"The Name of Freedom": A Hermeneutic Reading of *Hellas*

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erzen men, o despoine, tou pantos kakou
phaneis alastor he kakos daimon pothen
Aeschylus, *The Persians,* 353–54[1]

THE TYRANNY of Greece over Shelley could not have been foreseen, if one were to judge from the young poet's early utterances on the subject, and definitely not in the summer of 1812, when he was writing to Godwin, "Before I was a republican—Athens appeared to me the model of a government, but afterwards Athens bore in my mind the same relation to perfection that Great Britain did to Athe[ns]" (*PBSL* 1:303). In late July, in yet another letter to Godwin, after a brief reference to Athenian rule as "oppressive & arbitrary,"[2] he passes from political to "literary despotism," launching an attack (very much in Plato's fashion) on the poets: "And what do we learn from their poets?" He phrases a rhetorical question to Godwin, to come up with a subversive answer: "as you yourself have acknowledged somewhere 'they are fit for nothing but the perpetuation of the noxious race of heroes in the world'" (*PBSL* 1:317). However, it was precisely through the reading of Greek literature (and philosophy) in the years that intervened between 1812 and 1818—most readily expressed in the avowal "I read the Greek dramatists & Plato forever" (*PBSL* 2:364), and also through the

mutual intellectual stimulation and encouragement of Shelley's "Athenian" circle[3]—that the original criticism and suspicion toward things Greek was enlightened (or bedimmed), Shelley's attitude passing from rejection to acclamation via recognition of difference: "the manners & feelings of the Athenians—so different on many subjects from that of any other community that ever existed" (*PBSL* 2:20), From this point on, Shelley's ravishment with Greece and its productions follows an ascending ladder of rhapsodic exclamations, praising "the manners and feelings of those divine people, who, in their very errors, are the mirrors, as it were, in which all that is delicate and graceful contemplates itself" (*PBSL* 2:29). In a letter addressed to Peacock early in 1819, Shelley laments the self-destructive violence that brought about the downfall of Greece: "O, but for that series of wretched wars which terminated in the Roman conquest of the world, but for the Christian religion which put a finishing stroke to the antient system; but for those changes which conducted Athens to its ruin, to what an eminence might not humanity have arrived!" (*PBSL* 2:75).

It was in this mixed mood of exultation and regret that the news of the Greek war of independence reached Shelley, firing his imagination: "Greece has declared its freedom," he announced triumphantly to Claire Clairmont, expressing his deepest, if premature, conviction that "Greece will most certainly be free." His joy was tainted only by the unavoidable "knowledge of the blood that must be shed on this occasion," a thought quickly brushed aside at the prospect of the fulfillment of a deep longing: "What a delight it will be to visit Greece free" (*PBSL* 2:278). Yet news of the (inevitable) bloodshed that arrived from the site of war presented the descendants of "those glorious beings" to Shelley's eyes as "degraded by moral and political slavery to the practice of the basest vices it engenders—and that below the level of ordinary degradation" (*OSA* 447). As a result, his enthusiasm for the just cause—"Greece has risen in this moment to vindicate its freedom"—was spoiled by the cruelty of military practices. As he announced to Medwin two days later, admitting his reluctance to engage in activities that were of dubious integrity, "Massacres of the Turks have begun in various parts.—This is a sufficient objection to our Grecian project even if other circumstances would permit my being one of the party." Shelley's moral reservations, however, did not prevent him from dreaming: "There is nothing I so earnestly desired as to visit Greece; but the fates do not seem propitious to my desires" (*PBSL* 2:280). Ultimately, Shelley's "Grecian project" turned out to be one of not presence but representation, not praxis but *poesis:* "I am just

finishing a dramatic poem called *Hellas* upon the contest now waging in Greece—a sort of imitation of the Persae of Aeschylus, full of lyrical poetry" (*PBSL* 2:363–64).

It is not accidental, I believe, that Shelley should have chosen the genre of Greek tragedy to body forth his vision of a regenerated Greece, since it was his conviction, proclaimed in the *Defence of Poetry,* that social perfection and dramatic excellence are correlative. Shelley praises drama as the highest expression of the creative faculty of Greece, which he sees as resisting evil practices and social corruption by enhancing the powers of imagination and pleasure, by alerting the "sensibility to the influence of the senses and the affections," while also enhancing "those thoughts which belong to the inner faculties of our nature" (494). If, as Shelley believes, "the connexion of poetry and social good is more observable in the drama than in whatever other form" (494), then the choice of the Aeschylean *Persians* as a prototype for *Hellas* (following the precedent of *Prometheus Unbound*) should not surprise us, since it would be the best example of Shelley's celebrated proposition that "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world" (508). Or, as this statement appears in an earlier and expanded version, "Poets and philosophers are the unacknowledged legislators of the world" (*Julian* 7:20). In fact, it is in the equation of poetizing, philosophizing, and legislating—the creative practices of poets, thinkers, and founders of state (as Heidegger puts it)—that, in Shelley's view, the historical difference between classical Greece and modernity is to be found: "The study of modern history is the study of kings, financiers, statesmen, and priests. The history of ancient Greece is the study of legislators, philosophers, and poets." (*Julian* 7: 226).[4]

But what did the term *legislator* mean for ancient Greece—how did it sound to a Greek ear? Plato's definition of a legislator as given in the *Cratylus* is not a maker of laws, as one would expect, but a "maker of names" (389a).[5] In the course of the discussion on the nature of language in the same dialogue, Socrates repeatedly contends that the "artist of names is called the legislator" (431e), because "naming is an art, and has artificers," who are none other than the legislators (428e–29a). So, by transferring the art of naming from linguists, or rhetoricians, to legislators, Plato sets the problem of the ultimate authority of language and its vital role in the formation of society and origination of history.

This founding role of language is also detected by Heidegger, who claims that although language is commonly used for communication and exchange

of information, its primary and pristine function is to "name," an act that inaugurates the historical existence of man, when the "poet speaks the essential word," thus nominating "the existent as what it is." Such a hermeneutic dialogue between man and world can be achieved in a dual manner, as Heidegger affirms: (philosophical) thinking and (imaginative) poetizing: "The thinker utters Being. The poet names what is holy." So the thinker whose task is to proclaim being and the poet who has the mission to name the holy—both legislators in the platonic sense of the word—are the initiators of human historicity, since language is the essential prerequisite for man's constructing of a world. In that sense, for Heidegger (and Shelley) poetry's nominating function is sustained, in that it gives a "habitation and a name" to the opacity of natural forces and psychic powers to which man is subject, thus setting in motion the historical process: "Poetry is the foundation which supports history." History itself begins, Heidegger informs us, only when beings are drawn into an "unconcealment" initiated by the questioning of the very nature of being. This unconcealment or open region to which man comes as a historical entity is the space of "freedom," a freedom that is not the property of man but the essence of truth to which humans belong by virtue of history. The existence of historical man begins at the very moment when "the first thinker takes a questioning stand"—or when the first poet names freedom's possession of man—because "Man does not 'possess' freedom as a property. At best, the converse holds: freedom . . . possesses man."[6]

The thought and name of freedom were originally contemplated and uttered for both Heidegger and Shelley in the inaugural moment of history that coincides with ancient Greece. Because Shelley and Heidegger look upon Greek as a language that can speak being, they recognize it as the logos of freedom. To the extent that (Greek) language creates history, it also creates freedom by naming it, calling it into existence, disclosing it, retrieving it from ontological or semantic confusion or from speechlessness—an act (or verbum) that simultaneously transforms chaos into cosmos. Shelley's lifelong concern with freedom is constantly present in both his theoretical and his poetic work. In fact, I think that one would be quite justified in proposing that the binary opposition freedom/slavery is the axis on which is constructed his political, ethical, and metaphysical universe. There are two places, however, where Shelley attempts to give what we might call a genealogy of freedom—*The Revolt of Islam* of 1817 (that imaginary preview of the Greek revolution) and the "Ode to Liberty" of 1820. The historical moment when

freedom literally comes into being coincides absolutely for Shelley with the awakening into consciousness of Greece. The "Ode to Liberty," after its diachronic representation of the vicissitudes of freedom across the whole of European history, ends by foregrounding the distance traversed from freedom's archaic call to the poet to the modern poet's desperate call to freedom:

> O Liberty! if such could be thy name
> Wert thou disjointed from these, or they from thee:
> If thine or theirs were treasures to be bought
> By blood or tears, have not the wise and free
> Wept tears, and blood like tears? (lines 266–70)

This call to freedom finds its historical justification for Shelley in the rising of modern Greece against Turkish tyranny, and its textual incarnation in his lyrical drama *Hellas,* in which he hopes that Greece can "again become / The fountain in the desert whence the earth / Shall drink of freedom" (*OSA,* Prologue, 137–39). The modeling of the poem on *The Persians* of Aeschylus not only explains its dramatic form but also shows the appropriate choice from the Greek tragic canon of a play based on a historical event rather than a mythical account, to house the "glorious contest now waging in Greece" (408), still in progress. Although Shelley seems to doubt the artistic value of his goat song, one can discern in the poem the tripartite structure of tragic myth as expounded by Aristotle in the *Poetics: peripeteia* (change in action), *anagnorisis* (change of mind), and *pathos* (suffering). By placing the setting of the drama in enemy territory, Shelley, like Aeschylus, adopts a methodological strategy that looks at the same from the perspective of the other. In the case of Aeschylus, this technique vindicates the construction of the tragic out of heroic materials. In Shelley's case, it operates both as a formal device and as a thematic element: Transformation of sameness into otherness lies at the core of this controversial compound that calls itself a lyrical drama and is the key event in both the dramatic and lyrical parts.[7]

The name of Freedom first enters the poem through the speech of Christ in the (discarded) prologue, charged with an aura of unrealized potentialities and being related to the pervasive ophidian imagery that clusters around Shelley's conception of the good:

> from Tyranny which arms
> Adverse miscreeds and emulous anarchies
> To stamp, as on a wingéd serpent's seed,
> Upon the name of Freedom. (*OSA* 105–8)

"Freedom" reappears in the speech of Satan, who presents it as a freshwater spring overflowing from Greece (*OSA* 137–39) and associates it with "power," "pleasure," "glory," "science," and "security," which "On Freedom hang like fruit on the green tree" (*OSA* 158), an image reminiscent of "The Mask of Anarchy," in which "Science, Poetry, and Thought" are made the "lamps" of a freedom that is identified with "Justice," "Wisdom," "Peace," and "Love." In the opening scene of *Hellas,* introduced with a *parodos,* a choral song uttered by the group of Greek captive women, the presence of freedom strikes like "lightning"—which is in fact the dominant iconographic representation Shelley employs. Freedom "enlightens" in a total transvaluation of given assumptions and conditions, as for instance "sleep," whose "softness," "depth," "calmness," and "quietness" are suddenly revealed in its adverse character—"death" and "deadly," lulling and treacherous: When "Tyrants sleep, let Freedom wake" (line 29). Playing with the theme of appearance and reality, the chorus tosses about binary oppositions, giving hints of a chaotic condition that both preceded "the great morning of the world" (line 46) and the advent of freedom and also follows upon its withdrawal and oblivion.

The first *epeisodion* or dialogic part, in fact the whole of the drama as such, is concerned with the education in the ways of freedom of the protagonist, the Turkish sultan. When Mahmud opens his eyes, he seems to be trailing clouds of otherness from the world of sleep back into ordinary reality, ready to undertake a journey of discovery that will lead him to *anagnorisis.* His first utterance strangely echoes the confusion of opposites and the state of nondifferentiation introduced by the chorus: "One spark may mix in reconciling ruin / The conqueror and the conquered" (lines 119–20). The "mightier world of sleep" (to remember "Mont Blanc," line 55) hangs heavily on him, enticing him to a dangerous quest on the path of knowledge. Bored, tired, languid but intellectually restless, Mahmud leaves behind the security of the familiar world built on firmly defined oppositions to enter the perilous area of (philosophical) questioning and (imaginative) equivocalness—the freedom of thought, where the materialist despot becomes exposed to the menace of thinking and "being." Somehow duplicating the recollective process of Prometheus, Mahmud wants to remember "strange and secret and forgotten things," eager to pursue a regressive procedure that will reactivate buried memories. His temptation is to pass from action to introspection, to recollect, to move backwards into personal and collective history in a counterclockwise motion, searching the caverns of mind and

"being," in line with Shelley's conviction that "If it were possible that a person should give a faithful history of his being, from the earliest period of his recollection, a picture would be presented such as the world has never contemplated before" (*Julian* 7:61). Mahmud's initiation into freedom begins when he undertakes the return journey in a (platonic?) *anamnesis* of the past.

The confrontation between the tyrant Mahmud and the philosopher Ahasuerus is an education in "error." "Philosophy," as Shelley enunciates in his essay "On Life," "destroys error, and the roots of error. It leaves, what is too often the duty of the reformer in political and ethical questions to leave, a vacancy. It reduces the mind to that freedom in which it would have acted, but for the misuse of words and signs, the instruments of its own creation. . . . Our whole life is thus an education of error" (477). Mahmud's "education" is literally a leading-out from "the tide of war" and into "the chrystalline sea / Of thought and its eternity" (*OSA* 697–699). Ahasuerus, who is not only an adept in "Greek and Frank philosophy" (line 742) but also a compendium of *all* philosophy (not to mention Shakespeare)—in that his teaching encompasses almost the whole spectrum of Western and Eastern theories, variations of anything from Platonism to (British) empiricism, (German) idealism, and Hinduism—entices him to the treacherous region of every (and any) philosophy, undermining the common sense of reality taken for granted by the unsuspecting realist, who ignores the fact that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in his (non)philosophy. By presenting an immaterialistic view of the world as the product of subjectivity, denying the independent existence of phenomena, Ahasuerus shatters Mahmud's assumptions and convictions and thrusts him into the state of *aporia.* Ahasuerus in fact undertakes the dual Socratic role of the expert dialectician who simultaneously undermines the intellectual securities and presuppositions of his pupil through skepticism while exposing him to a vision of reality astonishingly different from that of the unthinking materialist.

The first instance of Mahmud's paradisiacal ignorance having been stung by the Greek serpent of philosophical wonder is indicated in an ontological experiment, so to speak: his playing around with the verb *to be.* In fact, the whole dialogue between the tyrant and the prophet is an exercise in inflection of the grammar of "being." Mahmud initiates the game by addressing his instructor with the words "I honour thee, and would be what thou art / Were I not what I am" (lines 751–52), subverting any firm sense of identity and throwing a questioning light on the relation between self and

other or subject and object. Ahasuerus joins in with an allusion to hubris, the pride of individuals "Who would be what they may not, or would seem / That which they are not" (lines 765–66), gradually expanding from a psychological to a cosmic perspective, to the whole by which all beings "have been, are, or cease to be" (line 779), unveiling the hidden relation between "that which has been, or will be, to that / Which is—the absent to the present" (lines 794–96). As Mahmud is tricked onto the quicksand of philosophical relativity, "Wild—wilder thoughts convulse" his spirit (line 806), and "war" becomes internalized in his skull. The "hiss," "roar," "crush," and "shriek" that trouble his mind echo the chorus lines of the previous *stasimon* (as well as Prometheus's engagement with the Erinyes), indicating Mahmud's gradual subjection of imperial authority to the authorship of philosophy and poetry: "Thy words / Have power on me!—I see—" (lines 812–13).

The Turkish tyrant's painful process of "paedeutics" from ignorance of knowledge to knowledge of knowledge, through knowledge of ignorance, is an introduction into the realm of freedom, where he allows things to be what they are—the "letting be" or "let it come" (line 759) that characterizes man's exposure to the openness of being.[8] As Mahmud gradually discards selfhood, calculation, mastery over things and time—in short monarchy—Ahasuerus prepares for him (at his own request) the second phase of the rite of passage, the transition from the experience of philosophy to that of poetry, or the plunging into the mental condition called "free imagination" that dissolves the normal sense of reality. As Shelley has indicated in his notes to the poem, in staging Mahmud's encounter with otherness, he has entirely relinquished any supernatural agency—adopting instead, I would suggest, what Keats has called "negative capability" or what Coleridge nominates "the willing suspension of disbelief which constitutes poetic faith." Shelley has the cold realist, Mahmud, lured "to that state of mind in which ideas may be supposed to assume the force of sensations through the confusion of thought with the objects of thought, and the excess of passion animating the creations of imagination"(*OSA* 479, n6).[9] We must remember here that freedom in the exercise of imagination is one of the things for which Shelley envied the Greeks.

As the monarch Mahmud becomes subject to "Thought / Alone, and its quick elements, Will, Passion / Reason, Imagination" (lines 795–97), experiencing the eternity of thought in the Parmenidean sense ("Thinking and being are tautological"), the thinking of being that has nothing to do "with

time or place or circumstance" (line 802), the conjoined forces of philosophy and poetry erupt into the space of history, transposing the realms of reality and dream. Mahmud, reenacting the scene of Prometheus's contact with the phantasm of Jupiter, is confronted by the phantom of Mahomet, "communing" with a "portion" of himself (lines 854–55), thus following the recollecting process to its ultimate extremity. With the total crumbling of the symbolic order that began with his subjection to dialectical *elenchos,* Mahmud ends by being drawn into the imaginary, into a "mighty trance" (line 914) from which he is totally reluctant to emerge—despising those "human voices [that] wake us and we drown." Inevitably, though, Mahmud is forced back into habitual consciousness (and history), wondering, like Keats in the "Ode to a Nightingale," whether it was all "a vision or a waking dream" (line 79), and carrying ambivalent intimations of mortality (as well as immortality) that have utterly exploded his categories of experience (and language), since "on all things surest, brightest, best" are cast "Doubt, insecurity, astonishment" (lines 790–91). Having exchanged "power" for "knowledge," and having gone through philosophical skepticism to a state of existential "freedom," Mahmud has gained insight into the fabrication of opposition, the games of power—and glory—that sustain the system and mechanism of subject/object, tyrant/slave, victory/defeat: "Victory? poor slaves!" (line 930).

Slavery as such, in its political and social aspects, is represented in the poem through the Greek captive women, whose singing of memory and desire spans the past and the future and evokes the name of freedom (in nature and history) in multiple ways, spellbound as they are by the very power of poetic imagery and the harmony and rhythm of lyric. It is in their songs that the permanence and eternity of (Greek) thought are contrasted with the mutability of history and time, conflict, decay, and corruption, and in their visionary flights that the millennial expectation of a return of the Golden Age is expressed. Amid a piling up of references to natural, social, political, and personal freedom, the chorus celebrates the intellectual freedom inaugurated by Greece, the liberation of thought from time, place, and circumstance:

> But 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—— (lines 696–703)

Unaware of (or indifferent to) the "hermeneutic" violation that they commit, in their support of "logocentrism," intending to substitute an intellectual imperialism in place of a political one, the chorus of Greek captive women (and Shelley?) seeks refuge in the detached serenity of Greek noetic constructs, removed from the "tide of [historical] war," ignorant (?) of the fact that the oldest surviving voice of the "peaceful" eternity of Greek thought, the Anaximander fragment, speaks of flux and "war," revenge and discord, conflict and antithesis—mental and cosmic strife: "But where things have their origin, there too their passing away occurs according to necessity; for they pay recompense and penalty to one another for their recklessness, according to firmly established time."[10] Similarly, Heraclitus, yet another ancestral voice "prophesying war," has proclaimed that "War is father of all and king of all; and some he has shown as gods, other as men; some he has made slaves, others free," the originary *polemos* that precedes and dominates all forms of existence, the struggle that divides but also joins. "One must realize," Heraclitus tells us in another fragment, "that war is shared and Conflict is Justice, and that all things come to pass (and are ordained?) in accordance with conflict." In fact, harmony and concord appear to be the other side of discord, not its elimination, since "The counter-thrust brings together, and from tones at variance comes perfect attunement, and all things come to pass through conflict."[11]

So, if we are to interpret the Greek captive women's ideas concerning the "origins" of Greek thought as essentially illusive, we should be expecting yet another "education" (in freedom) to take place in Shelley's lyrical drama that calls itself *Hellas.* If we open up to a hermeneutic (or deconstructive?) "dialogue" with the chorus, we soon come to realize the cracks that imperceptibly appear in those solid "foundations" of tranquil meditation and calm composure. The chorus's initiation entails not the sacrifice of selfhood, as in Mahmud's case, but a sacrifice of innocence in the recognition and acceptance of metaphysical, and physical, tension. Theirs is a passage from the Apollonian aesthetic vision of "chrystalline depths" of a "stainless sea" (line 490) to the essentially Dionysian, i.e., tragic, quality of human existence—in other words their enforcement to confront the problem of evil. Of course, "evil" is not such stuff as lyric songs are made of (especially in romantic

dramas). But the reality of evil somehow projects itself as a "necessary" shadow upon the chorus's utopian vision.

The second choral song, "Worlds on worlds are rolling ever," probably gets its cue from Mahmud's reaction to a "shout within," that it bodes "Evil doubtless like all human sounds. / Let me converse with spirits" (lines 186–87), indicating the allocation of evil to the human rather than the supernatural world. In his notes to the song, Shelley affirms once more both his preoccupation, not to say obsession, with the presence of evil and the futility of hoping to solve it: "Let it not be supposed that I mean to dogmatise upon a subject, concerning which all men are equally ignorant, or that I think the Gordian knot of the origin of evil can be disentangled by that or any similar assertions" (*OSA* 478, n2). Although his remarks on the possibility of divine malevolence, which he considers "inexplicable and incredible," refer to the god of Christianity, in a manner tragically ironic, they are also pertinent to the "tragic theology"[12] of Greece. Shelley refuses to tackle the ontological "Gordian knot" of evil's origination, postponing the "true solution of the riddle" to a future state and leaving the matter at that, choosing instead "to attach himself to those ideas which exalt and ennoble humanity," such as the notion of freedom (as individual perfectibility, social progress, and political equality).

Yet, despite Shelley's separatist stance, "freedom" and "evil" seem to be inextricably linked, and their correlation is of course the crux of ethical science. One interesting instance of looking at this issue is to be found in the idealist philosophy of Shelley's contemporary, Schelling. Heidegger, in his extensive discussion on Schelling's *Essence of Human Freedom,* after an initial proposition that asserts the familiar Heideggerian postulate, "Man is at best the property of freedom," testifies that "human freedom is the faculty of good and evil," evil being defined as "the individual will gaining mastery over the universal will." So a metaphysics of evil becomes the foundation of an ethics of freedom, because "evil is a way of man's being free." Freedom as the function of good and evil is a reiterated motif in the essay, which explores the various aspects of the term, proposing its subdivision into categories, the basic distinction giving us, on the one hand, the idealistic concept of freedom as "self-determination in terms of one's own law of being," and on the other "true freedom," which is "found only where a choice is no longer possible and no longer necessary."[13] Such is what seems to me the tragic *hermeneia* of "freedom as an understanding of necessity," expressed by Aeschylus and the

other Greek dramatic writers. Or, as Ricoeur puts it, "It is precisely the tragic myth which is the depository of the Ineluctible implied in the very exercise of freedom, and which awakens us to those fateful aspects which we are always stirring up and uncovering as we progress in maturity, autonomy, and the social engagement of freedom." "That is why tragedy has never finished dying," Ricoeur concludes; "Killed twice, by the philosophical Logos and by the Judeo-Christian Kerygma, it survived its double death."[14]

The final chorus of *Hellas* opens with the celebratory hymn to the (historical or metaphysical) rebirth of Greece: "The world's great age begins anew, / The golden years return" (lines 1060–61). The vision of a regenerated world bears close resemblance in terms of its imaginative representation to act 4 of *Prometheus Unbound*. Here again,

> The earth doth like a snake renew
> Her winter weeds outworn:
> Heaven smiles, and faiths and empires gleam,
> Like wrecks of a dissolving dream. (lines 1062–65)

Subsequently, the description of natural transformation focuses on the Greek landscape, and the advent of the idyllic Golden Age makes itself apparent in a series of Arcadian scenes, in which the repeated use of comparatives denotes a vision of nature as perfectible: a "brighter Hellas," "waves serener far," a "new Peneus," "fairer Tempes," "Young Cyclads," "sunnier deep" (lines 1066–71). The song gains momentum, passing from nature to culture, applying the same principle of evolution and amelioration to the archetypal stories of Greece: a "loftier Argo," "Another Orpheus," a "new Ulysses" (lines 1073–76). Yet these seemingly positive references to the mythical age, which foreground the virtues of heroic adventure, erotic devotion, and patriotic fervor,[15] are unavoidably accompanied by a sinister resonance, as they carry an "other" or hidden side of evil practices: Argo's quest "prize" is not only the golden fleece but the murderess Medea; Orpheus is the transcendental singer who suffered dismemberment at the hands of humanity; Ulysses is also the crafty villain responsible for the destruction of Troy.

In the following stanza, uncontrolled and unredeemable tragedy, as well as ominous prophecy, momentarily burst into and violate the lyrical space:

> O, write no more the tale of Troy,
> If earth Death's scroll must be!
> Nor mix with Laian rage the joy

> Which dawns upon the free:
> Although a subtler Sphinx renew
> Riddles of death Thebes never knew. (lines 1078–83)

In its regressive movement through time toward cultural origins, the Golden Age that is to be revived, the chorus takes an imaginative leap from history to myth, uncovering those primal scenes to be not Rousseauistic or romantic spots of primeval innocence but demonic stories of war, murder, destruction—tales of unavoidable and unmitigated violence depicting the evil at the heart of (human and divine) existence. The "painted veil" is quickly drawn, and the Greek captive women, closing their eyes to the repulsiveness of the tragic vision and rejecting recollection, turn again to teleology and the millennial expectations of historical evolution (appropriately "named" after an illusory and utopian past): "Another Athens shall arise" (line 1084).

But the abyss has opened, the reality of tragedy gaping beneath both historical "content" and lyrical "form." A last reference to "Saturn and Love," the reigning deities of the Golden Age, supposedly superior to all divinities of posterity—"Saturn and Love their long repose / Shall burst, more bright and good" (lines 1090–91)—conducts the chorus from romance to ritual, to the place of sacrificial offering: "Not gold, not blood, their altar dowers / But votive tears and symbol flowers" (lines 1094–95). The allusion is to the earlier reference in the poem to "Pity's altar," which stood in "sacred Athens," dedicated to the "unknown God" whose "broken shrine" should be worshipped with "Love for hate and tears for blood" (lines 733–37). But what about the known *alastores,* avenging spirits or "wicked" gods of tragedy, and the tragic themes of revenge, wrong, guilt, suffering, and death—the dying that is not an ordinary death but sacrifice, implied in the utterance immediately preceding this one (lines 729–32), and which, taken from the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus, shows the danger and futility of ignoring the pervasive presence and inscrutable workings of the divine? The double negation of "Not gold, not blood" simply multiplies the force of the image that Shelley wishes to eliminate, adding negativity to radical evil and expounding all the rich and ambiguous complexity of the cluster gold/blood/tears that constitutes, I believe, the controlling metaphor of the poem. "Votive tears" can be as much signs of gratitude as instances of unrelieved despair, expressive of conditions of extremity and suffering. By a crucial (if unwilling) semantic transference, the chorus sees the two-in-one nature of blood—the dual, if terrifying, essence of violence, whereby "evil and the

violent measures taken to combat evil are essentially the same"—in the function of ritual, which is to purify social aggressiveness and bloodshed through the blood shed in sacrifice. Such is the symbolization process—"symbol flowers" and all—that substitutes the *pharmakos,* the surrogate victim, as the "necessary" recipient of human malice. It is upon the sacrificial altar, it has been argued, that "the clock of history" was "set in motion, and the beginnings of a social life [were] plotted out."[16]

Confronted with such an *apocalypsis* of "the horror," of the tragic origins of history, that inevitably darkens any vision of a utopian Golden Age, the chorus's optimistic resistance totally collapses:

> 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! (lines 1096–101)

After such knowledge, what expectation? The chorus falls into a lyrical paroxysm in the tragic realization that regeneration is impossible, that there is no "second coming" of any Golden Age, except in the ultimate extinction of the past and the radical annihilation of the world as we know it. In such circumstances the urge of the semichorus, uttered shortly before, takes an ironic resonance:

> Let the tyrants rule the desart they have made—
> Let the free possess the paradise they claim,
> Be the fortune of our fierce oppressors weighed
> With our ruin, our resistance and our name! (lines 1008–10)

These words add a new interpretation to that "name of freedom" which may after all be a mere sign without a referent, a signifier totally devoid of any type of a signified—let alone "paradise."

Before the lyric chorus of Greek captive women,[17] maddened by Dionysian *pathos,* turns into a tragic *thiasos* in maenadic possession, Shelley interrupts the action of his lyrical drama *in medias res.* With a masterful platonic gesture, reenacting the act of the statesman in the *Republic,* who exiled the tragic poets as dangerous to the social welfare, Shelley the legislator overrules Shelley the poet when the Hellenic tragic vision threatens his "beautiful idealisms of moral excellence" (135), his conviction that

"man could be so perfectionized as to be able to expel evil from his own nature, and from the greater part of the creation" (*OSA* 271). As it is, the rest is silence. Because there is only one way the poem could have ended after it just stops with the prophecy "Saturn and Love their long repose / Shall burst, more bright and good"—"That twenty centuries of stony sleep / Were vexed to nightmare by a [glorious war], / And what rough beast, its hour come round at last, / Slouches towards [Athens] to be born?"[18]

2. See vol. 5, no. 6 (December 1, 1838), 83–85; vol. 5, no. 7 (December 8, 1838), 103; vol. 5, no. 9 (December 22, 1838), 134–36; vol. 5, no. 11 (January 5, 1839), 166–68; and vol. 5, no. 17 (February 16, 1839), 262–64.

3. *Athenaeum* 262 (November 3, 1832), [705].

4. *People's Paper* (September 17, 1853). Also see September 24, 185.

5. H. Buxton Forman, *Vicissitudes of Shelley's* Queen Mab: *A Chapter in the History of Reform* (London: privately published, 1887), 21.

6. See Bouthaina Shaaban, "Shelley in the Chartist Press," *Keats-Shelley Memorial Bulletin* 34 (1983), 41.

7. See, for example, vol. 16 (1854), 221; vol. 18 (1855), 123; no. 3, 24; no. 4, 32; no. 5, 40; no. 6, 48; and nos. 7, 8, 9, and 10. Also see vol. 19 (1855), vol. 20 (1856), vols. 21 and 22 (1857), vol. 23 (1858), and vol. 24 (1859).

8. *Studies of Sensation and Event, Poems by Ebenezer Jones* (London 1879), ed. by Richard Herne Shepherd with memorial notices of the author by Sumner Jones and William James Linton (1843; London: privately published, 1879), xxxix, xliv. In the same footnote the editor further explains that this letter to M. Considerant by Ebenezer Jones also appeared in the first number (January, 1842) of the *Promethean, or Communitarian Apostle,* a monthly magazine edited by Goodwyn Barmby.

9. Dante G. Rossetti, *Notes and Queries* 5, no. 110, 4th series (February 5, 1870), 154.

10. T. Mardy Rees, *Ebenezer Jones, the Neglected Poet* (1820–1860) (Chelsea: privately published, n.d.), 1.

11. Thomas Cooper, *Eight Letters to the Young Men of the Working Classes* (London: privately published, 1851).

12. Thomas Cooper, *The Belief in a Personal God and a Future Life* (London: Holyoake, 1860) and *A Calm Inquiry into the Nature of Deity* (London: privately published, 1864).

13. See Jones's introduction to his important poem *My Life* (London: privately published, 1846).

14. Yuri B. Kovalev, ed., *An Anthology of the Chartist Literature* (Moscow: privately published, 1956), preface.

15. Martha Vicinus, *The Industrial Muse: A Study of Nineteenth Century British-Class Literature* (London: Croom Helm, 1974), 100.

16. Diary of Ernest Charles Jones, 1839–1847, 2 vols. Manchester Public Library, England. MS. 923.2J18.

17. Jones, *Studies of Sensation and Event,* 106.

18. "Literary Review," *Labourer* 2 (1847): 239–40, 96.

19. *Plain Speaker* 1, no. 2 (1849), [9], no. 8 (1849), 57–58.

20. George Lukács, *Goethe and his Age,* trans. Robert Anchor (London: Merlin Press, 1979), 153.

21. "Politics of Poets," *Chartist Circular* 42 (July 11, 1840), 170.

22. "P. B. Shelley," *Chartist Circular* 4 (October 19, 1839), 16. For a similar evaluation of Shelley's poetry, see the *Times,* January 28, 1869.

23. Diary of Ernest Charles Jones, 1839–1847, vol. 1.

24. Ernest Charles Jones, "Literature and Reviews," *People's Paper* (September 9, 1854), 5.

25. Ernest Charles Jones, *Notes to the People* (London: privately published, 1851), 1:4.

26. *People's Paper* (March 28, 1857), [4].

27. MS. F. 923.2J8 (italics are in the original). These pages carry no date, but the epigraph suggests that the poet is not alive. Both the fact that Jones died in 1869 and the use of the word *socialists* indicate that this plan might have been written in the 1870s or 1880s.

28. In *The Battle Day and Other Poems* (London, New York: privately published, 1855), 125–27.

29. In *Songs of Democracy* (London: privately published, 1856–57), [1].

30. The edition I used for this study is the first edition of *The Purgatory of Suicides* (London: privately published, 1845).

Chapter 11: "THE NAME OF FREEDOM"

1. "My Queen, some destructive power or evil spirit, that appeared I know not whence, caused the beginning of our utter route"; Aeschylus, *The Persians,* Loeb Classical Library, trans. H. Weir Smyth (London: Heinemann; Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1922), lines 353–54. It was Aeschylus who revived the world of the daemons, Dodds informs us, emphasizing that it was through the *alastor* or evil spirit that the *phthonos* (envy) of the gods worked; E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1951), 31–40.

2. Timothy Webb points out that "Shelley's admiration for Greece was balanced by an understanding of its weaknesses," for instance, the dependence of Athenian society upon a slave class, or the "system of revenge and retribution against which Aeschylus had warned his countrymen so often"; *Shelley: A Voice Not Understood* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1977), 194.

3. "Ancient Greece is indeed an enduring, atemporal ideal for Shelley and his circle, but one that can speak to the present era . . . [which Shelley] portrays as emerging from authoritarian Christianity to a new pagan-inspired liberality, egalitar-

ianism, and harmony"; Mark Kipperman, "History and Ideality: The Politics of Shelley's *Hellas,*" *Studies in Romanticism* 30 (1991): 154.

4. "Shelley uses the word 'legislator' with an exact sense of its contemporary meaning," Stuart Curran remarks, "signifying not a parliamentarian disputing over the methods of rule, but a law giver, like Zoroaster or Moses"; *Shelley's Annus Mirabilis: The Maturing of an Epic Vision* (San Marino, Calif.: Huntington Library, 1975), 199. Conversely, Timothy Clark indicates that "the conception of poets as legislators becomes, tragically, their implication in the chain of tyrannies constituting the greater part of history"; *Embodying Revolution: The Figure of the Poet in Shelley* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 227–28.

5. References to Plato's text are to *The Collected Dialogues of Plato,* ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1963). William Keach believes that it is useful to look at Monboddo's commentary on the *Cratylus,* which "suggests a basis for Shelley's positive ideal of linguistic arbitrariness," adding that it is "certainly consistent with Shelley's idea of poets as 'unacknowledged legislators' to think of words as originally produced by the imagination of *arbiters,* 'lawgivers' of language"; *Shelley's Style* (New York: Methuen, 1984), 17–18.

6. For Heidegger's discussion of history, language, and freedom, see especially "Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry" and "What is Metaphysics?" in *Existence and Being,* ed. Werner Brock (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1949); also "On the Essence of Truth," in *Basic Writings,* ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper and Rowe, 1977). Heidegger does not only homologize the openness of "truth" to "freedom," but also to "conflict": "Truth is the primal conflict in which, always in some particular way, the Open is won"; *Poetry, Language, Thought,* trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 60.

7. "Shelley's structural solution in *Hellas* is a combination of the perspectives that each genre provides. . . . [in a play of] generic opposites against one another" to heighten the "contrast of the contradictory forms and of the inimical mental attitudes that they express," Constance Walker maintains. I am in total agreement, although, as the development of my argument will show, I would not subscribe to the proposition that follows, namely that the "dynamics" of drama must be overcome before the paradise of Hellas may be regained—"opposition," as I see it, being precisely the metaphysical structure of Hellenism that is not then the "antithesis of antitheses"; "The Urn of Bitter Prophecy: Antithetical Patterns in *Hellas,*" *Keats-Shelley Memorial Bulletin* 33 (1982): 37, 39.

8. Besides Heidegger's well-known position on freedom as open receptivity, Ricoeur also sees the ultimate state of freedom as that which "passes over into necessity, becoming subordinate to the initiative of things"; this freedom, he points

out, "no longer dares: it consents, it yields"; Paul Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary,* trans. Erazim V. Kohak (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1966), 482.

9. "If Shelley sees the imagination as freedom, he also conceives of it as order . . . [which makes] true order and true liberty . . . [the] result of imaginative activity"; (P. M. S. Dawson, *The Unacknowledged Legislator: Shelley and Politics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 244–45).

10. Martin Heidegger, *Early Greek Thinking,* trans. David Farrell Krell and Frank A. Capuzzi (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), 13. In his commentary Heidegger states that the fragment is essentially "tragic," that we discover in it "a trace of the essence of tragedy" (44).

11. Fragments 83, 82, and 75, in *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus: An Edition of the Fragments with Translation and Commentary,* ed. Charles H. Kahn (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1979).

12. Defined by Ricoeur as "the tragic theology of the god who tempts, blinds, leads astray," "the scandalous theology of predestination to evil"; *The Symbolism of Evil,* trans. Emerson Buchanan (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 173, 212.

13. *Schelling's Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom,* trans. Joan Stambaugh (Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 1985). Curran, discussing Shelley's conception of freedom, emphasizes that "Failure to discriminate between free will and will is finally responsible for all the tyrannies of the world. . . . [because] the former is predicated on the liberty of all beings, the latter only on that of oneself"; *Shelley's Annus Mirabilis,* 200.

14. Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil,* 312, 326. "Without the dialectics of fate and freedom," Ricoeur observes, "there would be no tragedy. Tragedy requires, on the one hand, transcendence and, more precisely, hostile transcendence. . . . [and on the other] the upsurge of a freedom that *delays* the fulfillment of fate" (220).

15. Richard Cronin, *Shelley's Poetic Thoughts* (London: Macmillan, 1981), 136, and Milton Wilson, *Shelley's Later Poetry: A Study of his Prophetic Imagination* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1957), 195, also perceive this sinister undertone.

16. René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred,* trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1977), 307.

17. Jerrold E. Hogle also focuses on the "female" nature of the chorus, pointing toward the subversive role played by nonmilitaristic, marginalized women in a patriarchal society; *Shelley's Process: Radical Transference and the Development of his Major Works* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1988), 293.

18. W. B. Yeats, "The Second Coming,"; *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats* (New York: Macmillan, 1956), 185. This argument appropriately closes with Yeats because

his interest in Shelley's work and perceptive discussion of "The Philosophy of elley's Poetry," incorporated in his *Ideas of Good and Evil;* his own reading of story in terms of a very strict system of historical cycles; and his virtual copying in e poem "Two Songs from a Play" of the final stanza of *Hellas* in a context that ings together "holy Dionysus," "God's death," "darkening thought," "formless rkness," "odour of blood," and the failure of "Platonic tolerance"—all pointing ward the futility of hoping "Another Troy must rise and set, / Another lineage feed e crow, / Another Argo's painted prow / Drive to a flashier bauble yet" (210). orthrop Frye points out both similarities and differences in the Shelleyan and atsian visions: "Here we touch on the feature of Shelley's thought that so delights ats, the prophesy of a new religion 'antithetical' to Christianity and reverting to iny features of Greek thought and culture. . . . Shelley's version of this new culture ' the critic admits, "much less vulgar than Yeats's: it does not rest on a facile cyclism rationalize everything brutal and degenerate in both Greek and modern culture as t of a 'tragic' or 'heroic' way of life"; *A Study of English Romanticism* (New York: ndom House, 1968), 101.

Chapter 12: SHELLEY'S IMPACT ON ITALIAN LITERATURE

1. Giacomo Zanella, "Paralleli Letterari. P.B. Shelley e G. Leopardi," *Nuova tologia* (January 8, 1883).

2. *The Romantics' Reviewers* 1802–1824, ed. John O. Hayden (Chicago: Univ. of icago Press, 1968), 124.

3. Giuseppe Nicolini, *Vita di Giorgio Lord Byron* (1834; Milan: Lombardi, 1855), oks 3–4.

4. Giambattista Niccolini, "Beatrice Cenci. Discorso intorno all'antica e mod- ia tragedia," in *Opere edite e inedite di Giovanni Battista Niccolini,* ed. Corrado rgiolli, vol. 3: *Tragedie Varie* (Turin: M. Guidoni, 1862).

5. The article appeared in the Neapolitan Magazine *Il Museo.* In the same year, wever, Marcello Mazzoni published his *Fiori* and *Glorie della letteratura Italiana,* in ich a translation by Blennio of *Alastor* also appeared; this issue helped to spread elley's name and work among Italian critics.

6. *Byron: A Self-Portrait, Letters and Diaries,* ed. Peter Quennell (London: John rray, 1950), 2:399.

7. Ibid., 480–81.

8. Zanella, "Paralleli Letterari," 412, 425–26, 428.

9. Federico Olivero, "Percy Bysshe Shelley e il paesaggio italico," *Nuova Angia* 941 (March 1, 1911): 90.

10. *The Journals of Mary Shelley,* 1814–1844, ed. Paula R. Feldman and Diana Scott-Kilvert (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 1:226. It is true, however, that Mary Shelley would return to Monti as well as to Alfieri when writing her *Lives of the Most Eminent Literary and Scientific Men of Italy, Spain and Portugal* (London: Longman, 1835). See also her letters to Gabriele Rossetti sent on April 3 and 20, 1835.

11. *Byron,* 2:479–86.

12. Alfieri must have remained important for Mary Shelley until at least March 1819, when she was still translating his *Mirra.* See *MWSJ* 1:226–27, 253.

13. Alan M. Weinberg, *Shelley's Italian Experience* (London: Macmillan, 1991), 23.

14. Giovanni Caldana, "Giudizi di Percy Bysshe Shelley sui poeti italiani," *Nuova Antologia* (May-June 1907): 672.

15. See, for instance, the letter Shelley sent to Peacock on April 20, 1818, expressing his intention to write a tragedy on Tasso's madness, and also his letter to the Gisbornes on July 11, 1818. See also his visit to Ferrara on November 7, 1818, described in detail in a letter to Peacock (*PBSL* 2:45–48). Shelley enclosed in this letter a piece of wood from the door of Tasso's cell.

16. Emilio Cecchi, "La Difesa della Poesia," *Nuova Antologia,* 228 (September 1, 1909), 57. Benedetto Croce, *Ultimi Saggi* (Bari: Laterza, 1935), 59–78.

17. Giosuè Carducci, "Introduzione," in *Prometeo Liberato,* trans. Ettore Sanfelice (Turin: L. Roux, 1894), xiv.

18. Ibid., xv–xvii.

19. Walter Binni, *La Poetica del decadentismo* (Florence: Sansoni, 1936), 107–9.

20. Ibid., 109.

21. See Carla Chiummo, *Shelley nella bottega di Pascoli* (Fasano: Schena, 1992).

22. Ibid., 21.

23. Binni, *La Poetica del decadentismo,* 22.

24. For a further discussion of Shelley's critical heritage in Italy, see L. M. Crisafulli Jones, *Shelley fra Ottocento e Novecento* (Bologna: CLUEB, 1990).

25. Gabriele D'Annunzio, "Commemorazione di Percy Bysshe Shelley," in *Opere di Gabriele D'Annunzio* (Milan: Mondadori, 1950, rpt. 1962), 370.

26. D'Annunzio will come back again to Shelley in 1925 in Mario Praz's early appreciation of the Romantic poet. Praz notes how two dominant themes prevail in Shelley's poetry: the platonic conception of cosmos and a deep attraction toward magic and the occult. Praz shows how these two elements make possible the birth of a new religion in which the primordial elements of the earth become myths once again, while nature herself turns into a human being or, better into a freer and more spiritual sort of mankind. See Mario Praz, "Percy Bysshe Shelley," in *Poeti Inglesi*