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Anatomy of an Ode: Shelley and the Sonnet Tradition

THERE ARE good reasons why the generic questions raised by the "Ode to the West Wind" have hardly been essential to Shelley criticism. The decisive one is that the very notion of genre has become controversial for an increasing number of contemporary scholars, who consider studies in traditional poetics obsolete. In the early nineteenth century, however, most writers, not only in England but also on the continent, still respected crustacean literary species; toward the end of the same century, and especially after the publication of Croce's *Estetica*, they were often inclined to distrust and neglect strict prosodic patterns. "Free Inspiration" and "The Muses Unbound" were among their slogans. Shelley still belonged to the generation concerned with fixed forms, although to him such forms were not frozen: organisms living in the shelter of similar shells, he realized, may enjoy remarkable flexibility as far as their economy and even their ecology are concerned. In studying the literary anatomy of the "Ode," the critic must remember contexts: that of the author's own writings and of English literature on the one hand, and on the other hand, that of European letters. The latter aspect will be emphasized here: if we are to understand better Shelley's work in general and his "Ode" in particular, we must consider them in their international framework.[1]

[1] A comparative approach to Shelley has been taken incidentally in various studies, but the emphasis, by and large, has been on Shelley's role in English literature. See Neville Rogers, *Shelley at Work: A Critical Inquiry* (Oxford, 1956), and his "Shelley and the West Wind" (*The London Magazine*, 3, 6, 1956, pp. 56-68); James Rieger, *The Mutiny Within: The Heresies of Percy Bysshe Schelley* (New York, 1968), esp. Ch. vi, "Orpheus and the West Wind"; Ben L. Collins' note, "The Stanzaic Pattern of Shelley's Ode to the West Wind" (*KSJ*, 19, 1970,

Each of the five stanzas of the "Ode" is divided into four tercets and a couplet. The rhyme scheme is that of the *Divina commedia*, except that Dante did not use a distich to end his cantos. He understood that one verse was sufficient for echoing the middle rhyme left in suspense in the last tercet: thus he created and practiced the classical terza rima *aba bcb cdc . . . yzy z*. The fourteenth line of his stanzas seems to be Shelley's rabbit in the hat: with a sleight of hand he transforms four terza rima tercets into a sonnet, pulling from his sleeve a Shakespearean couplet instead of a Dantesque end-line and thus metamorphosing five terza rima poems into a kind of coronet. Obviously, we will need to show that terza rima is a valid rhyme arrangement for the sonnet and that Shelley, by using it, is a poet familiar with the fundamentals of the genre, rather than a prestidigitator amazing his spectators. One critic has stated that each of the five terza rima strophes shows "the strength and compactness of a sonnet," while another one asserts that "Shelley's use of terza rima accounts in large part for the fact that none of the five stanzas of the Ode reads like a sonnet."[2]

We must also ask the question, What more do we know about a poem by putting its title under a new rubric, that is, by saying or proving that the "Ode to the West Wind" is not only an ode but also a short sonnet cycle? The answer is that the acknowledgment and recognition of the genre or genres to which a literary work belongs may modify the reader's understanding and interpretation. The identification of the categories in which a masterpiece may be placed determines, to some degree, the mood in which the audience listens or should listen. While a classification cannot modify intrinsic values, it may reveal some concealed artistic qualities, lead to deeper insight, and thus grant a fuller enjoyment of the work. Horace's "*utile*" blends better with his "*dulce*" when a text is read in unison with its creator. Therefore the question arises: was Shelley aware, while calling his poem an ode, that he was at the same time experimenting in another genre? Or may his case be summarized by a slightly altered quotation from Austin Dobson's "Rose-Leaves": "I intended an Ode / And it turned to five Sonnets"?[3] In fact, Shelley did write an ode, but he knew better than some of his critics that a poem may at one and the same time belong to several

pp. 7-8); Helen E. Haworth, "'Ode to the West Wind' and the Sonnet Form" (*KSJ*, 20, 1971, pp. 71-77); *Shelley: Shorter Poems and Lyrics*, ed. Patrick Swinden (London, 1976). Several scholars, among them Helen Rossetti Angeli, Maria Luisa Giartosio de Courten, Nicolò Mustacchia, and Jean de Palacio, have studied Shelley's relationship with Italy, her culture, the contacts he maintained and his travels in the country.

[2] Rogers, "Shelley and the West Wind," p. 66, and Swinden, p. 233 (in his chapter "Shelley's Use of Terza Rima").

[3] *The Complete Poetical Works* (London, 1923), p. 324, Section "Urceus Exit." Dobson's text has "a sonnet."

literary species. He was conscious not only of the aesthetic but also of the technical characteristics of his poem. One of the most striking of those technical characteristics is the reduction of generic ambiguity into poetic unity.

Shelley's thoughts are deeply rooted in antiquity. To understand the complexities of his genius, his readers must be classicists. Already some of his earliest works reveal his fascination for Aeschylus' and Homer's Greece; he translated a few *Dialogues* of Plato, and his last drama was *Hellas* (1821). Poetical, sentimental, and political motivations joined in developing, from André Chénier to Novalis and Byron, the philhellenism that marked some of the most distinguished pre-Romantics and Romantics all over Europe. In 1772 the twenty-three-year-old Goethe wrote to Herder: "Ich wohne jetzt in Pindar."[4] One year later his drama *Götz von Berlichingen* appeared, announcing "Sturm und Drang." How does one reconcile the two trends? The study of romanticism must include a chapter on the "classicisme des romantiques."[5] Shelley not only adopted ancient forms into which he would pour modern substance, he also revised and renewed them. Out of five sonnets—if we may once more beg the question—he made a poem which belongs to a venerable tradition, the ode. The theme of the "Ode" and also the key in which it is composed—with some reservations concerning the last two stanzas—fit perfectly with the genre he chose.

Another question: is Shelley's "Ode" in the Pindaric or the Horatian tradition? At first glance it reveals all the major traits of the Roman type. Its linear sequence of structurally identical stanzas leads to the triumphal hope: "If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?"[6] The "Ode," however, offers characteristics of the Greek type as well. The first three stanzas together constitute the Pindaric strophe: the leaf, the cloud, and the wave join in shaping the central idea: the earthly, "a-theological" notion of the infinite does not come from scholastic philosophy. The leaf, the cloud, and the wave symbolize the transient: the leaf, which belongs to the earth; the cloud, which is air; and the

[4] "I am presently dwelling in Pindar" (*Der junge Goethe*, ed. Hanna Fischer-Lamberg, Berlin and New York, 1963-72, II, 255). The editor dates the letter "Wetzlar, etwa 10. Juli 1772."

[5] I refer to Pierre Moreau, *Le Classicisme des romantiques* (Paris, 1932). On October 20, 1921, Shelley wrote to T. J. Hogg: "I have employed Greek in large doses, & I consider it the only sure remedy for diseases of the mind. I read the tragedians, Homer, & Plato perpetually, & have translated the Symposium, the Ion, & part of the Phaedo" (*New Shelley Letters*, ed. W. S. Scott, New Haven, Conn., 1949, p. 131).

[6] The line seems to answer the only formal question we find in Keats's ode "To Autumn," written one month before Shelley's "Ode": "Where are the songs of Spring? Aye, where are they?"

water of the sea.[7] The three inseparable elements mingle in the first three sonnets. The fourth element, however, although mentioned in passing at the end of the second stanza, finds its function only in the remaining two. The wind will scatter Shelley's fiery word "as from an unextinguished hearth / Ashes and sparks" (lines 66-67). The fire Shelley refers to is not to be found in the physical world but in the creator's, in the poet's soul. Thus the "Ode" is thematically divided into two contrasting parts. In the second, the reader may recognize a kind of epode rather than an antistrophe. The Pindaric ode, triadic in essence, has been truncated.

Still other considerations may be significant. In Shelley's bipartite poem, the opposition between the first three stanzas and the last two conforms to the basic principles underlying the structure of the sonnet. In the second part of the "Ode," Shelley endows the anonymous third-person singer of the first part with a personality, his own: "If I were a dead leaf thou mightest bear" (line 43). Such a sharp contrast is characteristic of the sonnet, not of the classical ode in which the author remains invisible or has only a marginal, rhetorical function. No ancient poet would ever think of an "Ode to myself." Nothing like "My heart aches" or "If I were a dead leaf" can be found, either in Pindar or in Horace, though their carmina—called "odes" only by later commentators—do not always treat the dignified topics one might expect. Such sighs and dreams belong to Keats and Shelley and to their generation. For critics who choose to ignore the historical evolution of literary species, neither the "West Wind" nor the "Nightingale" is an ode. By the same token, however, these critics must argue that the stanzas in question are not sonnets. But let us take Virgil's advice: "Non ragionam di lor, ma guarda e passa."

These introductory remarks lead back to the main questions which they should help to answer: are the five stanzas really sonnets? Was their author aware that in writing them he was actually composing sonnets?

The nominalistic answer to the first question is no. The use of the terza rima pattern seems to be irreconcilable not only with the English sonnet tradition but also with the history of the sonnet in the Western

[7] The motif of the leaf was to be particularly popular among the French Romantics. Hugo wrote a collection of poems, *Les Feuilles d'automne* (1831) and Lamartine, comparing himself to "une feuille morte" a few years earlier (1818), conjures the wind in the last line of "L'Isolement": "Emportez-moi comme elle, orageux aquilons!" which announces Shelley's (1819): "Oh! lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!" (line 53).

world. There are indeed very few examples of sonnets which prefigure or follow Shelley's rhyme scheme. But if we consider the essential qualities that characterize a sonnet, if we analyze the "differentia specifica," allowing the reader to identify it among and distinguish it from other kinds of poems, the answer is yes.

The history of the sonnet as a literary genre or species is complicated. The archetypes were written at the court of Frederick II in Palermo during the second quarter of the thirteenth century. They suggest many different avenues for further developments. No definite rhyme arrangements can be seen in these early samples. How did the invention come about? The importance of troubadour and Arabic influences, on the one hand, and on the other, the roles of the *tenzone* and of the *strambotto* in the development of the new form are still debatable. Clearly the crystallization of the genre took place in Tuscany, under the leadership of Dante and especially of Petrarch, who bears the main responsibility for its fortune in European letters; yet Petrarchism is a philosophy of sighing and love rather than a doctrine of rhythm and rhyme.

At no time was there consensus on the length of the sonnet line, although the overwhelming majority of the samples that figure in the international sonnetarium are written in the most stately verses the diverse national prosodies have to offer. Technically,

I
Through
Blue
Sky
Fly
To
You.
Why?

Sweet
Love
Feet
Move
So
Slow.

is a sonnet. But Frank Sidgwick (1879-1939), in this message of an "Astronaut to his Lady," intends to be only a *poeta ludens* or *volans* rather than a *poeta canens*. Nor has general agreement ever been reached on a far more important issue: is there a standard rhyme scheme which corresponds to the internal, thematic division of the poem? Here we are moving directly into *medias res*. The question is: might the terza rima pattern, among scores of other rhyme arrangements, be acceptable to the Sonnet Muse? Should we deny that the

stanzas of the "Ode to the West Wind" may be considered sonnets because of the unusual, if not unique, accords and harmonies they convey to a sensitive ear?

The answers to these questions must be based upon our knowledge of the European sonnet tradition. Petrarch illustrated the genre with over three hundred models—more than three times the number Dante wrote—which show clearly that he did not recommend or prescribe a single, rigid form. While Petrarch's samples illustrate the validity of various patterns, without constituting an exhaustive inventory for all time, they do establish the essential generic rules. Petrarch intended that the sonnet comprise fourteen lines, as did his ancestor Jacopo da Lentino, the official founder of the more than seven-centuries-old dynasty of sonneteers. These fourteen lines must be divided into two distinct portions which form two groups or systems of equal weight but unequal length. Practically speaking, in all Romance literatures these systems consist of two stanzas, one of eight and the other of six verses, which may be subdivided into two quatrains and two tercets respectively. The rhymes and rhyme scheme of the second system should be different from those of the first. Thus the first system of the Petrarchan sonnet consists of eight lines with either alternate rhymes (Sicilian octave) or enclosing rhymes (Italian octave). Only two rhymes can be used here, while in the sestet we find either two or three rhymes, although two patterns are predominant: *cde cde* and *cdc dcd*. The latter scheme approaches terza rima. It might actually be considered a terza rima ending (*cdc d*) complemented by two more lines (*cd*) than necessary to stop Dante's perpetuum mobile and thus representing a "terza rima caudata," so to speak.

The Spenserian and Shakespearean sonnets, often somewhat disparagingly called quatorzains, follow the basic rule exemplified by Petrarch, the rule of dualism or bipolarity. Instead of dividing the fourteen lines into two quatrains and two tercets, the poet chooses to write three quatrains and a couplet. Some critics would protest, "Quo vadis, Sonette?" However, both the Italian and the English techniques, intended as they are to enhance the aesthetic effect of the poem, can do so only if their musical structure, including first, the rhymes, but also other sound devices, like alliteration and assonance, corresponds to the thematic structure. The sonnet is not an isomorphic poem: its two parts are heard as two distinct voices, which serve to mark either a logical or a psychological division of the topic. One system serves as a frame, the other as a portrait; one poses a question, the other gives the answer; here one expresses an idea, there one triggers an emotion. The general is followed by the particular, an exposition by a lesson,

a theory by an application, a premise by a conclusion, or a fact by its explanation. Clearly these and similar pairings correspond to one of the basic epistemological patterns of man, a circumstance that led the sonnet to its triumph and seems to warrant its immortality.

There is, however, a noticeable difference between the space Petrarch gives his second system and that which Spenser and Shakespeare grant theirs. This difference has both aesthetic implications and practical consequences. In replacing a sestet with a couplet—the four other lines being integrated into the first system—the two English poets, along with their predecessors such as Surrey and Gascoigne, and their disciples such as Daniel and Drayton, drastically restrict the original and natural function of the second system and yield to Petrarch an advantage of balance and harmony which accounts for the overwhelming victory, at least in continental poetry, of the Italian sonnet over the English. Shelley most admirably illustrated that his sonnets and those of his countrymen are not, however, rigidly stereotyped. In Shelley's "Ode" four tercets instead of three quatrains counterbalance the couplet. Whether Shakespeare would have approved of Shelley's variation should be treated in a dialogue of the dead rather than here. We should note that Shelley adopted the typographical subdivisions of the *Divina commedia* as they appeared in the editions he knew. In thirteenth-century Italy or in sixteenth-century England copyists and printers often reproduced sonnets as compact stanzas: the reader's mind, rather than his eyes, recognized in the first system either a douzain or an octave.

Many sonneteers have shown that the Petrarchan patterns may be used flexibly. Shelley remains a key witness to the fact that the Elizabethan variant, too, is subject to change within the limits of its accidentals, which are the accidentals of the sonnet itself, namely the rhyme schemes, the number of rhymes, and the internal division of the systems. Theoreticians do not always distinguish these accidentals from the essentials, which consist of a combined thematic and acoustic contrast between two groups of lines of unequal length, fourteen in all. Théophile Gautier, who may be considered the leader of the intolerant critics, advocates a certain Romance form, obviously the French one, to the exclusion of all others. In the introduction to his edition of *Les Fleurs du mal* he suggests that Baudelaire, who thought that one third of his poetical work consisted of sonnets despite their very personal rhyme patterns, in fact wrote only a few. For Gautier one must necessarily write sonnets like Ronsard's or "ne pas écrire de sonnets du tout." With this declaration Gautier seems to be whispering to Shakespeare: "You must either submit to the laws consecrated by Euripides and Sophocles or abstain from writing tragedies."

Many poets other than Shelley and Baudelaire imposed on the sonnet patterns of their own invention, some of them with high distinction. One of England's early sonneteers, Thomas Lodge, did not reason like Sidgwick, whose monosyllabic sonnet has already been quoted. He thought that since he was using for his "Love guides the roses of thy lips" a shorter verse than the one he had adopted for the other sonnets of the *Phillis* cycle, he should decrease the verbal loss by adding a quatrain. The rhyme arrangement could be Shakespeare's: *abab cdcd efef ghgh ii*. Almost three centuries later, Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote curtal sonnets which consist of a hendecastich subdivided into a sestet, a quatrain, and a final bisyllabic line—a sonnetomorphic poem, to be sure, interplay and contrast of two systems of thought and two rhyme patterns—a sonnet pattern, however, which does not lock into either Petrarch's or Shakespeare's orbit. Other poets chose original patterns while still complying with the basic rules. Thomas Lovell Beddoes, for instance, preferred a scheme which is at least as surprising, yet as valid, as Shelley's: *ababab cdcdcd ee*. Here the three Shakespearean quatrains are replaced by two sestets; Baudelaire—in "L'Invitation au voyage"—replaced them with four tercets, and so did Shelley. Beddoes' innovation, it seems, is an attempt to match Petrarch with Shakespeare: his final couplet contrasts with the alternating rhymes of the douzain, two sixains with two rhymes replacing the classical two-rhyme octave.

The perfect reconciliation between the two major sonnet types is the Pushkinian stanza used in *Eugene Onegin*. The poet's rhyme scheme is *abab ccdd effe gg*. We seem to be close to the Shakespearean model. Line twelve (*e*), however, is often intended to be labile: it may belong to either system. Thus the same poem may also be read as if it were divided into a single octave with four rhymes and a sestet with three. Pushkin, however, had at least one precursor, Wyatt. Some of Wyatt's sonnets with the scheme *abba abba cddc ee* have a labile *c* line, the twelfth, and can be interpreted as Romance sonnets so far as the distribution of the lines is concerned: *abba abba cdd cee*.[8]

Each of the five parts of Shelley's "Ode" follows both Italian and English sonnet rules at the same time, which brings us one step closer to our conclusion: these five quatorzains are authentic sonnets. In order to resolve the problem fully, we must study more closely the

[8] Vladimir Nabokov was fully aware of the specific form Pushkin used for his stanzas, as he reveals in the last lines of a perfect Pushkinian sonnet:

> I grew another stalk and turned
> Your stanza, patterned on a sonnet,
> Into my honest roadside prose—
> All thorn, but cousin to your rose.

(*Eugene Onegin*, rev. ed., Princeton, N.J., 1975, I, 9)

nature of the first system and its relationship to the second. Both Petrarchan and Shakespearean patterns are characterized by strong acoustic and thematic unity, although both the octave and the douzain are often spiced with apparent contrasts to be reconciled in the second system. Hence the question: how do the Petrarchan and Shakespearean schools come to terms with a problem common to both of them? In a similar, even identical manner. In Italy and England the thematic unity of the first system must be underscored by morphological unity, by uniformity—the word keeping here its etymological meaning—in contrast to the multiformity of the second. The diverse facets of a thought, the shades of an emotion, and the nuances of reasoning are tied together by two means: the poet appeals both to the reader's intellect and to his ear. He uses words that must convey both meaning and melody: the word "sonnet" itself is the diminutive of *suono* 'sound.'

The uniformity of the first system is more evident in the Petrarchan sonnet than in the Shakespearean. We may ask whether the douzain really is a formal unit. The answer is yes, but only because of the isomorphism of the three quatrains—a rather fragile cohesiveness. One might even suggest that the Shakespearean sonnet is a kind of reversed sonnet in the sense that the melodic diversity (six rhymes instead of two) is in the first system and the melodic uniformity (one rhyme instead of two or three) in the second, the obligatory final couplet. In the Italian tradition the couplet is carefully avoided by the vast majority of poets, while it is already widely used in *Tottel's Miscellany*. Petrarch's first system is monomelic and his second heteromelic; the English Renaissance, and the Elizabethan school as well, often chose the opposite arrangement.

Other devices than those of Petrarch and Shakespeare can shape a sonnet system into formal homogeneity, for instance, Dante's. In choosing the terza rima device for his douzain, Shelley followed the spirit, if not the letter, of the founding fathers of the sonnet code. The basic idea concerning the function of the rhyme is illustrated both in the *Canzoniere* and in the *Divina commedia*: alternating and enclosing rhymes are best fitted for an extended cohesion of sounds. Yet Petrarch's and Dante's melodies differ structurally: their phonetic rhythm, beaten by the rhyme, has two counts in the Sicilian and Italian octaves, and three in terza rima poetry.[9] Both the two-beat and the three-beat

[9] Some British and American critics believe that "rime" is the correct spelling, arguing that "rime" comes closer than "rhyme" to the older English word meaning 'reckoning, number.' Almost all early English sonneteers knew some of the Italian masters and had traveled in Italy, where rhyme meant rhythm. The short lines of the *Dies irae*, the *Stabat mater*, the *Adoro te devote*, and many other medieval hymns, which figure among the very first rhymed poems in Western literature, clearly show that rhyme was a basic element of rhythm. For his treatise on rhyme

phonetic rhythms are intended to tie groups of lines tightly together. Shelley has his own system. In the "Ode" his ideas and emotions coalesce into two different, but still organic, systems according to one of the basic rules established by Tuscany's master sonneteers: the first system, the terza rima douzain, seems inspired by Italy; the second, the final couplet, by England.

Petrarch's alternating rhyme pattern in the octave, *abababab,* was less readily accepted and adopted by his successors than his other formula, *abbaabba.* Here the unity of the system is guaranteed not only by identical rhymes in two consecutive quatrains which seem to be juxtaposed, but also by a third enclosing rhyme quatrain formed by the last two lines of the first and the first two lines of the second: *baab.* The sounds of all three quatrains of the octave—the two real quatrains and the virtual one—overlap just as they do in the terza rima stanza and thus enhance in the reader's ear and mind the feeling of tense unity that the first system should provide. Shelley put such tense unity into his douzain, a unity lacking in Shakespeare's triple quatrains. His later poems exhibit a particularly tight cohesion: "To a Skylark" (1820) has *ababb*; "Stanzas Written in Dejection near Naples" (1818) and "Adonais" (1821) each have *ababbcbcc,* which is the Spenserian stanza. There is no reason why terza rima should not be a valid sonnet pattern for the first system.

A formal analysis of Shelley's five stanzas thus leads to the conclusion that they should be read as sonnets. In order to dispel some possible doubts, we may consult the author himself. What was his intention when he composed the "Ode"? A glance at his poetical work and literary affinities will give us the answer.

Shelley wrote twenty-two poems that he termed sonnets or that are indeed easily identified as such. This number does not include either the strophes of the "Ode" we are discussing or posthumously published sonnet fragments. Shelley's sonnet production—to compare only quantities—is approximately that of Milton, Goethe, Foscolo, and Musset. More important, however, is the fact that only the rhyme schemes of Musset, who belonged to a later generation, were more inventive than Shelley's. He never used the same one twice. In English literature the prize for prosodic variety in sonnet composition undoubtedly goes to Shelley, if we restrict the competition to major poets up to his time. Only four of his sonnets, besides of course the five "West Wind"

patterns to be used in the three major kinds of poems written in Italian (*sonetto, ballata, canzone*), Antonio da Tempo chose the title *Summa artis rithmicae vulgaris dictaminis* (1332).

stanzas, follow an identical model, *abbacdcdefefgg,* which seems to be his own invention.[10] Each of the others is one of a kind. Two, "Ozymandias" (*ababacdcedefef*) and "Political Greatness" (*abababcdcdcede*), suggest a relationship with terza rima. The rhyme *a* in the first of these sonnets holds the position one, three, and five, while *e* holds the position nine, eleven, and thirteen. In the second sonnet *a* plays the same role as in the first, *b* is second, fourth, and sixth, while *c* occurs in a terza rima rhythm, namely in the seventh, ninth, and eleventh lines. We are very close to the Beddoes pattern.

When he was twenty-four Shelley translated some fragments of Greek idylls. The author, Moschus, who lived in the second century B.C., evidently did not write his poetry in the meter or spirit of Jacopo da Lentino. Shelley selected thirteen of Moschus' lines and metamorphosed them into a sonnet, choosing a rhyme pattern which, in his whole work, comes closest (or second closest, if one decides in favor of "To the Nile") to the Italian tradition: *ababcdcd eefggf.* We see through his choice of prosodic form that Shelley recognized the exceptional suitability of the sonnet for rendering lyrical motifs, rather than "un amour déréglé" for surprising anachronisms. Another version of Moschus is even more original: seven Greek lines are turned into thirteen English blank verses. Both translations definitely belong in the gallery of "belles infidèles."

The sonnet is a Procrustean bed. Fourteen is the ineluctable measure. Shelley was one of the most imaginative poets to alleviate the legendary torture. He certainly agreed on the size of the bed, but permitted the Sonnet Muse to bend her knees or stretch her arms in order to reach the headboard. The body of the poem may be untraditionally and irregularly organized, as Shelley, among others, demonstrates. He delights in defying the rules that he regards as inessential to the genre. The sonnet "To the Nile" (*abba abba cdc dee*) could not be a sonnet "To the Arno": a final couplet, it is true, is not exceptional in Petrarch's work, but it concludes a *canzone,* not a sonnet. We are dealing here with a specific device marking the difference between the two forms. Again we notice Shelley's experimentation with various systems of interlocking rhymes, although here he takes a step toward a traditional solution.[11] Keats, too, tried several rhyme schemes but proved far less

[10] "To Ianthe," "Feelings of a Republican on the Fall of Bonaparte," "Guido Cavalcanti to Dante Alighieri" (a translation-adaptation), "To a Balloon Laden with Knowledge." Shelley does not divide his sonnets into stanzas typographically; the "Ode" is an exception to his usual practice.

[11] Rieger, after exemplifying the variety of Shelley's sonnet patterns, concludes: "Such sloppiness is freakish in Shelley and indicates nothing less than boredom with the form" (p. 167). Why, then, did Shelley ever try his pen at the sonnet? In fact, he deals with the genre in the same way as many other poets in

daring than his fellow poet. Among his fifty-two sonnets, thirty-three are of the Petrarchan type with *abba abba* in the octave; some have the *cdc dee* pattern in the sestet, which is exceptional in the Romance tradition. Seventeen of Shelley's sonnets follow strictly the Elizabethan scheme, while in the rhyme patterns only two of them are truly original: "If by dull rhymes" and "Written on May-Day." The former, composed in the same year as the "Ode to the West Wind" (1819), should be considered here. It is logically divided into four tercets and two additional lines (*abc abc cab cde de*). The analogy with Shelley's stanzas in his "Ode" is clear.[12]

Among Keats's sonnets are three which together constitute one poem: three, not five. They could be, in form, the strophes of an ode, if its subject matter merited a song. Neither Pindar nor Horace began any of his poems as Keats begins his "Three Sonnets on Women": "Woman! when I behold thee slipping, vain, / Inconstant, childish, proud and full of fancies."[13] The triptych is a kind of mini-cycle intended to satirize the fair sex, composed in a pattern (*abbaabba cdcdcd*) used by Petrarch to exalt Laura's charms. As for Shelley, his originality obviously has to be seen not only in his choice of terza rima as a valid sonnet pattern but also in his use of sonnets as ode stanzas: his "Ode" is a "sequenzina."

Two translations and three poems surrounding the composition of the "Ode" deserve special attention.[14] The "Inferno" passage of twenty-one triplets recounting the famous Ugolino story was translated either by Shelley or by his cousin Thomas Medwin under Shelley's supervision. Medwin says that Shelley made so many corrections that the

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England and on the continent—and in America as well—who felt and proved that Petrarch may be integrated into modern times.

[12] A semicolon marks the end of each tercet. In Keats's poem, written in April 1819, we find the central recurring image of the "Ode," namely "dead leaves" (line 12). Shelley has it in each of his five stanzas: leaves dead, decaying leaves, sapless foliage, dead leaf, withered leaves. Keats's sonnets have been studied by Lawrence John Zillman, *John Keats and the Sonnet Tradition* (1929; rpt. New York, 1966). All except five of Shelley's sonnets end with a couplet.

[13] Written in 1815. *The Poems and Verses of John Keats*, ed. John Middleton Murry (London, 1930), I, 15.

[14] See Corrado Zacchetti, *Shelley et Dante* (Milan and Florence, 1922), and the more recent studies by Jean de Palacio, "Shelley and Dante: An Essay in Textual Criticism," *RLC*, 35 (1961), 105-12, and "Shelley traducteur de Dante: le chant XXVIII du Purgatoire," *RLC*, 36 (1963), 571-78. Shelley left England with a good knowledge of Italian. Only after crossing the Alps, however, did he understand the practical merits of a language he hardly studied systematically over a long period of time. "With what delight," he wrote from Milan in his first report to Thomas Love Peacock, "did I hear the woman who conducted us . . . speak the clear and complete language of Italy, though half unintelligible to me, after the nasal and abbreviated cacophony of the French!" (letter of April 1818, in *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Roger Ingpen, London, 1915, I, 591-92).

version is "almost" his own. On the other hand, Shelley is said to have mentioned to his wife that Medwin had carried off part of his texts. The second Dante translation, the Matelda episode narrated in seventeen triplets—the motif of the flower-gathering lady plays a significant role in romantic thematics—is incontestably Shelley's own achievement. This time Medwin gives Shelley full credit for his work. He also hints at the translator's principles: an adequate translation, Shelley is said to believe, must respect not only the content, but also the form of the original. Both these passages of the *Commedia* are rendered in terza rima.

While the two Dante texts were written after Shelley's departure for Italy, that of *Prince Athanase* precedes it. The fragment we have of that work consists of two parts, two cantos. The first contains forty triplets and a classic final terza rima quatrain (*zyz y*); the second contains fifty-three triplets but lacks the proper ending. The poem demonstrates Shelley's early concern with terza rima, though no connection with any possible sonnet pattern can be detected. Such a connection is found in a shorter composition, "Laurel." It is not in the strictest sense a sonnet, except possibly, as has been argued, in a subtler and more refined sense, or in a structuralist way.[15] It consists of a chain of four perfect terza rima stanzas, one single line sounding the final accord, as Dante's example prescribes. The sonnet is one verse short. But Shakespeare, after all, was short two lines in his Sonnet 126 (it consists of six distichs), and felt that one of the three quatrains in his Sonnet 99 (*ababa cdcd efef gg*) could be a "quintrain" as well, and that neither poem would be out of place in his sonnet cycle. Among Shelley's contemporaries, Byron managed to persuade his critics that the thirteen lines of his "Sonnet to Lake Geneva" really made a sonnet. Why should Shelley be forbidden to write sonnets of that length?

It would theoretically be possible to separate the last thirteen lines of Dante's one hundred cantos from their context and publish them as a virtual *Commedia* sonnet sequence. Indeed, any thematically coherent section of thirteen lines, the last line being the first of the fifth tercet, could be isolated and interpreted as an autonomous unit. A frivolous undertaking, since sequences of thirteen- or fifteen-line poems are not usually recognized as sonnet sequences (exceptions—poems like Robert Tofte's *Laura*—are found mainly in the English Renaissance), while single sonnets of irregular dimensions are more

[15] See Haworth, p. 73. "Laurel"—the title varies according to the edition—was composed before the "Ode"; it is identical with the first thirteen lines (only one of them being amended) of a longer terza rima composition included in the *Notebooks* and precedes the first draft of the "Ode."

likely to encounter tolerant critics. For instance, a structural and thematic analysis of Shelley's "Laurel" shows that it was conceived as a sonnet, although the poet was most permissive in his rhyme scheme (*aba bcbc dcd ede*). The poem's first system consists of a tercet and a quatrain, the second of two tercets. However, if one does not divide the thirteen lines into prosodic units defined by content, but groups them instead according to sound patterns, one obtains a different scheme, *vwv wxw xyx yzy z*, that of the final thirteen lines of Dante's cantos. Each stanza of the "Ode" has a fourteenth line that, together with the thirteenth, constitutes a Shakespearean couplet—a further proof that Shelley did in fact intend to write five sonnets.[16]

After writing "Ode to the West Wind" Shelley continued to explore and exploit the possibilities of terza rima and related patterns. "The Triumph of Life" was his last composition, written only a few weeks before he drowned in the Tyrrhenian Sea, in July 1822. More significant: the imagery of "The Triumph of Life" is close to that of the "Ode." Consisting of 181 terza rima stanzas, it is three or four times longer than an average canto of Dante's *Commedia* and seems to represent the inception, perhaps the first part, of a composition similar in form and content to Petrarch's *Trionfi*.

Also in 1822 Shelley worked on a prefatory poem to one of his major works. The first part of his "Lines Written for *Prometheus Unbound*," a sketchy quatorzain, was intended to become a tercet sonnet, although not a terza rima sonnet. Shelley's sestet (*aab ccb*) consists of two reversed rime couée triplets,[17] as we find them in Baudelaire's "Invitation au voyage," a poem made up of three sonnets. Baudelaire uses four triplets for each of these sonnets and a couplet functions three times as a kind of refrain (*aab ccb dde ffe gg*).[18] Although Baudelaire, whose mother was born in London, was keenly interested in English letters and despite the fact that his *Fleurs du mal* appeared as late as 1857, one

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16 Collins erroneously thought he could justify the validity of combining terza rima and sonnet patterns by asserting that "each canto of the *Commedia* ends with a couplet" (p. 7). He may have been led into that error by Lewis Turco, who defined terza rima as a poem usually ending "in a couplet rhymed from the second line of the last triplet: yzy/zz" (*Book of Forms*, New York, 1968, p. 124).

17 "Rime couée" usually means that the last line is shortened, tailed. Shelley chose the opposite arrangement, the last line of his triplet being longer than the first two:

As a violet's gentle eye
Gazes on the azure sky,
Until its hue grows like what it beholds.

See Shelley's tail-rhymed "To Night."

18 The first tercet reads:

Mon enfant, ma sœur,
Songe à la douceur
D'aller là-bas vivre ensemble!

can hardly suspect the English poet of having influenced the French one.[19] We may conclude that Baudelaire in "L'Invitation" and Shelley in all of his triadic compositions were following independent paths. "Non merita nome di creatore," says Shelley quoting Tasso in *Defence of Poetry*, "se non Iddio ed il Poeta." Only God, however, creates "ex nihilo," while writers, ineluctably, are to a certain degree bound to create "ex traditione" or "in traditionem." Even the most sublime poets are artificers, albeit with moments of rapture.

Rather than speculating on affinities and analyzing resemblances that we might detect between Shelley and other modern lyricists, we should glance at the authors Shelley knew well, those who wrote when the sonnet was experiencing its first exuberant blooming. Not only Dante must have our attention, but especially Guido Cavalcanti (1255?-1300), his "primo amico," to whom he dedicated his *Vita nuova* and who was in many respects his model. Shelley—who wrote a charming three-stanza serenade in Italian, "Buona notte"—translated one sonnet by each; one is entitled "Dante Alighieri to Guido Cavalcanti," first printed with *Alastor* in 1816, the other "Guido Cavalcanti to Dante Alighieri," probably written in 1815 but not published until 1876. While Cavalcanti enjoyed Dante's admiration, this in itself is insufficient reason for deserving Shelley's also. Shelley was attracted by Cavalcanti's poetical forms and especially by some of his philosophical or metaphysical beliefs. An inventory of Cavalcanti's vocabulary shows that the three nouns most frequently used in his *Rime* are *amore*, *core* —no wonder—and, much more important, *spirito*, a Shelleyan word par excellence. "Spirit" pervades Shelley's major works.

A formal study of the "Ode" should also include probable influences, such as Cavalcanti's best-known poem "Donna me prega," which consists of five stanzas of fourteen hendecasyllabic lines and a conclusion, a kind of envoi of five lines of equal length. Each stanza is naturally divided, as shown by the rhythm and the rhymes, into four tercets and a couplet: *abc abc def fde gg*; the scheme of the envoi is *abacc*. Cavalcanti's rhyme pattern does not respect the rules of the sonnet as it was practiced in trecento Tuscany. Half a millenium later these rules, however, have been interpreted with amazing flexibility and apparent tolerance. In fact, flexibility is not tolerance: in literature and in life, as Darwin knew, species undergo changes and adapt themselves to new conditions. Cavalcanti wanted to write a *canzone*, as his traditional envoi explicitly says: "Tu puoi sicuramente gir, canzone." He certainly

[19] If the rhyme scheme of "L'Invitation au voyage" is not Baudelaire's invention, it would be natural to suppose that he was struck by a poem of the same pattern, that of "La Petite Pleureuse à sa mère," by Marceline Desbordes-Valmore (1785-1859), about whom he had published an article.

wrote a *canzone*, although some modern critic may be tempted to paraphrase Dobson: "I intended a canzone / And it turned to five sonnets." Five sonnets may constitute a *canzone* just as they may constitute a hymn or an ode; Cavalcanti, like the philologist, knew that in romance dialects "canzone" means what "ode" means in Greek: song.

In Cavalcanti's time there were three major lyric species: *canzone, ballata,* and *sonetto*. Dante discusses all of them—with frequent references to Cavalcanti's models—in his *De vulgari eloquentia,* written toward the end of the thirteenth century. Among these species he establishes the following hierarchy: the *canzone*—like the Provençal *canso* a substitute for the ode—is first in importance; the *ballata* second and the *sonetto* third. This order was reversed some three decades later by Antonio da Tempo, the most pedantic and pompous of all the early legislators of Euterpe's realm.[20] One fact was clear to all: the species were intimately related. The *canzone* was intended to be *cantata* 'sung,' the *ballata* had to be *ballata* 'danced,' and the *sonetto* originally was *suonato* 'played.' Fixed or semi-fixed structures were indispensable to all three forms, since all involved music. The structures of all three types were nevertheless malleable to a certain extent. Many texts show that they were sometimes interchangeable. The genre was defined not by form alone but also by theme, mood, and tone.

In May 1816, Shelley journeyed to Geneva, from where he visited the Chamonix Valley. Savoy, at that time, was part of the Kingdom of Sardinia, a kind of transalpine province of Italy. Not until two years later did Shelley go beyond Mont Blanc, which he had celebrated in a poem written on his first trip. The second trip was begun in March 1818. The Shelleys, a party of three adults and three small children—Percy Bysshe was then twenty-five—arrived in Milan in April

Several circumstances persuaded Shelley to go to Italy. His doctor urged him to abandon the damp river valley of Marlow and to go to a country where winter is just a preface to spring. Furthermore, real and potential financial obligations and personal circumstances made his stay in England difficult, and living expenses were lower beyond the Alps. Finally, Shelley loved Italy and her literature—a love fostered by Leigh Hunt—not so much the poets of his time as those of the Middle Ages and the early Renaissance. As soon as he touched Cisalpine ground—he never saw Athens, whose culture he had absorbed far more thoroughly than that of Rome—his feelings for the legitimate heirs of the Latin tradition found abundant literary expression. Already

[20] See note 9.

his earliest publications show his affection for, and understanding of, the classical world.[21] Long and short compositions testify to his admiration for Italy's countryside ("Lines Written Among the Euganean Hills,"[22] "Passage of the Apennines"[23]), for its historical past (*The Cenci*[24]), and its literary patrimony (translations of excerpts from Dante). The historic October day in 1819 when Shelley, as he says in his *Notebooks*, conceived and chiefly wrote "Ode to the West Wind," is best viewed as the point at which the poet achieved the integration of all aspects of Italian culture into his humanistic past.[25]

The genesis of the outer form of the "Ode" may be rather easily traced to its sources. Immediately preceding a rough draft of the fourth and last act of *Prometheus Unbound*,[26] there is in the *Notebooks* a terza rima fragment of twenty-two lines. It evidently represents the main idea of the "Ode." Shelley feels his calling is to create immortal poetry. It is not "presumptuous," he believes, to declare: "if I fall / I shall not creep out of the vital day." The image of the unextinguished hearth, central to the last sonnet of the "Ode," is already there, at the end of the fragment.

Although the circumstances in which Shelley wrote his terza rima draft remain unknown, those attending the composition of the "Ode"

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21 Shelley was sixteen or seventeen when he wrote "Epitaphium," a "Latin version of the epitaph in Gray's Elegy." In *Les Fleurs du mal* we also find a Latin poem, "Franciscae meae laudes," written by Baudelaire at the age of thirty-six. While Shelley definitely had a fine ear for Latin metrics, Baudelaire, in his years of scholastic training, failed to acquire the slightest feeling for Latin scansion, though he received a prize for Latin verse composition.

22 The year before the Shelleys left England, one of the best-known editions of Ugo Foscolo's *Le ultime lettere di Jacopo Ortis* appeared in London. Most of the action takes place on the Euganean Hills romantically described by Ortis. In Shelley's poem there is no allusion to Foscolo, who used terza rima in several of his compositions. In his preface, Shelley admires the "lovely mountains which surround what was once the retreat and where is now the sepulchre, of Petrarch." One of the themes treated in the "Lines," however, is that of *Le ultime lettere*: Italy's political enslavement.

23 The beginning of the twelve-line poem seems to forecast one of the themes of the "Ode": "Listen, listen, Mary mine / To the whispers of the Apennine."

24 One of the main characters, besides Count Francesco Cenci, a most promiment scoundrel in the Roman Renaissance, is his daughter Beatrice, an ambiguous personality in both history and fiction. Shelley is one of the very first authors to treat the Cenci theme. His example was followed by Stendhal, Alexandre Dumas, Jr., Francesco Domenico Guerrazzi, Antônio Gonçalves Dias, and most recently by Alberto Moravia.

25 *Peter Bell the Third* was also written in October 1819. A burlesque drama, a piece of drollery, it is nonetheless the immediate companion of some of Shelley's masterpieces.

26 The first, three-act version of the drama was completed by April 6, 1819, and the definitive five-act composition toward the end of the year. One notices the parallel with the "Ode," which, in its original form, had three stanzas; two more were added some days later.

are familiar. He was on the banks of the Arno, in a state of excitement triggered not only by the landscape but by the atmospheric conditions that brought back to his "wuthering" soul the whole cluster of his most familiar themes: winds and waves, ghosts and clouds, leaves and loves, elements out of his reach and grasp—as the unattainable Laura had been to Petrarch.[27] Time and again, before and after his creating the "Ode," he felt deeply the spell of Florence, the charm of her "genius loci." In November 1819 one of his sons was born. He named him Percy Florence, obviously with a symbolic intention. A few months later he wrote in his "Ode to Naples": "Florence! beneath the sun, / Of cities fairest one!"

Tuscany, especially the towns bathed by the Arno and its tributaries, gave birth in Dante's and in Petrarch's time to a host of sonneteers important in the early history of the genre: Guittone d'Arezzo, Chiaro Davanzati, Guido Cavalcanti, Cino da Pistoia, Cecco Angiolieri, Antonio Pucci and, a hundred years later, the *Morgante* poet Luigi Pulci. Many of the most prominent men who created the Florentine Renaissance also wrote sonnets, men without any ambition of ever being "poeti laureati": not only Lorenzo il Magnifico, Pulci's friend, but also Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci, Cellini and Machiavelli. For Shelley the waves of the Arno lapped the shores in terza rima and in the sonnet rhythm. When composing his poem he heard both. The two combined forms are the matrix of his "Ode."

The draft of the first three stanzas of the "Ode" in Shelley's *Notebooks* is very close to the final version except in one important instance, namely, the rhyme scheme of the last four lines. The theoreticians, one recalls, want the poet to use new rhymes in the minor system, and practitioners of the genre generally comply with this rule. Surrey and Baudelaire wrote outstanding exceptions—the first, a sonnet on spring; the second, on autumn—while Mallarmé furnished a sample with his "Sonnet en-ix." Surrey's "The soote season" (*abab abab abab aa*) and Baudelaire's "Sonnet d'automne" (*abba abba baa bab*) differ only in the arrangement, not the number, of rhymes. A traditional critic would say that both are good or remarkable poems but mediocre sonnets. As a sonneteer, Shelley was seldom on the side of strict observance, not even when faced with the rule of the separation of rhyme patterns in the systems. Using terza rima and deciding to create a poem of fourteen

[27] Richard Harter Fogle (*The Imagery of Keats and Shelley*, Hamden, Conn., 1962) and Jean Perrin (*Les Structures de l'imaginaire shelleyen*, Paris, 1973) have studied most accurately the aspects of Shelley's poetry relevant to the present context. It should be noted that in the "Ode" the leaves appear to be those of Hyde Park rather than of Le Cascine: elms and live oaks predominate in the section of that park where Shelley drafted his poem.

lines ending with a Shakespearean couplet, he had a choice between a rhyme run-on from the last tercet to the distich and an unresolved rhyme suspense, with the result that the middle line of the last tercet has no mate. In the *Notebooks,* where Shelley paid scant attention to punctuation, the last five verses of the first stanza read thus:

> blow
> Her clarion oer the dreaming earth and fill
> With radiant flowers and living leaves
> The atmosphere investing plain and hill
> O spirit which art moving every where
> Destroyer and Preserver hear O hear ![28]

The final version of the "Ode," published with *Prometheus Unbound* in 1820, has an important variant:

> blow
> Her clarion o'er the dreaming earth, and fill
> (Driving sweet buds like flocks to feed in air)
> With living hues and odors plain and hill:
>
> Wild Spirit, which art moving everywhere;
> Destroyer and preserver; hear, oh, hear ![29]

In the eleventh line of the draft "leaves" remains unpaired, while "air" of the definitive text rhymes with the couplet.[30] Shelley decided to break a rule, that of the acoustic contrast between two systems. He did it in other sonnets written during the same period, for example, "Ozymandias" (*abab acdc ede fef*) and "England in 1819" (*ababab cdcdcc dd*).

The dilemma was easier to resolve in the second stanza, where "sepulchre" (line 11) could simply be changed to "sepulcher" in order to come closer, at least, to a vague eye-rhyme matching "atmosphere" and "hear." The draft and the published text of the third stanza are practically identical. Shelley had made up his mind: he chose the run-on pattern and confirmed his choice in the two remaining stanzas.[31] The

[28] I quote from the edition by H. Buxton Forman (Boston, 1911), pp. 163 ff.

[29] Cambridge edition of *The Poetical Works of Shelley,* ed. Nevell F. Ford (Boston, 1975, p. 378); all quotations from Shelley are from this edition. It should be noticed that other sonnets written in 1818-1819 do not use new rhymes in the second system; see "Lift not the Painted Veil" and "England in 1819."

[30] An inventory of international sonnet production shows only very few cases of verse endings that remain single. The least-known and most brilliant example is Rilke's "Römische Fontäne," where *Schale* may remain unmatched for thematic reasons: the poet is alluding to the uniqueness of that *Schale.* In Keats's sonnet "Great spirits now on earth" the thirteenth line is incomplete, thus without rhyme: here a satirical rather than a lyrical effect is intended. The "living leaves" of Shelley's draft had to be eliminated since "dead leaves" is one of the motifs of the "Ode" (see n. 12).

[31] Shelley made ample use of enjambment. He often links the two systems grammatically. This is the case in stanzas 2, 3, and 5 of the "Ode." One of his masters, quoted both in the terza rima poem "Laurel" and in his *Prometheus Un-*

contrast between polyphonic douzain and monophonic couplet, despite the infringement of the first rhyme system upon the second, is as striking here as in the Shakespearean sonnet.

The composition of the "Ode" took place in two stages. The draft of the first three stanzas, which is not basically different from the published text, constitutes a strong poetic unity. Shelley begins each stanza with an invocation and concludes it with a refrain-like appeal, "Oh, hear," to the reader or to himself—which suggests some analogy with the *ballade*. No trace of the two remaining stanzas, probably written a few days later, can be found in the *Notebooks*.[32] Thus Shelley's poem partakes of at least three genres, and one may wonder whether his intention, in writing it, was that expressed in the title of one of Edna St. Vincent Millay's sonnets: "I will put Chaos into fourteen lines." Instead, he created a new order, reacting, as Michael Drayton had done two hundred years before, against a rigid tradition that demanded renewal, "Since sonnets such in bundles are impressed, / And ev'ry drudge doth dull our satiated ear."[33] The spirit, rather than the letter, rejuvenates a genre.

It would have eased the critic's task if Shelley had plainly declared that he was writing a sonnet ode. One may reply, however, that the poem itself constitutes such a declaration, since the author uses all the ingredients necessary for the sonnet: a recipe for polenta produces polenta whether the cook uses the word or not. Usually, poets have a genre in mind while writing their works. It should be repeated, however, that Horace left no statement telling the first commentators on his carmina that he meant to write odes. In fact, his books contain heterostrophic poems, of the Pindaric type, and isostrophic ones as well. Shelley composed five sonnets as stanzas of an ode: no Porphyrio warrants that identity, but the poetic tradition of the West proves it. In the history of the sonnet, these stanzas represent a milestone showing how far, in the course of six hundred years, the sonnet form had traveled all over Europe without losing any of its original characteristics

bound, may have encouraged him to adopt this procedure. The two systems, according to Milton and Shelley, should not be juxtaposed, but tied together: this is the function of the enjambments. The subdivisions of Shelley's strophes, the terza rima stanzinas, and the couplet are not always complete either syntactically or rhetorically. The quatrains and tercets of his less irregular sonnets—and those of scores of other sonneteers—offer the same characteristics. The device is intended to strengthen the cohesion of each of the two distinct portions of lines, the two systems as wholes, and thereby to enhance the sonnet-like character of the poem. At the same time, the rather static division of the "legitimate" sonnet is replaced by a kinetic formula.

[32] Forman, p. 169.

[33] The first line of Drayton's sonnet reads, "Methinks I see some crooked mimic jeer." The poem, written in the Elizabethan scheme, is part of the author's sequence *Idea* (1619).

or sacrificing the essentials of its literary personality.

"Ode to the West Wind" is by consensus among Shelley's masterpieces. If an international committee preparing an anthology of lyric poetry had to choose a single work for each author to be included—and Shelley would certainly be among them—the "Ode" would in all probability be selected to represent him: five of his sonnets, it is implied. The reader of that imaginary anthology would ask: may a sequence of five sonnets constitute an ode? Any kind of strophe has traditionally been used for the Horatian ode, and quite a few for the Pindaric. There is no reason why the sonnet should be discriminated against. The reader's second question, May a terza rima pattern be used for a sonnet? has received an affirmative answer in the preceding pages.

One crucial problem has been neglected so far. The "*Sonnet Cycle* to the West Wind," it was argued, is the prosodic epitome or synthesis of the *Commedia* and the *Canzoniere*. Is that *Cycle*, the "Ode," also rooted in the tradition of English poetry? Terza rima, although used by eminent poets, did not have an impact on English or continental letters comparable to that of other rhyme schemes.[34] Some of these schemes possess unifying virtues similar to those of Dante's invention. This is particularly true of the strophes of Spenser, who exercised an extraordinary influence on the generation of Keats and Shelley.[35] The Spenserian stanza, *ababbcbcc*—the octava rima has *abababcc*—is an expanded rhyme royal (*ababbcc*), just as the Spenserian sonnet (*abab bcbc cdcd ee*) is an expanded Spenserian stanza. Here the first system is a combination of *seconda* and terza rima. Thus each sonnet of the *Amoretti*—the rhymes of each quatrain flowing into the following one as Dante's tercet rhymes do—has as convincing a prosodic unity as any canto of the *Commedia*, "si parva licet componere magnis."

Perhaps it is worth repeating here that one of Spenser's most respected masters, Clément Marot, continually used in all sorts of poems—ballades, chansons, and especially sonnets—a scheme in which rhymes four and five match. Marot contracted that habit in Italy, where he

[34] Seymour Reiter thinks that critics erroneously give the verse form of the "Ode to the West Wind" as terza rima, saying that "the form is rather a brilliant invention, five fourteen-line stanzas comprising a regular ode" (*A Study of Shelley's Poetry*, Albuquerque, N.M., 1967, p. 225). It is true that Dante does not have run-on lines from tercet to tercet, but modern terza rima compositions do.

[35] The manuscript of "Laurel" shows that Shelley wanted to replace "Milton's" by "Spenser's" (line 10); but since he had written in line 5, "Who wander o'er the Paradise of fame," Milton had to stay. In his sonnet "The Poets," Leigh Hunt mentions six of them: Pulci, Chaucer, Milton, Spenser, Horace, and Shakespeare. In the first system he asks which poet is "dearest" to him, in the second he answers: "Spenser." Shelley never established such a clear hierarchy among his predecessors and colleagues on Mount Parnassus.

sojourned several times. His intention was to achieve by means of a linking scheme the same prosodic coherence as terza rima, the symbol of supreme coherence, since Dante used it as an image of the Holy Trinity, the one and threefold God. Shakespeare did not like that kind of theology and for his douzains wrote three quatrains unlinked by rhyme. Wordsworth preferred the Romance sonnet form. He thought, however, that Petrarch's symmetry between the rhymes of the two quatrains (*abba abba*) might in the long run prove monotonous. The Petrarchan two-rhyme pattern of the first system could not withstand the acceleration of life and history. Rhyme *a*, Wordsworth believed, may be sufficient to guarantee the prosodic consistency of the first system: in one-third of his five hundred sonnets he chose the pattern *abba acca*.

One of the most natural solutions to the problem of unity is that proposed and exemplified by Shelley. The terza rima pattern which he used in the sonnets that constitute his "Ode" endows the first system with both homogeneity and variety. Instead of expressing reservations about Shelley's use of terza rima as a sonnet pattern, we should be wondering why the formula, which could well have become a standard sonnet scheme, was hardly used by poets before or after Shelley. The intrusion of the rhymes of one system into the other was foreign to any kind of codified sonnet scheme, although that sort of enjambment may mean link as well as break. Some rare examples of terza rima sonnets exist. Robert Frost's "Acquainted with the Night" and Philip Larkin's "Whatever Happened" are good sonnets. Their rhyme scheme is that chosen by Shelley for his "Ode."

The main reason, however, that sonneteers have excluded terza rima as a regular device is that terza rima itself has never achieved permanent acceptance in any European literature. Italian poets of the Middle Ages, it is true, used it generously in obvious imitation of Dante. Francesco Stabili's *L'acerba*, written under the pseudonym Cecco d'Ascoli, is one of the earliest examples. Boccaccio wrote in terza rima the fifty short canti of *L'amorosa visione*, and quite a few later poets, such as Benedetto Menzini, author of an *Arte poetica*, were mindful of the technique used in the *Divina commedia*. Outside Italy no large-scale masterpiece of world literature has been written in terza rima. Jorge de Montemayor uses the device several times in *La Diana*, as does Cervantes, for example, in *La Galatea* and Camoëns in some of his *Eclogas*. In France terza rima, although not unknown in the Renaissance, enjoyed a limited popularity in the nineteenth century. The first poem of Vigny's collection *Les Destinées* illustrates the genre.[36] Other

[36] This poem may serve as an example of comparative poetics. Dante stops his perpetuum mobile by converting the last tercet of his cantos into quatrains (*xyx*

French poets used it when dealing with Italian themes, for instance, Théophile Gautier, in "À l'Italie." Goethe, following the example of August Wilhelm Schlegel, has two well-known terza rima compositions: his poem "Schiller" of 1826 and the monologue at the beginning of the second part of *Faust*. Other German specimens may occasionally be found in works like Chamisso's *Mateo Falcone, der Korse*—embedded among some forty other long terza rima pieces, Hofmannsthal's *Terzinen über Vergänglichkeit*, and, closer to us, Weinheber's *Adel und Untergang*. English poets, too, obeyed Dante's muse rather reluctantly. Again, occasional practitioners of terza rima may be seen in the nineteenth century. One of the best-known English poems written in the Dante tradition is *The Prophecy of Dante*, which Byron composed in four cantos after his visit to Dante's tomb in Ravenna only a few months before Shelley wrote his "Ode." Robert Browning reveals his taste for terza rima in "The Statue and the Bust" and in "Aristophanes' Apology." Despite these and a few other scattered examples, terza rima cannot be considered an integral part of a living tradition in nineteenth-century literature, nor do these examples announce a renewal of the form.[37]

Shelley's "Ode"—the form of his "Ode"—was precipitated by his own personal experiences, namely, the vivid impression made on him by some of the founding fathers of Italian literature, especially Dante, Petrarch, and their disciples. The British pilgrim to the peninsula was prepared to understand their message and their mind. With two fixed prosodic patterns, that of terza rima and that of the sonnet, the *libeccio*, the west wind, blowing on the sparks of his spirit, he created a poem in which both structural components remain clearly recognizable. After composing it, Shelley, who had constantly been tinkering with various stanza patterns, could finally shout his eureka. Or was it a Biblical miracle? Terza rima begat sonnets and sonnets begat an ode which bears the hallmark of genius. Shelley had no serious imitator; the best examples are not always followed.[38] Nonetheless, the critic and anat-

yzyz), actually by limiting himself to writing the first line only of the next tercet. Vigny's last stanza (the poem includes 43) is a tercet like all the others. Instead of introducing in the penultimate line a new rhyme calling for a partner in a "postultimate" line, Vigny repeats a rhyme of the two preceding tercets (*xyx yzy zyz*). Thus the rhyme *y* appears four times: the example may be unique in the history of terza rima.

[37] The revival—or attempts at a revival—of terza rima during the first half of the nineteenth century expresses one aspect of the Romantics' infatuation with things medieval. In England, Germany, and France the sonnet was rejuvenated during the same period.

[38] Odes may be sonnet sequences. May sonnet sequences also be made into odes?

omist analyzing schemes and strophes, ribs and vertebrae, should understand and explain their function in the body under examination. Identifying and justifying the structure of the "Ode" amounts to assigning it the place it occupies within the literary kingdom.

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A definition or description of the sonnet refers mainly to its form—though it was for ages the "official" voice of Petrarchism—while a definition or description of the ode refers mainly to its content. Since the stanzas of the Horatian ode welcome most meters and practically all rhyme patterns, including those of the sonnet, the answer will not depend on externals but on the substance of the poem, its theme and tone, and on the poet's intention. Since the structural and prosodic characteristics of the sonnet are more striking than those of the ode, the reader will spontaneously identify our virtual ode as a sonnet sequence. He should not forget, however, that a single poem may be classified in more than one way.

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