with Southey being hurled ungraciously back to earth and the King “slipping” into heaven's gates while no one is watching—a significant revision from the triumphant heavenly reception both figures receive in the original version.

Byron does very little to disguise his four-pronged agenda, which explains, at least in part, why John Hunt was punished for “calumniating the late king, and wounding the feelings of his present majesty” (qtd. in Wolfson 183). Byron did, however, refrain from including his name on the title page, and the multifacetedness of his objectives complicates the poem at least enough to somewhat disguise each individual agenda. A poem that sought

only to berate Southey would have been even more transparent than Byron's effort to mock Southey's poem, berate Southey more generally, re-establish King George III as the problematic monarch he was, and criticize Tory politics and leaders in general. Each of Byron's agendas is, essentially, disguised in part by another agenda.

The mythopoeic strategy Byron uses the most extensively in the poem is the extra-textual significance he ascribes to the narrative by means of literary, historical, and religious associations. He largely relies on the same religious associations and mythography as Southey. Paradoxically, Byron increases the poetic gravitas of his *Vision* by means of his colloquial, almost comical tone. Although most myths elevate themselves by adopting a grandiose tone or form (as Southey did), Byron's manages to achieve the same effect through the opposite means. He uses informal language despite the "lofty" subject matter and in doing so situates his poem within a larger formal tradition of satire and travesty. Emrys Jones explains in "Byron's Visions of Judgment," that Byron was prompted to compose his *Vision* in response to Southey but that the poem's form, style, and tone are greatly influenced by the ancient satires *Julius Exclusus* by Erasmus and *Apocolocyntosis* (also known as *The Apotheosis of Claudius*), believed to be by the younger Seneca. Juxtaposing the high content with low language, Byron not only draws attention to Southey's arrogance and the overwrought nature of his *Vision* but also places himself in a long-standing literary tradition (just as Southey attempted to place his poem in the larger line of religious epics). Frederick L. Beaty explains the inverse effects of Southey and Byron's registers:

Whereas Southey treated it [George's judgment] with extraordinary solemnity, Byron reduced the event to a mundane legal procedure. Southey had employed language so formal so as to suggest a religious epic...Byron, on the other hand, even when alluding to scripture, employed the technique of

low burlesque in resorting to language so colloquial as to deflate the situation and undermine Southey's cant. (186)

The directness and accessibility that would ordinarily diminish the "literariness" of a poem are executed in *The Vision of Judgment* with uncannily precise wit, a feat made all the more impressive when one considers how Southey labored to make his poem read like a proper epic:

And this is not a theologic tract
To prove with Hebrew and with Arabic
If Job be allegory or fact,
But a true narrative; and thus I pick
From out the whole but such an act
As sets aside the slightest thought of trick.
'Tis every tittle true, beyond suspicion,
And accurate as any other vision. (265-72)

Byron also adds a historical significance to the poem by means of several references to historical figures who also appear in Southey's version. He alludes to the beheading and subsequent (fictional, of course) martyrdom of Louis XVI, establishing heaven as a place that overthrows "whatever has been wisely done below" (168). The two main historical figures Byron focuses on are John Wilkes, a political radical who was expelled from the House of Commons and driven into exile after an attack on George III in his periodical *The North Briton*, and Junius, the pseudonym of a still unidentified author who attacked George III and his supporters in a series of letters from 1769-1771. Wilkes's ghost, however, will not testify against the King because he does not harbor the hostility in death that he did in life, and Junius will not speak out against George because he feels his letters have done enough damage to George III. Byron's historical associations, rather than lending authority and credibility to his narrative (by making fiction seem factual) as they would in a

traditional myth, serve primarily to explain the strange and unfortunate circumstances that could possibly lead to George III being allowed into heaven in Southey's poem.

The poem's prominent religious figures include St. Peter, the heavenly gatekeeper; Michael, the lawyer-like representative of heaven's interests; and Satan, Michael's hellish counterpart. Byron was particularly irritated by Southey's conflation of religion/morality with history and subsequently uses the poet's own celestial system against him. The same angels and saints who happily welcome George III into their company in *A Vision of Judgement* reject not only George but Southey himself in Byron's version. St. Peter vehemently claims, "Sooner will I with Cerberus exchange / My office (and his is no sinecure) / Than see this royal Bedlam bigot range / The azure fields of heaven, of that be sure!" (393-96). Additionally, Southey—who appears late in the poem and recites lines from his own *Vision*—is insulted by this supernatural company. Before the angels, demons, and ghosts are run off by Southey's bad poetry, Michael quotes Horace's *Art of Poetry*, "mediocrity in poets has never been tolerated by either men, or gods, or booksellers."⁴⁵ Most mythmakers use religious and historical associations to add authority and credibility to their myth (which is what Southey does), but Byron's maneuver has the added benefit of mocking Southey. By undermining the poet who attempted to undermine him, Byron boosts his own credibility as a mythmaker. Although Byron's *Vision* contains references to Biblical characters, it is generally free of specific mythographic references to the Bible. Byron does, however, make several classical allusions, uniting in the same poem a heaven guarded by St. Peter and a hell protected by Charon and Cerberus. This combination of

⁴⁵ Translation provided by *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* Volume D, edited by Deidre Shauna Lynch and Jack Stillinger.

mythologies simultaneously gives the poem a Miltonic feel (a poetic and political association Byron certainly would not have minded) and places Christianity on the same plane as paganism (thereby demoting the religion Southey attempted to use as a moralizer to just another world mythology).

One of the most significant ways in which Byron's *Vision of Judgment* succeeds where Southey's fails is his elimination of particulars, which creates more universal and symbolic figures and events. On the one hand, elevating a historically situated narrative to mythic status necessitates a certain amount of generalizing to keep the narrative from being tied to a particular time or event. In this regard, Byron's characters are similar to Southey's: each author portrays them as larger-than-life and only focuses on the (sometimes invented) aspects of their character that promote his agenda. Beaty explains, "Even Michael and Satan are reduced from the role of cosmic Manichean duelists to the level of lawyers quibbling over their case" (192). The full story behind Michael and Satan's rivalry and their roles in the War in Heaven is not relevant to George's judgment, so Byron uses the characters simply as symbolic representatives of their respective realms. On the other hand, Byron avoids Southey's misstep of oversimplifying and overgeneralizing his characters. Byron simplifies character's *roles* in the poem, but even Satan and Michael still feel like complex characters in general: "Southey's characters were stamped out with allegorical simplicity (evil Whigs; good Tories; and reformed revolutionaries). Byron rehabilitates Satan as a Byronic Whig—wry, satirical, and with more than a plausible claim on the monarch's soul for hell" (Wolfson 176). After laying out a scathing indictment of George III (which would seem to confirm both Satan's desire for the monarch's soul and George's place in hell), Satan admits:

I can have fifty better souls than this
With far less trouble than we have gone through
Already, and I merely argued his
Late Majesty of Britain's case with you
Upon a point of form. (507-11)

Byron's Satan is neither a personification of evil nor singularly focused, as one might expect, on acquiring George's soul. Byron's Satan is lighthearted at times, acknowledging his less than sincere motives, but also frustrated at others, such as when Wilkes and Junius refuse to testify. On the whole, Satan (along with the other figures in the poem) as a character does not suffer as a result of Byron's simplification of his role: "Whereas the Laureate had invested his characters with either angelic goodness or diabolical evil suggestive of absolute standards, Byron endowed his characters with practical, realistic ethics that at best implied moral relativism" (Beaty 186).

Similarly, instead of representing King George as an evil tyrant, Byron presents a more nuanced (yet still symbolic) character. The poet explains in stanza eight that the King was "no tyrant, [but] one / Who shielded tyrants" (58-59). Satan explains that even though George was not particularly evil or sinful, his incompetency as king resulted in one of the bloodiest reigns in history (345-52). As Beaty explains, there really is no appropriate place for the soul of George III, his earthly deeds having been not bad enough for hell and not good enough for heaven" (189). In one of the poem's strongest rhetorical moments, Satan summons as his witnesses against the king (none of whom end up testifying) the personifications of a number of countries, including England (John Bull), Ireland (Paddy), Scotland (the temperate Scot), France (the French ghost), the United States (Brother Jonathan), and "shades / From Otaheite's Isle to Salisbury Plain" (474-75). Byron uses

these personified generalizations of geographic/political entities to hint at specific fallings out and injustices without having to ground the poem in specific historical references. Even the reader who is not familiar with the specific conflicts and events implied by the presence of the personifications can understand Byron's suggestion that there are numerous countries with a bone to pick against the late King—from the rural plains of Southern England to the exotic colony of Tahiti.

The final mythopoeic strategy Byron employs is the articulation of "truths" that serve as alternative to the conservative version of events Southey describes in his *Vision of Judgment*. Although Byron uses the aforementioned mythopoeic strategies to work more subtly toward his agenda of offering more accurate representations of King George and of Southey, he also takes a more direct approach: "Because Southey claimed to have been chosen to experience the apocalyptic vision, which he strove to convey through ethereal imagery, Byron insisted that his 'true narrative' would recognize human limitations and draw 'comparisons from clay'" (Beatty 186). Byron wished to correct the public's estimation of King George, but correcting their estimation of Southey was equally important and a necessary first step in setting the overall record straight.

In *A Vision of Judgement*, Southey positions himself as a "son of muses" who is granted a vision of heaven that he is passing along to the masses. Southey's rhetoric in this opening section is obviously exaggerated, but even if he is not sincerely claiming to be divinely inspired, he is attempting to use that framework to place himself in the same literary company as authors such as Chaucer, Dante, and Milton. Among Byron's exaggerations in his own representation of Southey, there are several kernels of "truth" he wishes to replace Southey's narrative with. He brings the poet down to earth (literally) by

having both the angels and demons physically suffer and eventually flee upon hearing him recite his poetry:

Now the Bard, glad to have an audience, which
By no means often was his case below,
Began to cough, and hawk, and hem, and pitch
His voice into that awful note of woe...
Those grand heroics acted as a spell:
The angels stopp'd their ears and piled their pinions;
The devils ran howling, deafen'd down to hell;
The ghosts fled, gibbering, for their own dominions. (713-16, 817-20)

The most direct attack against Southey comes in stanzas 96-101 in which Byron highlights both the hypocrisy and arrogance of the Laureate. He explains how Southey, over the course of his career, went from condoning regicide to being a monarchist, from praising wars to condemning them, from insulting the art of literary reviews to becoming a reviewer himself. These inconsistencies culminate in the poem with Southey shamelessly flattering Satan and offering his services as a biographer and then immediately pandering to Michael when Satan declines (785-95). Finally, Byron mocks Southey's arrogance by having his version of Southey claim to be doing God's work for him: "I settle all these things by intuition, / Times present, past, to come, heaven, hell, and all, / Like King Alfonso, when I thus see double, / I save the Deity some worlds of trouble" (805-08).

Attacking Southey's poem and his character is one of Byron's agendas in his *Vision of Judgment*, but that motive also has the side effect of allowing Byron to more readily attack King George. With Southey's credibility severely undermined, the Laureate's grandiose claims about the King's virtues and innocence come into question, and Byron further destabilizes Southey's image of George III by having Satan himself attack his character and reign. Satan's indictment includes everything from the depravity of the officials he appointed to office to the blood on his hands from international and domestic conflicts to

England's (and all of Europe's) general decline over the course of George's reign. But what is even worse than this negative portrayal of the King is the mediocrity Byron goes on to associate with him. Although Byron's George does not belong in heaven, he is neither important nor evil enough for Satan to be invested in his place in hell. And when St. Peter is told that George III has died, he knows nothing of the man: "What George? What Third?" (139). Byron presents not only an incompetent king, in contrast to Southey's version, but a king whose life and legacy are so wholly uninspiring that he is of no concern to the celestial powers—not even the heavenly ones that, according to Southey's Christianity, care for everyone.

Algernon Swinburne referred in 1866 to "the funeral and the fate of George III" as "a matter so worthy of brief contempt and long oblivion" and claims that *The Vision of Judgment* "stands alone, not in Byron's work only, but in the work of the world" (252). But if Byron's poem succeeded in demoting George's legacy "to mere footnotes" as Susan Wolfson puts it ("Vision" 184), it had the opposite effect on Southey's reputation. Geoffrey Carnall argues that "Southey's reputation has never recovered from Byron's ridicule" (para. 26).

Whether by appropriating a specific word, an ideology, or a whole poem, poets Shelley, Hemans, and Byron demonstrate how myths can not only promote individual agendas but also highlight the weaknesses of opposing myths and propaganda and expose the true agenda underneath. Myths succeed by presenting a historically situated narrative as something politically neutral and innocuous, and when the underlying agenda is exposed, the illusion falls apart. Shelley exposes the hypocrisy of the conservative press' threats of "anarchy;" Hemans draws attention to the hidden dark spots of England's myth

of national identity; Byron exposes the numerous failings of the myths Southey attempted to circulate about King George III and about himself. I began this project with the assertion that the correlation between political upheaval and poetic productivity of England in 1819 was more than coincidence, a sentiment that bears reiterating here. Politics and poetics were invariably linked for the Romantics, and the post-Peterloo political climate not only prompted but arguably necessitated the direct and unapologetic literary responses represented by the poems in this chapter. The more the government attempted to suppress radical speech, the more radical the subsequent mythic responses became.

CONCLUSION SHELLEY, BYRON, AND GREECE

Once the post-Peterloo fireworks subsided, Shelley, who was still living in Italy, and Byron turned their attention to Greece. The Ottoman Empire had maintained control of Greece since the fall of the Byzantine Empire in the mid-1400s, and when the War of Greek Independence broke out in March of 1821, it was a matter of months before Shelley was contributing poetically and practically to the cause with his lyrical drama *Hellas*. Since Greece was the source of the mythology that pervaded so much of Romantic poetry, writing for and about it provided Shelley the opportunity to strengthen the potential power of his mythopoesis. Just as Felicia Hemans invokes Greece's status as the foundation of Western art and culture to argue that the Elgin Marbles will positively influence English society in *Modern Greece*, the Greek inspiration and content of *Hellas* gives Shelley's poem mythic associations even before his mythopoeic strategies come into play.

This transition from English to Greek politics is a logical one for Shelley, who claims in the preface to the lyrical drama *Hellas*, "We are all Greeks. Our laws, our literature, our religion, our arts have their root in Greece" (viii-ix). As Roderick Beaton explains, what Shelley means by "We are all Greeks" is that "we are all equally the inheritors of an idea that is not bounded by history but exists for all time...Greece is no longer fixed in a remote and unredeemable past. Greece, as an idea, has become an aspiration to be realized in the future" (87). As in Hemans's poem, Greece for Shelley is an abstract ideal for other societies to reach toward, which makes Greece's lack of liberty all the more troubling for the poet.

The Ottoman oppression of Greece is both a black mark on this archetypal society and, because “We are all Greeks,” a threat to liberty everywhere.

In October of 1821, Shelley completed *Hellas*, a loose revision of Aeschylus’s *Persians*, which recounts the Battle of Salamis in 480 B.C. Shelley’s drama replaces the ancient alliance of Greek city-states and invading Persians with their “descendants,” modern Greek revolutionaries and Ottoman oppressors. Shelley writes in the preface:

The Persae of Aeschylus afforded me the first model of my conception, although the decision of the glorious contest now waging in Greece being yet suspended forbids a catastrophe parallel to the return of Xerxes and the desolation of the Persians. I have, therefore, contented myself with exhibiting a series of lyric pictures ... [suggesting] the final triumph of the Greek cause as a portion of the cause of civilization and social improvement. (vii-viii)

On the one hand, *Hellas* is a specific and purposeful attempt on Shelley’s part to draw attention and support to Greece’s struggle for independence. Shelley even stresses to publisher Charles Ollier in a November 1821 letter the importance of its timely publication: “What little interest this poem may ever excite, depends upon its immediate publication” (*LPBS* 2.365). On the other hand, there is without a doubt a larger commentary in the poem regarding the cyclical nature of history in which Greece’s revolution operates as a template for the progress to which any and all societies can aspire. Earl Wasserman claims, “only in a nearly trivial way is *Hellas* a propagandistic call to rally to the Greek cause; in its true scope, it centers upon the Greek revolution to validate Shelley’s confidence in an imminent and ineluctable universal transformation” (*Shelley* 375). Wasserman is correct in his recognition of Greece’s role within a grander “scope,” but he dismisses too easily Shelley’s investment in affecting the historical moment of Greece in 1821. In fact, I would argue that the “true scope” Wasserman cites of “transform[ing] merely temporal events into an

eternal truth" (376) is actually a mythopoeic strategy Shelley employs to promote his "propagandistic" goal of garnering support for the Greek revolution.

I do not wish to restrict the relevance of *Hellas* to 1821 or suggest that Shelley did not imagine the poem as a significant piece of literature outside of that particular historical moment, only that its composition, like that of Hemans's *Modern Greece* and Southey's *Vision of Judgement*, was prompted by contemporary events that remain foregrounded in the poem. Mark Kipperman's response to Wasserman in "History and Ideality: The Politics of Shelley's 'Hellas'" also refers to Shelley's Greek agenda as "propaganda" but propaganda that the rest of the poem is working to promote:

Shelley's *Hellas* aligns itself with the historical moment of insurgency in 1821, in Spain, Naples, and among the Westernized Greeks, against the Holy Alliance and for constitutional nationhood...And, as with all good revolutionary propaganda, *Hellas* associates this progressive movement with the utopian evolution of mankind in general. (148)

If universalizing a historically situated agenda is the overall purpose of mythopoesis, Shelley uses several specific rhetorical strategies in order to accomplish this process, including 1) increasing the historical significance of Greece's revolution by placing it within a cycle that includes all times, places, and people, 2) relying on the historical and mythological associations of Aeschylus's narrative and the figure of the Wandering Jew to lend credibility to Shelley's version of events, and 3) using supernatural elements such as prophets and dreams to promote the subjective truth that the Greek victory is both necessary and inevitable.

Shelley adapts Aeschylus's ancient drama to the mental theatre that Shelley and Byron utilized in texts such as *Prometheus Unbound*, *The Cenci*, and *Manfred*. Most of the poem's "action" takes place in the palace of the Turkish King, Mahmud, and consists of him

receiving reports of his army's victories. Despite the encouraging news he continues to receive, however, Mahmud is plagued by unsettling dreams, which he enlists the help of Ahasuerus, the Wandering Jew, to interpret. With Ahasuerus's help, Mahmud eventually comes to understand that the Greeks will prevail, and while the reader experiences this turn of events from the perspective of Mahmud and his court, Shelley also provides a lens through which to witness the shift in Greek morale: a chorus of Greek citizens whose outlook evolves over the course of the drama from dismayed to prophetically optimistic.

The chorus is primarily responsible for explaining Greece's place within the larger cycle of human history and, subsequently, elevating the significance of the fictional and actual Greek war for independence. As the chorus explains shortly before Ahasuerus arrives:

Greece and her foundations are
Built below the tide of war,
Based on the chrystalline 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. (696-703)

The plight of revolutionary and pre-revolutionary Greece serves as one iteration of a larger pattern in human history. The chorus establishes ancient Greece as the progenitor of Western civilization and in the poem's famous final passage, uses the larger cycle of oppression and liberation across human history to affirm the significance and inevitability of relief for the Greek people and to offer hope for a future that does not include violence and tyranny:

The world's great age begins anew,
The golden years return,
The earth doth like a snake renew

Her winter weeds outworn:
Heaven smiles, and faiths and empires gleam,
Like wrecks of a dissolving dream...
Oh, cease! must hate and death return?
Cease! must men kill and die?
Cease! drain not to its dregs the urn
Of bitter prophecy.
The world is weary of the past,
Oh, might it die or rest at last! (1060-1101)

Greece's role within the poem as a manifestation of a universal pattern of human experience lends gravitas to Shelley's agenda because Greece's contemporary political climate becomes representative of an eternal truth that is relevant to everyone regardless of their prior investment in Greek politics.

Shelley also uses two sets of historical/mythological narratives to lend credibility to and establish a "historical" precedent for Greece's right to independence. Aeschylus's *Persians* already succeeds in dramatizing the historical Battle of Salamis as a myth, and Shelley's modernization of that account relies on both preexisting historical and literary narratives in order to make his version of events seem more credible. Modeling the modern conflict between the Greek alliance and the Ottoman Empire on the ancient conflict between Greece and Persia simultaneously encourages cooperation between factionalist Greeks, establishes the War of Greek Independence as the continuation of an ancient conflict, and uses historical precedent to justify Shelley's argument that Greece must and will emerge victorious. Similarly, Shelley uses the figure of the Wandering Jew, who also appears in *Queen Mab*, as a prophet and mouthpiece. As William Ulmer explains in "Hellas and the Historical Uncanny:" "As his prophetic mantle implies, Ahasuerus serves Shelley as a poet-figure. He is a sage learned in dream, the visionary philosopher whose inspired language...bestows glimpses of truth on other characters" (612). Shelley uses the already

mythic figure of Ahasuerus—a “life of unconsumed thought which pierces / The present, and the past, and the to-come” (147-48) to express in more authoritative and universal terms the poet’s desire to see Greece gain its independence.

Finally, Shelley uses Mahmud’s dreams and Ahasuerus’s prophet-like ability to interpret them to make his version of the truth seem objectively accurate. Although messengers are still bringing word of Turkish victories, Mahmud’s dreams and the subsequent prophecies that result from Ahasuerus’s explanation of them lead the king to the realization that, even with fighting left to be done, Greece has won the war. Dreams—and dream visions in particular—have historically been used by authors as a means of deflecting accountability for controversial content and granting divine corroboration for subjective statements. The dreams and prophecies in *Hellas* play just such a role, suggesting a supernatural and thereby indisputable source for Shelley’s claim that Greece can and will gain its independence. Ahasuerus foretells the predetermined and inevitable fall of the Ottoman Empire:

E’en on the height thou holdest,
Thou mayst now learn how the full tide of power
Ebbs to its depths. — Inheritor of glory,
Conceived in darkness, born in blood, and nourished
With tears and toil, thou seest the mortal throes
Of that whose birth was but the same. The Past
Now stands before thee like an Incarnation
Of the To-come; yet wouldst thou commune with
That portion of thyself which was ere thou
Didst start for this brief race whose crown is death. (844-56)

This destiny for Mahmud and the Turks is part of the universal cycle of which Greece is also an example. By elevating the significance of Greece’s fight for independence, establishing a historical precedent for its liberation via mythography, and relying on dreams and prophecies to increase the credibility of his own version of history, Shelley creates a poem

that not only encourages the idea of an “enduring principle of liberation existing potentially within each moment” (Kipperman 159) but also uses that idea to universalize the historically situated politics of Greece in 1821.

In addition to using *Hellas* to garner attention and support for Greek independence, Shelley also had the more concrete goal of using the lyrical drama to raise money for the Greek cause, a practicality Byron would continue when he joined the Greek war effort two years later. Byron arrived in Greece in August of 1823 and died there in April of the following year, composing very little poetry in that time but contributing to the war effort in a number of significant ways. Upon arriving in Greece (with a cargo hold full of medical supplies he purchased for the Greek army with his own money), Byron befriended Greek aristocrat—and future Prime Minister—Alexandros Mavrokordatos, whom Shelley had met in Pisa in early 1821 and to whom he dedicated *Hellas*. Over the next eight months, Byron would, despite having no military experience or training, be invited to war councils, consulted for political strategy, and even commissioned by Mavrokordatos to lead an expedition against the Turkish-held fortress of Lepanto. Byron would also, in that time, agree to loan thousands of pounds (a transaction that would be completed shortly after his death) to the Greek political leaders, attract significant foreign publicity and support for the revolutionary cause, and act as a symbol of Hope for Greek citizens and soldiers.

Byron’s audacious personality, lavish lifestyle, general disregard for rules, and unapologetic poetic and political statements had already made him an icon of infamy before his final journey to Greece. His self-fashioned “Napoleonic” exile from England in 1816 and his triumphant return to the mythical setting of Greece, which he and his semi-autobiographical poetic persona, Childe Harold, had already visited more than ten years

before, combine to create an image of Byron as his own Greek myth. Malcom Kelsall, dismisses Byron's "self-fashioning" and "myth-building" as attempts to compensate for the "utter failure, in the real world" of Byron's political endeavors (50), and while whether or not "utter failure" is a fair representation of the poet's political career is up for debate, Kelsall is not wrong about Byron's tendency to mythologize himself via comparisons to historic, literary, and/or mythic figures. Byron admired and idealized Napoleon for much of his poetic career and made a conscious effort as he exiled himself from England to cast himself as another Napoleon. Kelsall explains:

His post-Waterloo departure into "exile" (provoked in fact by debts and sexual scandal) was marked by his commissioning of a replica of Napoleon's own coach in which Byron embarked on Childe Harold's second European tour (of necessity avoiding France). It was an analogy he was to develop later by signing his letters N[oel] B[yron] and by his claim to be the "grand Napoleon of the realms of rhyme." (50-51)

Byron first visited Greece in 1809 on the grand tour that would inspire the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, but Byron revived the semi-autobiographical Childe Harold when he departed from England for the last time, taking the character on a second European tour that mirrored Byron's own from 1816-1818. Although the fourth and final canto had been published by the time Byron returned to Greece in 1823, the poet's travels over the course of his life had been so in line with those of Childe Harold, Byron's arrival in Greece can almost be interpreted as a return of Harold himself.

Adding to the pomp and myth of Byron's exile was his insistence on the parallels between himself and Napoleon. As Kelsall notes, Byron likened himself to Napoleon by means calling himself the Napoleon of rhyme, commissioning a replica of Napoleon's coach, and signing his name "N.B." from 1822 until his death (in order to gain his inheritance after the death of his mother-in-law, Byron was required to take her surname, making him "Noel

Byron”). Through his own self-fashioning and myth-building, Byron constructed a colossal myth of himself as poet, victim, wanderer, and revolutionary, a feat he accomplished by combining the poetic myth of Childe Harold, the historical myth of Napoleon, and his relocation and significant contributions to the mythic topos of Greece.

In February of 1824, just before he could command his siege against Lepanto, Byron fell ill and by April had succumbed to a fever that was worsened by the bloodletting intended to cure it. Despite his relatively short time in Greece and the fact that the war would continue for another eight years after his death, Byron became a national hero and a myth for the soon-to-be nation of Greece. Byron is fondly remembered in Greece as having died “fighting” for the country’s independence, so much so that biographer Fiona MacCarthy hypothesizes that Byron, had he lived, “might have been proclaimed king of Greece” (“Lord Byron”). Traces of Byron’s legacy can still be found all over Greece with streets, museums, and people bearing the Greek variant of his name, Vyron. One of Athens’s largest suburbs is called Vyronas in honor of the poet and features a monument to the hero. Immediately following his death, Byron’s body was embalmed in Greece before being returned to England, but there are rumors that Greece could not bear to part with him entirely and that Byron’s heart remains in his final living home of Missolonghi. Additionally, the King of Greece sent a slab of Grecian marble to be laid over Byron’s grave, which is housed in the church of St. Mary Magdalene in Nottinghamshire since Westminster Abbey refused to house his remains for moral reasons. The myths surrounding Byron’s life—from housing a pet bear at Trinity College to his incestuous romance with half-sister Augusta Leigh—did not stop with his exile or his death. In his home country, the myth of Byron is

that he was “mad, bad, and dangerous to know” while in Greece he was and remains a national hero.

As Edmund Burke laments the passing of “the glory of Europe” in his *Reflections*, he observes, “never more shall we behold that generous loyalty to rank and sex, that proud submission, that dignified obedience, that subordination of the heart, which kept alive...the spirit of an exalted freedom” (467). But Europe would, in fact, behold “the spirit of exalted freedom” again—in the form of Byron, the bear-owning, incest-practicing, rabble-rousing profligate. Burke could not have guessed in 1790 when he published his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* that the mythopoeic strategies he established in that treatise would become staples of Romantic rhetoric, and he certainly would not be pleased to know that those same strategies would eventually contribute to the construction of Byron as a national hero of mythic proportions.

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