

***Shelley and Androgyny***

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**Abstract**

This thesis explores Percy Bysshe Shelley’s uses of androgyny alongside his readings and translations of Plato, with particular attention to the *Phaedo* and the *Symposium*. Taking its cue from Diane Long Hoeveler’s analysis of the failed quality of the canonical male Romantics’ uses of androgyny, this study takes up Hoeveler’s exception of ‘Platonic metaphysics’ to demonstrate the ways in which Shelley’s uses of androgyny are subtly combined with his Platonism.[[1]](#footnote-1) Aside from in his translation of the *Symposium*, the word ‘androgyny’ does not appear within Shelley’s works, but the idea underpins his poetic thoughts and is extant throughout his compositions from 1811 until his accidental death in 1822. Shelley’s corpus expands the meaning of androgyny from its traditional conception of the reunion of the masculine and the feminine to encompass the ‘psychic union’ of the poet and the reader,[[2]](#footnote-2) and this mental mingling includes the poet’s own identification as reader through acts of intertextuality and allusivity. ‘Shelley became Shelley through his immersion in Plato’, Michael O’Neill writes, and Shelley’s ‘poetic self-awareness…is always bound up with awareness of otherness’.[[3]](#footnote-3) Ultimately, Shelley tests the bounds of selfhood between reader and poet, where for Plato the reader is implicated as an interlocutor, by imagining and imaging the reconciliation of self and Other through androgyny’s idealisation of mental union.

Working chronologically, this thesis analyses androgyny in five of Shelley’s major works: *Alastor*, *Laon and Cythna*, *Prometheus Unbound*, *The Witch of Atlas*, and *Epipsychidion*. The introduction directs attention to androgyny in three less canonical poems, ‘The Sunset’, ‘Love’s Philosophy’, and ‘…sweet flower that I had sung…’, and the conclusion considers Shelley’s final lyrics to Jane Williams. The mingling of the masculine and the feminine and the harmonising of self and Other pervade Shelley’s works, and this thesis demonstrates how Shelley self-consciously implements androgyny with Platonic subtlety.

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**Declaration**

*I, the author, confirm that the Thesis is my own work. I am aware of the University’s Guidance on the Use of Unfair Means (*[*www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/unfair-means*](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/unfair-means)*). This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, university.*

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**Introduction: ‘the unreserve of mingled being’: Shelley and Androgyny**

Androgyny underpins Shelley’s poetic thoughts.[[4]](#footnote-4) Although the word ‘androgyny’ does not appear in Shelley’s works, apart from in his translation of Plato’s *Symposium* as *The Banquet*, Nathaniel Brown confirms that ‘the idea is implicit throughout his work, particularly in his portrayal of the sexes, with their harmonious blending of the traditionally masculine and the traditionally feminine’.[[5]](#footnote-5) In 1816, Shelley describes the relationship between a masculine ‘One’ and feminine Other as constituted by ‘the unreserve of mingled being’ (‘The Sunset’, 8), where ‘mingle’ becomes an operative word for androgynous blending.[[6]](#footnote-6) For the editors, ‘[t]he word “mingle” expresses S.’s sense of reciprocity in sexual intercourse, “mingled being” that of combined sexual and spiritual mutuality’.[[7]](#footnote-7) The *Concordance* reveals the breadth and range of Shelley’s use of the word ‘mingle’ and its variants with over 90 entries, most commonly meaning to unite, but also to join, to join together, to mix, to intermix, to combine, and to blend.[[8]](#footnote-8) Androgyny, as defined by Diane Long Hoeveler, is ‘the true reconciliation of masculine and feminine, spirit and psyche’, or ‘the fictional perfect balance of masculine and feminine in the human psyche’, and is traceable to Aristophanes’ creation myth in Plato’s *Symposium*.[[9]](#footnote-9) In the *Concordance*, shades of meaning surface as ‘mingle’ comes to include both sexual and mental union, recognising that throughout Shelley’s works there is an ambivalent vacillation between the psychic and the physical. This thesis demonstrates the centrality of androgyny to Shelley’s poetic thoughts.

The word’s most prolific usage occurs in *Queen Mab* and *Prometheus Unbound*, but it also appears repeatedly in two short poems: ‘The Sunset’ and ‘Love’s Philosophy’. In both, the act of mingling does not result in the easy achievement of union, but rather reveals Shelley’s ever-present ambivalence between the material and the ideal. Shelley’s implicit androgyny is strongly linked to his ‘natural’ Platonism,[[10]](#footnote-10) and his readings and translations of Plato, particularly the *Symposium*, equip the poet with a multifaceted, shifting, and potentialised vision of androgyny and its implication of the reader. In Plato’s *Symposium*, Shelley finds in Aristophanes’ account of the androgynes a ‘subject rhyme’—to adopt Michael O’Neill’s term—for the mental and sexual union that pervades his poetic, philosophical, and political thoughts.[[11]](#footnote-11) Beauty, of both the physical and intellectual persuasion, is contingent upon equality in Shelley’s political tracts on reform and revolution, where in his explanatory fragment written to accompany *The Banquet*, Shelley decries the ‘invidious distinction of human kind, as a class of beings [of] intellectual nature, into two sexes’ as ‘a remnant of savage barbarism which we have less excuse than they [the Greeks] for not having totally abolished’ (‘A Discourse on the Manners of the Ancient Greeks’, p. 408).[[12]](#footnote-12) James A. Notopoulos’ assertion that ‘[t]he *Republic* satisfied Shelley’s passion for reforming the world; the *Symposium* satisfied Shelley the poet and artist’ demarcates too divisively between Shelley’s passion for reform and his artistry,[[13]](#footnote-13) overlooking the potential for poetry to prompt, enact, and embody revolution as it does in *Laon and Cythna* and more subtly in *Prometheus Unbound*. Notopoulos’ claim does not take into consideration the passionate cries for reform within his ‘Discourse’, the transmutations of the *Symposium* into the artistry of *Epipsychidion*, and also excludes the Platonic dialogue that first captured—and continued to hold—Shelley’s imagination: the *Phaedo*. This is not to discount the importance of Notopoulos’ analysis of Shelley’s Platonism, but rather to urge a closer examination of Shelley’s reading, translating, and transmuting of Plato—himself ‘essentially a poet’—into his own poetic thoughts (*A Defence of Poetry*, p. 679).[[14]](#footnote-14) Throughout his oeuvre, and with increasing concentration, Shelley adopts the subtleties of Plato’s thoughts and the ‘mechanism of [the *Symposium*’s] drama’,[[15]](#footnote-15) along with his implication of the reader as interlocutor, through his continued experimentations with androgyny as a ‘psychic union’.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Androgyny in Shelley’s corpus extends from its traditional conception of the union of masculine and feminine to encompass the psychic union of poet and reader, and this broadened interpretation is reflective of Shelley’s readings and translations of Plato, for whom the reader is implicated as interlocutor. ‘As art’, Notopolous writes, ‘the Dialogues of Plato are finalities; but as philosophy they are thought in process, images of an adventure into philosophy’, and androgyny, in its indebtedness to Plato, is carried out through Shelley’s poetry in a similar act of becoming. Notopoulos’ study, while invaluable in its compiling of Shelley’s readings and translations of Plato, offers scant attention to Plato’s intentional implication of the reader as interlocutor, and Shelley’s own implication of the reader as co-creator of meaning. ‘Poetry promotes imaginative vitality, and in doing so it expands ethical awareness’.[[17]](#footnote-17) The vitality of poetry, not unlike Plato’s dialogues, is sustained through the poet’s communion with the reader.[[18]](#footnote-18) In the *Phaedrus*, Phaedrus models the living discourse that transforms the written word from an image into ‘living, ensouled speech’, words that, for Socrates, are ‘written along with knowledge in the soul of a student’ (*Phaedrus*, 276a).[[19]](#footnote-19) Although Shelley’s didacticism after *Queen Mab* is enacted with measured degrees of hesitance, he assumes the Wordsworthian stance of ‘Teacher’ with Socratic scepticism,[[20]](#footnote-20) levelling the positions of teacher and student through their shared reciprocity by noting that the ‘the pleasure resulting from the manner in which [poets] express the influence of society or nature upon their own minds, communicates itself to others, and gathers a sort of reduplication from that community’, so that the act of communicating through poetry sustains the reciprocal process between poet and reader through which poetry is vitalised (*A Defence of Poetry*, p. 676).

Through close attention to Shelley’s reading, translating, and writing of Plato, the ‘contradictory and obscure’ movements that William Keach identifies in Shelley’s poems, prose, and ‘poem[s] in prose’ gain clarity through the subtlety and intentionality of Plato’s dialogues that implicate the reader as an equally active interlocutor or co-creator of meaning.[[21]](#footnote-21) For Michael O’Neill, the ‘sense of language’s deficiencies helps to explain why [Shelley’s] prose is that of a poet, concerned, like Plato, “to kindle a harmony in thoughts” (*A Defence of Poetry*, 679), aware both that “harmony” involves a necessary awareness of the possibility of discord and a commitment to the imagination’,[[22]](#footnote-22) and Shelley’s attunement to his reader is a continuing source of hope and despair, but one that fuels poetic creation. Aware that ‘the deep truth is imageless’ (*Prometheus Unbound*, 2.4.116), Shelley nonetheless strives to vitalise the ‘image’ of written language through the ‘living and breathing discourse’ of poetry (*Phaedrus*, 276a),[[23]](#footnote-23) where Shelley’s estimation of Plato as ‘essentially a poet’ ambiguously blends the conditions of ‘poet’ and ‘philosopher’, refusing Keach’s distinction between these states in the *Defence* (*A Defence of Poetry*, p. 679).[[24]](#footnote-24) Shelley affords both himself and Plato the mingled status of philosopher-poet whose art, through the active engagement of the reader, affects a moral aim in pursuit of idealistic amelioration. ‘Complete unity’ in Plato’s dialogues ‘is not something that exists *in the work*, but has to be created *by the reader* on the basis of a longer process of reflection’,[[25]](#footnote-25) and a similar sense of working towards unity, or androgynous wholeness, pervades the *Symposium* and its absorption into Shelley’s poetic thoughts.

The aim of this thesis is twofold. It urges a reconsideration of Shelley’s uses of androgyny, hereto unapprehended, and the ways in which androgyny is radically transferred, to adopt Jerrold E. Hogle’s description of Shelley’s process,[[26]](#footnote-26) throughout a selection of his major works. It also analyses Shelley’s relationship with Plato as a reader and an emulator. By centring this study’s focus primarily upon the *Symposium*, it will become apparent how these aims are interconnected. My theoretical approach is predominately new formalist and, in contrast to Hogle’s approach, follows Richard Cronin’s pursuit of Shelley’s poetic thoughts through his poetry. Michael O’Neill’s and William Keach’s expansion of Shelley’s poetry to include his prose poetry, or ‘poem[s] in prose’, which, as O’Neill demonstrates, is deeply connected to Plato’s poetic language and its unbinding of form,[[27]](#footnote-27) is instrumental to this study. In addition to his poetry, Shelley’s letters inform this study’s tracing of the development of androgyny in Shelley’s poetic thoughts, and in this respect I draw upon Madeleine Callaghan’s analysis of Shelley’s artistry as it is interwoven through his letters. Nancy Moore Goslee’s emphasis on an understanding of Shelley’s ‘active engagement with public discourse’ as drawing upon composition as a visual process also informs my analysis of Shelley’s manuscripts and sketches.[[28]](#footnote-28) Published poems, abandoned fragments, notebooks, letters, and sketches are each considered as equally important compositions that, in many cases, meld and blend into one another, and although a selection of Shelley’s major works are taken as the subject of this study, this is not to discount the broad range of compositions that influence and are influenced by the five poems that make up the chapters herein. Following Stuart Sperry, this study treats Shelley as ‘above all an idealist’, considering that ‘as Plato demonstrates, the most extreme forms of skepticism and idealism are frequently compatible’.[[29]](#footnote-29) Shelley’s sceptical idealism shines through in his testing of androgyny, where the ‘fictional perfect balance of masculine and feminine in the human psyche’ blends with the real potential for what Shelley terms a ‘future state’, or de Beauvoirian ‘androgynous world’ of sexual equality (*PBS Letters*, I, p. 195).[[30]](#footnote-30)

Shelley’s idealism is inclusive of his feminism, and in this respect this thesis builds upon Nathaniel Brown’s pioneering study of Shelley’s feminism and its rootedness in the poet’s desire for ‘equality between the sexes’.[[31]](#footnote-31) In his translation of the *Symposium*, Shelley stresses through Aristophanes ‘the happiness of all, both men and women’, and emphasises equality for a spectrum of sexual orientations (*The Banquet*, p. 433),[[32]](#footnote-32) and sexual equality is imaginatively realised within Shelley’s poetry, vocalised most explicitly in Cythna’s rallying cry: ‘Can man be free if woman be a slave?’ (*Laon and Cythna* 2.43.379).[[33]](#footnote-33) While Brown repeatedly turns to the prose fragments written to accompany Shelley’s translation in defence of his feminism, comparatively little attention is granted to the *Symposium* itself, and his analyses of Shelley’s poetry are scant. However, Brown’s useful attention to ‘the doctrine of sympathy’ promotes ‘the dissolution of sex roles and gender stereotypes’, and he locates in Shelley’s writings the ‘modern feminist ideals of unisexuality or androgyny’ espoused in modern feminist works such as Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* and Carolyn G. Heilbrun’s *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny*.[[34]](#footnote-34) But Shelley also anticipates the dangers of androgyny as identified by twentieth-century feminist theorists,[[35]](#footnote-35) and the threat posed by androgynous assimilation as opposed to reciprocal union. As Michael O’Neill writes, ‘Shelley not only idealizes and delights in Plato’s idealizing; he is aware of what is at stake in the act of idealizing’,[[36]](#footnote-36) and this self-consciousness, coupled with his emulation of Plato, remains largely unappreciated.

Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi and Teddi Chichester Bonca offer correctives to Brown’s exaltation of Shelley’s feminism, with Gelpi admitting to have considered ‘the viability of androgyny as a feminist concept’ in Shelley’s poetry before ‘abandoning androgyny as a feminist project’ and emphatically rejecting Brown’s ‘view that Shelley was a feminist’.[[37]](#footnote-37) Bonca also refuses androgyny in Shelley’s poetry and favours instead ‘imaginative transsexualism’, or the ‘crossing over from one distinctly defined gender to the other’ by charting Shelley’s self-feminising efforts. Bonca’s study, like Gelpi’s, blends psychoanalysis and biography, and she deems Shelley a narcissist, albeit a self-conscious one and ‘a creature of the poet’s own invention’.[[38]](#footnote-38) But Bonca’s claims of narcissism crumble under Shelley’s own admission that to compose ‘[in] solitude or put forth thoughts without sympathy is unprofitable vanity’ (*PBS Letters*, II, p. 368). More profitable is Judith Chernaik’s affirmation that ‘[t]he great defense Shelley makes of poetry is that it counters egoism…for both creator and reader it involves an identification with the “other,” hence self-forgetfulness’.[[39]](#footnote-39) Diane Long Hoeveler’s preeminent study of Shelley’s androgyny locates, throughout the works of the canonical male Romantics, androgyny as a self-created male fantasy that is witness to the masculine appropriation or cannibalisation of the feminine, and Warren Stevenson traces a course through the canonical male Romantics akin to Hoeveler’s and Bonca’s studies by fusing, or confusing, androgyny with narcissism.[[40]](#footnote-40) ‘Platonic metaphysics notwithstanding’, Hoeveler writes, ‘the Romantic poet found himself, as well as his poetry, in an abyss from which there was no escape, where language and imagery failed’.[[41]](#footnote-41) This crucial omission severely limits an analysis of Shelley’s androgyny and its rootedness in Plato’s *Symposium*, nonetheless described by Hoeveler as ‘[t]he single most important source for Shelley’s treatment of love’.[[42]](#footnote-42) For Plato, ‘Eros is the vitalizing rhythm of communication between the philosopher and Being’,[[43]](#footnote-43) and androgyny, powered by love, enacts an intersubjective form of communion between poet and reader through poetry.

Ross Wilson’s recent analysis of Shelley as translator and philosopher-poet centres upon the *Symposium*, and his admission that ‘there is still considerable progress to be made’ chimes with Benjamin Sudarsky’s call for renewed critical interest in Shelley’s translation.[[44]](#footnote-44) Sudarsky, echoing Mary Shelley’s sentiments and their consideration by Michael O’Neill, asserts that ‘*The Banquet* deserves our attention for its formal elegance, valued by Shelley’s contemporaneous readers’ and discerns through its mediation of ‘Golden Age Greece and British Romanticism’ a ‘close dialogue between two celebrated periods of literary achievement’.[[45]](#footnote-45) Sudarsky lights upon the dialogism intrinsic to Plato’s methodology in his description of Shelley’s translation as encouraging a dialogue between two periods of literary achievement. His description also echoes Shelley’s estimation of Dante as the poet whose works ‘may be considered as the bridge thrown over the stream of time which unites the modern and the ancient world’ (*A Defence of Poetry*, p. 691). This thesis attempts, in a sense, its own form of bridging three discernible categories of Shelley scholarship: the works of the 1960s to the 1990s that wrestled with Shelley’s feminism, and androgyny as a feminist concept; studies of Shelley’s Platonism in both sceptical and idealist traditions; and new formalist analyses of Shelley’s works as self-conscious and self-reflexive, in which there is ‘a dynamic interaction between the work and the reading process’.[[46]](#footnote-46)

In departing from the psychoanalytic lens applied to androgyny by Bonca and Gelpi, excepting Gelpi’s Lacanian intersubjectivity between self and Other, which I adopt throughout, this thesis follows more closely Hoeveler’s pluralistic methodology, but with the crucial inclusion of the ‘Platonic metaphysics’ that she avoids. It also makes use of Derridean deconstruction, Beauvoirian feminism, and Judith Butler and Catherine Malabou’s divergent but overlapping approaches to Hegelian dialectic and subjectivity, gender, and post-gender theory. Simone de Beauvoir’s call for an ‘androgynous world’ echoes Shelley’s desire for a ‘future state’ in which the distinctions between male and female are abolished (*PBS Letters*, I, p. 195). This is not an elimination of difference, for the androgynous condition is predicated upon masculine and feminine equality, but is rather an effacement of ‘the masculine world of the past’.[[47]](#footnote-47) And although Catherine Malabou does not use the term ‘androgynous’, she invokes its essence in describing ‘a difference without opposition, to this empty and multiple space of between-genders, within which there is not any real conflict between a feminine and a masculine self-touching’, where binaries cease to dominate as rigidly opposed structures.[[48]](#footnote-48) The mingling that is intrinsic to androgyny enables a dissolution of binary structures without eliminating difference, so that ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ are unified, operating in synchronicity, rather than in opposition.

Out of respect for Shelley’s distinction between ‘the poet & the man’ (*PBS Letters*, II, p. 310), this study takes ‘the poet’ as its subject, and this respect marks its greatest departure from existing studies of Shelley and androgyny wherein details of Shelley’s life are made to undermine the ideals espoused in his writings. In proposing that Shelley’s androgyny hinges upon his readings and translations of Plato, this thesis builds upon the poet’s Platonism as analysed by James A. Notopoulos, C. E. Pulos, and Ross G. Woodman, but in closest respects it traces the footsteps of Michael O’Neill’s pioneering study of *The Banquet*.[[49]](#footnote-49) O’Neill’s affirmation that ‘Shelley became Shelley through his immersion in Plato’ points out the importance of analysing Shelley’s poetic thoughts in tandem with his thoughts on, and from, Plato.[[50]](#footnote-50) Shelley’s engagement with Plato runs a far deeper course than merely philosophical borrowings or influence, and the poet’s Platonism is not necessarily at odds with his scepticism or materialism. As Harold Bloom notes, ‘Shelley’s interpretation of Plato [is] as a skeptical poet’.[[51]](#footnote-51) Shelley finds in Plato not only the myth of the androgyne but the mingling that is intrinsic to androgyny, from the mingling of the sceptical and ideal, and the spiritual and the material, espoused in the *Phaedo* to the mingling of lover and beloved in the *Symposium*, to the intellectual and imaginative mingling between self and Other that the dialogic form promotes in its implication of the reader as interlocutor.

Placing Plato as the ‘centre and circumference’ of Shelley’s poetic thoughts, this thesis, crucially, considers the way in which Plato implicates the reader as interlocutor, and how this dynamic interaction is transmuted into Shelley’s own works (*A Defence of Poetry*, p. 696). Shelley’s description of poetry as the ‘centre and circumference of knowledge’ in his *Defence* is itself a borrowing from Plato’s *Timaeus*, wherein ‘The soul, interfused everywhere from the centre to the circumference of heaven, of which she is the external envelopment, herself turning in herself, began a divine beginning of never-ceasing rational life enduring throughout all time’ (*Timaeus*, 36d-e).[[52]](#footnote-52) Poetry enables self-knowledge, construed positively in the *Defence* but antithetically in *Peter Bell the Third*, where it is used to describe the egotistically sublime Wordsworth:

He had a mind which was somehow

At once circumference and centre

Of all he might or feel or know;

Nothing went ever out, although

Something did ever enter

(*Peter Bell the Third*, 293-297)

Wordsworth’s inability to go out of his own mind is at odds with Shelley’s definition of love as ‘a going out of our own nature’ in empathic identification with an Other (*A Defence of Poetry*, p. 682), but the ambivalence aroused by the ‘Something’ that ‘did ever enter’ points towards the possibility that, although the Lake poet’s ability to influence others may have faded, his ability to be influenced remains open. This is a hope that haunts Shelley’s writings most explicitly in *Alastor*, but one that never truly vanishes.

Imitation and influence accompany androgyny as a processing of self and Other that is not limited to the reconciliation of masculine and feminine but expands to encompass the psychic union of poet and reader. This is an area as yet uncharted in Shelley criticism, but one that builds upon the critical attention to Shelley’s reader undertaken by Stephen C. Behrendt and Ronald Tetreault, among others.[[53]](#footnote-53) Plato’s reader is vitally embodied within his dialogues as interlocutor, anticipating Ross Wilson’s concept of ‘interanimation’ wherein ‘the poem only lives in the reader’s reading, but that, at the same time, the reader is brought more fully to life by the poem’.[[54]](#footnote-54) As for Shelley, Plato’s dialogues aim to morally improve the reader through their active mental participation within the text, and this thesis traces the development of Shelley’s increasingly subtle mode of didacticism, starting from Mary Shelley’s assertion that *Alastor* ‘ought rather to be considered didactic than narrative’,[[55]](#footnote-55) to *Laon and Cythna*’s being ‘in the style and for the same object as “Queen Mab”’ (*PBS Letters*, I, p. 557), but crucially without instructive notes, to Shelley’s proclamation that ‘Didactic poetry is my abhorrence’ in the preface to *Prometheus Unbound* (p. 232), and his increasing testing of the reader’s involvement and understanding in *The Witch of Atlas* and *Epipsychidion*. As Judith Chernaik notes, Shelley ‘defined didacticism in a narrow sense as the use of poetry to effect change directly’, so that ‘[i]n a wider sense, his poetry is didactic’.[[56]](#footnote-56) Shelley’s subtle didacticism owes to his engagement with Plato, for whom ‘the dialogues communicate with their reader in a secret way’. A. K. Cotton notes that ‘Plato held certain views to be correct, yet did not want to set them out in writing directly for fear of misinterpretation, so pointed discerning readers towards them in indirect ways’,[[57]](#footnote-57) and, similarly, Shelley’s fears of misinterpretation or failed intertextual communication surface in his essay ‘On Love’, written to accompany his translation of the *Symposium*. Therein, he directly addresses the reader in his claim to ‘know not the internal constitution of other men, or even of thine whom I now address’, lamenting that when ‘I have thought to appeal to something in common and unburden my inmost soul to them, I have found my language misunderstood’. ‘I have everywhere sought’, Shelley concludes his verse paragraph, with Mary’s editorial addition of ‘sympathy’ aptly echoing the sentiments that pervade the poet’s thoughts in the months before his accidental death. ‘I write little now’, Shelley laments to John Gisborne in June 1822, continuing:

It is impossible to compose except under the strong excitement of an assurance of finding sympathy in what you write. Imagine Demosthenes reciting a Philippic to the waves of the Atlantic! Lord Byron is in this respect fortunate. He touched a chord to which a million hearts responded, and the coarse music which he produced to please them disciplined him to the perfection to which he now approaches.

(*PBS Letters*, II, p. 436).

The reader, for Shelley, is not a passive audience or empty receptacle, but a responsive and active co-producer sharing in the poet’s intent. Shelley’s musical metaphorization of Byron’s relationship with his readers recalls Eryximachus’ description of music as ‘producing love and agreement between adverse things’, where sympathy becomes an act of poesis (*The Banquet*, p. 427). Shelley extends this metaphor in ‘On Love’ where self and Other are intermingled in the imagination ‘in secret’, ‘like the chords of two exquisite lyres’ that ‘vibrate with the vibrations of our own’ (‘On Love’, p. 632). The sympathetic intermingling between poet and reader is an act in pursuit of perfection, akin to androgyny.

My survey of Shelley’s major works excludes *Queen Mab*, *The Cenci*, *Adonais*, and *The Triumph of Life* with reasoned reluctance. *Queen Mab*’s influence is considered throughout, but the poem itself offers little to no space for the reader’s psychic integration, instead circumscribing the reader with its appended Notes and exacted vision. *Laon and Cythna* improves upon *Queen Mab* by allowing space for the reader’s burgeoning interanimation, and its overt androgynous imaging of the Form in the Temple of the Spirit and its masculine and feminine protagonists, united first through their desire and later through their sacrificial self-immolation, builds upon the spiritual and corporeal framework laid out in *Queen Mab* through Ianthe, who is imaginatively inhabited by the poet but leaves no space for the reader. *The Cenci*, intended by Shelley as a drama to be performed on the stage, deliberately lacks the building lyricism of *Prometheus Unbound*, and is not equipped or intended to foster androgynous mingling between poet and reader. *Adonais* also leaves little room for the reader apart from its elegiac invocation of the mourning masses.[[58]](#footnote-58) Warren Stevenson reads evidence of Shelley’s narcissistic androgyny in the elegy through the poet’s implication of Keats within his own identity as ‘androgynous artist’ and suggests that Shelley’s Dionysian self-figuration pictures the poet ‘as something of an androgyne’.[[59]](#footnote-59)

His head was bound with pansies overblown,

And faded violets, white, and pied, and blue;

And a light spear topped with a cypress cone,

Round whose rude shaft dark ivy-tresses grew

Yet dripping with the forest’s noonday dew,

Vibrated, as the ever-beating heart

Shook the weak hand that grasped it;

(*Adonais*, 33.289-295)

The dual-sexed Dionysus and the bisexual ivy that covers his spear sponsors the figure’s androgynous implications, but the homoeroticism of this depiction seems to more explicitly invoke the Dionysian Alcibiades’ presence in the *Symposium*, ‘crowned with a thick crown of ivy and violets’, than Aristophanes’ androgynes (*The Banquet*, pp. 450-451). In contrast with the symposiasts’ speeches on love that draw further and further away from the body before culminating in Diotima’s ungendered Love, ‘uncontaminated with the intermixture of human flesh’ (*The Banquet*, p. 450), Alcibiades is earthbound, appetitive, and consumed with desire for Socrates. *Adonais* performs an enclosed act of imaginative sympathy between Keats and Shelley rather than the narcissism Stevenson alleges through the poet’s self-elegising, but this is a sympathetic exchange that remains closed off to the reader. Similarly, *The Triumph of Life* works to alienate rather than involve its reader. Although it seems to image androgynous synthesis in the feminine ‘shape all light, which with one hand did fling / Dew on the earth’ who ‘stood / Amid the Sun, as he amid the blaze / Of his own glory’ (*The Triumph of Life*, 352 and 348-350), this sexual and elemental mingling ceaselessly shifts and resists implicating the reader. Where Shelley employs the sympathetic gaze to enact androgynous intermingling in *Laon and Cythna* and *Prometheus Unbound*, expanded in ‘On Love’ where ‘the beams of [another’s] eyes should kindle at once and mix and melt into our own’ (p. 631), itself a recasting of Aristophanes’ androgynes’ desire ‘to mix and melt and to be melted…so that one should be made out of two’ (*The Banquet*, p. 432), in *The Triumph of Life* ‘the gazer’s mind was strewn beneath / Her feet like embers, and she, thought by thought, / Trampled its fires into the dust of death’ (*The Triumph of Life*, 386-388) as Shelley refuses the reader’s psychic participation.

Working chronologically, my thesis takes *Alastor* as its starting point, and in an accompanying poem, ‘The Sunset’, Shelley builds upon the dichotomy of the masculine Poet and the feminine veilèd maid and the pair’s ambiguous mingling into an ungendered Spirit. In this early poem, as in poems throughout Shelley’s career, ‘mingle’ acts as an operative, albeit subtle, indicator of androgynous union. ‘For Shelley’, Teddi Chichester Bonca writes, ‘mingled being was the ultimate communion between self and other’, vitalised by ‘the sexual and sympathetic energy that, according to the science of the day, they exuded as a kind of electro-magnetic fluid’.[[60]](#footnote-60) But androgynous mingling comes to be more than a sexual or psychosexual communion between lovers, as Shelley’s handling of the union between self and Other expands to include allusivity and the reader’s embodiment or implication within the text. ‘The Sunset’ anticipates the dedication ‘To Mary’ prefacing *Laon and Cythna* in its textual embodiment of Mary—Shelley’s real and ideal reader—as ‘Maria’ in the poem’s draft form, altered to ‘Rosalind’ and then ‘Isabel’ in the published text. In a subtle echo of Wordsworth’s projected posthumous relationship with, and within, Dorothy in *Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey*, Shelley casts Mary following her lover’s death as a liminal figure dissolving away in ‘wisdom-working grief’ (‘The Sunset’, 36). As in *Alastor*, the lyric and narrative mingling of ‘The Sunset’ is coloured by a subtle Neoplatonism, from the Plotinian ‘wisdom-working grief’ that progressively wears away the corporeal frame to the Orphic body prison of the *Phaedo*: ‘The tomb of thy dead self’ (‘The Sunset’, 42). But there is also an echo of the *Symposium* in Isabel’s account of ‘the deep sea of Love’, anticipating Diotima’s mouthing of Shelley’s ‘wide ocean of intellectual beauty’ (*The Banquet*, p. 449). The alliterative excess and overwrought lines of ‘The Sunset’ may account for its understudied status, but its emphasis upon ‘mingling’ and its subtle shades of Platonism mark its importance to a discussion of Shelley’s experiment with androgyny. In the poem, ‘mingled shades of twilight’ anticipate the way in which ‘the youth and lady mingled lay / In love and sleep’, while ‘the unreserve of mingled being’ seems to offer an image of union inclusive of physical and psychic enmeshment. (‘The Sunset’, 16, 24-25, and 8). Along with the androgynous implications of ‘mingling’, the lyric reveals Shelley seeming to test or wrest with a sexual union that promotes equilibrium over assimilation or absorption. In a cancelled version of line 8, Shelley writes ‘take his soul into her own’, before favouring instead ‘the unreserve of mingled being’. Androgyny is tested, not simply as a wholly harmonious ideal, but as a condition that risks absorbing or assimilating the self into the other, a condition not entirely unlike the threat of Wordsworth’s ‘egotistical sublime’. Shelley returns to this risk with increased circumspection in *Epipsychidion*, where the soul uneasily moves out of and upon the Other. But in *Laon and Cythna* *and Prometheus Unbound*, androgyny is coupled with hope for sexual equality and for the reciprocal mingling of the poet and the reader.

Reciprocity is key in texts that encourage the reader’s mental activity, where poetry is vitalised through the psychic union of poet and reader. *Laon and Cythna* includes Shelley’s most explicitly androgynous figure, the ‘Form’ in the Temple of the Spirit, embodied by the simultaneous dissolution and reunion of the phallic Serpent and Woman, who is maenadic in her kinship with the Serpent, recalling Euripides’ *Bacchae*, wherein the maenads have ‘writhing snakes that licked their cheeks’.[[61]](#footnote-61) In a union that transcends the sensual, the pair ‘round each other rolled, dilating more / And more—then rose, commingling into one’ (*Laon and Cythna*, 1.56.500-501). The ‘Form’ which appears as a result of this commingling is, although gendered with the masculine pronoun ‘He’, described in traditionally feminine terms as ‘Fairer than tongue can speak or thought may frame, / The radiance of whose limbs rose-like and warm / Flowed forth’ (*Laon and Cythna*, 1.57.507-509). Rather than the perfectly symmetrical and Janus-faced androgynes of Aristophanes’ myth in the *Symposium*, androgyny is for Shelley a mingled state of mental equilibrium, where binarily gendered forms are dissolved through ungendered union. Androgyny is presented as a cyclical process of union and disunion in the series of transferences that ultimately give way to Laon and Cythna’s rebirth from the Form’s imagination and into the poem’s narrative action. The act of narration is transferred from the poem’s anonymous Narrator to the androgynous Form through his gaze, ‘like moonlight’ (*Laon and Cythna*, 1.58.517), under whose ocular and oracular direction Laon and Cythna appear:

Beneath the darkness of his outspread hair

He stood thus beautiful: but there was One

Who sate beside him like his shadow there,

And held his hand—far lovelier—she was known

To be thus fair, by the few lines alone

Which thro’ her floating locks and gathered cloke,

Glances of soul-dissolving glory, shone:—

None else beheld her eyes—in him they woke

Memories which found a tongue, as thus he silence broke.

(*Laon and Cythna*, 1.60.532-540)

Reminiscent of a Coleridgean multeity in unity, Laon and Cythna are figured as distinctly separate and essentially masculine and feminine entities united within the androgynous Form’s gaze. For Tracy Hargreaves, ‘[t]he androgyne exists spectrally, as though it is always brought into being by the gaze, lacking a secure ontology’.[[62]](#footnote-62) But in Shelley’s experimentations, the androgyne’s ontological basis is predicated upon the reciprocal activity of poet and reader. Like the vacillations between the ideal and the material that extend throughout Shelley’s career, androgyny similarly shifts between a state resigned to the imagination and a site of potential embodiment through the poet and reader’s shared mental activity. The androgynous Form’s shared gaze with the poem’s Narrator—himself a form of reader—brings Laon and Cythna into being, thereby modelling androgyny to the text’s reader as a shared process capable of inciting a mental revolution in pursuit of sexual equality.

Androgyny’s aim of achieving sexual equality is in large part indebted to Plato. ‘The principle of equality had been discovered and applied by Plato in his Republic’, Shelley writes (*A Defence of Poetry*, p. 689). Sexual difference in the *Republic*, Socrates suggests, rests upon ‘the possibility that all of the differences between men and women can be reduced to this one difference: that females bear and males beget’.[[63]](#footnote-63) But, as Diotima reveals through Socrates at the centre of the *Symposium*, *kuousin*, although associated with the female act of childbearing, becomes a condition irrespective of sexual difference. Plato’s ‘playfulness’ with gendered language, in Angela Hobbs’ estimation, enables him ‘to break down distinctions between the male and the female, and the masculine and the feminine’,[[64]](#footnote-64) ultimately reflecting the philosopher’s encouragement of aspirations toward the ungendered Forms. This thesis considers how Shelley’s intellectual communion with Plato informs his involvement of the reader, and how this reciprocal involvement reduplicates androgyny as it appears in the union of masculine and feminine figurations within the text.

Shelley’s earliest suggestion of androgyny as a revolutionary process of union-through-dissolution appears in a letter of 1812 to Elizabeth Hitchener:

I understand you, when you say we are free. Liberty is the very soul of friendship, and from the very soul of Liberty art thou my friend—aye, & such a sense as this can never fade. ‘Earthly those passions of the Earth which perish where they had their birth, but Love is indestructible’—I almost wish that Southey had not made the glendoveer a male—these detestable distinctions will surely be abolished in a future state of being—‘The *holy* flame forever burneth, from Heaven it came, to Heaven returneth’—Might there not have been a *prior* state of existence, might not we have been friends there?

(*PBS Letters*, I, p. 195)

In Shelley’s view, Southey’s adherence to the binary categories of male and female undermines the revolutionary potential of his poem, so that in Shelley’s own poetry of revolution he repeatedly subverts the gender binary and its traditional associations of femininity with passivity and masculinity with action through the confusion or dissolution of binarily gendered characteristics. Cythna and Asia are the active, and by extension, masculine, protagonists of their respective works, while Laon and Prometheus are presented as passive and feminine. The confusion of binary gender categories enables Shelley to experiment with the dissolution of these ‘detestable distinctions’ through the genderless or asexual union afforded by androgyny, while also recalling Aristophanes’ description of a third sex, now non-existent: ‘The androgynous sex, both in appearance and in name, was common both to male and female’ (*The Banquet*, p. 429). In *Laon and Cythna*, Shelley’s conceptions of ‘a future state of being’ and ‘a *prior* state of existence’ are made one and the same in the Temple of the Spirit that cyclically opens and closes the poem’s first and final cantos, where the Form’s state of being is wholly androgynous. In 1812, the Platonic dialogue with greatest hold upon Shelley’s imagination seems to be the *Phaedo*,[[65]](#footnote-65) where Socrates’ meditations upon the soul’s former and future states of being resonate within Shelley’s letter. But the androgynes of Aristophanes’ myth also experience a similar conflation of a future and prior state of being, being formerly whole and unified, but in their postlapsarian state, yearning through love, ‘that reconciler and bond of union of their original nature’, to ‘make two, one, and to heal the divided nature of man’ (*The Banquet*, p. 431).

One year before his letter to Hitchener, Shelley’s attention to the binary categories of male and female and their potential associations with the positions of writer and reader are demonstrated in his first letter to William Godwin. Posing as ‘Jennings Stukeley’, Shelley’s ambiguously gendered pseudonym anticipates the experiments with androgyny that occur throughout his works. Shelley writes to Godwin:

Altho’ unacquainted with you otherwise than by your writings, I am nevertheless induced by the spirit of liberal investigation, & ardency for the rights of humanity which they breathe, to address you, to lay aside all bondages of etiquette, to address you as a common friend to Nature, Justice & Reason. I enclose you therefore, a tract, which I have compressed from much prolix reasoning, & which I believe to come near to the truth, which I submit to your inspection. Your opinion, or the reasons which induce you to think any part of the enclosed reasoning incorrect, [?unclearre], or false will much oblige me; the truth of it if established would very much festinate the approach of that period, when mankind shall see the truth of, & be actuated by the morality of “Political Justice.”

I do not add more, but after an attentive perusal, perhaps you will favor me with a letter containing your opinions relative to it’s [*sic*] comparative truth or fallacy.

     Your friend

     Jennings Stukeley[[66]](#footnote-66)

Shelley immediately foregrounds his position as reader by emphasising his knowledge of Godwin through his writing, and this form of acquaintance is emphasised as being more intimate than knowing Godwin in person. In establishing his own position as reader of Godwin, Shelley is quickly able to move Godwin into the position of a reader of his own work, the attached ‘tract’: *The Necessity of Atheism*. This calculated manoeuvring quickly equalises the writers’ positions, and greatly contrasts with the marked disparity between Shelley and Godwin in the poet’s first letter, as Percy B. Shelley, in the following year. Therein, Shelley elevates Godwin as a ‘luminary too dazzling for the darkness which surrounds him’ and makes no mention of his own writings (*PBS Letters*, I, p. 220). But, posing as the ambiguously gendered ‘Jennings’, where an elongated stroke beneath the ‘in’ at the end of the name suggests that Shelley deliberated over writing ‘Jenny’ before forming ‘Jennyngs’,[[67]](#footnote-67) Shelley establishes his and Godwin’s shared subject positions as writers and readers. Through this complicity, Shelley’s ‘tract’ works to ‘festinate the approach of that period, when mankind shall see the truth of, & be actuated by the morality of “Political Justice”’, as the aims and destined effects of Godwin’s writings are blended into Shelley’s own. Shelley’s closing designation of ‘friend’ in this first letter to Godwin underscores a sense of intimate intellectual exchange or mutuality that is lacking from his later letters which end instead with formal expressions of sincerity and devotion.[[68]](#footnote-68) This complicity between poet and reader, and Shelley’s interest in the conflation of subject positions, come to play out through his poetry in the form of androgyny. Shelley’s later letters to Godwin, signed in his own name, express a sentimental rhetoric that veers towards the traditionally feminine, from espousing his former zeal for Gothic Romances to presenting himself as inferior and meek, in contrast to Godwin’s traditionally masculine, paternal, and power-wielding position as ‘the regulator and former of my mind’ (*PBS Letters*, I, p. 229). But androgyny, in its harmonious blending of masculine and feminine, offers liberation from these binary constraints of ‘male’ and ‘female’, so that, in assuming the ambiguously gendered position of ‘Jennings’ or ‘Jennyngs’, Shelley is able to enact the intellectual melding that drives androgyny as a ‘psychic union’ in his poetry.

Working through poetry, Shelley reconciles the binaries of male and female, masculine and feminine, and poet and reader through androgyny. In 1818, Shelley’s translation of the *Symposium*, despite his claims of it being a simple ‘exercise’ (*PBS Letters*, II, p. 20), revolutionises his conceptions of the roles of poet and reader, and of self and Other, as his contemporaneous prose composition, ‘On Love’, suggests. Professing not to know ‘the internal constitution of other men, or even of thine whom I now address’, Shelley recounts how when ‘I have thought to appeal to something in common and unburden my inmost soul to them, I have found my language misunderstood’. Foregrounding the division between poet and reader, self and Other, Shelley goes on to demonstrate how union becomes possible through poetic language: ‘if we imagine, we would that the airy children of our brain were born anew within another’s; if we feel, we would that another’s nerves should vibrate to our own, that the beams of their eyes should kindle at once and mix and melt into our own’ (‘On Love’, p. 631). Ultimately, it is through

the meeting with an understanding capable of clearly estimating the deductions of our own, an imagination which should enter into and seize upon the subtle and delicate peculiarities which we have delighted to cherish and unfold in secret, with a frame whose nerves, like the chords of two exquisite lyres strung to the accompaniment of one delightful voice, vibrate with the vibrations of our own

(‘On Love’, p. 632)

Shelley’s likening of the sympathetic imagination to music resonates with his descriptions of Plato’s language following his translation of the *Symposium*. ‘Plato exhibits the rare union of close and subtle logic, with the Pythian enthusiasm of poetry, melted by the splendour and harmony of his periods into one irresistible stream of musical impressions’, Shelley writes, later describing Plato as ‘essentially a poet—the truth and splendour of his imagery and the melody of his language is the most intense that it is possible to conceive’ (Preface to *The Banquet*, p. 402 and *A Defence of Poetry*, p. 679). Taken together, the prose fragments reveal how the experience of translating Plato’s ‘irresistible stream of musical impressions’ underscores the potential for self and Other to achieve harmonious union through ‘the melody of…language’. Benjamin Sudarsky, arguing in favour of the originality of Shelley’s translation, notes how, ‘[i]n the *Symposium*, Eryximachus distinguishes μελοποιία, the invention of one’s own melody, from παιδεία, training in the music of another (187d)’ where ‘Shelley translates the former as “poetry, or the composition of melody”’. ‘Given Eryximachus’ distinction’, Sudarsky writes, ‘if “composition” translates ποίησις (or μελοποιία), the phrase “original composition” is tautological to the Greek way of thinking’.[[69]](#footnote-69) Shelley confers upon Plato the status of a poet owing to the melody of his language, where the composition of melody becomes analogous to poesis. Shelley’s translation of the *Symposium* witnesses the poet’s own language vibrating in harmony with the ancient philosopher’s melody, and it is this harmonising process that Shelley extends to his reader through the conception of androgyny, where the demarcations between original and translation or imitation, and poet and reader, become dissolved in favour of harmonious union. Androgyny comes to include much more than the fusion of masculine and feminine halves into a united whole, encompassing the mental union between the poet and the reader, but also the allusive relations of the poet as reader.

Chapter One examines how intertextuality and allusivity work alongside Shelley’s development of androgyny as a psychic union or mental compact between poet and reader in *Alastor*. *Alastor* marks Shelley’s first sustained experiment with androgyny as an intersubjective processing of self and Other, where the textual figurations of the masculine Poet and the feminine ‘veilèd maid’ (151) intermingle alongside the Narrator’s imaginative sympathy for the Poet. Sympathy blurs the distinctions between self and Other as *Alastor* experiments with the mingling that is intrinsic to androgyny. The poem’s radical fusion of the narrative and lyric projects in form what it tests in content, as the subjective confines of selfhood are momentarily diffused through attempted mental union with the Other. The Narrator’s efforts at sympathetic projection anticipate the prose poetry of ‘On Love’, where love is ‘that powerful attraction towards all that we conceive or fear or hope beyond ourselves when we find within our own thoughts the chasm of an insufficient void and seek to awaken in all things that are a community with what we experience within ourselves’ (p. 631). In *Alastor*, ‘pale despair’ is mingled with ‘a clinging hope’ as the poem experiments with androgyny as a reconciling processing of self and Other (718 and 717). *Alastor*’s responsiveness to Wordsworth’s *Excursion* points up the fears of selfhood that permeate Shelley’s poetic thoughts, where the Lake poet’s fallen status as ‘slave’ underscores the self-servitude of his egoism.[[70]](#footnote-70) But the hope for communal experience underlying love, and androgyny, also stirs the poet’s fear that ‘there is selfishness in the passion of Love’ (*PBS Letters*, I, p. 36). Rather than evidencing Shelley’s alleged narcissism,[[71]](#footnote-71) *Alastor* bears witness to the poet’s sceptical circumscription of selfhood. The poem polyphonically echoes a range of voices from Wordsworth and Coleridge to Ovid and Aeschylus, underpinned by a Platonic dialogism—influenced by Thomas Love Peacock—that works to dissolve the demarcations of subjective isolation. The mingling between the masculine Poet and the feminine veiled maid, at once psychic and physical, results in the formation of the ungendered, starry-eyed Spirit in an early, albeit ambivalent, imaging of androgyny.

In Chapter Two, the androgynous Spirit and recurrent mingling of *Alastor* finds clearer expression in Laon and Cythna’s appearance within the emphatically androgynous Form in the poem’s first canto. *Laon and Cythna* sees Shelley’s most direct and explicit attempt to image androgyny as a unifying process inclusive of physical and psychic intermingling, and this imaged union is in no small part indebted to the poet’s revisiting of Plato’s *Symposium* in tandem with the poem’s composition. Building upon the multivocal, dialogic atmosphere of *Alastor*, *Laon and Cythna* is witness to Shelley’s self-conscious mediation between the states of reader and writer, or literary consumer and composer. The anxieties of allusiveness are offset by the intimate and reciprocal potential of imitation, as, building upon Mary’s status as ideal reader and reciprocal partner to Shelley, *Laon and Cythna* weaves into verse the poet’s epistolary desire for he and Mary to ‘imitate each others [*sic*] excellencies…so that constituting but one being, all real knowledge may be comprised in the maxim *γνωθι* *σεαυτον* (know thyself)’ (*PBS Letters*, I, p. 414). Cythna voices this maxim in her imperative to ‘Reproach not thine own soul, but know thyself’ (8.22.190) which, ironically misconstrued as Shelleyan self-love by *The Quarterly Review*, instead promotes the empathic love that fuels androgynous oneness. Laon and Cythna’s revolution fails in its time and place, but the pair succeed in their efforts to rouse their audience’s imaginative sympathy, whose ‘warm tears burst in spite of faith and fear’ (12.14.118). In the midst of despair, Shelley’s hope of inspiring sympathy and universal emotion in his readers is reflected in the eyes of the impassioned onlookers as androgyny is conceived of as a communal and progressive process, mediating between Godwinian perfectibility and Platonic amelioration.

*Prometheus Unbound* is Shelley’s greatest work of hope, weaving an ameliorated universe out of *Laon and Cythna*’s strains of optimism in its audience’s imaginative involvement. Chapter Three charts Shelley’s direct implication of the reader in the psychic union afforded by androgyny in *Prometheus Unbound*, where poet and reader are equally active actors in the lyrical drama’s mental theatre. Prometheus and Asia apotheosise the masculine and feminine union of Laon and Cythna, and Shelley works to subvert patriarchal tyranny through the pair’s inverted gender roles. Building upon the epic-romance, Prometheus is feminised through his passivity while Asia assumes the traditionally masculine, chivalric role of active quester and redeemer. The turn and centre of the drama is Asia’s Socratic dialogue with the emphatically genderless Demogorgon, whose reappearance in Act 4 issues forth a liberated universe where androgyny is exalted as a revolutionary mental process capable of undoing binary gender and its hierarchical implications. Finding himself ‘totally incapable of original composition’ in the months preceding the composition of *Prometheus Unbound* (*PBS Letters*, I, p. 26), Shelley again returns to Plato’s *Symposium*, this time translating it into English and composing the prefatory prose fragments that include ‘On Love’. The transmutation of ‘the splendour and harmony of [Plato’s] periods into one irresistible stream of musical impressions’ in *The Banquet* marks a point of revolution in Shelley’s thoughts on love and on the amorphous melding of reader and writer, or self and Other. In Aristophanes’ account of the androgynes who desire to ‘intimately mix and melt and to be melted together…so that one should be made out of two’ (*The Banquet*, p. 432), Shelley finds a ‘subject rhyme’—to adopt Michael O’Neill’s term—for the mental and sexual union that pervades his poetic, philosophical, and political thoughts.[[72]](#footnote-72)

‘Shelley did not expect sympathy and approbation from the public; but the want of it took away a portion of the ardour that ought to have sustained him while writing’, Mary writes in her ‘Note to *The Witch of Atlas*’.[[73]](#footnote-73) Cognisant of but not dependent on his reader’s receptivity, Shelley casts a sceptical spotlight on androgyny as a psychically unifying strategy in *The Witch of Atlas*, exploring the extent to which poetry can successfully synthesise subjectivities and to what ends. Androgyny’s pitfalls and lingering potential are tested, where Shelley clearly demarcates between androgyny and hermaphroditism as ideal and fallen conditions of achieved or failed mental union. The androgynous Witch is the perfect union of elemental opposites, being equal parts Apollo and Venus. She embodies and bodies forth poetry that gives and delights in itself, whereas her creation, Hermaphroditus, lacks her imaginative vitality and is all artifice. Chapter Four considers Shelley’s vacillating engagement with his reader in *The Witch of Atlas*, where the poet’s imaginative autonomy is tested as a *monoeidic* form of the androgynous ideal. Autonomous and yet alienated, the Witch as poet experiments with and doubts the necessity of the empathic union Shelley had previously envisaged through the textual representations of reunited masculine and feminine entities and through the concurrent mental mingling of the poet and the reader.

Chapter Five turns to the subtle wit of Shelley’s letters and the Witch-like delight that plays through *Epipsychidion*. In 1821, Shelley’s self-deprecating joke that ‘you might as well go to a ginshop for a leg of mutton, as expect any thing human or earthly from me’ accompanies his anxiety over *Epipsychidion*’s reception. ‘I desired Ollier not to circulate this piece except to the *Σύνετοι*’, Shelley writes, ‘and even they it seems are inclined to approximate me to the circle of a servant girl & her sweetheart. — But I intend to write a Symposium of my own to set all this right’ (*PBS Letters*, II, p. 363). Following Nancy Moore Goslee’s analysis of Emilia Viviani’s ‘dispersoned’ textual figuration in the draft manuscripts and Mary’s description of the poem as the ‘story of Shelley[’s] Italian platonics’,[[74]](#footnote-74) this chapter considers *Epipsychidion* as Shelley’s own *Symposium*, where Emily stands as a radically transferred figuration of ἔρως (*erōs*). Shelley’s wry chiding of his readership in *Epipsychidion*, of even the *Σύνετοι* (sunetoi) who are unattuned to the Platonic subtleties of his artistry, is saturated with Socratic irony. *Epipsychidion* is a subtle and painstakingly crafted versification and development of *The Banquet* as Shelley ventriloquises his former self through the repurposing of fragments, replicating this process through the fictionalised poet’s recollections and the Advertisement author’s locating and publishing of the fragmentary materials. Emily stands as both Other and a doubled self as she fluctuates between the substantiality of a human form and the ethereality of an incorporeal outline, and as such she mimics the way in which Michael Rossington notes that ‘[t]ranslation acts as poetry’s double, enabling not simply the “carrying over” of words from one language to another, but a dialogue with the original that generates originality’.[[75]](#footnote-75) Ultimately, Emily’s figured transferences follow the transubstantiations of ἔρως in *The Banquet*, as Shelley transmutes the translated prose of Plato’s immensely influential dialectic on love into verse.

The epic-romance of *Laon and Cythna* looks towards the mock-heroic mode of Shelley’s most explicitly allusive poem, *Peter Bell the Third*, penned in 1819 partially in reaction to negative reviews of *The Revolt of Islam*, so that the two poems operate almost dialectically, self-referentially engaging one another in conversation. *Peter Bell the Third*’s epic cyclicality, promoted by Shelley half-jestingly placing his satire among the ranks of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* in the poem’s preface, finds a precedent in the structural balance of *Laon and Cythna*. ‘The poem moves in a circle’, Stuart Curran notes, ‘balancing the poet’s journey to the Temple of the Spirit in Canto I with that of Laon, Cythna, and her child in Canto XII’.[[76]](#footnote-76) The cyclicality of *Alastor*, where the deceased Poet is repeatedly revived through the Narrator’s sympathetic intervention, is developed in *Laon and Cythna* through the poem’s epic magnitude and structural balance. *Laon and Cythna* mingles the chivalric romance of Spenser with the epic heroism of Homer and, while its preface doesn’t boast the bravado of *Peter Bell the Third*’s, Homer’s name appears marginally throughout the *Laon and Cythna* manuscripts as if Shelley is privately situating himself alongside his epic poem’s greatest predecessor.

Sympathetic identification is blurred with imitation in the *Laon and Cythna* manuscripts as, seemingly building upon the kaleidoscopic mingling of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Aeschylus, and Ovid, among others, in *Alastor*, *Laon and Cythna* attempts to encourage an imaginative compact between poet and reader—and poets as readers—through the vehicle of androgyny. In *Laon and Cythna*, the eponymous siblings’ incestuous relationship acts as an extension of androgyny, and one that underscores Shelley’s fraught but sympathetic relationship with Wordsworth. A cancelled stanza from *Peter Bell the Third* alludes to the unfallen Wordsworth of *Tintern Abbey*:

Another—‘Impious Libertine!

That commits i——t with his sister

In ruined Abbeys—mighty fine

To write odes on it’!—I opine

Peter had never even kissed her.[[77]](#footnote-77)

As the elided ‘i——t’ reveals, Wordsworth’s intimate relationship with Dorothy attracted rumours of incest, rumours that were all too familiar to Shelley through his purported sexual relations with Mary’s step-sister, Claire Clairmont. But to Shelley the bond between brother and sister, of blood relations or not, was sacrosanct.[[78]](#footnote-78) In naming Elizabeth Hitchener the ‘sister of [his] soul’ (*PBS Letters*, I, p. 150) Shelley may have had the ‘holier love’ of William and Dorothy’s relationship along the banks of the Wye in mind (*Tintern Abbey*, 156). Biographical implications aside, in censoring the word ‘incest’, Shelley transforms the ‘very poetical circumstance’ into the ungendered pronoun ‘it’ (*PBS Letters*, II, p. 154), thereby bolstering the connection between androgyny and incest that informs *Laon and Cythna*. In a cancelled footnote to the discarded stanza, Shelley writes:

I think it is my duty to inform the reader that this hitherto innocent pronoun has been discovered to possess a very obscure & sinister meaning: some curious persons have attempted to discover it by placing a dash between the only two letters which compose IT.[[79]](#footnote-79)

In *Prometheus Unbound*, the pronoun ‘it’ is used to signify ‘Demogorgon’s genderless state’, Michael O’Neill notes, and Shelley’s careful and subtly instructive handling of pronouns extends throughout his oeuvre.[[80]](#footnote-80) The instrumental use of incest in *Laon and Cythna* and the circumstance’s reappearance in *Peter Bell the Third* coupled with Shelley’s cancelled footnote establishes a synonymity between incest and androgyny, and the pronoun ‘it’ comes to be indicative of the genderlessness that is intrinsic to androgyny in Shelley’s later works.

A similar sense of union underlies Shelley’s retributive satire in *Peter Bell the Third*, provoked by the fact that he and Wordsworth were ‘two spirits who ought to have agreed’.[[81]](#footnote-81) This spiritual similitude is brought to the fore through Shelley’s allusive engagement with Wordsworth in Laon and Cythna’s love scene. ‘The common blood which ran within our frames’ in *Laon and Cythna* responds to ‘the breath of this corporeal frame, / And even the motion of our human blood’ in *Tintern Abbey* as both poets’ use of the first-person plural pronoun implicates the reader in the sibling-lovers’ vital intermingling (*Laon and Cythna*, 6.31.276 and *Tintern Abbey*, 44-45). Presaging Shelley’s last great work of hope, *Prometheus Unbound*,[[82]](#footnote-82) *Laon and Cythna* is invested in bringing about ‘hope and reform’ through the shared activity of poet and reader.[[83]](#footnote-83) ‘Laon and Cythna are not simply failed realistic presentations of lovers or siblings’, Madeleine Callaghan writes; ‘In Laon’s incarnation of his early creative power, they come to represent the relationship between poet and reader through the revolutionary potential of their pairing’.[[84]](#footnote-84) This revolutionary potential is one that draws upon Wordsworth’s early radicalism and sympathy, where strains of William and Dorothy’s intercourse sound throughout Shelley’s epic-romance:

The tones of Cythna’s voice like echoes were

Of those far murmuring streams; they rose and fell,

Mixed with mine own in the tempestuous air,—

And so we sate, until our talk befel

Of the late ruin, swift and horrible,

And how those seeds of hope might yet be sown

(6.42.370-375)

Cythna’s voice, like a Wordsworthian ‘murmuring stream’, mingles loss with romantic union all the while promoting a doubling or return, and this doubling becomes intrinsically androgynous as Cythna’s voice, like her body and soul or spirit, ‘Mixed with mine own’.[[85]](#footnote-85)

Laon and Cythna’s incestuous relationship underscores the similitude that informs androgyny, ‘blend[ing] two restless frames into one reposing soul’ (6.36.324). But in attempting a similar blending between his own words and vision and those of Wordsworth’s and other poets a Bloomian anxiety of influence seems to surface, particularly in the preface, where

I have avoided, as I have said before, the imitation of any contemporary styles. But there must be a resemblance which does not depend upon their own will, between all the writers of any particular age. They cannot escape from subjection to a common influence which arises out of an infinite combination of circumstances belonging to the times in which they live, though each is in a degree the author of the very influence by which his being is thus pervaded.

(Preface to *Laon and Cythna*, p. 117)[[86]](#footnote-86)

However, rather than voicing anxiety, Shelley anticipates what he will later recast in *A Defence of Poetry* as the great chain of poets, a borrowing from Plato’s *Ion*, ‘which all poets like the co-operating thoughts of one great mind have built up since the beginning of the world’ (*A Defence of Poetry*, p. 687). The *monoeidic* quality of Shelley’s ‘one great mind’ risks and reconciles the finitude of the Platonic ideal by presaging the co-equal collaboration of ‘*all* poets’ (emphasis added; *The Banquet*, p. 449). Intertextuality becomes explicitly visible in the manuscript pages of *Laon and Cythna*, where Byron, Coleridge, and Wordsworth’s names appear marginally and alongside lines of verse. In adds. e. 19, while struggling to describe the luminous power that comes to animate the androgynous Form in the Temple of the Spirit in Canto 1, Shelley seems to voice an anxiety over imitating his contemporaries. He writes,

Is this an imitation of Ld Byron’s poem?

It is certainly written in the same metre..

[?Are] Coleridge & Wordsworth to be considered

[?me] never

(p. 11, 7-10)[[87]](#footnote-87)

This interjection—written in ink—overlaps a pencil sketch which Tatsuo Tokoo describes as the ‘drawing of a profile’. On closer inspection, the immediately discernible nose, lips, and ink-blot eye of the profile seem interposed with a curvature that suggests a second figure, turned so that its face is covered, or suggested, by the discernible properties of the profile identified by Tokoo. The curvature of the second profile suggests the back of a head, a chin and lower lip on line with the other profile’s lips, and the soft sloping of neck and shoulder. Taken together, the text and intimate image seem to suggest less an anxiety of imitation but more a literal and figurative meeting of minds. This sense is bolstered by Shelley’s use of the word ‘imitation’ which, while often read as relaying the poet’s fears of copying his contemporaries, underscores one of Shelley’s earliest conceptions of androgyny as a reciprocal processing between poet and reader.

How divinely sweet a task it is to imitate each others excellencies—& each moment to become wiser in this surpassing love—so that constituting but one being, all real knowledge may be comprised in the maxim *γνωθι* *σεαυτον* (know thyself) with infinitely more justice than in its narrow & common application.

(*PBS Letters*, I, p. 414)

Here, imitation is a reciprocal act that unites self and Other, ‘constituting but one being’ in an act of androgynous intermingling. The hierarchical implications of imitation, where the imitator is implicitly lesser than the imitated, are undone in favour of reciprocal unification in Shelley’s androgynous envisioning of ‘one being’. Elsewhere, Shelley positively identifies imitation with unique poetic creation, such as in the case of Virgil who, in the *Aeneid*, unfairly received ‘the fame of an imitator even whilst he created anew all that he copied’ (*A Defence of Poetry*, p. 692). In *Alastor*, Shelley’s deliberate voicing of Wordsworth throughout the poem, but most explicitly in his quoting of the ‘“deep for tears”’ of the *Immortality Ode* (*Alastor*, 713), blends the positions of the poet and reader as Shelley seems to imaginatively invoke the Lake poet in order to encourage a return to his formerly sympathetic self.

A similar sense of reciprocal activity is embodied in *Prometheus Unbound* where Prometheus and Asia’s ‘combined sexual and spiritual mutuality’, to adopt *The Poems of Shelley* editors’ gloss of ‘mingling’, reaches a crescendo in their retirement to a cave. Ross Greig Woodman views their retirement as symbolic of their return to the androgynous state from which issues the apparent epithalamium of Act 4.[[88]](#footnote-88) But, as Act 4 reveals, androgynous ‘mingling’ in Shelley’s corpus bespeaks a much wider, and much more ambiguous, state than simply sexual intercourse. Nathaniel Brown’s recognition that androgyny ‘is implicit throughout [Shelley’s] work, *particularly* in his portrayal of the sexes’ (my emphasis), allows space for other, non-sexual uses of androgyny. Much more than ‘embody[ing] a sexual relationship’ in which the Earth is ‘maturely male and the Moon maturely female’, as Harold Bloom has it, the scene of celestial exchange culminates in ambiguously androgynous unity.[[89]](#footnote-89) Act 4 is witness to a confusion of genders and a mingling of disembodied selves: a cacophony of spirits and voices that are ultimately united in the ‘All’ that responds to the genderless Demogorgon, where the reader is implicated and involved in the poem’s androgynous mingling. This thesis analyses Shelley’s implicit androgyny in major works from *Alastor* to *Epipsychidion*, recognising but moving beyond androgyny as the blending of masculine and feminine, and away from androgyny as the masculine cannibalisation of the feminine, towards a consideration of androgyny as an experimental strategy to affect mental revolution and to involve the reader in its process.

Woodman suggests that, as Shelley’s career progresses, the poet-cum-visionary ‘moves with an inevitability similar to the dialectic of those Platonic dialogues which influenced him profoundly, [and] can perhaps only be understood in the light of an occult Platonism’ and proposes ‘an examination of some of Shelley’s major visionary works within the framework of his growing insight into the meaning of Plato’s philosophy’.[[90]](#footnote-90) But, as Michael O’Neill demonstrates, the influence of Plato’s dialogues upon Shelley is by no means limited to his philosophy. For O’Neill, ‘Shelley bec[omes] Shelley through his immersion in Plato, a writer who influenced not only his thinking but also his style, and not only his poetic style, but his development of an original poetic prose’.[[91]](#footnote-91) Shelley’s style deserves a reappraisal in light of the immersive Platonism that O’Neill deftly explores, and this thesis encourages such a reappraisal, particularly with attention to the *Symposium* and also the *Phaedo*, with the knowledge that much work remains to be done. While the anamnesis of the *Phaedo* and its distorted reflection in Wordsworth’s *Immortality Ode* colour Shelley’s philosophical thoughts on pre-existence and an afterlife, the subtleties of Plato’s artistry, the melody of his language, his mingling of form, and the dialogism of his texts, resonate with ever-increasing influence upon Shelley’s poetic thoughts. Stephen C. Behrendt notes that, like Plato, Shelley ‘requires that his readers be willing to participate actively in an intellectual dialogue of which he will supply both the principal ingredients and the rhetorical and intellectual framework’.[[92]](#footnote-92) Plato’s influence upon Shelley does not simply owe to an interest in his philosophy, but to an understanding, appreciation, and even an adoption of Plato’s poesis and the way in which Shelley charts and crafts these mechanisms. It is particularly through the *Symposium* and its harmonisation of selves and sexes that Shelley’s use of androgyny develops into a process that implicates the reader as interlocutor.

The influence of Plato’s philosophy and poetic craftsmanship shines through in ‘Love’s Philosophy’. Believed to have been written in 1819, the lyric addresses the subject of Plato’s *Symposium* while toying with the courtly, epithalamic mode of Act 4 of *Prometheus Unbound*, bridging the melioristic heights of the lyrical drama with the sceptical self-circumscription of Shelley’s later works. First published in *The Indicator*, Leigh Hunt presents the poem as a ‘delightful little lyric’ performed by Mercury and Love, describing it as ‘elemental, Platonical; a meeting of divineness with humanity’.[[93]](#footnote-93) The ‘elemental’ mingling of *Prometheus Unbound*, which finds its apex in the Moon and Earth’s reciprocal interpenetration, is fused with the ‘Platonical’ in a meeting that mimics the movements of Diotima’s daemonical Love at the centre of the *Symposium*, itself at once human and divine. Hunt’s intimate knowledge of Shelley’s Platonism surfaces in his introductory remarks on ‘Love’s Philosophy’, where his description of the poem’s ‘meeting of divineness with humanity’ recalls Shelley’s translation of Diotima’s account of love as ‘A great Daemon’, who ‘hold[s] an intermediate place between what is divine and what is mortal’ (*The Banquet*, pp. 442 and 443).

‘Love’s Philosophy’ plays with the mingling of self and Other that is intrinsic to androgyny with an underlying sense of frustration, anticipating *Epipsychidion*’s admittance of androgyny’s failure to reach free and equal union through commingling without binding the Other with the self’s ‘chains of lead’ (*Epipsychidion*, 590). Intermediacy and indeterminacy are characteristic of mingled states in Shelley’s writings, and are also defining traits of the lyric poem’s performers: Mercury and Love. Mercury, as the messenger of the gods, is continually flitting between the heavenly and sublunary spheres, performing a communitive mingling between gods and mortals. Similarly, the daemonic Love of the *Symposium* ‘fills up that intermediate space between these two classes of beings [Gods and men], so as to bind together, by his own power, the whole universe of things’ (*The Banquet*, p. 442). Love’s ability to bind two together echoes the androgynous melting of lover and beloved in Aristophanes’ account. ‘Binding’ is a markedly ambiguous word in Shelley’s oeuvre, taken literally to tie or restrain, but also used as a synonym of ‘mingle’ in its meaning ‘to unite’.[[94]](#footnote-94) The androgynous implications of ‘binding’ extend, like ‘mingling’, throughout Shelley’s works, but *Prometheus Unbound* effectively promotes its ambiguous, and androgynous, connotations. Prometheus’ unbinding from his place in Jupiter’s patriarchal order results from and is replaced by love: ‘the bond and sanction which connects not only man with man, but with everything which exists’ (‘On Love’, p. 632). Prometheus and Asia are bound through androgynous union, the ‘transforming presence—which would fade / If it were mingled not with thine’ (*Prometheus Unbound*, 1.832-833).

‘Couched in the language of courtly invitation’, Teddi Chichester Bonca writes, ‘this charming lyric asks a crucial question in the guise of playful seduction, a question which the poet, not the coy mistress must answer’.[[95]](#footnote-95)

The Fountains mingle with the River

And the Rivers with the Ocean,

The winds of Heaven mix forever

With a sweet emotion;

Nothing in the world is single,

All things by a law divine

In one spirit meet and mingle.

Why not I with thine?—

(‘Love’s Philosophy’, 1-8)

Bonca locates Shelley’s earliest efforts to answer this question in his adolescent writings, and it remains a question that propels the poet’s quest for union and understanding throughout his career. Despite Bonca’s assertion that the question is left up to the poet to answer, the poem’s use of direct address implicates, not simply a coy mistress or, to follow Bonca’s broader thesis, an imaginatively transsexual feminised self,[[96]](#footnote-96) but also the reader. Mingling, as an operative word for androgyny, insists on the reader’s participation nowhere more than in the ‘interanimation’ of *Prometheus Unbound*,[[97]](#footnote-97) so that the short lyric’s composition in near tandem with the lyrical drama seems to see an extension or overflow of the longer work’s integrative mode. Earlier, *Alastor*’s experimentations with androgyny include the compact between reader and writer, owing to the reciprocal intimacy of Mary’s prototypical relationship with Shelley, while also extending androgynous blending to include the allusive relations of poets as readers. Intellectual intimacy and imitation blur in the draft manuscripts of *Laon and Cythna* as allusiveness becomes a vital and self-conscious processing between poets. Reading a work, Timothy Webb notes, is ‘in a sense, to translate it, because reading involves transplanting the thoughts of another into our own mind. It requires imaginative sympathy’.[[98]](#footnote-98) Although translation seems to be, for Shelley, a diminutive act of ‘cast[ing] a violet into a crucible’, he extends his metaphor to assert that ‘The plant must spring again from its seed or it will bear no flower’ (*A Defence of Poetry*, p. 678), and here Webb’s sense of intellectual transplantation seems especially apt. This process of intellectual transplantation through imaginative sympathy reaches its apotheosis in *The Banquet*. Therein, Shelley invests himself in translating the melody and feeling of Plato’s words, weaving what Michael O’Neill terms the ‘sinuous eloquence’ that ‘illustrates Shelley’s ability to find a language answerable to Platonic vision’,[[99]](#footnote-99) where the poet delights in moments of harmonisation between his and Plato’s thoughts rather than merely translating the meanings of the words themselves, and these intellectual intimacies of translation course beneath the elemental mingling of fountains and rivers in ‘Love’s Philosophy’. In the letter that accompanies the lyric, Shelley, disappointed to hear that Hunt is employed in translating Tasso’s *Aminta*, writes: ‘You are formed to be a living fountain and not a canal however clear’ (*PBS Letters*, II, p. 152). Shelley’s metaphorization of the fountain reappears in his *Defence* where ‘a great Poem is a fountain forever overflowing with the waters of wisdom and delight’ (*A Defence of Poetry*, p. 693), where poetry’s vitality is emphasised in his letter through the image of the ‘*living* fountain’. Translations lacking in lyricism are, Shelley seems to imply in his letter, relegated to the status of canals: artificially constructed means of transporting intellectual products from one source to another. But ‘Love’s Philosophy’ suggests the alternative mode of original composition Shelley experienced in *The Banquet*, where Diotima’s motif of the pregnant soul indeterminably blends the mortal and immortal, the intellectual and the corporeal. In blending with Plato’s ‘immortal spirit’ (Preface to *The Banquet*, p. 402), Shelley’s river or canal-like means of intellectual transportation is combined with fountaining lyrical effusions. As such, translations that promote harmony between translator and subject are akin to androgyny in their mingling of self and Other. Following his composition of *The Banquet*, Shelley exalts love in terms that suggest translation, as ‘the meeting with an understanding capable of clearly estimating the deductions of our own, an imagination which should enter into and seize upon the subtle and delicate peculiarities which we have delighted to cherish and unfold in secret’ (‘On Love’, p. 632).

In one iteration, ‘Love’s Philosophy’ poses as a private lyric to Sophia Stacey, in another it is fodder for Hunt’s periodicals, and in Mary’s fair copy it becomes ‘An Anacreontic’, prompting critical readings of the poem as a translation of an Anacreontic ode from the Greek or even of a French ballad.[[100]](#footnote-100) Critical contentions aside, Hunt’s description of the poem as ‘elemental, Platonical’ points towards an analysis of the poem as Platonic, approximating the word’s philosophical and mechanical implications. ‘Love’s Philosophy’ anticipatorily condenses the fleet-footed *terza rima* octaves of *The Witch of Atlas* into a pair of octet stanzas, visually mimicking the doubling and separation intrinsic to androgyny on the page.

See the mountains kiss high Heaven

And the waves clasp one another,

No sister-flower would be forgiven

If it disdained its brother,

And the sunlight clasps the earth

And the moonbeams kiss the sea;—

What is all this sweet work worth

If thou kiss not me?

(‘Love’s Philosophy’, 9-16)

Stuart Curran identifies in *Prometheus Unbound* Shelley’s fusing of the Pythagorean with the Ancient Greek elemental quaternity of Heaven, Earth, Light, and Love, where Love acts as a primordial and universal power.[[101]](#footnote-101) But elemental distinctions are blurred in the lyrical drama through what Ellen Brown Herson terms ‘elemental synaesthesia’. For Herson, ‘*Prometheus Unbound* is a journey toward perfection without a single reference point for perfection’, and Shelley’s shifting use of androgyny, itself a form of prelapsarian perfection, follows a similar trajectory, propelled towards union ‘Without a course, without a star’ (*Prometheus Unbound*, 2.4.89). Shelley’s ambivalence staves off the rational assurances of pure Platonism, but the poet remains throughout much of his career ‘a Platonist in the sceptical tradition’,[[102]](#footnote-102) influenced in large part by Peacock for whom ‘[t]he Academy is essentially sceptical’.[[103]](#footnote-103) Scepticism and sympathy blur alongside idealism and materiality in the *Phaedo*, while in the *Symposium* Platonic ascension towards the Form of Beauty is seemingly disrupted by an earthbound eroticism. Through attention to its Platonism, ‘Love’s Philosophy’ runs a deeper and more troubled course that belies its appearance as a courtly seduction lyric. The eroticisms of the poem are metaphysical rather than physical, as the elemental mingling of mountain and heaven, sunlight and earth, and moonbeams and sea emphasises a lack of physical contact. Michael O’Neill notes that the lyric shares an affinity with the mingling of the Earth and the Moon in the fourth act of *Prometheus Unbound*, but hastens to add that ‘in its mixture of erotic gallantry and philosophical mischief, the shorter poem has a timbre all its own’.[[104]](#footnote-104) Where the amorous intermingling of the masculine Earth and the feminine Moon in the lyrical drama promotes their union, each reflecting and embodying the qualities of the other, the elemental bodies of ‘Love’s Philosophy’ remain decisively separate. The lyric yearns for union while also voicing an awareness of the risk of subjection that underlies androgyny.

Shelley’s androgyny is also enacted at the level of creative practice displayed in the manuscripts. The material forms of Shelley’s notebooks offer added insight into the poet’s vacillations between the material and the ideal or imaginary, where, on the manuscript pages, the verbal and visual at times blend into one another.[[105]](#footnote-105) The heavily marked cover of *The Witch of Atlas* notebook (adds. e. 6) interlays sketches, a reference to Shelley’s ‘Discourse on the Manners of the Ancient Greeks’, and the lines of a lyric fragment, while the contents of the notebook involve a similar palimpsestic overlap. Visually, lines of *The Witch of Atlas* blend with transcriptions from Plato, among others, as Shelley manoeuvres between prose and verse, English and Greek with daemonic momentum. On the front cover, waves of water undulate vertically under smudged, shadow-like lines of verse and appear to course with a rhythmic ease beneath the couplet of ‘sung’ and ‘flung’ (p. 3, 1a and 3). A solitary tree rises from the waves at the lower left-hand corner of the cover, seeming to visually enact the elemental mingling that pervades Shelley’s poetry, and a lone sailboat perches atop the waves’ highest crest with the ink of its mast blending into the notebook’s spine. A lighthouse, or ‘beacon tower’ to invoke Yeats (‘Blood and the Moon’, 2.1),[[106]](#footnote-106) symbolic of ‘Thought’s crowned powers’ (*Prometheus Unbound*, 4.103), rises out of the sea’s centre. While such palimpsestic practices and scenes of boats and trees are by no means unique to Shelley’s notebooks, the image on the cover of *The Witch of Atlas* notebook visually echoes Shelley’s Witch-like lamentation to Maria Gisborne in 1819, wherein

I have been lately voyaging in a sea without my pilot, & although my sail has often been torn, my boat become leaky, & the log lost, I have yet sailed in a kind of way from island to island, some of craggy & mountainous magnificence, some clothed with moss & flowers & radiant with fountains, some barren desarts.

(*PBS Letters*, II, p. 154)

Anticipating the letter’s transmutation into *The Witch of Atlas* through Shelley’s ‘sculpting of a poetic self from the marble of the living man’s life and dreams’, the ‘living artistry’ that Madeline Callaghan views as ‘fundamental to Shelley’s imaginative project’,[[107]](#footnote-107) this mental voyaging suggests a metaphorization of reading as a doubled, reciprocal process between poet and reader, or poet as reader. In the poem, the reader is tested or reflected by the Witch-as-poet’s own seafaring companion, Hermaphroditus, who, through its inactivity and closed eyes, is representative of an unsympathetic or disengaged reader. The dormancy of Hermaphroditus’ imagination is indicated by its ‘two rapid wings’ which, though ‘Fit to have borne it to the seventh sphere, / Tipped with the speed of liquid lightnings’ remain furled as ‘the Image lay / With folded wings and unawakened eyes’ (*The Witch of Atlas*, 37.337-339 and 40.361-362). Throughout his oeuvre, the intimate reciprocity of reading accompanies Shelley’s conception of androgyny as an equally active process moving towards ameliorative union in the imagination, anticipating Coleridge’s claim that ‘a great mind must be androgynous’.[[108]](#footnote-108) ‘*I have been reading Calderon without you*’, Shelley adds in his letter to Maria with an emphasis that is at once dejected and playful. Calderon is, along with Plato, a god in Shelley’s estimation: a divinity whose immortality is ensured through his art, recalling that, for Diotima, the ‘children of [the] soul’ that the ‘great poets have left behind them [are] the sources of their own immortal memory’ (*The Banquet*, p. 448).[[109]](#footnote-109) The mental and the material are inextricably blended in, and on, Shelley’s notebooks, and this blending extends into Shelley’s uses of androgyny.

The lyric fragment on the cover of *The Witch of Atlas* notebook has received little attention from critics, in no small part due to the rubbing and blotting that has made it nearly illegible. Nonetheless, the discernible lines are highly suggestive of the activities of reading and translation that promote the empathic processing of self and Other underlying androgyny, and the doubleness of such a state. There are variations in transcriptions of the poem, owing to its poor condition, so I would like to consider both *The Poems of Shelley* editors’ and Carlene Adamson’s transcriptions. *The Poems of Shelley* editors transcribe the poem, ‘with considerable reservation’, as follows:

[?] [sweet flower that I had sung]

?[Around me its] [?] odours flung

And find, as poets used to find,

With sympathy, with [?] ?[lined],

And I half sad and half delighted

To [?]

Wept tears of pleasure

(‘[?] [sweet flower that I had sung]’, 1-7)[[110]](#footnote-110)

Adamson offers the following transcription:

had

<…> sweet flower that I sung

Re…

<Around me> <…> <…> <odours> <flung>

<And find, as poets ought to find>

With empathy <with> <…> <…>

And I half sad <…> half delighted

To <…>

Wept tears of <pleasure>

(‘…sweet flower that I had sung…’, 1-8)[[111]](#footnote-111)

In both cases, the lyric seems to meditate upon the poet’s duties, and perhaps upon a diminished, former, or anticipated ability or state owing to the variants ‘as poets used to find’ and ‘as poets ought to find’. In either case, the poet is expected to act with and receive sympathy, or empathy. ‘In Shelley’s view’, Stephen Behrendt writes on *Adonais*, ‘readers must, ideally, extend this love first to the authors they read, in a gesture of charity and friendship that reciprocates the author’s own gesture of giving, of sharing’, and a similar sense seems to motivate this lyric.  The lyric’s materialisation on the notebook’s cover, in public view, sponsors the sense of it being a thing to be shared. In the instance of the transcriptions’ lexical variants, ‘sympathy’ is more likely to be the correct reading, as the *OED* records the first appearance of ‘empathy’ in 1895 where it is described as a ‘psychophysical energy’.[[112]](#footnote-112) For the editors of *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, the distinction between empathy and sympathy is that ‘sympathy runs parallel, while empathy unites’; however, empathy is also equated ‘with the sympathy of Hume and Smith’, originating in English in the 16th-century owing to translations and descriptions of ‘fellow-feeling’ in Plato and Pliny.[[113]](#footnote-113) Shelley’s use of the word ‘sympathy’ correlates with the contemporary definition of ‘empathy’ as a means of gaining understanding by mentally identifying oneself with another, and even in its initial use as a psychological term it is not entirely dissimilar to the 18th and 19th century conception of ‘sympathy’ as an electrical fluid.[[114]](#footnote-114) Throughout this thesis, the terms ‘empathy’ and ‘sympathy’ are used interchangeably, not in order to create confusion, but rather to emphasise how, for Shelley, sympathy is empathy, and empathic love—‘a going out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action or person, not our own’—is the fuel of androgynous union in Shelley’s corpus (*A Defence of Poetry*, p. 682). Ultimately, Adamson’s editorial decision to read ‘empathy’ in the lyric underscores the way in which the emotive act of psychophysical identification with the Other pervades Shelley’s works, and subtly gestures towards her own empathic engagement as a reader.

Shelley’s ambivalence should not be equated with the Eliotian view of immaturity or adolescent incompetence, but instead reveals the vital activity of the poet’s mind and his refusal to submit to the limited and deadening thought structures prescribed by religion and other hierarchical forms. Madeleine Callaghan considers ‘the aesthetic productivity’ of Shelley’s vacillations, and the poet’s conscious engagement in acts of mingling, by stressing vacillation as ‘a key Shelleyan principle’; ‘Ambivalence, rather than confusion, becomes the hallmark of Shelley’s art’.[[115]](#footnote-115) The ‘tears of pleasure’ and the sense of being ‘half sad’ and ‘half delighted’ in the lyric bespeak Shelley’s pervading ambivalence, or the refusal to choose that the poet finds reciprocated in the still understudied and underestimated influence of Thomas Love Peacock.[[116]](#footnote-116) But the blended bifurcation between sorrow and delighted pleasure also recalls Aristophanes’ divided androgynes in Plato’s *Symposium*, who mourn for the loss of their union while delighting in the shared love and desire that traces their former wholeness. This thesis does not purport to prescribe androgyny as the sole means through which Shelley’s ambivalence must be analysed, but instead encourages a reconsideration of Shelley’s misunderstood and underappreciated uses of androgyny. Shelley’s self-conscious artistry promotes a testing of the bounds of selfhood, and of the positions of self and Other, through androgynous intermingling, where androgyny expands from its traditional conception of the union of masculine and feminine to include the psychic union of the poet and the reader. Coupled with androgyny, this thesis charts from *Alastor* to *Epipsychidion* Shelley’s doubled position of poet-philosopher, and poet-reader, owing in no small part to Plato’s oftentimes subtle but instrumental influence.

**Chapter One: Androgyny and Allusion in *Alastor***

*Alastor* is Shelley’s first sustained experimentation with androgyny as a mental process of intersubjective unification between poet and reader. In creating the intermingled textual figurations of the masculine Poet and the feminine ‘veilèd maid’ (151) alongside the Narrator’s imaginative blending with the Poet, and interweaving his narrative with voices that include artists from Aeschylus and Ovid to Coleridge and Wordsworth, Shelley adopts and adapts in large part from Plato a dialogic patterning that is inclusive of the reader’s mental participation.[[117]](#footnote-117) Shelley’s shifting approach to engaging with his reader in *Alastor* owes to his altered attitude towards the study of the Classics, prompted by Thomas Love Peacock, and his status as reader of Wordsworth and his perception of and commiseration with the older poet’s failings, and also significantly draws upon his relationship with Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin: the poet’s first real, or ‘actual’ and ‘ideal’, reader.[[118]](#footnote-118) In 1814, Shelley’s relationship with Mary as partner, intellectual equal, and reader becomes the prototype of androgyny as a textual and mental processing resultant in a ‘psychic unity’,[[119]](#footnote-119) where the wholly mental union afforded by androgynous mingling starkly contrasts with the failed or fallen state of the fleshly hermaphrodite. Recounting his meeting and the beginnings of his relationship with Mary to Thomas Jefferson Hogg in early October 1814, Shelley first conceives of the distinction between the hermaphroditic state of failed intellectual communion in contrast with the reciprocal unification afforded by androgyny. Shelley’s attention to Mary as real and ideal reader in *Alastor* is conflated with the poet’s contentious but sympathetic status as reader of Wordsworth. Androgynous intellectual union comes to motivate *Alastor*, where the Narrator’s sympathetic projection into the Poet is complemented by the reciprocal psychic mingling of the Poet and the veiled maid. Both cases of doubling underscore how androgyny, for Shelley and for Plato, depends not upon the outward melding of man and woman, but the intellectual mixing and melting of self and Other.

Shelley writes of his deteriorating relationship with Harriet as feeling ‘as if a dead & living body had been linked together in loathsome & horrible communion’ (*PBS Letters*, I, p. 402) in a morbid echo of Salmacis forcibly linking her body to Hermaphroditus, so that ‘these two bodies [were] knit in close embrace: they were no longer two, nor such as to be called, one, woman, and one, man. They seemed neither, and yet both’.[[120]](#footnote-120) In contrast to hermaphroditic physical union, Shelley’s relationship with Mary is described in the intellectually reciprocal terms that come to define androgyny as a state of achieved psychic equality:

I speak thus of Mary now — & so intimately are our natures now united, that I feel whilst I describe her excellencies as if I were an egoist expatiating upon his own perfections — *Then,* how deeply did I not feel my inferiority, how willingly confess myself far surpassed in originality, in genuine elevation & magnificence of the intellectual nature until she consented to share her capabilities with me.

(*PBS Letters*, I, p. 402)

Shelley envisages himself and Mary becoming intellectually united in a consensual and reciprocal processing of androgyny. The same processing is recreated in *Alastor* through the mental melding of the Poet and the veiled maid, where their union ultimately results in the androgynous figuration of the ungendered Spirit (479). However, Shelley’s fears around the unequal conflation of self and Other are underscored in this letter’s attention to the potential for androgyny to result in egotism, where ‘*her* excellencies’ are subsumed into ‘*his* own perfections’. These fears are acknowledged in *Alastor* through Shelley’s ambiguous rendering of the masculine Poet and feminine veiled maid’s shifting between intellectual or ethereal manifestations and bodily forms. No sooner has the veiled maid shifted from a dreamy ‘voice like the voice of his own soul’ to a physical form—‘her outspread arms now bare, / Her dark locks floating in the breath of night, / Her beamy bending eyes, her parted lips’—than she ‘Folded his frame in her dissolving arms’, leaving the Poet’s mind ‘vacant’ (153; 177-179; 187; 191). Mental mingling is jarred by a dissolution that is at once physical and psychic as the poet’s fears around the oppressive egotism of the Other’s subsumption into the Self are met with sceptical circumscription. Shelley’s anxieties around egotism punctuate his letters from 1811 onwards, and this fear of the encroaching weight of *self* is brought to the forefront in *Alastor*. As a result, *Alastor* sees the poet’s first sustained experimentation with the sceptical testing of androgyny as an intellectual union, privileging soul over body, where the physicality of selfhood is sloughed off through attempted intellectual union with the Other.

In *Alastor*, Shelley begins to experiment with androgyny as a process of ‘psychic unity’ between the masculine textual figuration of the Poet and the feminine textual figuration of the veiled maid.[[121]](#footnote-121) Simultaneously, he also demonstrates a growing awareness of his desire to mentally meld with, or at the very least to mentally mould, his readership through the sympathetically responsive Narrator and the authorial voice of the Preface. William A. Ulmer remarks that, ‘[a]s always in Shelley, the textual politics of *Alastor* lies principally with his attempt to affectively reform an audience’ and that ‘[t]he poem establishes its Narrator as a surrogate reader, an interpreter who provides a dramatic locus for empathy’.[[122]](#footnote-122) While the Narrator is undeniably a source of empathy and directs the reader’s commiseration for the Poet’s plight, in 1815 Shelley has not yet fully established the mechanism of ‘interanimation’ that becomes essential to *Prometheus Unbound*’s affective reform of its audience.[[123]](#footnote-123) *Alastor* experiments with rather than establishes its ideas, and because of this, the poem ‘is difficult because the identities of all three figures—Shelley, the narrator, and the Poet—are indeterminate’, Frederick Kirchhoff writes.[[124]](#footnote-124) Once one resists the acceptance of the Preface as literal instruction and refuses to follow the authorial voice’s suggestion that ‘The poem entitled “ALASTOR,” may be considered as allegorical of one of the most interesting situations of the human mind’ (Preface to *Alastor*, p. 92), the poem’s indeterminacy becomes key to its achievement. Indeterminacy also pervades the Preface, where the authorial voice’s seemingly didactic instruction to allegorically render the poem is presented in language that places emphasis upon subjective interpretation, in that the modality of ‘*may* be considered’ acknowledges the existence of alternative readings. Elise M. Gold observes that ‘Shelley’s prefaces often reflect their poems in miniature, embodying the psychological, philosophical, and imaginative struggles their speakers or protagonists undergo’ while also ‘engag[ing] the reader in their works’ creative processes’.[[125]](#footnote-125) When read in this light, *Alastor*’s Preface positions the reader in a fog of indeterminacy, ‘portray[ing] the dialectical tendencies of a mind fighting for its equilibrium’.[[126]](#footnote-126) This dialectical inclination underscores Shelley’s experimentation with androgyny as a process indebted to and involved in Platonic thought. In *Alastor*, androgyny experimentally shifts between the poet’s desire for all-subsuming union with the Other and the mental struggle for equilibrium between two separate minds.

Rather than spotlighting solipsism or narcissism or promoting ‘the cannibalistic absorption’ of textual female figurations by the male poet,[[127]](#footnote-127) in *Alastor*, Shelley demonstrates an awareness of the shared mental receptivity and activity that will come to motivate androgyny as a revolutionising process occurring both textually and psychically between poet and reader in later poems. Shelley’s ‘second major work’ sees a shift away from Godwinian utilitarianism,[[128]](#footnote-128) where in the poet’s first major work, *Queen Mab*, Shelley’s ‘utility is morality’ (‘Notes on *Queen Mab*’ in *CPWPBS*, p. 802), to the beginnings of a moral and mental revolution fuelled by love, or empathy, to be later described by Shelley in his translation of Plato’s *Symposium* as the desire ‘to mix and melt and to be melted together’ in androgynous unity (*The Banquet*, p. 432). *Alastor* reveals, not the pure Platonism of Shelley’s oeuvre from 1818 onwards,[[129]](#footnote-129) but a turning towards a specific version of Plato and his interpreters, those whose ‘symbolism was intentionally obscure; their language deliberately opaque’.[[130]](#footnote-130) Shelley’s engagement with mystical philosophy in *Alastor* concomitantly reveals his growing attention to his audience: ‘the textual politics of *Alastor* lies principally with his attempt to affectively reform an audience’, Carlos Baker writes, and Mary Shelley, in her note to the poem in *The Poetical Works*, remarks that ‘[t]he poem ought rather to be considered didactic than narrative’.[[131]](#footnote-131) This is not the straightforward didacticism that Shelley claims to abhor in the lyrical drama’s preface(Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, p. 232), but is instead a subtle means of instruction that draws from ‘the sublime teachings of the ancients’, where the ‘deepest truths, beyond the comprehension of the ignorant multitude, should be hidden so that only those who were fit to appreciate the mysteries should receive them’.[[132]](#footnote-132) The subtle interpretive ability that Shelley comes to expect from his sympathetic readership is put to practice in the poet’s letters to Mary: his first real ideal reader. Prefiguring *Alastor*, Shelley writes to Mary in 1814:

Mary love—we must be united. I will not part from you again after Saturday night. We must devise some scheme. I must return. Your thoughts alone can waken mine to energy. My mind without yours is dead & cold as the dark midnight river when the moon is down. […] How divinely sweet a task it is to imitate each others [*sic*] excellencies—& each moment to become wiser in this surpassing love—so that constituting but one being, all real knowledge may be comprised in the maxim *γνωθι* *σεαυτον* (know thyself) with infinitely more justice than in its narrow & common application.

(*PBS Letters*, I, p. 414)

The poet’s subtle instruction to his ideal reader is veiled in the Greek maxim *γνωθι* *σεαυτον* where, in ‘constituting but one being’, self-knowledge is simultaneously an intersubjective knowing of the Other. Under Thomas Love Peacock’s influence, Shelley’s absorption in Classical studies opens ‘a point of entry to a world of moral and psychological significance’, and this is a world that he invites Mary into through their shared reading and study of Greek.[[133]](#footnote-133) ‘Knowing’ becomes itself a vital, intellectual, and dialectical process towards union in Shelley’s letter, as the poet’s ‘mind without yours is dead’. Mary as reader is granted the active role of intellectual life-giver by means of reciprocally engaging with the poet’s words and thoughts. This is a proclivity that Peacock recounts in his *Memoirs of Shelley*, wherein he recalls the poet, early in his relationship with Mary, asserting: ‘Every one who knows me must know that the partner of my life should be one who can feel poetry and understand philosophy’.[[134]](#footnote-134) The poet relies upon the sympathetic reader’s interpretative abilities, and thereby shifts away from wielding the tyrannical sway of a didacticism that would hierarchically posit teacher over pupil, writer over reader, choosing instead to privilege an equal, active partnership. Shelley’s letter to Mary, and its prefiguring of *Alastor*, sees Shelley conceiving an intellectual partnership by means of an androgynous process of mental union between poet and reader where the constitution of ‘one being’ through a ‘surpassing love’ evocatively recalls both Aristophanes’ reunited androgynes and Diotima’s ladder of love in Plato’s *Symposium*.  Shelley’s inclusion of the Delphic maxim to ‘know thyself’ in his letter to Mary is indicative of his mindfulness of Plato and his absorption in Greek studies that will only intensify during the ‘Attic’ engrossment in the winter of 1815-1816, as the aphorism appears in Plato’s dialectics at least six times.[[135]](#footnote-135) And Shelley’s transcription of the Greek characters reveals the beginnings of a self-education, with assistance from Peacock, that will eventually enable to him to transmute Plato’s Greek ‘splendour and harmony’, his ‘stream of musical impressions’, into English (‘Preface to the Banquet of Plato’, p. 402).[[136]](#footnote-136) Shelley’s intellectual communion with Plato reaches its apotheosis nowhere more so than in his masterful translation of the *Symposium*: *The Banquet*,where he ‘commands language splendid and melodious as Plato’.[[137]](#footnote-137) Relying on translations and viewing Platonism ‘through a glass darkly’ in 1815, *Alastor* nonetheless ‘marks the beginning of a kind of Platonic poetry which Shelley continued to write the rest of his life’.[[138]](#footnote-138) Shelley’s Platonic reverberations in 1815 are muted echoes rather than the melodious impressions of 1818, but *Alastor* sees Shelley consciously encouraging the reader’s interpretation and interpenetration of the text through its shifting textual figurations and seemingly disjointed voices with Platonic subtlety. Shelley, building upon the commingled constitution of ‘one being’ with his at once actual and ideal reader, Mary, experimentally extends the intimacies of this epistolary, intellectual union to a wider audience in *Alastor*. Androgyny becomes a concurrent process of inter- and extra-textual intellectual union between the fictional figures of Poet and veiled maid and between the actual poet and reader.

The *Symposium*’s influence upon *Alastor* is a shade of what the work’s import comes to be following Shelley’s recorded reading of it in 1817 and his subsequent re-reading and translation of it from the Greek, with occasional assistance from the Latin, in 1818.[[139]](#footnote-139) Shelley revisits a page in his 1816 Geneva notebook to make notes on his 1817 reading of the *Symposium*, transposing uncharacteristically neat and detailed line and page numbers atop a landscape drawing. These notes centre upon ‘The wonderful description of Love’, or ἔρως (*erōs*), and reveal the poet’s early fascination with Diotima’s speech in the note: ‘Diotima’s Atheism’.[[140]](#footnote-140) *Alastor* sees Shelley moving away from the overtly didactic and allegorical to an understated means of instruction—an unconscious echo of Wordsworth’s claim in 1808 that ‘Every great Poet is a Teacher: I wish either to be considered as a Teacher or, as nothing’—mindful of Socrates’ dialectics and Plato’s carefully crafted dramatic dialogues.[[141]](#footnote-141) In his 1817 notes on the *Symposium*, Shelley writes:

I should say in answer that ἔρως neither loved nor was

loved but is the cause of love in others – A subtlety

to beat Plato[[142]](#footnote-142)

*Alastor*, with its shifting figures and seemingly disjointed prefatory and narrative voices, rather than revealing confusion and self-contradiction, instead demonstrates Shelley’s early engagement with Platonic subtlety and scepticism. C. E. Pulos comments to this effect, writing that ‘Shelley’s first effort in poetry to adjust his concept of Beauty to a sceptical theory of knowledge appears in *Alastor*’.[[143]](#footnote-143) Under close scrutiny, *Alastor*’s indebtedness to Plato’s dialogic form becomes strikingly apparent. The *Symposium* and the *Phaedo*, Plato’s dialectics on love and death respectively, are both ‘nested tales’,[[144]](#footnote-144) and this formal patterning, alongside the themes of love and death, is duplicated in *Alastor*. The narrative and lyric become transposed as the poet first experiments with intersubjectivity: the mental mingling that becomes intrinsic to androgyny as a ‘psychic unity’.

It is likely that Shelley first encountered the *Symposium* during his readings of Plato with Thomas Jefferson Hogg while at Oxford; however, the *Phaedo* is the first Platonic text that seems to have captured Shelley’s imagination. Hogg recounts: ‘Shelley was never weary of reading, or of listening to me whilst I read, passages from the dialogues…and especially from the *Phaedo*’.[[145]](#footnote-145) In *Alastor*, shades of the Platonic and the Wordsworthian intermingle alongside Shelley’s staging of voices from Aeschylus and Euripides to Ovid as the poet begins to engage with an androgynous process of intersubjective mingling between textual figurations, between poet and reader, and between poet as reader. This is not pure Platonism, but is instead a distillation of mystical influences ranging from the available French and Latin translations of the dialogues by Dacier and Ficino, to the bowdlerised English translation by Sydenham, described by Mary Shelley as being ‘so harsh and un-English in its style’,[[146]](#footnote-146) and to the muddled Neoplatonism of Thomas Taylor’s *Cratylus, Phaedo, Parmenides, and Timaeus*, with the additional influences of the Platonic anamnesis of Wordsworth’s *Immortality Ode* and the Zoroastrianism of Peacock’s abandoned *Ahrimanes*. Mysticism is mingled with scepticism in *Alastor*, and this doubt not only suggests Shelley’s displacement of Godwin in favour of Plato, but also underscores the significance of the *Phaedo* to this early poem. C. E. Pulos, positing Shelley as ‘a Platonist in the sceptical tradition’, remarks that the ‘renascence of Platonism in his mature writings—a development that previous critics have never satisfactorily explained—owed much to the poet’s investigation of the sceptical tradition during the years 1813-1816’. For Pulos, ‘[s]cepticism liberated Shelley from the prejudice against Platonism which he had inherited from the French materialists and rationalists of the eighteenth century’.[[147]](#footnote-147) As much as the *Phaedo* focuses upon the separation of body and soul, at the centre of the dialogue is a separation between belief and doubt, as Simmias and Cebes sceptically question Socrates’ conviction in the immortality of the soul. Socrates warns against misanthropy and misology and offers as alternatives sociability and love of *logoi*, but not without agreeing with Simmias and Cebes that their mistrust is warranted. In doing so, Thomas Miller reveals, ‘Socrates in the *Phaedo* ha[s] an actual influence on the development of skeptical thought—an influence that has gone entirely unrecognized’, where Socrates’ ‘covert sympathy…is much more subtle than usually recognized’.[[148]](#footnote-148) By tracing the *Phaedo*’s influence upon *Alastor*, a similar undercurrent of scepticism and sympathy becomes evident. As Socrates’ mingling of scepticism, sympathy, and hope enables his listeners to be ἰάσατο (cured), so does Shelley’s *Alastor* explore division and, cognisant of the *Symposium*, healing through intellectual union.[[149]](#footnote-149) The poem attempts to resolve apparent oppositions into unity as androgyny becomes a processing of intellectual union between self and Other through the gradual shedding of the body in favour of the mind, echoing the separation of body and soul at the heart of the *Phaedo*.

Earl Wasserman writes that, in *Alastor*, ‘Shelley’s use of the dialogue form for the skeptical purpose of bringing contrary views into mutual confrontation…suggests at least the possibility that the presence of both the fictional Narrator of *Alastor* and the Visionary who is made the subject of his lament implies a dramatizing of sharply discriminated perspectives’, and this seems reminiscent of Plato’s careful rendering of a sympathetic rather than protreptic dialogic exchange between Socrates and those who doubt the immortality of the soul in the *Phaedo*. Rather than reading the poem’s Narrator as an allegorical Wordsworthian figure, as Wasserman posits and successive critics affirm and refute in equal measure, Shelley demonstrates engagement with Platonism through the intermediary of Wordsworth. Overt allegory would undermine the subtleties of Shelley’s vision in *Alastor*; instead, the poem seems concerned with intersubjectivity and interpretation. Dismantling the obstructive barriers that divide poet and reader, Shelley conflates the acts of creation and reception by spotlighting his position of reader and re-imaginer of Wordsworth. Shelley’s desire for intersubjective interaction with Wordsworth is expressed in the text through ‘the Narrator’s obvious sympathy for the poet’s alienated plight’.[[150]](#footnote-150) Wordsworthianism is invoked with sympathy, and not chastisement, as an opening to and means of understanding the Other, where Shelley asserts himself as receptive and reimaginative reader to Wordsworth’s position as poet. The Narrator’s recollections unravel in moments of lyricism as self and Other are painfully coalesced, so that the moment when the Poet ‘overleaps the bounds’ between dream and wakefulness seems to also see the Narrator overleaping the bounds of isolated subjective experience.

He eagerly pursues

Beyond the realms of dream that fleeting shade;

He overleaps the bounds. Alas! alas!

(205-207)

The Narrator’s disruptive cries of ‘Alas! alas!’ recall the pained ‘ai! ai!’ of Aeschylus’ doubled pair of Prometheus and Io, and also evoke Echo’s repetition of Narcissus’ lamentations.[[151]](#footnote-151) The androgynous intermingling that begins to underscore Shelley’s relationship with his audience similarly drives his self-aware status as reader of Wordsworth. Shelley’s own bitter disappointment with the Lake poet never quite outweighs his hope in Wordsworth’s poetry’s propensity to endure and to inspire if met with a receptive readership, of which Shelley counts himself a part, so that when the Narrator speaks of the Poet’s ‘insatiate hope which…stung / His brain even like despair’ (221-222), his own psychic pain shudders through the lines. The diverse lyrical modes present in *Lyrical Ballads* see the poet empathically transporting himself, and his reader, into a position that is radically Other. In tracing the lines of Wordsworth’s ‘A Poet’s Epitaph’ in 1812, Shelley writes: ‘I have transcribed a piece of Wordsworths [*sic*] poetry.—It may give you some idea of the Man—how expressively keen are the first stanzas. I shall see this man soon’ (*PBS Letters*, I, p. 218). Shelley’s identification with Wordsworth is that of a kindred spirit, but one whose kinship is gleaned in momentary reflections rather than as a mirror image. But in his tracing of the lines of ‘A Poet’s Epitaph’, Shelley lights upon the desire for empathic communion that motivates both poets. The subject of empathic communion between reader and poet is central to ‘A Poet’s Epitaph’, cloaked in the dry wit that Shelley comes to master in *Epipsychidion*, where through ‘empathy with the poetic spirit figure…Wordsworth projects both his own self-image, and (in a reflexive doubling of that image) his best hopes of being understood by his readers’. In this ‘circular pattern of identification’, Lucy Newlyn writes, ‘not only is the ideal reader singled out as possessing poetic characteristics, he is also literally conflated with the speaker himself’.[[152]](#footnote-152) In *Alastor*, Shelley’s empathic mingling of Poet and Narrator echoes Wordsworth’s conflation of ideal reader and poetic speaker.

‘[T]he influence of Wordsworth on Shelley’s Platonism’, Notopoulos writes, ‘lies not so much in tangible borrowing as the awaking of a cognate Platonism in Shelley’s soul upon hearing the lark of Wordsworth’s Platonism’.[[153]](#footnote-153) ‘A Poet’s Epitaph’ is allusively intermingled with Platonism in *Alastor*, as Wordsworth’s self-reflexive meditation upon the eponymous poet ‘Who murmurs near the running brooks / A music sweeter than their own’ is recast in the Poet who looks upon the swan and laments, ‘what am I that I should linger here, / With voice far sweeter than thy dying notes’ (‘A Poet’s Epitaph’, 39-40; *Alastor*, 285-286). In Wordsworth, Shelley gleans reflections of his own ‘natural Platonism’,[[154]](#footnote-154) or mystical philosophy, and his early attraction to ‘A Poet’s Epitaph’ bolsters this. Despite the poem’s satirical bent, Stephen Gill notes that ‘with it should be read the passage from the *Preface* to *Lyrical Ballads* beginning, “Aristotle, I have been told, hath said, that Poetry is the most philosophic of all writing: it is so”’.[[155]](#footnote-155) Wordsworth’s lamentation of loss and encouragement of empathic transportation in *Lyrical Ballads*, and most prevalently in the *Immortality Ode*, alongside his loss of moral and poetic integrity in Shelley’s reaction to *The Excursion*, is coupled with Socrates’ desire for loss and subsequent union through death in the *Phaedo*. Addressing his sceptical auditors in the *Phaedo*, Socrates parallels himself with the swans ‘who, when they perceive that it is necessary for them to die, sing not only as usual, but then more than ever; rejoicing that they are about to depart to that deity in whose service they are engaged’.[[156]](#footnote-156) Shelley demonstrates and encourages multiple ways of seeing in *Alastor*, not out of confusion, but in response to his Wordsworthian engagement, particularly with the quasi-Platonism of the *Immortality Ode*, and in response to his own increasing study of and intellectual communion with Plato.

Shelley combines Wordsworth’s gradations of Platonism with his own in *Alastor*’s opening invocation to the ‘great Mother’. Where Wordsworth’s Earth has ‘a Mother’s mind’ (*Immortality Ode*, 79),[[157]](#footnote-157) Shelley’s ‘great Mother’ is distinctly Other from the earth in being the mother of ‘Earth, ocean, air’ (*Alastor*, 1). William Keach rightly notes that ‘[t]he Wordsworthianism of Shelley’s narrator never was the simple pantheistic nature-worship invoked by Wasserman’, and any sense of Wordsworth as the ‘Poet of Nature’ (‘To Wordsworth’, 1) here is disrupted by the Narrator’s mysticism as opposed to nature-worship. It is the quasi-Platonism of the *Immortality Ode* and the Plotinian tones of *The Excursion* that Shelley harnesses in *Alastor* through careful reworkings. Wordsworth’s anamnestic ‘shadowy recollections’ are recast in *Alastor* as the Narrator has ‘watched / Thy shadow, and the darkness of thy steps’, and the ‘deep noonday thought’ sees Shelley condensing Wordsworth’s ‘Clouds that gather round the setting sun’ with the ‘Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears’ (*Immortality Ode*, 152, 199, and 206; *Alastor*, 20-21 and 40). Rather than serving simply as an allegorical Wordsworthian voice, the Narrator’s introductory invocations (lines 1-49) foreground the ensuing psychic mingling of Narrator and Poet—‘the two figures overlap, blend, are involved in one another’, Michael O’Neill notes—and this intersubjective dialogue unfolds through the establishment of temporality in a formal structure that follows Plato’s dialogic patterning in the *Phaedo* and the *Symposium*.[[158]](#footnote-158) The lyricism of these lines recalls Phaedo’s own voice as he recounts Socrates’ death to Echecrates, where ‘There was a Poet whose untimely tomb’ designates this shift into a state of recollection (50). Recollection also serves as recognition of the poem’s persisting Wordsworthian engagement: ‘In the background of this passage is also its Wordsworthian pre-text, “There was a boy,”’ Tilottama Rajan writes, ‘a lyric poem about a lyric poet who is as close to nature as art can be’.[[159]](#footnote-159) But there is also a clear echo of the *Immortality Ode*, where, in evoking the *Ode*’s opening line, ‘There was a time’ (1), Shelley synthesises Wordsworth and Plato as key influences. Wordsworth’s influential presence in *Alastor* allows Shelley to test his own position of sympathetic reader, as androgyny becomes an experimental mode of inter- and extra-textual engagement indebted to Plato’s dialogic patterning.

Marilyn Butler pinpoints ‘the decisive moment of Shelley’s early career, as of Peacock’s’ as the ‘reading of *The Excursion*’;[[160]](#footnote-160) however, where Butler sees Shelley seeking to challenge and ultimately reject Wordsworth, *Alastor* reveals a subtler mode of engagement with the Lake poet. In *Alastor* and its accompanying poems, Shelley’s response to Wordsworth is predicated upon the dialectical communion engaged in with Peacock and adopted from Plato, and does not end in decisive rejection. John C. Bean views in *Alastor* ‘the necessity of choosing between the indirect Wordsworthian approach to knowledge, which turns man’s spiritual quest outward toward nature, and the direct mystical approach, which excludes nature and focuses on self’.[[161]](#footnote-161) Rather than participating in ‘the necessity of choosing’ between the ‘Wordsworthian’, as Bean would have it, and the mystical, Shelley conflates the mystical with Wordsworth through his indebtedness to a gradation of Platonism that traces its source, not just to the *Phaedo*, but to Wordsworth’s own interpretation of anamnesis. Notopoulos writes that the *Immortality Ode* ‘reveals the assimilative rather than the imitative use of Platonic doctrines’, and asserts that it is in response to the *Immortality Ode* and not to the *Phaedo* that Shelley alludes in the Poet’s waking from his dream-state: ‘Whither have fled / The hues of heaven’ (196-197). This allusion reappears in the poem’s final verse paragraph in the Narrator’s repeated lament, ‘thou art fled’ (686).[[162]](#footnote-162) While elsewhere Shelley draws from his translated readings of the *Phaedo*, the final verse paragraph of *Alastor* sees Shelley exalting and lamenting the mystical Wordsworth of *Tintern Abbey* and the *Immortality Ode* with its departing ‘clouds of glory’ (*Immortality Ode*, 64):

But thou art fled!

Like some frail exhalation; which the dawn

Robes in its golden beams,—ah! thou hast fled!

(*Alastor*, 686-688)

*Alastor*’s status as a direct response to Wordsworth’s *Excursion*, and as a response that sees Shelley figuratively killing off or turning away from the older poet, has been critically maintained in part by reference to Mary Shelley’s incendiary journal entry: ‘Shelley…brings home Wordsworths [*sic*] Excursion of which we read a part—much disappointed—He is a slave’ (*MWS Journals*, I, p. 25). However, disappointment does not equate to outright rejection; instead, Eric Lindstrom offers a persuasive and sensitive analysis of Mary’s journal entry that questions if Wordsworth’s ‘being a slave involve[s] a practice of self-servitude’.[[163]](#footnote-163) Shelley’s disappointment with *The Excursion* may underlie his frustrations with the concept of self: ‘[A]dieu to egotism; I am sick to Death at the name of *self*’, Shelley writes to Hogg in 1811, praising the merits ofαφιλαυτια (lack of self-love) repeatedly throughout 1811 (*PBS Letters*, I, p. 34). The self-serving slave appears in the form of Ahasuerus in *Alastor*: ‘Vessel of deathless wrath, a slave that feels / No proud exemption’ (678-679), where Shelley’s use of enjambment isolates the ‘slave that feels’ in the momentary offer of chance for escape from the binds of the self through ‘feeling’: ‘if we feel, we would that another’s nerves should vibrate to our own’ (‘On Love’, p. 631). The profuse usage of enjambment in *Alastor* reveals Shelley’s careful handling of verbal movement, the speedy bursts and cautious pauses that accompany the Poet’s quest, and also highlights the poet’s Wordsworthian engagement. William Keach notes how *Alastor*’s ‘expansive periods’ underscore Wordsworth’s ‘searchingly and ambivalently assessed’ influence with particular attention to Shelley’s ‘sensitivity to the iconic or mimetic suggestiveness of enjambed blank-verse line-endings’.[[164]](#footnote-164) Reflective of Shelley’s conception of Wordsworth as self-serving slave, *Alastor*, in its flight from the bonds of selfhood coupled with the sceptical circumscription of such an escape—the fear that ‘there is selfishness in the passion of Love’ (*PBS Letters*, I, p. 36)—sees Shelley first experimenting with the attempted loss of self through love in the image of the androgyne. While the climactic scene between the Poet and the veiled maid marks the process of movement towards androgynous union, it is in the resultant emergence of the starry-eyed Spirit that Shelley forms an androgynous entity unbound by selfhood and undistinguished by gender.

*Alastor* is Shelley’s first psychological poem in that it self-reflexively dwells upon unconscious desire and influence, the excited impulse to, Shelley writes to Hogg in August 1815, ‘consider the perverted energies of the human mind’ (*PBS Letters*, I, p. 429). *Alastor*, like Peacock’s *Ahrimanes*, is a work of experimentation, breaking from ‘the long, formless eighteenth-century didactic poem’,[[165]](#footnote-165) and one in which Shelley recognises the dangers not simply of solipsism but also of its inverse state. In his anticipation of Wordsworth’s *Excursion*, and upon being ‘[b]lasted by his disappointment’ (Preface to *Alastor*, p. 92), Shelley recognises the attractions and dangers of intersubjective experience that he will come to consider in his prose poem, ‘On Love’, where the ‘want’ or lack of love—‘the meeting with an understanding capable of clearly estimating the deductions of our own’—witnesses ‘man becom[ing] a living sepulchre of himself, and what yet survives is the mere husk of what once he was’ (‘On Love’, p. 632). Immediately after translating Plato’s *Symposium* in 1818, ‘On Love’ appears as if Shelley were meditating upon *Alastor*’s early intimations of ἔρως of the *Symposium*. ‘On Love’ echoes the speaker of the Preface’s claim that the Poet ‘seeks in vain for a prototype of his conception. Blasted by his disappointment, he descends to an untimely grave’ (Preface to *Alastor*, p. 92). In the glow of Peacock’s influence, *Alastor* sees Shelley exercising his own newfound power in the form of a philosophical mode of poetry that seeks through its subtleties to guide its reader inwards, towards a plane of intersubjective communion. In 1817, Shelley describes Peacock’s *Rhododaphne* to Hogg as ‘a story of classical mystery and magic—the transfused essence of Lucian, Petronius, and Apuleius’, and concludes a fragmentary review of the poem with the assertion that ‘This it is to be a scholar; this it is to have read Homer and Sophocles and Plato’ (*PBS Letters*, I, p. 569).[[166]](#footnote-166) Despite Peacock’s lack of success as a poet, Shelley remained a staunch admirer of his older peer’s poetry, writing in 1812 that Peacock’s ‘poems abound with a genius, an information, the power & extent of which I admire’, and even making the effusive claim that ‘the conclusion of “Palmyra” [is] the finest piece of poetry I ever read’ (*PBS Letters*, I, p. 325). It is directly through Peacock, to whom ‘it is in negation that Plato shines most’,[[167]](#footnote-167) that Shelley develops his sceptical strain of Platonism: ‘The Academy is essentially sceptical’.[[168]](#footnote-168) *Alastor* reveals the beginnings of Peacock’s influence and Shelley’s adoption of ‘classical mystery and magic’ along with ‘the transfused essence’, not only of Wordsworth, but also of a mystical shade of Plato. Androgyny’s union in *Alastor* grows out of Shelley’s willingness to be both poet and reader.

Ultimately, the dialogic patterning Shelley adopts from Plato becomes a means of staving off finality to allow androgyny to play through the poem without end. *Alastor*’s resistance to a final conclusion, lesson, or moral is predicated upon the reader’s interpretive involvement. Shelley consciously creates a narrative voice whose very efforts to understand and explain events result in futility in order to spotlight the reader’s active, interpretive role. Refusing a didacticism that would hierarchically subordinate reader to writer, Shelley instead riskily and deliberately weaves a fractured narrative that allows for the reader’s interpenetration through interpretation. The polarity of critical positions surrounding finitude in *Alastor* may be summed up in contrasting Milton Wilson’s claim that ‘*Alastor* is a profoundly ambiguous poem, not because it is a good and complex poem, but because Shelley has failed to work it out with sufficient rigor and finality’ with Michael O’Neill’s assertion that *Alastor*’s ‘suspicion of “finality” is central to its achievement’.[[169]](#footnote-169) It is a similar sense of suspicion that forms the turning point of Plato’s *Phaedo*, where Simmias and Cebes’ doubting of Socrates’ conviction in the soul’s immortality results in the dialogue’s stand-in for the reader, Echecrates, exclaiming: ‘In what arguments can we any longer believe? For the discourse of Socrates, which a little before was vehemently credible, is now fallen into unbelief’.[[170]](#footnote-170) This falling into doubt allows for Socrates to sympathise with Cebes and Simmias through the exercising of scepticism, and also allows him to repeat his assertion on the soul’s immortality to his auditors. Ironically, this moment of doubt that would seem to discredit Socrates’ conviction in the immortal soul allows him to enact verbally the cyclical process of repetition that ensures the soul’s immortality. The compounding of sympathy-through-scepticism with the reiteration of the soul’s immortality ‘cures’ Socrates’ auditors and the reader vis-à-vis Echecrates.

Rather than designing to ‘cure’ his own readership, in *Alastor*, Shelley is satisfied to remain in the liminal space between conviction and unbelief. Doubt and uncertainty save the Poet from the finality of death as, in the poem, the Narrator repeats their tale without appending a moral or conclusion. This ambiguity bypasses overt didacticism by conferring moral agency upon the reader. The poem’s movement is predicated upon the reader’s active participation, as androgyny enables Shelley to experiment with the reciprocity between poet and reader. The repetitive structure and dialogic patterning of *Alastor* ensures the Poet’s own immortality through the Narrator’s, and reader’s, sympathetic projection. The Narrator ‘persist[s]…as a hidden presence in the poem and…reemerge[s] into our awareness’, Stuart Sperry notes, and this hidden persistence underscores the psychic merging that motivates androgyny.[[171]](#footnote-171) Rajan writes that by ‘[i]nserting the past into the present, the format of narrative as a story told to someone necessarily implicates it in a future in which the story may be retold, re-visioned’.[[172]](#footnote-172) The dialogic patterning of Plato’s *Phaedo* and *Symposium* allows for a similar re-visioning. Bo Earle, in offering a comparative analysis of the *Symposium* and *Alastor*, writes that ‘the offspring of Socrates’ failed seduction is not his speech itself’ but is instead ‘what his auditors, and finally us, Plato’s readers, make of his speech’. In the aftermath of Socrates’ speech, which of course is not his own speech at all but another nested tale taking the form of a repetition of a dialogue between himself and Diotima conducted at an unspecified time in the past, ‘we cannot return to Socrates’ competitors’ speeches and read them as we had before’.[[173]](#footnote-173) As in *Alastor*, things ‘are not as they were’ (720). Any return to the speeches of the *Symposium* becomes predicated upon Diotima’s ladder of love, ascending to ‘the supreme beauty itself, simple, pure, uncontaminated with the intermixture of human flesh and colours, and all other idle and unreal shapes attendant on mortality; the divine, the original, the supreme, the self consistent, the modoeidic beautiful itself’.[[174]](#footnote-174) Diotima’s ‘supreme beauty’ that is ‘uncontaminated with the intermixture of human flesh’ upsets the preceding meditations on love as attendant upon the body, from the bodily love of Pausanias’ Pandemian and Uranian Venuses to the rending and rendering of Aristophanes’ divided androgynes’ bodies, and even to Agathon’s fluid and ephemeral Love who is nonetheless described in the fleshly terms of being ‘tender and soft’.[[175]](#footnote-175) And yet, as Socrates reaches, through Diotima, to unveil the Form of love, this attempt is also subverted by the body through Alcibiades’ disruptive, drunken, and sexually charged entrance. In *Alastor*, the Poet and veiled maid indeterminately vacillate between bodily and intellectual states: ascension to ‘the modoeidic beautiful’ is repeatedly compromised by physical presence. Similarly, the *Symposium*’s participants’ intention of purely philosophical discussion is undermined by the body, as ‘everything became full of confusion; and no order being observed, every one was obliged to drink a great quantity of wine’. The party’s drunkenness causes some participants to drift to sleep during the night, excepting ‘Aristophanes, Agathon, and Socrates’ who ‘had alone stood it out’.Aristophanes and Agathon finally succumb to sleep in the early hours of the morning, and Socrates, after ‘having put them to sleep, went away’.It is in the final line of his translation that Shelley makes a significant departure from the original text. In Plato’s version, after departing the banquet, Socrates bathes, leads an ordinary day, and goes home to sleep. However, Shelley’s translation ends simply with: Socrates ‘went home in the evening’.[[176]](#footnote-176)  Earle’s analysis crucially ignores Shelley’s translation and its nuanced alterations, and this problematises his reading of ‘Socrates’ sleep as merely the final iteration in the series of corporal compulsions that proceeded through hiccups, sneezing and laughing’.[[177]](#footnote-177) While the speakers’ disruptive bodily functions foreshadow Alcibiades’ interruption of Socrates’ speech, Shelley’s decision to omit Socrates’ sleep from his translation seems too significant to overlook. Shelley’s omission of Socrates’ sleeping body from *The Banquet* recalls, through its absence, the philosopher’s prone and lifeless body at the end of the *Phaedo*. Despite his death, Socrates, like the poet of *Alastor*, is refused the finality that Phaedo’s conclusion would seem to provide. Although Phaedo tells Echecreates that that ‘was the end of our associate’, the very act of narration ensures that Socrates will rise from his sleep-like death infinitely.[[178]](#footnote-178) The finality of Socrates’ death is withheld by the repetitive nature of Plato’s dialogic patterning; similarly, the Narrator of *Alastor* denies the Poet’s death through the open-endedness afforded by dialogic engagement with the reader.

The Platonic separation of body and soul becomes crucial to the Shelleyan conception of androgyny as ‘a merger of psychic characteristics within the imagination’ resulting in the ‘restoration of the psyche to its original, asexual wholeness’.[[179]](#footnote-179) The body, while an essential component of ascent in Diotima’s ladder of love, nonetheless must be discarded in order for the soul to achieve the state of liberation necessary for Platonic rebirth or Neoplatonic reunion. But *Alastor*, tinged by Shelley’s lingering materialist leanings and burgeoning scepticism, refuses to completely abandon the body in favour of a purely mental mingling. Shelley consciously tethers both Poet and Narrator to earthly existence, and this grounding underscores the poet’s sympathetic engagement with the earthbound Wordsworth. Likewise, Shelley’s omission of Socrates’ sleeping body from the end of *The Banquet* underscores his sceptical strain of Platonism: one that refuses complete belief in immortality. Androgyny, for Shelley, is predicated upon the equal division of mental activity in order to achieve a state of psychic unity, but with unity, Shelley begins to fear, comes completion and finality. Androgyny is approached through ambiguity in *Alastor* and nowhere moreso than in the Poet’s exchange with the veiled maid and the subsequent appearance of the starry-eyed Spirit. If the veiled maid can be read as an early embodiment of Intellectual Beauty then her foil is the Arab maiden. The Poet’s rejection of the Arab maiden’s physical comfort and bodily sustenance allows for his dream-state mental mingling with the veiled maid. Through psychic rather than physical communion with the veiled maid, the Poet approaches the androgynous state of unity.

The Platonic dialectic of body and soul becomes a key theme in *Alastor*, where the Narrator’s intimations of immortality draw on the anamnesis of Wordsworth’s *Ode*, the Plotinian disciplining of the body, and the body and soul as they are considered in the *Phaedo* and the *Symposium*. The Poet does not seem entirely human as descriptions of him vacillate between the bodily and the ethereal throughout the Narrator’s tale. When his body is described, it is done so in a state of decrepitude, as when the Narrator describes his ‘scattered hair’ and ‘listless hand’ that ‘Hung like dead bone within its withered skin’ (248, 250, and 251). The decaying state of his body is contrasted with the seemingly supernatural eminence of his spirit: the vitality of his ‘spectral form’, ‘lightning eyes, and eager breath’ (259 and 260). His physical body becomes insubstantial as his ‘feet / Disturb[ing] not the drifted snow’ (260-261). The poet’s decaying body is not indicative of failure, corruption, or weakness but, evocative of Plotinian philosophy, the disciplined ascent of the soul and untethering of soul from body. For Plotinus, happiness is ‘an Act of the Soul’ in which the tyrannous ‘body must be lessened, reduced’; the Proficient ‘will not wish to be wholly untried in sickness, still less never to feel pain: if such troubles should not come to him of themselves, he will wish to know them, during his youth at least’.[[180]](#footnote-180) In light of Plotinian philosophy, the youthful Poet’s seemingly futile quest and eventual death is not irrefutably marked by failure; instead, the strategic balancing of the pained and weakened body with the untethering of the soul demonstrates Shelley’s growing engagement with Platonic thought, and the privileging of androgyny as an intellectual union over fleshly hermaphroditism.

For Plotinus, the individual soul seeks unification with the One through the eroticised pairing of lover and beloved, and this eroticisation draws most vividly upon Diotima’s envisioning of the soul’s ascent to the pure Form of beauty in Plato’s *Symposium*. In *Alastor*, the Narrator’s eroticisation of nature marks a significant departure from the ‘conspicuously asexual’ Wordsworth, the poet who Shelley satirises in *Peter Bell the Third* as feeling faint upon ‘touch[ing] the hem of Nature’s shift’ (*Peter Bell the Third*, 4.315).[[181]](#footnote-181) *Alastor*, in ‘its insistence on sexual metaphor and its fascination with death, reveals a mysticism darker and more Germanic than the pantheism of the English Lake poets’, John C. Bean writes.[[182]](#footnote-182) However, Shelley’s readings surrounding *Alastor*’s compositional period are more Hellenistic than Germanic, and it is from a muddling of Platonic, Neo-Platonic, and Plotinian sources that the poem wins its mysticism. The Narrator erotically personifies nature, from ‘spring’s voluptuous pantings when she breathes / Her first sweet kisses’ to the occult union of ‘strange tears’ and ‘breathless kisses’ that make ‘Such magic’ (11; 34 and 35). The sexualised desire for union in *Alastor* draws upon Plato’s *Symposium*, but also the Plotinian eroticism in the soul’s desire to be reunited with the One, and Socrates’ physical intimacy with his auditors in the *Phaedo*. Wordsworth’s asexuality prevents him from being able to attain the androgynous ability to mentally mix and melt with the Other, and Shelley, like Keats, scrutinises the Lake poet’s egotism. Egotism, motivating what Shelley considers to be Wordsworth’s self-serving political and religious turncoating, prevents him from being able to overleap the bounds of selfhood and ‘imagine…the airy children of [his] brain…born anew within another’s’ (‘On Love’, p. 631). Even *Tintern Abbey*, with its intersubjective insistence upon ‘[t]he mind that is within us’ (127), sees Wordsworth envisioning his own reflection being sustained within his sister’s eyes. However, Shelley’s recognition of Wordsworth’s enslavement to selfalso motivates his own self-scrutiny. *Alastor*’s Narrator’s eroticisation of nature and his intense sympathy towards the Poet conjures a redemptive revisioning of Shelley’s imagined relationship with Wordsworth, one that acknowledges the older poet’s ‘points of sympathy’ and pauses them from being withdrawn through the open-endedness afforded by the poem’s dialogic patterning (‘On Love’, p. 631).

The most explicitly erotic scene in *Alastor* occurs, not between the Poet and a figuration of Nature, but between himself and the figure of the ‘veilèd maid’, ‘Herself a poet’ (151 and 161). Rather than a narcissistic projection or an emanation of the male mind, the veiled maid is an independent and active agent: no more corporeal and no less ethereal than the Poet himself. Susan Fischman points up her agency in bestowing upon her the moniker of ‘dreamt poet’, writing that the ‘passive/active combination’ of this title ‘reveals both her dependence on another for her existence, and at the same time suggests her agency *as* a poet’ (author’s emphasis).[[183]](#footnote-183) It is her otherness to the Poet that allows for their union: ‘the warm light of *their* own life’ (175, my emphasis), and she is the active initiator of their eroticised encounter. She is not an abstraction, and the physicality of her shape—her ‘outspread arms’, ‘her parted lips’—prevents her from being interpreted as a Platonic Form ‘uncontaminated with the intermixture of human flesh and colours’ (177 and 179).[[184]](#footnote-184) However, critics who are quick to dismiss any trace of Platonism surrounding the female poet overlook the importance of Diotima’s ladder of love in the *Symposium* and the feminisation of philosophy in the *Phaedo*. David Towsey rightly notes of Diotima’s ladder of love that the ‘objective is to produce something non-physical, purely intellectual, but its necessary condition, the very medium in which it is produced, is precisely physical, the love of a beautiful body’, and this is a condition of the veiled maid’s Platonism that is repeatedly overlooked. For instance, Gerald E. Enscoe remarks that, due to the scene’s depiction of ‘sexual love’, ‘[t]here is nothing here to suggest that this dream-maiden is a Platonic ideal, a mirror image of the poet’s own abstracted and distorted consciousness’, while Raymond D. Havens asserts that ‘[t]here is no suggestion that he regards her as an abstraction, a Platonic ideal of the loved one’.[[185]](#footnote-185) The veiled maid’s sexualised physicality prevents an interpretation of her as a Platonic Form, but does nothing to discount the overt Platonism of this eroticised, and wholly androgynous, scene.

William Keach notes that the eroticisation of this scene marks Shelley’s significant departure from Wordsworth’s *Immortality Ode*. In *Alastor*, ‘the erotic additions are central, and so is the fact that Wordsworth’s metaphorical “dream,” in which the earth seemed “Apparelled in celestial light” (l. 4), becomes in *Alastor* an actual dream of union with an idealized projection of the self as other’.[[186]](#footnote-186) Similarly, William Ulmer reads the scene as ‘[t]he Poet’s projection of the veiled maid’, resulting in a confusion of ‘self and other so that, longing for the ultimate truth, he willingly deifies a “spiritual” authority mistakenly believed to originate outside his mind’.[[187]](#footnote-187) Ulmer and Keach’s readings of the veiled maid as ‘an idealized projection’ problematically strip her of her own agency as poet, but Shelley seems to discourage an interpretation of the veiled maid as a self-projection through the careful balancing of the passive Poet and active veiled maid:

Knowledge and truth and virtue were her theme,

And lofty hopes of divine liberty,

Thoughts most dear to him, and poesy,

Herself a poet.

(158-161)

Although these thoughts are ‘most dear to him’, the Poet, they are also the veiled maid’s own ‘theme’, and in the enjambed isolating of ‘Herself’ Shelley seems to emphasise the veiled maid’s active and differentiated status of poet. While the Poet ‘dreamed a veilèd maid / Sate near him’, his dream act is itself the product of a separate vision: ‘A vision on his sleep / There came, a dream of hopes’ (151-152 and 149-150). Michael O’Neill writes that ‘Shelley cunningly phrases the opening lines to draw attention to the fact of the “vision” rather than to the presence of a “visionary” who dreamed it up’.[[188]](#footnote-188) Shelley’s ‘cunning’ differentiation between the ‘vision’ and the ‘dream’ is worth closer examination, although I depart from O’Neill’s attribution of the vision to the Poet’s dream-state. The demarcation between the vision, an independent, active force, and the visionary Poet’s dream disturbs any reading of the veiled maid simply as a product of the male Poet’s mind. Shelley’s differentiation between a vision and a dream is subtly evocative of Wordsworth’s hauntingly unanswered questions: ‘Whither is fled the visionary gleam? / Where is it now, the glory and the dream?’ (*Immortality Ode*, 56-57). Keach’s reading of Wordsworth’s dream in the *Immortality Ode* as ‘metaphorical’ and Shelley’s as ‘actual’ gestures towards the question of the Platonic rift between things as they seem and things as they are. Both poets engage with this idea, albeit to different degrees. Wordsworth’s dream of anamnesis—‘Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting’ (58)—is perhaps only as ‘metaphorical’ as Plato’s own use of symbolism to ‘explain the invisible through its appropriate visible’ is.[[189]](#footnote-189) Shelley engages with Wordsworth’s Platonic anamnesis in *Alastor* by echoing its distinct reversal of Plato’s ascent towards the pure light of knowledge. For Wordsworth, the enlightened states of birth and infancy are darkened by growth: a paradoxical reversal of the Platonic pursuit of knowledge through the practice of philosophy. Although the ‘Shades of the prison-house begin to close / Upon the growing Boy’, in his youthfulness, the boy ‘beholds the light, and whence it flows’ until ‘At length the Man perceives it die away, / And fade into the light of common day’ (*Immortality Ode*, 67-68, 69, and 75-76). The darkening ‘Shades of the prison house begin to close’ around the growing boy in adoption of the Orphic body-prison of the *Phaedo*. Engaging with Wordsworth’s Platonic reversal, Shelley’s scene between the Poet and the veiled maid is a quasi-Platonic, mystical encounter that sees a process of descent rather than ascent.[[190]](#footnote-190) The veiled maid is first imaged in the abstract and synaesthetic mingling of sound and thought, music and ‘sense suspended in its web / Of many-coloured woof and shifting hues’ (156-157). It is only when ‘her pure mind kindled through all her frame / A permeating fire’ that she begins to become a physically embodied presence. After she has consciously, through the enkindling power of her own mind, given physical shape to her presence the Poet turns to face her

And saw by the warm light of their own life

Her glowing limbs beneath the sinuous veil

Of woven wind, her outspread arms now bare,

Her dark locks floating in the breath of night

Her beamy bending eyes, her parted lips

(175-179)

The pronoun ‘their’ in ‘the warm light of their own life’ may refer to ‘Her glowing limbs’ but seems more suggestive of the Poet and veiled maid’s unification. In descending from the intellectual heights of Diotima’s ladder to a lower state of physical embodiment, the veiled maid is able to achieve momentary oneness with the Poet. This androgynous mingling of masculine and feminine occurs in a mental dream state rather than the ‘real’ world of flesh, but the strikingly sensuous evocation of the veiled maid’s bodily shape jars against Diotima’s account of ‘the supreme beauty itself, simple, pure, uncontaminated with the intermixture of human flesh and colours, and all other idle and unreal shapes attendant on mortality’ (*The Banquet*, p. 450). The veiled maid is by no means a deliberate representation of a Platonic Form, but this does not completely undercut the scene’s Platonic referentiality. *Alastor*, as ‘the most important poetic response to Wordsworth’s *Immortality Ode*’, dwells in a similarly liminal space illuminated by the afterglow of ‘the visionary gleam’ (*Immortality Ode*, 56) but never reaching the uncontaminated light of pure Platonism.[[191]](#footnote-191)

The veiled maid’s materialisation is an eroticised coming-into-being that reveals her sexual agency. The orgasmic culmination of the interaction between the Poet and the veiled maid has not gone unnoticed by critics, but the veiled maid’s active role in the experience of orgasm has been little commented upon.[[192]](#footnote-192) Rather, the scene is typically glossed as an adolescent boy’s wet dream, but this simplification of this key event overlooks the veiled maid’s active role of poet: maker, bringer into being. The combination of the veiled maid’s status as poet and her active participation in the orgasm scene evocatively recalls Diotima’s discourse upon ποίησις (poiesis) in *The Banquet*, where the metaphorical approximation of pregnancy to the physical act of ejaculation is likened to the divine act of artistic creation:

Those whose bodies alone are pregnant with this principle of immortality are attracted by women, seeking through the production of children what they imagine to be happiness and immortality and an enduring remembrance; but they whose souls are far more pregnant than their bodies, conceive and produce that which is more suitable to the soul. What is suitable to the soul? Intelligence, and every other power and excellence of the mind, of which all poets, and all other artists who are creative and inventive, are the authors.

(*The Banquet*, p. 447)

In *Alastor*, Shelley marks Diotima’s distinction between the pregnant body and the pregnant soul through the bodily acts of the Arab maiden and the mental activity of the veiled maid. The Arab maiden is tethered to the terrestrial. She offers the Poet bodily sustenance in the forms of food and shelter, giving to him

Her daily portion, from her father’s tent,

And spread her matting for his couch, and stole

From duties and repose to tend his steps:—

Enamoured, yet not daring for deep awe

To speak her love:—and watched his nightly sleep,

Sleepless herself, to gaze upon his lips

(130-135)

Unable to penetrate the Poet’s dreams as the veiled maid does, the Arab maiden departs from the Poet ‘Wildered, and wan, and panting’ (139). The Arab maiden’s physical exertion anticipates the Poet’s erotic encounter with the veiled maid, where ‘He reared his shuddering limbs and quelled / His gasping breath, and spread his arms to meet / Her panting bosom’ (182-184). The veiled maid’s reciprocation of the Poet’s love starkly contrasts with the Arab maiden’s rejected and solitary state. Through this contrast, Shelley evokes the state in which the impregnating desire is repelled, and ‘retains unwillingly that with which it is pregnant’: ‘to one pregnant, and, as it were, already bursting with the load of his desire, the impulse towards that which is beautiful is intense, on account of the great pain of retaining that which he has conceived’ (*The Banquet*, p. 445). The incongruity between the Arab maiden as all-flesh and the Poet as an intermediary between the earthly and the immortal results in the Arab maiden’s rejection and unwilling containment of her generative principle. Shelley’s shifting between gendered and ungendered pronouns in *The Banquet*, as in ‘it [being] pregnant’ and pregnancy as ‘the load of his desire’ reveals the conscious subversion of sexual distinctions that he builds upon in *The Banquet*’s accompanying prose fragment, ‘Essay On the Literature, the Arts, and the Manners of the Athenians’ and later returns to in *A Defence of Poetry*. Benjamin Sudarsky notes that Shelley’s pronoun choices are ‘as gender-neutral as possible’, confirming that ‘[t]here is a feminist motive for these choices’.[[193]](#footnote-193) Acts of ejaculation and pregnancy are seemingly synonymous in *The Symposium*, and Plato’s decision to ascribe the feminine state of pregnancy to both males and females underscores his own subversive intentions. Angela Hobbs reveals that ‘Diotima could have used *tiktein* or *gennan*, which can apply to either sex, but she does not. There is no escaping the fact that she—Plato—has selected a term [*kuousin*] which the other symposiasts and Plato’s readers would have associated with women, despite the fact that it is here applied to all humans (*anthrōpoi*)’. For Hobbs, Plato’s subversive application of pregnancy to males and females alike reveals his preoccupation ‘with liberating men and women alike from inessential bodily and cultural constraints’ in recognition of the ungendered and therefore androgynous Forms.[[194]](#footnote-194) Shelley’s extracurricular study of Plato while at Oxford is in itself a subversive act, and through his growing engagement with Plato’s texts, significantly increasing during and immediately following *Alastor*’s composition and culminating in works of translation, Shelley comes to find his own desire for mental revolution through androgyny reflected in Plato’s subtle and melodious strains of thought.

Shelley’s interest in Platonic thought, albeit through the haze of translation and Neoplatonism, is carried over into poetic engagement through the friendship and influence of self-taught Classics scholar, poet, satirist, and sceptic, Thomas Love Peacock. Suzanne Barnett notes that ‘Peacock’s distinctly pagan (as opposed to patrician) reading of classicism opened up for Shelley the subversive potential of the ancient world’, building upon his natural Platonism and his extracurricular studies at Oxford.[[195]](#footnote-195) Despite *Alastor*’s indebtedness to Plato’s *Symposium*, the poem does not see Shelley explicitly translating Plato’s dialectics into verse, as he seems to in the abandoned *Athanase*, described by Mary as being ‘a good deal modelled on *Alastor*’ but overtly Neoplatonic, in that ‘Athanase seeks through the world the One whom he may love’.[[196]](#footnote-196) *Athanase* makes revisions to the mystical Platonism of *Alastor*. Predating *Athanase*, *Alastor* reveals how much ‘of what one meets in Romantic Platonism is nearer to Plotinus than to Plato’, but not intentionally so.[[197]](#footnote-197) Plato’s *Phaedo*,as the first Platonic dialectic to significantly affect Shelley, paves the way for a philosophical mode of poetry unconsciously imbued with Neoplatonism, which itself exercises ‘the psychology of the *Phaedo*’.[[198]](#footnote-198) While there is no presently known record of Shelley reading Plotinus directly, the Plotinian and Neoplatonic colour Shelley’s early understanding of and engagement with Platonism through the Neoplatonists Ficino and Taylor’s translations. In *Alastor*, Shelley channels the ‘mystical language’ of Plotinus through his readings of Plato in translation, so much so that the Narrator’s tale seems at times to be an evocative echo of Plotinus’ admonition in the *Enneads* that ‘we ought not to pursue [spiritual truth] with a view to detecting its secret source, but to watch in quiet till it suddenly shines upon us’.[[199]](#footnote-199) ‘Nature’s most secret steps’, the Narrator recounts, ‘He like her shadow has pursued’ ‘till meaning on his vacant mind / Flashed like strong inspiration’ (81-82 and 126-127). Taylor’s attraction to Plato is a result of his preoccupations with occultism and mysticism, beginning with the publication of *Mystical Initiations: or, Hymns of Orpheus*, where Taylor ordains himself as an interpreter of the Orphic religion through ‘the writings of the latter Platonists, as the only sources of genuine knowledge, on this sublime and obsolete enquiry’.[[200]](#footnote-200) Taylor’s subsequent translations from Plotinus and Plato are far removed from their original Greek sources and become a mysticised mingling of thought rather than the purely Platonic rational pursuit of truth. Notopoulos concedes, ‘[t]he Neoplatonic influences which reached Shelley through Thomas Taylor and other authors affected by Neoplatonism were more sympathetic to Shelley’s temperament than was logical Platonism’;[[201]](#footnote-201) however, while ideologically *Alastor* is indebted largely to a Neoplatonic rendering of Platonic thought, its subtle fashioning of a dialogic structure between the Narrator and the Poet, and by extension between the poet and the reader, is indebted to Plato’s dialectics: a ‘mechanism’ that makes a lasting impression upon Shelley’s poetics.[[202]](#footnote-202) The overtly didactic dialogic structure of *Queen Mab* undergoes careful revision in *Alastor* where dialogic structure is recast through the mingling of narrative and lyric*.* As Shelley writes to Hogg in 1813, ‘The didactic is in blank heroic verse, & the descriptive in blank lyrical measure’ (*PBS Letters*, I, p. 352). In turning his attention away from the explicit instruction of his readership and considering instead the potential for dynamic intertextual reciprocity, Shelley begins to experiment with androgyny as a ‘psychic unity’ between poet and reader, and textually between the masculine and feminine figurations of Poet and veiled maid.

Shelley’s gravitation towards a mingling of Neoplatonic and Platonic thought in *Queen Mab* is circumscribed by his materialist leanings, but shines through most explicitly in the division of Ianthe’s soul and body: a demarcation that underscores the influence of the *Phaedo* on Shelley’s poetic thoughts. Notopoulos writes that this demarcation between the physical form and soul is ‘one of the clearest expressions of Platonism in *Queen Mab*’ in its engagement with the *Phaedo*, albeit a Platonism coloured with tints of Pindaric and Plotinian influence. As ‘The perfect semblance of its bodily frame’ (*Queen Mab*, 1.133), the imaging of Ianthe’s soul can be traced alongside Plato to Pindar’s ‘image of life’, Notopoulos suggests,[[203]](#footnote-203) for Plato’s conception of the liberated soul retains no such bodily semblance. In denoting the veiled maid agency as ‘Herself a poet’ (161), *Alastor* sees Shelley reconfiguring the separation of body and soul in more ambiguous terms that lends itself to androgyny as an intersubjective processing. Shelley’s experimentation with androgyny is indebted, not only to Peacock’s encouragement of the poet’s Classical reading, but also to his demarcations between physical and ethereal forms, particularly in *Ahrimanes*. In *Alastor*, both Poet and veiled maid are conceived in terms that ambiguously conflate and separate body and soul, emphasising the activity of intermingling over defined separation. The invisible soul projects an image visible, Socrates suggests, in a fallen and intermediary state where it ‘wanders about monuments and tombs; about which indeed certain shadowy phantoms of souls appear, being the images produced by such souls as have not been purely liberated from the body’.[[204]](#footnote-204) This fallen state of the soul is juxtaposed against the Arab maiden’s attempts to nourish the Poet’s body. Before the Narrator recounts the scene of the Arab maiden tending to the Poet’s physical needs, he is pictured amongst ‘awful ruins’ (108) where ‘dead men / Hang their mute thoughts on the mute walls around’ (119-120), and where the Poet ‘Gazed on those speechless shapes’, continuing ‘when the moon / Filled the mysterious halls with floating shades’ (123 and 124). The Narrator’s description of the tethering of the fallen souls’ shades to the material world recalls Socrates’ description in the *Phaedo* of the descending, body-loving souls and anticipates the Arab maiden’s misguided efforts to nourish the Poet’s physical body. When the Poet does fall into the state of sleep in which he encounters the veiled maid he does not undergo Ianthe’s distinct separation of body and soul but instead experiences a state of intermingling: a textual processing of psychic union that experimentally aims to mimic the poet and reader’s mental melding. The intersubjective allowances of *Alastor*’s quasi-lyrical mode enable Shelley, through the experimental processing of androgyny, to engage the reader in the poet’s mental activity.

Through its indebtedness to the Platonic dialectic and the ‘speculative mysticism’ of Plotinian translations of Plato,[[205]](#footnote-205) *Alastor* becomes Shelley’s first foray into the philosophical mode of poetry that comes to motivate his greatest works, from *Prometheus Unbound* to *The Triumph of Life*, due in large part to the reciprocal influence of Peacock: a close enough friend of Thomas Taylor’s to be ‘christened’ by him as ‘Greeky-Peaky’.[[206]](#footnote-206) Shelley’s shifting away from the overt didacticism of *Queen Mab* with its appended and instructive Notes to a more subtle means of instruction in *Alastor* is concomitant with the young poet’s increasing time spent in Peacock’s company. Marilyn Butler remarks that 1815 ‘marked the beginning of Peacock’s real intimacy with Shelley, an intellectual friendship of crucial importance in deciding the future tone and quality of his work’.[[207]](#footnote-207) While *Laon and Cythna* appropriates elements of Peacock’s fragmentary *Ahrimanes* which Peacock finally abandoned and furnished to Shelley in 1816,[[208]](#footnote-208) the impact of Peacock’s presence, and particularly his knowledge of the Classics and inherent scepticism, is more significant than has been given due credit in *Alastor*. While Peacock’s instrumentality in titling *Alastor* is well-documented, the older poet’s influence upon the poem’s content has not yet been substantially investigated.[[209]](#footnote-209) Kenneth Neill Cameron dates *Ahrimanes*’ compositional period as beginning in the summer of 1813 and ending in the autumn of 1815, overlapping with *Alastor*’s period of composition. Cameron suggests that Shelley had seen *Ahrimanes* ‘as early as the summer of 1814’, and affirms that ‘when Shelley wrote *Alastor*, the memory of *Ahrimanes* was still with him, though vaguely and perhaps unconsciously’.[[210]](#footnote-210) The residual effects of *Ahrimanes* and Peacock’s presence upon *Alastor* are not as unconscious as Cameron claims. The subtleties of Peacock’s lasting influence are foreshadowed by Shelley’s remark in 1814, anticipating the ‘living sepulchre’ and ‘untimely grave’ of *Alastor* and ‘On Love’, that

I am always repeating to myself your lines from Sophocles:

Man’s happiest lot is not to be:

And when we tread life’s thorny steep,

Most blest are they, who earliest free,

Descend to death’s eternal sleep.[[211]](#footnote-211)

Peacock’s translated lines, which H. F. B. Brett-Smith attributes to a choral ode in *Oedipus at Colonus*, were memorised by Shelley and, Notopoulos writes, ‘may have influenced Shelley’s habit of translating from the Greek’.[[212]](#footnote-212) Significantly, Peacock employs these lines as ‘the motto’ of *Ahrimanes*.[[213]](#footnote-213) Peacock’s translation imbues the lines with a poetic cast that Shelley would likely have appreciated, where ‘death’s eternal sleep’ is evocative of *Queen Mab*’s opening invocation to ‘Death and his brother Sleep’ (2). Compare, for instance, the poetic licence of Peacock’s translation with the literalness of Gilbert Murray’s:

Not to be born, by all acclaim,

Were best; but once that gate be passed,

To hasten thither whence he came

Is man’s next prize—and fast, Oh fast![[214]](#footnote-214)

In addition to the parallel between death and sleep—‘Sleep and death’ (*Alastor*, 367)—Peacock’s lines imbue the chorus’ admonition with a sense of the mental topography—‘life’s thorny steep’—that comes to feature in *Alastor*, evoking the Poet’s final steps towards a death that is met by him ‘faintly smiling’ (645):

When on the threshold of the green recess

The wanderer’s footsteps fell, he knew that death

Was on him

(625-627)

Kenneth Neill Cameron and Richard Garnett identify parallels between *Ahrimanes* and *Alastor*, with Cameron noticing a similarity between the ‘dream maiden’, or veiled maid, of *Alastor* and a ‘female form’ in *Ahrimanes*. Cameron isolates the following lines from Peacock’s abandoned epic:

her eyes unearthly fire illumed:

Far o’er her shoulders streamed a sable veil.

(*Ahrimanes*, I, iv)[[215]](#footnote-215)

Cameron’s observation, while apt in its isolation of the fire and veil that Shelley adopts in his imaging of the veiled maid, lacks sustained analysis, and it is upon closer examination of Peacock’s ‘female form’ that Shelley’s veiled maid becomes an approximated shape. Peacock’s ‘awe-struck youth’, Darassah, perceives the female form’s voice ‘as music’s vesper’, and Shelley’s veiled maid’s voice is ‘music long’ to the Poet (*Ahrimanes*, 1.8 and *Alastor*, 154). Peacock makes a distinction between the female form and a maid, distinctly different from the female form, who accompanies Darassah on his voyage: a voyage upon a serendipitously found ‘bark’, down a stream and past scenes of blooming acacia, groves, and canopies, that is adopted into *Alastor*’s narrative.[[216]](#footnote-216) The distinction between the female form, ‘Lovely she was—not loveliness that might / In a mortal heart enkindle light desire’ (*Ahrimanes*, 1.5), and the maid, Darassah’s lover, who winds her arms around his body and presses her head to his chest, recalls Pausanias’ distinction between the Uranian and Pandemian Venuses in the *Symposium*, where the former holds sway over love that is inclusive of body and soul and the latter seeks only the love of the body. Influenced by and adapting *Ahrimanes*, Shelley juxtaposes the Poet’s encounter with the Arab maiden and the veiled maid to similar effect. Shelley considers the distinction between the Uranian and Pandemian Venuses most explicitly in *Athanase* and builds upon this demarcation in later works such as *The Witch of Atlas* and *Epipsychidion* through the gradated states of the hermaphrodite and the androgyne, where the hermaphroditical state is a failed form of androgyny resigned to a corporeality, and the condition of the androgyne subsists solely in the imagination. Peacock’s female form and Shelley’s veiled maid are both illumined, ethereal shapes, and both dissipate in similar scenes of departure:

round her form

A sable vapor, thickly-mantling, drew

Its volume folds, dark as the summer storm.

It wrapped her round, and in an instant flew,

Scattered like mist, though not a zephyr blew,

And left no vestige that she there had been.

The river rolled in light. The moonbeams threw

Their purest radiance on the lonely scene;

And hill, and grove, and rock, slept in the ray

serene.

(*Ahrimanes*, 1.30)

Shelley’s Poet, after being folded into the veiled maid’s ‘dissolving arms’ (187), awakens to consider a similarly ‘lonely scene’:

The cold white light of morning, the blue moon

Low in the west, the clear and garish hills,

The distinct valley and the vacant woods,

Spread round him where he stood. Whither have fled

The hues of heaven that canopied his bower

Of yesternight?

(*Alastor*, 193-195)

In addition to verbally echoing Wordsworth’s *Immortality Ode*, Shelley disturbs the luminous clarity of Peacock’s scene by transforming his pure radiance into ‘cold white light’. Where Peacock paints a scene of serenity that complements Darassah’s newly enlightened state, Shelley distorts the same scene into one where garish light reveals lack: a vacancy that is repeated in the imaging of the Poet’s ‘wan eyes’ that ‘Gaze on the empty scene as vacantly / As ocean’s moon looks on the moon in heaven’ (200-202). Shelley’s rendering allows for the addition of a Platonic undercurrent; here, Shelley seems to invoke the *Republic* where darkness and light, in their undiluted states, are equally damaging both to the physical and intellectual eye. The mind in a state of confusion is either ‘returning from a mode of existence which involves greater lucidity’ and has been ‘blinded by the unfamiliar darkness’, or is ‘moving from relative ignorance to relative lucidity’ and has been ‘overwhelmed and dazzled by the increased brightness’.[[217]](#footnote-217) In reconceiving Peacock’s passage, Shelley shifts emphasis onto the state of Becoming that is essential to both Platonic and Neoplatonic thought in their pursuits of knowledge and oneness. Androgynous mental mingling, lacking in *Ahrimanes*, becomes key to Shelley’s scene between the Poet and the veiled maid and the subsequent appearance of the starry-eyed Spirit. Before awakening to the ‘cold white light’ the Poet is plunged into total darkness, ‘blackness veiled his dizzy eyes’ (188), and in this disparity of vision Shelley emphasises the lack of the mingled state—the fading of darkness into light—that is integral to Becoming, and that has moments ago been essential to the Poet’s encounter with the veiled maid. Shelley adopts Peacock’s female form as a shape distinguished by her mingled presence:

as she moved, the moon-beams died away,

And shade around her fell—a circling shade—

That gave no outline of the wondrous maid.

Her form—soft-gliding as the summer gale—

In that portentous darkness shone arrayed,

Shone by her starry crown, her fiery veil,

And those refulgent eyes that made their radiance

pale.

(*Ahrimanes*, 1.6)

While *Ahrimanes* appears to convey Peacock’s short-lived interest in Zoroastrianism, his sustained attention to shadows, shades, shapes, and forms gestures towards his study of Platonic and Neoplatonic texts, and it is this Platonic symbolism and idea of Becoming, or ascending towards, that Shelley makes use of in *Alastor*. In a passage that condenses Peacock’s Platonic inclinations with the potential for intersubjective communion that Shelley builds between Narrator and Poet in *Alastor*, Peacock momentarily lingers upon the depths of Darassah’s mental state before moving back into the role of objective narrator:

Standing like one almost of sense bereaved,

That fixes on the vacant air his gaze,

Where wildered fancy’s troubled eye surveys

Dim-flitting forms, obscure and undefined,

That doubtful thoughts and shadowy feelings raise,

Leaving no settled image on the mind:

Like cloud-built rocks and towers, dissolved ere

half-combined.

(*Ahrimanes*, 1.29)

Shelley makes the additional demarcation between multiple planes of perception where the material world veils an ideal reality: a distinction lighted upon in the above lines but not sustained throughout *Ahrimanes*, and one that is bolstered by Shelley’s mingling of narrative and lyrical modes with attention directed towards the reader’s interpretive agency. Platonic thought, as it is channelled through Peacock’s self-teachings and Wordsworth’s interpretations, likely through Coleridge,[[218]](#footnote-218) offers Shelley a philosophical system that connects rather than binds.

In his *Defence of Poetry*, itself a Platonic dialogue in which Peacock stands as the Socratic figure, with whose darkness Shelley’s light intermingles, Shelley borrows from Plato’s *Ion* the chain of poetic creation and reception.

The sacred links of that chain have never been entirely disjoined, which descending through the minds of many men is attached to those great minds whence as from a magnet the invisible effluence is sent forth which at once connects, animates and sustains the life of all.

(*A Defence of Poetry*, p. 687)

The mental mingling that is intrinsic to Shelley’s use of androgyny, where masculine and feminine textual figurations are interanimated through the poet and reader’s intersubjective meeting, is symbolically rendered in the appearance of the moon in *Alastor*. Richard Garnett points to a parallel between lines 645-649 of *Alastor*, wherein the dying Poet gazes upon ‘the great moon’ (646) and the following lines in *Ahrimanes*:

The stars grow pale, and o’er

the western verge

Of heaven the moon her parting

orb suspends.

She sinks behind the hill.

(*Ahrimanes*, 2.11)[[219]](#footnote-219)

Shelley adopts the sinking moon of this scene and intensifies its androgynous connotations with the addition, ‘her mighty horn suspended’ (647). For Diane Long Hoeveler, this addition creates negation:

The feminine as symbolic of the spiritual life is negated by the power of the horned/phallic moon, the abject mother as destroyer as well as creator of the world of generation. Shelley knew through his translation of the *Symposium* that Plato considered the moon “androgynous” (*JW*, VII, 184), but the Mother as androgynous moon is compromised by her association with death and destruction.[[220]](#footnote-220)

Hoeveler’s reading, while noting the androgynous implications of the ‘horned/phallic’ female moon and the Platonic androgyny of the celestial body, overlooks the Platonic dialogue nearest to Shelley’s thoughts up until his rereading of the *Symposium* in 1817, the *Phaedo*. Therein, Socrates, maternal insofar as he is intellectually pregnant (*kuousin*) is not compromised by his proximity to death. Instead, death is pursued and practiced, as Socrates asserts to Simmias that ‘those who practice philosophy aright are cultivating dying’.[[221]](#footnote-221) In the *Phaedo*, Plato subtly approximates Socrates to the status of poet: ‘I consider myself as a fellow servant of the swans, and sacred to the same divinity’, for swans, ‘when they perceive that it is necessary for them to die, sing not only as usual, but then more than ever; rejoicing that they are about to depart to that deity in whose service they are engaged’.[[222]](#footnote-222) The Poet of *Alastor*, like Socrates, aspires to the condition of Apollo’s servant and hears sweetness rather than grief in the swan’s ‘dying notes’ (286). Prior to the Poet’s death, in the scene Michael O’Neill rightly dubs ‘one of the finest moments in the poem’,[[223]](#footnote-223) ‘A Spirit seemed / To stand beside him’ (479-480) and, ‘speech assuming’,

Held commune with him, as if he and it

Were all that was,—only…when his regard

Was raised by intense pensiveness,…two eyes

Two starry eyes, hung in the gloom of thought

And seemed with their serene and azure smiles

To beckon him.

(486-492)

Editors note that these ‘Two starry eyes’ ‘recall the earlier “beamy bending eyes” (l. 179)’ of the veiled maid, a line that anticipates ‘On Love’, where ‘the beams of [another’s] eyes should kindle at once and mix and melt into our own’ (‘On Love’, p. 631).[[224]](#footnote-224) Crucially, where the veiled maid is previously a female figure, she is now invoked using Shelley’s genderless pronoun, ‘it’. This shift from a gendered female state to a genderless, androgynous form, combined with the mental mixing and melting of ‘he and it’, marks the final iteration of the Poet’s quest, and also underscores androgyny’s Platonic import. Plato’s Forms are genderless, and ‘[a]ccording to Proclus, Atticus points out that for Plato the supreme Good is ἀγαθόυ, neuter, and not ἀγαθός, masculine, and this is an observation which Plotinus could have made in theory, though his practice of frequently using masculine pronouns for the primary hypostasis is scarcely an endorsement’; however, in Plotinus’ discourse on Beauty in *The Enneads*, adopted from Diotima’s speech in the *Symposium*, Plotinus follows Plato’s ungendering of the Good in describing ‘*Its* purity’ (emphasis added).[[225]](#footnote-225) Shelley, too, in his *Banquet* adopts the neuter pronoun ‘it’ in his translation of Diotima’s—Plato’s—account of Beauty. The ‘serene and azure smiles’ of the illuminated ‘starry eyes’ also reveal Shelley’s Plotinian mysticism. While referring to ‘That Light whose smile kindles the Universe’ in *Adonais* (54.478), Laura Quinney notes that ‘[t]he idea of the smiling Light…derives from Plotinus’.[[226]](#footnote-226) The Poet seems to return the Spirit’s luminous smile as he dies: ‘faintly smiling:—his last sight / Was the great moon’ (645-646). Shelley makes frequent use of dashes in *Alastor*, often for caesural effect, so the usage here is not particularly unique; however, in this instance the device visually connects the Poet’s smile and eyes in a reciprocation of the Spirit’s smiling eyes. The Spirit, originally appearing as a return of the veiled maid, androgynously involves the Poet in itself through their commune and reciprocated gaze. Kelvin Everest and Geoffrey Matthews read the Spirit as ‘an embodiment of Nature, not visually personified but communicating directly via the landscape’ and thereby ‘diverg[ing] explicitly from the experiences of the young Wordsworth’, while Wasserman views the Spirit as ‘another realization of the veiled maid, “diffused mysteriously throughout nature” (*Wasserman 32*)’.[[227]](#footnote-227) The Spirit of *Alastor* is not the same spirit that ‘rolls through all things’ in *Tintern Abbey* (104), and while I concur with Wasserman that its appearance marks the return of the veiled maid, it is not diffused through nature inasmuch as it is androgynously mingled with the Poet in a fusion that vacillates between physical and psychic states. The Poet’s perception of the Spirit’s ‘starry eyes’ echoes the earlier moonlit scene in which

His eyes beheld

Their own wan light through the reflected lines

Of his thin hair, distinct in the dark depth

Of that still fountain

(469-472)

This is not an instance of narcissistic self-absorption, but is instead a Plotinian turning-inwards towards the Intellectual state of ‘self-seeing and self-knowing in which seeing and thing seen are undistinguishably one thing’.[[228]](#footnote-228) Building upon the Platonic precept of sight as a reciprocal exchange of light established in the *Timaeus*, Plotinus envisions the enlightened soul as being self-illuminated and self-seen in contrast to the unenlightened soul that can only see others and not itself. The veiled maid’s return as a starry-eyed Spirit marks the Poet’s escalation to an enlightened state of perception, one that results in his pursuit ‘Obedient to the light / That shone within his soul’ (492-493). In his experimental conception of androgyny, Shelley appropriates Plotinus’ ‘pure Intellectual’, where ‘the vision and the envisioned are a unity; the seen is as the seeing and seeing as seen’.[[229]](#footnote-229) Androgyny is a means of achieving mental unity, and the means of vision in the Poet’s self-reflection and his perception of the Spirit ambiguously wavers between ocular and intellectual sight. The Poet’s act of beholding his eyes’ ‘own wan light’ ‘in the dark depth / Of that still fountain’ is figuratively likened to ‘the human heart, / Gazing in dreams over the gloomy grave’ (470; 471-472; 472-473), where the dream-state recalls the Poet’s first encounter with the veiled maid. Similarly, the Spirit first seems to be embodied, as Everest and Matthews note, through Nature; however, when the Poet perceives the ‘starry eyes’ they are ‘hung in the gloom of thought’ (490) in a markedly mental rather than natural or material embodiment. P. H. Butter points up the ambiguity of the Spirit’s seemingly psychic but potentially materialised form in weighing the significance of the verb, ‘*seemed*’, writing that ‘[t]he experience, like that of the veilèd maid, takes place in the poet’s mind, but that it is a *merely* subjective one Shelley neither states nor denies’ (author’s emphasis).[[230]](#footnote-230) A ‘*merely* subjective’ state would potentially consign the Poet’s mental vision to nothing more than a self-projected emanation, carrying with it charges of solipsism: a contention that Shelley dismisses through the masterful indeterminacy afforded by the verb, ‘*seemed*’. Instead, Shelley experimentally probes the potential of androgyny as an intersubjective process in which both parties reciprocally act in order to achieve union. The light of the Poet’s self-perceived eyes, likened to ‘Gazing in dreams’, becomes interfused with the glow of the Spirit’s ‘starry eyes’, which transition from the ‘evening gloom’ of the surrounding landscape to the mental ‘gloom of thought’. In a Plotinian shade of Platonic extramission, the fused beams of the Poet and Spirit’s illuminated self-seeing results in a collapse into psychic union. And yet, in its refusal to be consigned to a single stance, *Alastor* does not see this mental melding entirely displacing physical union. Prior to reaching his final resting place, the Poet’s ‘burning limbs’ recall the veiled maid’s ‘glowing limbs’ (517 and 175), and the Poet’s progression is peopled by a personified landscape imbued with scenes of androgynous union, where bisexual ‘Ivy clasped / The fissured stones with its entwining arms’ in an ungendered echo of the earlier heterosexual vines that ‘Twine their tendrils with the wedded boughs / Uniting their close union’ (578-579 and 444-445).[[231]](#footnote-231) Shelley tactfully maintains an indeterminacy between the physical and the psychic in his imaging of the Poet’s death, where ‘the Poet’s blood, / That ever beat in mystic sympathy’ pulses in ever-weakening unison with the gradual extinguishing of the ‘two lessening points of light’: the Spirit’s eyes conflated with the horned tips of the androgynous moon (651-652 and 654).

Raymond D. Havens, in misreading *Alastor* as a failed work, comments that ‘[t]he poem is not a unity, it does not produce a single impression, it was not the offspring of a single, dominating purpose’, and this criticism unwittingly highlights the attraction to and repulsion from androgyny that Shelley experiments with in the poem.[[232]](#footnote-232) Havens’ approximation of ‘a unity’ to ‘a single, dominating purpose’ underscores the poet’s fears of the self as ‘a single, dominating’ force where androgynous union risks resulting in the subsumption of Other into self. This commingled desire and fear echoes Shelley’s writing of Mary: ‘so intimately are our natures now united, that I feel whilst I describe her excellencies as if I were an egoist expatiating upon his own perfections’ (*PBS Letters*, I, p. 402). Returning to Michael O’Neill’s observation that *Alastor*’s ‘suspicion of “finality” is central to its achievement’ suggests the terms of the poem’s success, where Shelley curiously but suspiciously circles androgyny in his imaging of the Poet and veiled maid’s intermingling through the starry-eyed Spirit.[[233]](#footnote-233) Ultimately, the poet withholds the dominating singularity of union by refusing to commit to an entirely mental or wholly physical envisioning of union.

Shelley conflates mysticised light and sight with the androgynous moon as the Poet prepares his body for death:

—his last sight

Was the great moon, which o’er the western line

Of the wide world her mighty horn suspended,

With whose dun beams inwoven darkness seemed

To mingle.

(645-649)

The Shelleyan master verb of ‘seemed’ teasingly withholds mingling as a completed state, for to achieve complete union, Shelley fears, may result, not in a reciprocal exchange, but in an outcome no better than egotistical self-love. William Crisman’s comparative reading of *Alastor* and *The Witch of Atlas* posits a sense of reciprocity, albeit a ‘reciprocal dissolution’ in which ‘the Poet is in a constant state of dissolving because he refuses other beings as self-defining mirrors, so the world about him dissolves without being mirrored in him’.[[234]](#footnote-234) However, an attentiveness to Shelley’s Platonism, through the distorted lens of Plotinus, points not to the desire for dissolution as a result of the ‘bad’ childhood experience that Crisman conceives the Poet as having had, but to the casting off of the body not in order to dissolve, but to mingle or merge. In his processing of androgyny, Shelley modifies the Neoplatonic relationship with the body into a relationship with the self, where the final goal is not to mingle with the Neoplatonic One, but to mingle with the Other: to escape the binds and bounds of selfhood through an intersubjective melding that results in union: ‘Mary love—we must be united’ (*PBS Letters*, I, p. 414). For Plotinus, the body is a tyrant and ‘must be lessened, reduced’ in order for the Proficient to achieve union with the Intellectual-Principle.[[235]](#footnote-235) Shelley conceives of selfhood in terms not unlike the physical body: the self is tangible, disposable, and seemingly paradoxically capable of being excised from oneself. Haunted by a persistent desire to rid himself of his self, Shelley writes to Hogg in 1811, ‘adieu to egotism; I am sick to Death at the name of *self’*, and in 1819 the same sentiment recurs in a letter to Leigh Hunt: ‘So much for self—*self,* that burr that will stick to one. I can’t get it off yet’ (*PBS Letters*, I, p. 34 and II, pp. 108-109). But the pervading sense of union between the Poet and veiled maid is sustained when ‘two lessening points of light alone / Gleamed through the darkness’ (653-654). Zachary Leader and Michael O’Neill note that these ‘points of light’ suggest ‘either the eyes of the dream-maid (ll. 179, 489-92) or the tips of a crescent moon’, and Vincent Newey argues that ‘it is impossible to decide whether the “two lessening points of light” (l. 654) are aspects of the Poet himself, already condensed into “image”, or of the moon he looks at. Yet the detail also plainly evokes the “starry eyes” of the dream-maiden’.[[236]](#footnote-236) Shelley conflates the eyes of the veiled maid, which themselves reflect the Poet’s own upward-gazing eyes, with the tips of the moon in a final image of androgynous melding.

The androgynous moon of the *Symposium* becomes conflated with the mental mingling of poet and reader in Shelley’s approximation of the celestial body with his real ideal reader, Mary. In the letter wherein Shelley transcribes the Delphic maxim to ‘know thyself’, he also forms a lasting association between Mary and the moon:

Mary love—we must be united. […] Your thoughts alone can waken mine to energy. My mind without yours is dead & cold as the dark midnight river when the moon is down.

(*PBS Letters*, I, p. 414)

Shelley condenses the intersubjective reciprocity of androgyny into the doubly reflective symbols of river and moon. Neither moon nor river are sources of light, but instead share in the activity of reflection. This reciprocal activity between poet and reader, conceived in Shelley’s letter to Mary through the metaphoricity of river and moon, is implemented throughout *Alastor* as Shelley begins to conceive of androgyny as an experimentation in achieving mental union. The moon, already associated with androgyny through Aristophanes, finds an androgynous counterpart in the river if we are to follow W. B. Yeats’ ascription of rivers as symbols of Platonic knowledge in Shelley’s writings. Yeats notes that Shelley’s rivers often lead to or originate in caves. ‘[S]o good a Platonist as Shelley could hardly have thought of any cave as a symbol, without thinking of Plato’s cave’, Yeats writes while gesturing towards Shelley’s *Speculations on Metaphysics* where thought ‘is like a river whose rapid and perpetual stream flows outwards’ towards the ‘obscure and shadowy’ ‘caverns of the mind’.[[237]](#footnote-237) The androgynous implication of the river and cave symbol is ascertained through feminist readings of the cave as feminine womb and the river as phallic. The androgynous activity of cave and moon becomes central to the self-enkindling birth of the eponymous, androgynous Witch of 1820’s *The Witch of Atlas*, where ‘in that cave a dewy splendour hidden / Took shape and motion: with the living form / Of this embodied Power, the cave grew warm’ (*The Witch of Atlas*, 4.78-80). The distinction between androgyne and hermaphrodite that Shelley makes most explicit in his epyllion is visible in *Alastor* through the mystical rending and mingling of body and soul, and through the Witch and Hermaphroditus’ voyage along the river that recalls *Laon and Cythna* and *Alastor*, both of which recast Darassah’s voyage in *Ahrimanes*. Hermaphroditus is seated upon her boat’s prow where its wings serve as sails, recalling the winged spirit’s ‘divine canoe’ of *Laon and Cythna* (32.4730). Unlike the voyages of Darassah, the Witch, and Laon and Cythna, the *Alastor* Poet is the lone occupant of his vessel: he ‘Leaped in the boat, he spread his cloak aloft / On the bare mast, and took his lonely seat’ (312-313). His solitary state, if we are to take the poem’s Preface at face value, is allegorical of ‘Those who love not their fellow-beings’ (Preface to *Alastor*, p. 93). However, if we consider the poem’s mystical import, the Poet’s solitude becomes a key facet of his pursuit of the Good: ‘man is for Plotinus fundamentally isolated’.[[238]](#footnote-238) Social connections, like the body, are vestiges that must ultimately be cast aside in order for the soul to return to its pure and unified state. ‘Such a return is achievable during this life’, for Plotinus, ‘but only if a man by long discipline succeeds in turning from the outer world inward, and then only passingly, in an ecstasy of union in which all division vanishes’.[[239]](#footnote-239) *Alastor* is not an allegorical rendering of Plotinian ascent, but the mystical gradations of Platonism gleaned through translations such as Thomas Taylor’s contribute to the Poet’s refusal of physical companionship and sustenance. The Poet’s solitude is not solipsistic, but is instead a ‘turning from the outer world inward’ in pursuit of the ‘ecstasy of union in which all division vanishes’. For Shelley, whose revolutionary ideals become potentialized through love, or empathy, this union is potentially achievable through the process of androgyny.

The inverse of Shelley’s Platonic androgyny is Ovidian hermaphroditism: a failed form of androgynous union that partakes of body rather than mind. During his boat journey, the Poet is deposited into a cove, where ‘yellow flowers’—the self-loving narcissi—‘Forever gaze on their own drooping eyes’ (406-407).[[240]](#footnote-240) While seeming to allude to Ovid’s myth of Echo and Narcissus, the Poet’s narcissistic approximation to the flowers is disrupted by his desire for a shared experience: ‘The Poet longed / To deck with their bright hues his withered hair’ (413-414). Susan Fischman’s reading of *Alastor* as a crafted rendering of Ovid’s myth of Echo and Narcissus emphasises ‘how carefully [Shelley] followed Ovid’s notion that the story of Narcissus is intricately bound up with the story of Echo, the other half of his eponymous pair’, and how this interrelationship of masculine and feminine halves is commonly overlooked in discussions of the Poet’s alleged narcissism.[[241]](#footnote-241) In Shelley’s crafting, the Poet seems to bear as much a resemblance to Narcissus, enkindled and consumed by his own self-engulfing flame of love, as to Echo, who, unrequited, lives ‘among the leaves, and…in lonely caves’ where ‘[h]er sleepless thoughts waste away her sad form, and her body’s strength vanishes into the air’.[[242]](#footnote-242) Nearly posing as an antithesis to the myth of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus, Echo’s attempt to amorously enfold Narcissus in her arms results not in a forced unity but in the gradual dissolution of her body and the subsequent immolation and melting of Narcissus’s form into his namesake flowers, offering Shelley two failed versions of androgynous union.

Despite its potential to devolve into self-love through the subsumption of the Other, androgyny retains the potential for shared agency and intersubjective communion in *Alastor*, owing to Shelley’s prototypical relationship with Mary. The Platonic engagement and growing predilection towards intersubjective communion with his readership confronted in *Alastor* and indebted to his relationship with Mary finds a precedent in Shelley’s letter to Mary in 1814:

I did not forget to kiss your *ειδῶλον* *κὲνον* [unsubstantial image] before I slept.

(*PBS Letters*, I, p. 420)

Teddi Chichester Bonca reads Mary as a ‘simulacral’ figure in this line, invoked by Shelley as a protective ‘talisman’: an object to be used for self-serving purposes.[[243]](#footnote-243) However, Bonca’s interpretation neglects to consider the significance of Shelley’s untranslated Greek in this letter, as in his use of the untranslated Delphic ‘*γνωθι* *σεαυτον*’ (know thyself) in a previous letter (*PBS Letters*, I, p. 414). Mary’s journal reveals that, following her first Greek lesson on 18 September 1814, the reading and writing of Greek quickly becomes a shared, intimate practice between the Shelleys. Her journal entry for 18 September ends: ‘We talk – study a little Greek & go to bed’.[[244]](#footnote-244) Jennifer Wallace reads Shelley’s *ειδῶλον* *κὲνον* as ‘a Platonic substitute for the embodied Mary’.[[245]](#footnote-245) This demarcation between the ‘embodied’ and the ‘Platonic’ is evocative of *Alastor*’s veiled maid where the act of embodying—the veiled maid’s self-enkindling of her bodily presence—is one that occurs in the Poet’s dream-state: a state that is not solely of the Poet’s own psychic creation but is a shared plane between his dream and an independently acting vision. Shelley’s invocation of Mary, through the shared medium of untranslated Greek, is not one of possession or substitution but of a communal experience. Wallace notes that Shelley’s letter responds to a now lost letter of Mary’s, but gestures towards an earlier letter in speculation of the lost letter’s content. In a badly damaged letter tentatively dated 2 November 1814, Mary writes to Shelley: ‘may you sleep as well as though it wer[e] in my arms’ (*MWS Letters*, I, p. 4). The subject to which the ‘it’ refers is absent; however, the presence of an ‘it’ where one would expect a ‘you’ offers a striking similarity to Shelley’s *ειδῶλον* *κὲνον*: ‘an eroticized replacement’, Wallace writes, ‘for the absent love object which ancient Greek alone could articulate or translate’.[[246]](#footnote-246) Shelley’s use of untranslated Greek in his letters to Mary privileges her self-educated status as an intellectual equal, and her presumed creation of an ‘it’—*ειδῶλον* *κὲνον*—to comfort Shelley in her since lost letter highlights her active role in this intimate and mystical mode of discourse. The Shelleys’ shared study of Greek leads to their cooperative readings and translations of ancient texts including selected dialectics of Plato, and is indicative of the reciprocity and shared study of Greek that originates in Shelley and Peacock’s relationship.

*Alastor* points up Shelley’s self-recognised and conflated status of creator and reader of Plato and Wordsworth nowhere moreso than in the Narrator’s conclusive verse paragraph:

Art and eloquence,

And all the shows o’ the world are frail and vain

To weep a loss that turns their lights to shade.

It is a woe too ‘deep for tears,’ when all

Is reft at once, when some surpassing Spirit,

Whose light adorned the world around it, leaves

Those who remain behind, not sobs or groans,

The passionate tumult of a clinging hope;

But pale despair and cold tranquillity,

Nature’s vast frame, the web of human things,

Birth and the grave, that are not as they were.

(711-720)

William Keach notes that ‘Shelley signals the divergence of his poem from Wordsworth’s by placing the echoed phrase in quotation marks—we are meant to recognize that someone has written these words before’. In ‘conflating Wordsworth’s “Immortality Ode” and “Tintern Abbey”’, Madeleine Callaghan writes, ‘Shelley mouths his predecessor’s finest words and sentiments only to find them lacking in what the Poet himself would have valued’.[[247]](#footnote-247) This sense of lack reverberates through the poem’s final words: ‘Nature’s vast frame, the web of human things, / Birth and the grave, that are not as they were’ (719-720). Even in the mystic gloom of the Narrator’s parting words, Shelley maintains a sense of indeterminacy and potential afforded by the poem’s intermingling of lyric and narrative and its dialogic patterning. Rather than silencing Wordsworth through rejection, Shelley explicitly invokes and involves the older poet in his composition. If Wordsworth is a fallen poet, mystically consigned to the Orphic ‘Place of Unlikeness’ and separated from Shelley, his once sympathetic reader, Shelley does not entirely discount the potential for return.[[248]](#footnote-248) The poem’s dialogic patterning, indebted to Plato’s dialectics, acknowledges the reader’s interpretive agency and allows for the potential for the Poet’s revivified return. *Alastor*’s ambivalence anticipates love, the motivator of androgynous intellectual union, as ‘all that we conceive or fear or hope beyond ourselves’ (‘On Love’, p. 631): an escape from selfhood that is predicated, not necessarily upon ‘a clinging hope’, but potentially upon fear and ‘pale despair’. In reaction to his relationship with Wordsworth as reader, and in light of Mary as prototype of his own real ideal reader, *Alastor* sees Shelley establishing the reader’s role in androgyny as a reciprocal process, and laying the foundations for Shelley’s interrogations of self and Other.

**Chapter Two: ‘commingling into one’: *Laon and Cythna***

Shelley employs androgyny as a means of invoking others in the construction of binaries only to dissolve such rigid demarcations, testing what Lucy Newlyn deems the Romantic ‘series of binary oppositions—private-public; creation-reception; poetry-prose; masculine-feminine; active-passive; voice-echo; writing-speech’.[[249]](#footnote-249) Shelley places the mind at the centre of his epic-romance, privileging androgyny over hermaphroditism in a way that prefigures *The Witch of Atlas*. *Laon and Cythna* views the mind as porous, where the eponymous protagonists’ empathic gaze instigates the act of narration: ‘None else beheld her eyes—in him they woke / Memories which found a tongue, as thus he silence broke’ (1.60.539-540).[[250]](#footnote-250) Belying Wordsworth’s anxiety surrounding ‘the writer’s subjection to the invasive gaze of anonymous readers’,[[251]](#footnote-251) Shelley incorporates the reader’s gaze *into* the text, anticipating what Ross Wilson terms the ‘interanimation’ of *Prometheus Unbound*, in which ‘the poem only lives in the reader’s reading, but that, at the same time, the reader is brought more fully to life by the poem’.[[252]](#footnote-252) The empathic gaze encourages a form of active passivity, or passive activity, both receiving and acting upon the Other, so that the act of reading—like the act of narration within the poem—becomes a shared endeavour. For Shelley, ‘the reader has an active role in the shared creation of meaning’, where Madeleine Callaghan discerns Shelley’s acts of sympathy as concomitant with the creation of poetic language.[[253]](#footnote-253) In order to undo the hierarchical ‘classes of thought’ (*A Defence of Poetry*, p. 676), or the binary constructs of male and female or poet and reader, thoughts must be created anew through poetry. As is the case with Coleridge, the ‘construction of sympathy [is] a hermeneutic ideal’ in Shelley’s corpus.[[254]](#footnote-254) But where Coleridge hesitates to completely relinquish the hierarchical connotations of reader and poet by exercising his control through extratextual devices such as footnotes, Shelley’s composition of *Laon and Cythna* as, in part, an improvement upon *Queen Mab* and its appended Notes, seeks to undo hierarchical constraints through the very binaries that sustain them.[[255]](#footnote-255) Poet—or Narrator—and Reader are one set in a series of apparent binaries including Man and Woman, Good and Evil, which are confused and conflated in order to reveal their underlying unity. In *Laon and Cythna*, Shelley pursues the potential for mental revolution through the intersubjective union that is intrinsic to androgyny.

Despite its attempts to dissolve divisions, *Laon and Cythna* is the victim of divisive reactions, foremost in *The Quarterly Review*’s 1819 attack and its charges of blasphemy and moral corruption.[[256]](#footnote-256) The anonymous author of the review—presumed by Shelley to be Southey, but in actuality John Taylor Coleridge—writes, ‘Mr. Shelley is his own Laon: this is clear from many passages of the preface and dedication. The lady to whom the poem is addressed is certainly the original of Cythna’.[[257]](#footnote-257) Despite Shelley’s best efforts to create ‘verse dipped in flame’ (‘A Satire upon Satire’, 24) in reaction to the *Quarterly*, his retributive satire is inflected with sympathy in *Peter Bell the Third*, where the cancelled jibe at the Lake poet who ‘commits i——t with his sister / In ruined Abbeys’ self-reflexively recalls Laon and Cythna’s amorous reunion within a ruin upon ‘A rocky hill which overhung the Ocean’ (6.23.199).[[258]](#footnote-258) Laon and Cythna’s love involves an enmeshing of bodies and souls, anticipating Shelley’s translation of Plato’s *Symposium* into *The Banquet* wherein Aristophanes speaks of the divided androgynous beings for whom ‘it is not merely the sensual delights of their intercourse for the sake of which they dedicate themselves to each other with such serious affection; but the soul of each manifestly thirsts for, from the other, something which there are no words to describe’, longing to ‘intimately mix and melt and to be melted together with his beloved, so that one should be made out of two’ (*The Banquet*, p. 432).[[259]](#footnote-259) The pair’s sensual and selfless melding also recalls Shelley’s letter to Mary, as Madeleine Callaghan points out,[[260]](#footnote-260) where the lovers ‘imitate each others [*sic*] excellencies…so that constituting but one being, all real knowledge may be comprised in the maxim *γνωθι* *σεαυτον* (know thyself) with infinitely more justice than in its narrow & common application’ (*PBS Letters*, I, p. 414). Shelley weaves this maxim into Cythna’s imperative to ‘Reproach not thine own soul, but know thyself’ (8.22.190) which, ironically misconstrued as Shelleyan self-love by *The Quarterly Review*, instead promotes the empathic love that fuels androgynous oneness.

In *Laon and Cythna*, Shelley’s self-conscious intertextuality seems to grow out of a similar desire for unity—the ‘one mind’ of all poets—rather than to voice an anxiety of influence (‘On Life’, p. 636). In the manuscript draft pages Byron, Coleridge, and Wordsworth’s names appear, along with Homer, as Shelley seeks union rather than enmity with his peers. *Laon and Cythna* is also evidence of the continuing intertextual and intellectual exchange between Shelley and Thomas Love Peacock. This intertextuality anticipates the reader’s participation in the acts of continued poetic creation and draws upon the *Ion*, where Socrates makes clear that the chain of poets is inclusive of the poet’s audience (*Ion*, 536a).[[261]](#footnote-261) In *Laon and Cythna* this inclusivity comes to motivate the reciprocal processing of androgyny between poet and reader as binary oppositions give way to union. The editors of *The Poems of Shelley* identify ‘echoes of *Queen Mab* in *Ahrimanes* and of *Ahrimanes* in *Alastor*’, noting that, by 1816, ‘Peacock had acquired something of S.’s outlook and poetic aims’.[[262]](#footnote-262) Peacock and Shelley’s exchange has been well-documented in Kenneth Neill Cameron’s ‘Shelley and *Ahrimanes*’ where Cameron notices in the two poems a ‘striking parallel in narrative structure’ and ‘a number of remarkable parallels in situation, idea and imagery’,[[263]](#footnote-263) not least of which is Shelley’s composition of *Laon and Cythna* in Spenserian stanzas. But, while Cameron notes that Peacock draws upon Shelley’s *Alastor* in composition of *Rhododaphne*, no attention to *Rhododaphne*’s influence upon *Laon and Cythna* is proffered. Peacock’s composition of his ‘Thessalian Spell’ coincides with his reading of the *Symposium* in July 1817,[[264]](#footnote-264) so that Shelley’s rereading of the *Symposium* in August 1817 is likely prompted by Peacock. James A. Notopoulos suggests that Shelley’s *Athanase*, supposed by Thomas Medwin to be a recollection of Shelley’s first alleged reading of the *Symposium* with Dr Lind at Eton, in actuality records Shelley’s more recent reading of Plato’s text with Peacock.[[265]](#footnote-265)

[ ] Plato’s words of light in thee and me

Lingered like moonlight in the moonless East,

For we had just then read — thy memory

Is faithful now — the story of the feast;

And Agathon and Diotima seemed

From death, and Dark [ ] released

To talk with us of all they knew or dreamed,

Of love divine

(*Athanase* 190-197)[[266]](#footnote-266)

The positions of reader and poet are intimately mixed as Plato, himself ‘essentially a poet’ (*A Defence of Poetry*, p. 679), unites Shelley and Peacock with his ‘words of light’. Laon and Cythna, emanating out of the androgynous Form in the Temple of the Spirit in Canto 1, seem like Agathon and Diotima to be released from death, and ‘To talk with us of all they knew or dreamed, / Of love divine’, as Shelley adopts Plato’s penchant for involving the reader of his dialogues as interlocutor. ‘Love is celebrated every where as the sole law which should govern the moral world’, Shelley writes in *Laon and Cythna*’s preface, anticipating his claim in the *Defence* that ‘The great secret of morals is Love’ (*A Defence of Poetry*, p. 682). But if moral improvement is his poem’s aim, he renounces a straightforwardly didactic approach, for the poem ‘(with the exception of the first Canto, which is purely introductory), is narrative, not didactic’ (Preface to *Laon and Cythna*, p. 113). Shelley’s ‘purely introductory’ claim belies his denouncement of didacticism, for it is the first canto that informs the cyclical events that follow. The first canto, taken along with the dedication ‘To Mary’, unfolds in a multifaceted narrative, so that any reading that posits Laon as the poem’s sole or chief narrator misses the reciprocity between characters, and, by extension, between poet and reader. Passivity and activity, stances typically associated with reader and writer, and female and male in their traditional gendered associations,[[267]](#footnote-267) are but another set of binary oppositions to be amorphized in *Laon and Cythna*.

Considering ‘the formal structure of [*Laon and Cythna*] as a first-person narrative enclosing two other first-person narratives, as in Chinese boxes’, Nancy Moore Goslee writes, ‘this rhetorical force extends outward to include the anonymous frame narrator as well’.[[268]](#footnote-268) The formulation that Goslee discerns in *Laon and Cythna*’s structure, where the dedicatory address to Mary opens into the dialogue between Narrator and Woman, which in turn opens into the dialogue between Narrator and Form, and then unfolds into Laon and Cythna’s dialogue also follows the dialogic and multitemporal unfolding of Plato’s dialogues, such as the *Symposium*’s narration through Apollodorus and Glaucon’s conversation, itself far removed from the events of the celebration. The Socratic interchangeability of teacher and student is key to Athanase’s education.

And sweet and subtle talk they evermore,

The pupil and the master, shared; — until

Sharing that undiminishable store

The youth, as shadows o’er a grassy hill

Outrun the winds that chase them, soon outran

His teacher, and did teach with native skill

Strange truths and new to that experienced man.

Still they were friends, as few have ever been

Who mark the extremes of life’s discordant span. —

(*Athanase*, 139-147)

While *Laon and Cythna* clearly salvages portions of the abandoned *Ahrimanes*, it more subtly draws upon *Rhododaphne* and the effect of reading, in spotlighting the shared and reciprocal activity of reader and poet through Shelley and Peacock’s mutual influence. ‘We sit with Plato’, Shelley writes in his unpublished review of *Rhododaphne*, ‘We stand in the marble temples of the Gods, and see their sculptured forms gazing and almost breathing around’ (*PBS Prose*, I, p. 285).[[269]](#footnote-269) Shelley’s use of the first-person plural pronoun marks his own position as reader while acknowledging his complicity with the imagined reader of his—and Peacock’s—words, illumined by Plato’s own ‘words of light’. In *Laon and Cythna*, the reader is implicated in the Narrator’s sense of wonder at gazing upon a strikingly similar scene in the Temple of the Spirit where sculpted forms’ ‘gestures beamed with mind’ (1.54.482). ‘This it is to be a scholar’, Shelley writes, ‘this it is to have read Homer and Sophocles and Plato’ (*PBS Prose*, I, p. 286), ‘The Great, who had departed from mankind’ who compose the Temple of the Spirit’s ‘mighty Senate’ (1.54.479-480). But Shelley also voices his doubts in being met with a sympathetic readership as ‘anxiety becomes both a cause and an effect in the romantic poet’s desire to write’.[[270]](#footnote-270)

The preface to *Laon and Cythna* voices Shelley’s fears in, if not censorship, then at least misunderstanding, particularly surrounding his eponymous pair’s relationship. Seeming to anticipate the threat of censure, Shelley adds as a precautionary afterthought to his preface:

In the personal conduct of my Hero and Heroine, there is one circumstance which was intended to startle the reader from the trance of ordinary life. It was my object to break through the crust of those outworn opinions on which established institutions depend. I have appealed therefore to the most universal of all feelings, and have endeavoured to strengthen the moral sense, by forbidding it to waste its energies in seeking to avoid actions which are only crimes of convention. It is because there is so great a multitude of artificial vices, that there are so few real virtues. Those feelings alone which are benevolent or malevolent, are essentially good or bad. The circumstance of which I speak, was introduced, however, merely to accustom men to that charity and toleration which the exhibition of a practice widely differing from their own, has a tendency to promote.

(Preface to *Laon and Cythna*, p. 120)

On the surface, Shelley’s decision to introduce the ‘circumstance’ of incest to his epic romance is ‘to startle the reader from the trance of ordinary life’. Laon and Cythna’s incestuous doubling as siblings and lovers awakens the reader from their presumably passive stance, anticipating the mental collaboration of reader and poet that provokes action in *Prometheus Unbound*. More subtly, alchemical and mystical accounts of incest are an ‘important source for androgynous ideology’, as is the ‘brother-sister incest in Greek and Roman mythology’.[[271]](#footnote-271) James A. Notopoulos identifies another and less ancient source of brother-sister incest and the Platonic implications of such a relationship in Wieland’s *Agathon*, with its ‘kaleidoscope of Platonism’, where ‘Wieland skilfully has his lovers translate their Platonic Love into a brother-and-sister relationship’.[[272]](#footnote-272) Shelley’s experimentation with androgyny as a concurrent mental processing between poet and reader develops alongside his own position as reader—and translator—of Plato, and in Notopoulos’ study of Shelley’s Platonism the word ‘translate’ comes to be multifaceted. Translation, for Notopoulos, refers to the literal act of translating, involving in its first stage an assimilation of meaning and in the second stage a transmutation of form, and to the figural movements and substitutions such as in the case of Wieland’s ‘translation’ of ‘Platonic Love into a brother-and-sister relationship’. For Shelley, ‘translating was’, Notopoulos writes, ‘like Eros in the *Symposium*, an intermediary between inertia and poetic creation’,[[273]](#footnote-273) and a similar sense of movement and intermediacy underscores Shelley’s definition of love as ‘a going out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action or person not our own’ (*A Defence of Poetry*, p. 682). Love powers androgyny as an empathic mingling of self and Other, envisioned in Shelley’s relationship with Mary as reciprocated imitation. Imitation, like translation, is in Shelley’s corpus an act of love, so that in its uncensored form, Laon and Cythna’s incestuous relationship ensures a coincidence of androgyny and the equally active relationship between poet and reader.

Diane Long Hoeveler reads Laon and Cythna’s androgyny as providing ‘even more similarity’ to their incestuous sibling relationship, where the doubling of incest and androgyny allows them to ‘achieve psychic and physical balance’ albeit ‘only symbolically, briefly, tenuously’ in the bower of bliss in Canto 6.[[274]](#footnote-274) ‘Incest is like many other *incorrect* things a very poetical circumstance’, Shelley writes in 1819, which ‘confounding the good & bad in existing opinions breaks through them’ (*PBS Letters*, II, p. 154). In *Laon and Cythna*, good and bad, like male and female, are one of a series of binaries that Shelley seeks to upset for the purpose of ‘startl[ing] the reader from the trance of ordinary life’ and provoking them into action. Androgyny operates as a concurrent process, textually uniting the male and female—brother and sister—Laon and Cythna into the androgynous Form in the Temple of the Spirit while also encouraging the poet and reader to act in mental synchronicity in order to imagine ‘a future state of being’ wherein ‘these detestable distinctions [of male and female] will surely be abolished’ (*PBS Letters*, I, p. 195). Jerrold E. Hogle, in his analysis of Shelley’s radical transference, voices Shelley’s vexedness in asking ‘how is it that sexual differences, criss-crossed as they are with similarities transcending sex, can become a single binary opposition and a rigid separation of personal potentials into higher masculine and lower feminine types?’.[[275]](#footnote-275) Following his translation of the *Symposium*, Shelley decries the ‘invidious distinction of human kind, as a class of beings [of] intellectual nature, into two sexes’ (‘A Discourse on the Manners of the Ancient Greeks’, p. 412). Androgyny offers a corrective to a ‘societal structure based on a dominantly patriarchal mode of functioning with women in a subordinate role’,[[276]](#footnote-276) and in *Laon and Cythna* becomes a process through which Shelley seeks to dissolve these binary distinctions of male and female and thereby upset their hierarchical division.

Laon and Cythna’s progressive mental union subtly encourages a similar complicity between poet and reader. The poem attempts to incite a mental revolution ‘to enlighten and improve mankind’ (Preface to *Laon and Cythna*, p. 113) as Shelley’s Godwinian perfectibility becomes infused with strains of Platonic moral improvement and idealism. Following Thomas Love Peacock’s proclamation in the prefatory stanzas to *Rhododaphne* that ‘mind survives material doom’ (2), *Laon and Cythna*, informed by the outcome of the French Revolution, seeks not to provoke physical action and the subsequent threat of violent revolt or ‘doom’ but to free its readers from their Blakean ‘mind-forg’d manacles’ (‘London’, 8),[[277]](#footnote-277) where binary oppositions limit and oppress. *Laon and Cythna*, with its focus upon futurity and Wollstonecraftian emphasis upon sexual equality, is especially concerned with the hierarchical oppressiveness of the gender binary. For the proto-feminist Shelley, androgyny offers a means of achieving sexual equality, which is the chief subject of reform in *Laon and Cythna*. In his fragment composed to accompany his translation of the *Symposium*, Shelley laments that ‘half of the human race, by the Greek arrangement, were excluded. This invidious distinction of human kind, as a class of beings [of] intellectual nature, into two sexes, is a remnant of savage barbarism which we have less excuse than they for not having totally abolished’ (‘A Discourse on the Manners of the Ancient Greeks’, p. 412), and this is an injustice that Shelley seeks to rectify in—and potentially through—*Laon and Cythna*. Shelley, anticipating Simone de Beauvoir, locates sexual equality in the creation of an ‘androgynous world’,[[278]](#footnote-278) albeit one that is located in the imagination—symbolised in the poem as the Temple of the Spirit—rather than in reality. The poem’s subtitled status as ‘A Vision of the Nineteenth-Century’ looks towards De Beauvoir’s own twentieth-century envisioning where, in

mutually recognizing each other as subject, each will yet remain for the other an *other*. The reciprocity of their relations will not do away with the miracles – desire, possession, love, dream, adventure – worked by the division of human beings into two separate categories; and the words that move us – giving, conquering, uniting – will not lose their meaning. On the contrary, when we abolish the slavery of half of humanity, together with the whole system of hypocrisy that it implies, then the ‘division’ of humanity will reveal its genuine significance and the human couple will find its true form.[[279]](#footnote-279)

Cythna’s rallying cry, ‘Can man be free if woman be a slave?’ (2.43.379), anticipates De Beauvoir’s revolutionary tract where androgyny, in its co-equal mingling and ‘reciprocity of relations’, reveals humankind’s Platonically-inflected ‘true form’. Shelley’s testing of androgyny in *Laon and Cythna* anticipates the sexual equality predicted by De Beauvoir’s ‘androgynous world’, and also looks toward Caroline Levine’s recent work on forms, where a ‘productive alternative’ to the gender binary is one that ‘involves not the destruction of form but its multiplication’.[[280]](#footnote-280) Masculine and feminine forms are present throughout Shelley’s poetry, but *Laon and Cythna* tests the extent to which binaries may be reconciled into union rather than remaining diametrically opposed. Channelling Diotima’s speech on love at the centre of the *Symposium*, Shelley, in transmuting love into poetry, announces that:

Poetry turns all things to loveliness: it exalts the beauty of that which is most beautiful, and it adds beauty to that which is most deformed: it marries exultation and horror, grief and pleasure, eternity and change; it subdues to union under its light yoke all irreconcilable things.

(*A Defence of Poetry*, p. 698)

Acting through poetry, androgyny ‘subdues to union’ binary oppositions, and in *Laon and Cythna* this union is figured in the androgynous Form in the Temple of the Spirit:

Fairer than tongue can speak or thought may frame,

The radiance of whose limbs rose-like and warm

Flowed forth

(1.57.507-509)

The Form which appears, though designated with the masculine pronoun ‘He’, is described with overtly feminine features, from his radiating, ‘rose-like’ limbs, to the ‘warmth’ which ‘Flowed forth’ from his presence (1.57.505, 1.57.512, and 1.57.508-509). While Carlos Baker maintains that this entity is an exclusively ‘radiant male form’, John Donovan confirms that the Form is described ‘in the traditional diction and metaphor of female beauty’, and that ‘[t]he sexual interchangeability of language suggests the fluidity of sexual characteristics’, attesting to the Form’s androgynous nature.[[281]](#footnote-281) The androgynous nature of the Form is intensified by its allusiveness to the Venus of Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*, a figure who ‘hath both kinds in one, / Both male and female’ and who like the Form seated upon a ‘crystàlline throne’ (1.56.504), stands ‘Vpon an altar’ the substance of which is likened to ‘christall glasse’ (*The Faerie Queene*, 4.10.41 and 4.10.39).[[282]](#footnote-282) She, like the Form’s fusion of Woman and Serpent, is compounded with a snake: ‘And both her feete and legs together twyned / Were with a snake, whose head & tail were fast combined’ (*The Faerie Queene*, 4.10.40). Shelley’s Form is at once a unified whole comprised of distinct selves—Serpent and Woman, Laon and Cythna—operating not in binary opposition but in synchronicity.

Much more than ‘introductory’, the first and final cantos—the last cantos of the poem to be completed—illustrate the capacity of mind to survive material doom through the collectively unified imagination.[[283]](#footnote-283) Real events may result in material failure and destruction, as in the case of the French Revolution, but the unified imagination endures within the Temple of the Spirit. Stuart M. Sperry asserts that while ‘the lovers may fail in their aim to reform the world in the way they seek’, they ultimately ‘awaken from death in the realm of the eternal’, which is the same otherworldly environment featuring the moonstone and diamond Temple which the reader encounters in Canto 1.[[284]](#footnote-284) Though I depart from Sperry’s emphasis on the failed quality of their revolution, his sense of the key significance of this afterlife is apt. Carlos Baker elucidates upon the significance of the revolution’s failure in acknowledging that ‘the permanent overnight regeneration of mankind is impossible’, and affirms that Laon and Cythna’s deaths result in ‘a victory, but it is only a moral victory’.[[285]](#footnote-285) Baker’s ‘only’ understates the significance of this ‘moral victory’ that sees Othman’s subjects’ minds being moved ‘in spite of faith and fear’ to sympathise with Cythna’s selfless decision to join Laon on the pyre (12.14.118). Cythna’s self-sacrifice offers up the image of a female, Christ-like redeemer while also invoking Dido’s ascension to the sacrificial pyre in the *Aeneid*. In both cases, Shelley subverts Christian and epic tradition by presenting Cythna as an active, and by extension, masculine agent, or ‘a prefiguring of Prometheus’ to adopt Madeleine Callaghan’s reading.[[286]](#footnote-286) Her decision to join Laon on the pyre allows for their progression into the Temple of the Spirit where they are again united into the androgynous Form. Androgyny is the vital centre of Shelley’s poetry of revolution, where hierarchies between ‘The words *I*, and *you* and *they*’ are dissolved along with demarcations of binary gender (‘On Life’, p. 636). This dissolution results in an ideal, equal union between ‘everything which exists’ (‘On Love’, p. 632), or the creative reconsideration of the boundaries dividing male and female, self and Other, poet and reader. The imaginative revolution conceived through the reciprocity between the poet and the reader’s mind is echoed by Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi’s definition of androgyny as an inclusive power: ‘a psychic unity, either potential or actual, conceived as existing in all individuals’.[[287]](#footnote-287) The revolutionary capacity of the commingling between the poet and the reader’s imagination is bolstered by Shelley’s claim that ‘the great instrument of moral good is the imagination’ (*A Defence of Poetry*, p. 682). Love is the fuel of androgyny, enabling ‘a going out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action or person, not our own’ (*A Defence of Poetry*, p. 682). ‘Love is celebrated every where as the sole law which should govern the moral world’ in *Laon and Cythna* as androgyny becomes a vehicle of mental revolution, ‘awakening…an immense nation from their slavery and degradation to a true sense of moral dignity and freedom’ (Preface to *Laon and Cythna*, pp. 120 and 113).

In *Laon and Cythna*, Shelley postulates that the successful revolution will ultimately result in a collapse of the socially, religiously, and historically-conceived boundaries between the sexes and the universe.[[288]](#footnote-288) ‘Sexual equality’, David Duff writes, ‘is an explicit theme in the poem and an integral part of the social philosophy that the revolution is intended to put into practice’.[[289]](#footnote-289) For Shelley, revolution resulting in sexual equality is expressed by the imaginative creation of an androgynous entity, which, by its sexless nature, renounces binary oppositions in favour of unity. ‘The single most important source for Shelley’s treatment of love was Plato’s *Symposium*’, Diane Long Hoeveler writes, which Shelley himself described as ‘the most beautiful and perfect among all the works of Plato’.[[290]](#footnote-290) James A. Notopoulos posits that ‘1817 marks the beginning of the renascence of direct Platonism in Shelley’, and *Laon and Cythna*, as Shelley’s foremost work of 1817, responds directly to the beginnings of Shelley’s pure or ‘direct’ Platonism, albeit in a Neoplatonic gradation.[[291]](#footnote-291) Along with inspiring Shelley’s concept of love, the *Symposium* offers key images of androgyny, ‘that sex which participated in both sexes’, but notably lacked sexual organs until being divided into mortal male and female halves when through ‘the embrace of a man and woman the race is propagated’(*The Banquet* pp. 430 and 431). The return to an androgynous state is a departure from an exclusively sexual love—‘The act itself is nothing’, Shelley writes—in pursuit instead of a Platonic love which is eternal and ‘uncontaminated with the intermixture of human flesh’ (‘A Discourse on the Manners of the Ancient Greeks’, p. 410 and *The Banquet*, p. 450).[[292]](#footnote-292) Significantly, Cantos 1 and 12 of *Laon and Cythna* are both set in the Temple of the Spirit, wherein Shelley’s depiction of androgynous unification is most clearly conceived.[[293]](#footnote-293) The description of the androgynous Form that appears in the eternal Temple of the Spirit is deeply influenced by his reading and knowledge of the *Symposium*. While Shelley may have first read the *Symposium* at Eton under the guidance of Dr James Lind, or at Oxford in the company of Thomas Jefferson Hogg,[[294]](#footnote-294) his repeated returns to this seminal text are indicative of its importance to his maturing ideas on love, sexual equality, and the revolutionary power of imaginative sympathy.[[295]](#footnote-295)

*Laon and Cythna*’s subtitle, ‘A Vision of the Nineteenth Century’, reveals that, however the poem may seem to re-envision or respond to the outcome of the French Revolution, its focus is upon the future. Predating Shelley’s ‘Essay on a Future State’ with its consideration of the Platonic separation of body and soul, the poet uses the same phrase in a letter of 1812 to describe ‘a future state’ in which the ‘detestable distinctions’ of male and female may be abolished (*PBS Letters*, I, p. 195). *Laon and Cythna* looks ahead to the mental revolution of *Prometheus Unbound*, where Asia and Prometheus’ androgynous reunion inspires its audience’s mental liberation. But where *Prometheus Unbound* is addressed to the select few, ‘the highly refined imagination of the more select classes of poetical readers’, and refuses ‘the direct enforcement of reform’, (Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, p. 232), *Laon and Cythna* remains coloured by the poet’s ambition to affect widespread social reform. To read the poem as a failure is to overlook Shelley’s careful awareness of his audiences, both real and imagined.[[296]](#footnote-296) *Laon and Cythna* may pale in comparison to that ‘most perfect of [Shelley’s] productions’ (*PBS Letters*, II, p. 127), *Prometheus Unbound*, but its efforts to morally affect—and improve—his reader through their imaginative, and thereby empathetic, involvement in the plights of its characters cannot be deemed a failed effort. Frederick L. Jones points out that ‘it was in Canto I that Shelley first evolved a set of symbols which he later used with great success in *Prometheus Unbound*’, and Laon and Cythna’s androgynous reunion in the Temple of the Spirit anticipates Asia and Prometheus’ androgynous reunion in the cave, which in turn results in the liberated universe of Act 4. Rather than delivering a failed vision, *Laon and Cythna* offers a prototypical framework of androgyny as a process occurring textually between male and female hero, and extra-textually between poet and reader.

Where *Queen Mab*’s appended Notes instruct the reader in how to read the poem, *Laon and Cythna* begins to experiment with interanimation. Laon and Cythna, and the Narrator, Serpent, and Woman who prefigure their appearance in the poem, act in many ways as model readers and poets. Their repeated reciprocal acts—of speaking and listening, for instance—encourage a reduplication of reciprocity on the reader’s part. Stephen C. Behrendt notes that the preface to *Laon and Cythna* sees Shelley forging a ‘strategy—learned, undoubtedly, from the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*—of disenfranchising the critics from the compact between artist and audience’.[[297]](#footnote-297) Along with forging a compact between poet and reader, Michael Scrivener emphasises how the preface to *Laon and Cythna* presents its accompanying poem as an experiment in the vein of the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*.[[298]](#footnote-298) If *Alastor* is an emphatically Wordsworthian poem by virtue of its pantheism, solitary Poet, and blank verse, then *Laon and Cythna* gleans its own Wordsworthianism from the poet’s preoccupation with ‘keeping [his] reader in the company of flesh and blood’.[[299]](#footnote-299) Shelley’s defence of *Laon and Cythna* as ‘a mere human story’echoes Wordsworth’s own prefatory defences (*PBS Letters*, I, p. 563). The apparent incongruity between the *Alastor* preface and poem pushes the reader to be in two minds at once—to balance rather than decide between the positions of Poet and Narrator—in an early experiment with sympathetic intermingling. In turn, the preface to *Laon and Cythna* tests the links of sympathy between poet and reader as Shelley forges his own Wordsworthian ‘experiment on the temper of the public mind’ (Preface to *Laon and Cythna*, p. 113). Building upon *Alastor*, Shelley tests Wordsworth’s claim that ‘Every great Poet is a Teacher: I wish either to be considered as a Teacher or, as nothing’ by attempting a coincidence of poet and reader as doubled, androgynous teacher rather than reinforcing the binary opposition of teacher and pupil.[[300]](#footnote-300)

In *Laon and Cythna*, binary oppositions are dissolved through androgyny, fuelled by love. ‘Love creates the oneness that goes beyond prescribed gender roles in Shelley’s imagination’, Madeleine Callaghan writes, ‘and this freeing sense of love as destroying rigid boundaries underpins the intriguing relationship between Laon and Cythna in his eponymous poem’.[[301]](#footnote-301) Peter Finch summarises this sense in writing that ‘[l]ove was thus for Shelley the desire to dissolve all boundaries separating the loving subject from the loved one, seeking to merge together in order to make of them a single, better nature’.[[302]](#footnote-302) This process is notably Neoplatonic, owing to Shelley’s readings of Plato’s *Symposium* in Dacier’s French and Ficino’s Latin translations while at Oxford, and to Floyer Sydenham’s and Thomas Taylor’s English translations, in that the soul, freed from its corporeal form, is reunited with the One through a process that is analogised to the meeting of lover and beloved. Stuart Curran identifies the ‘Renaissance ideal of wholeness’, ‘both mental and physical’,[[303]](#footnote-303) as intrinsic to Laon and Cythna’s journey. For Shelley, this ‘Renaissance ideal of wholeness’ must derive, at least in part, from his rereading of the *Symposium* in Ficino’s translation in August 1817, contemporaneous with the composition of *Laon and Cythna*.[[304]](#footnote-304) In particular, Ficino’s explanatory notes to Aristophanes’ speech on the androgynous beings seem to inform the mental and physical pursuit of wholeness within *Laon and Cythna*:

*Men*, that is, the souls of men, *formerly*, that is, when they are created by God, *are whole*, they are provided with two lights, one innate and the other infused, in order that by the innate light they may perceive inferior and equal things, and by the infused, superior things.  *They wished to equal God*.  They turned themselves toward the innate light alone.  *Hence they were divided*.  They lost the infused splendor when they were turned toward the innate light alone, and they fell immediately into bodies.  […]  When souls, already divided and immersed in bodies, first have come to the years of adolescence, they are aroused by the natural and innate light which they retained (as if by a certain half of themselves) to recover, through the study of truth, that infused and divine light, once half of themselves, which they lost in falling (author’s emphasis).[[305]](#footnote-305)

Shelley restores Aristophanes’ postlapsarian sexual passion and sensual melding to the androgynes in his translation, and to Laon and Cythna in their sexual union in Canto 6, but he retains the Neoplatonic ‘infused light’ of Ficino’s translation. The divided and reunited Laon and Cythna enact the Neoplatonic process of infused and innate light, halved in separation from the divine, or beloved, combined with Platonic extramission, as it is interpreted by Plotinus, to make the empathetic gaze a key feature of androgynous intermingling. The eyes are wellsprings of intellectual beauty throughout Shelley’s oeuvre, but they are meditated upon with attention to sexual inequality in the ‘Discourse on the Manners of the Ancient Greeks’, a fragment composed to accompany his translation of the *Symposium*, wherein Greek women, enslaved by law and social custom and debased by the males of their society

were certainly devoid of that moral and intellectual loveliness with which the acquisition of knowledge and the cultivation of sentiment animates, as with another life of overpowering grace, the lineaments and the gestures of every form which it inhabits. Their eyes could not have been deep and intricate from the workings of the mind, and could have entangled no heart in soul-enwoven labyrinths.

(‘A Discourse on the Manners of the Ancient Greeks’, p. 408)

For Tracy Hargreaves, ‘[t]he androgyne exists spectrally, as though it is always brought into being by the gaze, lacking a secure ontology’.[[306]](#footnote-306) Throughout *Laon and Cythna*, the eponymous pair’s illumined eyes meet and mingle, as the one brings the other into being, symbolising their androgynous union and emphasising their intellectual equality. The androgynous ideal of Laon and Cythna’s relationship is carried through into the prose fragment ‘On Love’, written in 1818 to accompany Shelley’s translation of the *Symposium*, where an erotic mingling that is at once physical and psychic is communicated through the lover and beloved’s gaze: ‘the beams of their eyes should kindle at once and mix and melt into our own’ (‘On Love’, p. 631). While passivity and activity have been targeted as evidence of the pair’s inequality,[[307]](#footnote-307) or of Shelley’s failure to instil momentum and action into his narrative, attention to the characters’ eyes reveals the intricate workings of Shelley’s artistry and his burgeoning attention to androgyny as an empathetic, reciprocal processing of self and Other. Shelley’s inversions of traditionally masculine activity and feminine passivity reveal the transferability of gender roles and, in the case of Laon and Cythna, emphasise their androgynous union.[[308]](#footnote-308) The binary opposition of activity and passivity is reconciled through the empathic gaze, as the eye becomes a simultaneously active source and passive receptacle of light.

Following their immolation but preceding their androgynous assimilation in the Temple of the Spirit, Laon and Cythna awaken upon the sands of an ethereal land where they ‘sate gazing in a trance of wonder’ (12.20.172), anticipating ‘that verge where words abandon us, and what wonder if we grow dizzy to look down the dark abyss of—how little we know’ (‘On Life’, p. 636). This line of the poem marks a clear division between the siblings’ entry into the afterlife and their onward voyage, for it is followed by the appearance of the ‘divine’ boat that transports Laon and Cythna to the eternal Temple of the Spirit (12.21.182). The mutability of their state, where they still possess separate forms, since ‘Cythna sate reclined / Beside me [Laon]’ (12.18.155-156), reflects Lucy Newlyn’s description of ‘Shelley’s hermeneutic ideal’ wherein the reader is encouraged ‘to be open to the poet’s influence without fear of self-loss’.[[309]](#footnote-309) That Laon and Cythna are on the verge of androgynous amalgamation is illuminated by Shelley’s choice of the word ‘wonder’. In her reading of Descartes’ *The Passions of the Soul*, Catherine Malabou asserts that ‘[t]o wonder is to open oneself up to difference before granting it a value or establishing hierarchies’.[[310]](#footnote-310) Wonder, for Descartes, is the primary passion of the soul, as it is completely free and unbound. Malabou’s reading reveals a correlation between Descartes’ and Shelley’s sense of wonder, in that ‘wonder gives access to a difference without opposition, to this empty and multiple space of between-genders, within which there is not any real conflict between a feminine and a masculine self-touching’.[[311]](#footnote-311) Wonder implies an accessibility and an openness offering a sexless ‘space of between-genders’ where binaries cease to control. Within the afterlife, all constraints and restrictions are cast off, and two spirits merge into one entirely transcendent, androgynous form, liberated through love. This moment occurs in the final canto of *Laon and Cythna* when the aerial boat ‘struck the sands beside our [Laon and Cythna’s] feet’ (12.22.190), bridging the space between the solidity of the sand and the elemental mingling of the ‘sunset’s sea of beams’ (12.21.186).

Shelley ceases to identify Laon and Cythna as separate entities after they have stepped out of the boat, instead conveying their androgynous union through the use of the plural pronouns ‘we’ and ‘us’ throughout the eight ensuing stanzas. Ultimately, in the concluding stanza of the poem, the two have become amalgamated into one, indicated by the return of the singular pronoun ‘I’. Significantly, this form is capable of slipping through the veil that divides earth and the heavens, for absolute love cannot be confined to any one sphere, earthly or otherwise. This is made clear by Shelley’s conclusive description of the Temple of the Spirit hanging ‘in one hollow sky’ (12.41.365), where oneness indicates unity, anticipating the pure Form of Love in Shelley’s translation of the *Symposium*, which does not ‘subsist in any other thing that lives or is, either in earth, or in heaven, or in any other place; but it is eternally uniform and consistent, and monoeidic with itself’ (*The Banquet*, p. 449). The hollowness of the sky suggests a transcendent permeability recalling the ‘empty and multiple space’ of Descartes’ wonder as described by Malabou. Laon and Cythna’s united form is underscored by the repetition of the words: ‘I saw’ in the poem’s ultimate stanza. Sight not only opens the body to wonder, but also becomes essential to Shelley’s use of androgyny as a symbol of revolutionary unity. This is apparent from the commencement of Canto 1, where the Narrator ‘saw the golden dawn break forth’ over a dystopian paradise (1.1.6).

Even before the Narrator views the crystalline Temple of the Spirit, ‘likest Heaven’ (1.49.436), we are given a glimpse of the struggle to achieve access to this afterlife through the ambiguous image of Canto 1, that of the ‘Eagle and a Serpent wreathed in fight’ (1.8.67).[[312]](#footnote-312) While allusively drawing upon the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid*, and self-referentially alluding to the ‘eagle grasped / In the folds of the green serpent’ in *Alastor* (227-228),[[313]](#footnote-313) this Manichean symbol has most often been considered a warring depiction of good and evil, with the Eagle representing evil and the Serpent, Shelley’s alter-ego,[[314]](#footnote-314) representing the good: an inversion of the two creatures’ typical connotations. This concept owes to a similarity between the image of the warring Eagle and Serpent compounded with the portrayal of the battle between the Comet and the Morning Star, which is successively followed by the triumph of the Spirit of Evil and the defeated Spirit of Good in the two ensuing stanzas. The consequent assumption of the Eagle and Serpent representing the Comet and Morning Star, and therefore also the warring spirits of Good and Evil, relies upon the metaphorical transference between one image to the next, a process considered in depth by Jerrold E. Hogle in his description of transference as ‘a ceaseless transition between elements of thought’ employed by Shelley in order to ‘free us from hegemonic limitations’.[[315]](#footnote-315) Yet, in a poem in which good and evil are so frequently transposed, such an assertion of the binary opposition between Good and Evil being represented under different guises but ultimately unchanged throughout this succession of images seems inaccurate. Stuart Curran, while arguing that ‘Shelley’s successes in the poem are structural; his failings are conceptual’, suggests that the structural and thematic ‘parallels and antitheses’ in *Laon and Cythna* stress the poem’s Manicheanism.[[316]](#footnote-316) Curran draws a line between Shelley’s ‘English’ and ‘Italian’ poetry, where the former is marred by an ‘adolescent Manicheanism, separating black from white universally, and ignoring the subtle shades in which they merge’ and the latter is distinguished by a pervasive ambiguity.[[317]](#footnote-317) This seems an oversimplification. To overemphasise the import of Shelley’s Manicheanism is to overlook the burgeoning influence of Platonism, and particularly Shelley’s admiration of Plato’s subtle manipulation of his reader, upon Shelley’s thoughts. Kenneth Neill Cameron, in offering the first sustained comparative study of Shelley’s *Laon and Cythna* (or *The Revolt of Islam*) and Peacock’s *Ahrimanes*, lights upon the ambiguities of Shelley’s dualisms. Cameron notes that the conflict in *Laon and Cythna* ‘is not only—as it is with Peacock—one between good and evil principles, but between progressive and reactionary social and political forces’, where there is ‘a constant, ever-present struggle between good and evil, progress and reaction’.[[318]](#footnote-318) Donna Richardson makes a similar argument by stating that although ‘[v]irtually all interpretations of the *Revolt* assume that serpent and eagle represent absolute moral categories, either traditional or inverted’, they are instead ‘unresolvable contraries rather than morally distinct categories representing good and evil’.[[319]](#footnote-319) Rather than representing Good and Evil, the Eagle and the Serpent enact an almost amorous attempt to meld themselves into one, foreshadowing the process which must take place in order for Laon and Cythna to achieve an empathetic, androgynous assimilation, enabling them to access the afterlife.

The Eagle and Serpent appear simultaneously, already intertwined, where they are juxtaposed against ‘The pallid semicircle of the moon’ which

Past on, in slow and moving majesty;

Its upper horn arrayed in mists, which soon

But slowly fled, like dew beneath the beams of noon.

(1.5.42-45)

The lone, Mariner-like Narrator ‘could not choose but gaze’ as ‘the hue’

Of the white moon, amid that heaven so blue,

Suddenly stained with shadow did appear;

A speck, a cloud, a shape, approaching grew,

Like a great ship in the sun’s sinking sphere

Beheld afar at sea, and swift it came anear.

(1.6.46 and 1.6.49-54)

In the *Symposium*, Aristophanes traces the androgynes’ origin to ‘the Moon, by reason of the androgynous nature of the Moon’, and by this reasoning Shelley’s renderings of the moon often carry with them associations with androgyny (*The Banquet*, p. 430). In this instance, the moon, typically denoted with feminine pronouns in Shelley’s work, is instead granted the gender-neutral ‘its’, with its phallic ‘upper horn’ obscured and ‘arrayed in mists’ (1.5.44) in an emphatically androgynous recasting of ‘the great moon’ of *Alastor*, ‘her mighty horn suspended’, and ‘With whose dun beams inwoven darkness seemed / To mingle’ (*Alastor*, 646, 647 and 648-649). The aerial sequence between the Eagle and Serpent recalls Coleridge’s Ancient Mariner’s glimpsing of the spectre-ship,[[320]](#footnote-320) where the ship appears like

A speck, a mist, a shape, I wist!

And still it neared and neared:

As if it dodged a water-sprite,

It plunged and tacked and veered.

(*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, 3.153-156)[[321]](#footnote-321)

But the presence of the moon also seems to invoke Wordsworth and the unusual synchronicity between ascent and descent in ‘Strange fits of passion I have known’, where ‘Upon the moon I fixed my eye’, ‘And, all the while, my eyes I kept / On the descending moon’ until ‘At once the planet dropped’ (9, 19-20, and 24). The Eagle and Serpent’s bodies are ‘inextricably blended’ (1.9.75), anticipating the blending of Laon and Cythna’s ‘two restless frames into one reposing soul’ (6.36.324). This ephemeral moment of blending peaks when the Serpent contorts itself ‘before the Eagle’s stedfast eye’ (1.9.81), recalling the strange fixedness of Wordsworth’s speaker’s gaze; similarly, the Serpent ‘at last / Fell to the sea’ in an echo of ‘At once the planet dropped’, in both cases evoking the fear of death. The Eagle’s penetrative gaze fixes the Serpent in a position of otherness, where the Serpent’s inability to maintain eye contact with the Eagle, instead ‘warily / Shift[ing] and glanc[ing]’ indicates its inability to empathise—to lovingly go out of itself—and unite with the Other (1.9.80-81). Ultimately, the sequence’s Wordsworthian import underscores Shelley’s efforts to subvert binary categories in *Laon and Cythna*. Geoffrey Hartman notes that, in Wordsworth’s poem, ‘the moon is more than backdrop and passive symbol. It is an *agent* as soon as the lover fixes his eye on it’ (author’s emphasis).[[322]](#footnote-322) Throughout *Laon and Cythna* Shelley transposes and blends the gendered positions of activity and passivity so as to promote sexual equality. The Eagle’s steadfast gaze perpetuates the binary split between self and Other as subjective selves, but the inextricable blending of the creatures’ bodies offers up a seemingly contradictory enmeshment, albeit on a physical rather than psychic level. Stuart Sperry notes that ‘[a]mong the various sources of Shelley’s conception of the image of the eagle and the serpent is the story of the creation of Hermaphroditus in Book IV of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*’. While Sperry’s observation that the ‘androgynous ideal’ is achieved through the Eagle and Serpent’s initial appearance as a ‘winged Form’ (1.7.60), and then through the Serpent and Woman’s ‘commingling into one’ (1.56.501) seems apt, his conclusion that the symbolism of Canto 1 ‘seems to set forth a hierarchy presided over by a union of the sexes and embracing beneath it ideals of the male and female form and character’ troublingly reasserts the very hierarchical structure that Shelley seeks to topple.[[323]](#footnote-323) In a motif that isn’t fully realised until *The Witch of Atlas*, Shelley draws a distinction between two forms of androgyny: one ideal, and one fallen. The ideal form of androgyny accords with Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi’s and Diane Long Hoeveler’s definitions as a ‘psychic unity’ or ‘a merger of psychic characteristics within the imagination’,[[324]](#footnote-324) whereas the fallen form of androgyny is a forced melding that is limited to the body. In *The Witch of Atlas*, this dichotomy is fully realised in the characters of the Witch and her creation, Hermaphroditus where, Hoeveler notes, the Witch as ‘androgyne is the true reconciliation of masculine and feminine, spirit and psyche’ and ‘the hermaphrodite is all flesh, a mockery of the possibility of spiritual transcendence’.[[325]](#footnote-325) Shelley’s reading of Spenser while composing *Laon and Cythna* proffers the image of the hermaphrodite in the figure of *The Faerie Queene*’s Venus Hermaphroditus, but Mary’s reading of Francis Beaumont’s *Salmasis and Hermaphroditus* in February 1817 is an equally likely source, as it is Ovid’s imaging of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus that comes to figure in Shelley’s rendering of the fallen form of androgyny between his speaker and Emily in *Epipsychidion*.

Shelley’s struggle to translate Emilia Viviani into a textual figuration or metaphor in *Epipsychidion* sees him vacillating between material form and mental or intellectual shape, both within the published poem but most evidently in the pages of his notebooks, where the words ‘form’ and ‘shape’ are repeatedly cancelled and substituted.[[326]](#footnote-326) This process of vacillating between material and intangible descriptions of being is also evident in Shelley’s figuring of Cythna. Throughout the *Laon and Cythna* manuscripts, Nancy Moore Goslee reads Shelley’s cancellations as indications of his awareness of the ‘threat to Cythna’s autonomy and thus to the autonomy of all women’, and his recognition of the danger of ‘a hierarchical dualism’ that would posit Cythna as subordinate to Laon.[[327]](#footnote-327) The poet extends his energies of cancellation to Cythna in order to promote her activity, and this is especially visible in adds. e. 10 where Cythna mouths intimations of the *Ode to the West Wind*. Shelley writes,

Cythna shall be the prophetess of love

Her lips [floating]

The ~~Poet who~~ shall steal the grace [thou] [?wearest]

Around thy heart, to clothe the shapes which [rove]

Thro the bleak future’s bare & wintry grove –

~~The husbandman casts seeds into~~

[…]

blasts

The ~~winds~~ of autumn drive the winged seeds[[328]](#footnote-328)

Seeming to correct his own hierarchical position of masculine poet, Shelley cancels ‘Poet’ in favour of ‘Her lips’, thereby reversing Cythna’s position from passive creation to active speaker. Similarly, he cancels the masculine and sexualised image of ‘The husbandman cast[ing] seeds’ in favour of autumn’s autonomous blasts. This subversion or reversal of the gender binary carries through into the *Ode to the West Wind* where *The Poems of Shelley* editors note that Shelley ‘feminises the gentle west wind of spring (Zephyrus), the bringer of clear skies, traditionally personified as a young man’.[[329]](#footnote-329) *Laon and Cythna*’s hope for reform is condensed within these intimations of the *Ode to the West Wind*, where the feminised west wind and its issuance from Cythna’s lips are coupled with an etymological origin of her name. Among other possibilities, ‘Cythna’s name is the plural form of the Attic Greek word *kythnón*, a synonym of *sperma* “seed”’, Stuart Peterfruend writes.[[330]](#footnote-330) Cythna, in her approximation to the west wind and seeds, becomes a figure of hope and potentiality while also mingling masculine and feminine qualities. Shelley works to draw the intimations of his *Ode* from what becomes Cythna’s speech in Canto 9, described by Stuart Curran as ‘the long first draft of the *Ode to the West Wind*’,[[331]](#footnote-331) anticipating his claim in the *Defence* that ‘the future is contained within the present as the plant within the seed’ (*A Defence of Poetry*, p. 675). If men and women are to remain enslaved by custom and hierarchically opposed in Shelley’s present, then through Cythna’s cry to ‘Let all be free and equal’ (8.17.145), he like Beauvoir hopes for a future state, albeit one that ‘cannot be transformed unless society has first made her really the equal of man’.[[332]](#footnote-332)

While the poet’s ostensible shifting away from the materialist philosophy of his youth towards the ambivalent idealism of his later years seems present in these cancellations and substitutions, these shiftings between ‘form’ and ‘shape’ also owe to Shelley’s burgeoning interest in Plato’s *Symposium*. In his translation of the *Symposium*, ‘“[f]orms”’, Michael O’Neill writes, ‘is Shelley’s preferred single equivalent for what in Plato are different words (including “bodies”) for the object of the lover’s attention; in its capacity to suggest both the physical and the spiritual, the choice by Shelley of “forms” here shows an unsupine responsiveness to the Greek’.[[333]](#footnote-333) Shelley’s vacillations between the ambiguities of ‘form’, along with ‘shape’, and ‘shade’, predate his translation of the *Symposium*, similarly anticipating his assimilation of ‘intellectual beauty’ into the translation where, O’Neill suggests, ‘Shelley found in Plato a subject-rhyme with his own intuitions in his earlier *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*’ where ‘beauty, though supra-sensuous, is tangled up with the sensuous’.[[334]](#footnote-334) Similar entanglements between sensual body and intellectual being permeate *Laon and Cythna*, anticipating the ambivalence of Shelley’s later works, where the poet locates the amorphous and active potential underlying binary constructs. In *Laon and Cythna*, androgyny is the means of undoing the binary division and consequent hierarchical imbalance between the sexes.

In his preface, Shelley describes *Laon and Cythna* as ‘a succession of pictures illustrating the growth and progress of individual mind aspiring after excellence’ and later defends the poem from Godwin’s censure by claiming it to be ‘a genuine picture of my own mind’ (Preface, p. 113 and *PBS Letters*, I, p. 577). Rather than indicating solipsism, Shelley’s ‘individual mind’ looks ahead to Beauvoir’s similar blueprint for social progress towards sexual equality, where ‘if we imagine…a society in which the equality of the sexes would be concretely realized, this equality would find expression in each individual’.[[335]](#footnote-335) Diane Long Hoeveler notes that Shelley’s emphasis upon the ‘individual mind’ ensures that ‘the action, as in Blake’s epics, is circular and to a large extent psychic’.[[336]](#footnote-336) Hoeveler’s collocation seems to also anticipate the mental theatre of *Prometheus Unbound*, wherein the unified singularity of the ‘individual mind’ is echoed in the lyrical drama’s attention to its readers’ ‘highly refined imagination’ (Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, p. 232). ‘The imagination’, Timothy Webb writes, ‘working through its main agent poetry, is in opposition to the principle of self and enables us to identify sympathetically’.[[337]](#footnote-337) In the epic arena of *Laon and Cythna* sympathetic identification comes through the active adoption of passivity. This is first modelled by the Serpent’s passive decision to loosen its hold on the Eagle in Canto 1 and reappears throughout Laon and Cythna’s actions, or active choices to remain passive.[[338]](#footnote-338) Passivity, described by Stuart Curran as ‘one of [Shelley’s] major contributions, not only to English literature but to Romantic psychology’,[[339]](#footnote-339) becomes linked to Shelley’s repeated description of his poem as a picture when considering the Lacanian gaze as an act of objective othering. For Lacan, ‘[t]he painter…gives something for the eye to feed on, but he invites the person to whom this picture is presented to lay down his gaze there as one lays down one’s weapons. This is the pacifying, Apollonian effect of painting’,[[340]](#footnote-340) and in *Laon and Cythna* Shelley seems conscious of the potential for a similar pacification in his creation of a purportedly narrative ‘picture’. The laying down of the gaze allows for the erasure of subjectivity, which is not to eliminate all distinctions of self, but rather to acknowledge the intersubjective union of what Shelley in his essay ‘On Life’ terms the ‘one mind’ (‘On Life’, p. 636).

Throughout *Laon and Cythna*, ‘the beams of [the Other’s] eyes…kindle at once and mix and melt into our own’ (‘On Love’, p. 631), and John Donovan notes that ‘[t]he analogy between eyes and stars is never far to seek in *Laon and Cythna*’ where they indicate ‘another plane of being on which perfect union is the norm’.[[341]](#footnote-341) This ‘perfect union’ is one of absolute equality, unrestrained by hierarchical limitations and distinguished by the empathetic melting of two beings into one androgynous whole. Hoeveler’s assertion that ‘Shelley recognized that the androgynous existed only as a desired goal, an elusive mirage, perhaps even a false siren, but never as a reality that could be sustained as a vehicle for social reform’ overlooks the androgynous ‘psychic unity’ between poet and reader.[[342]](#footnote-342) Androgyny may not, Shelley realised in composing *Laon and Cythna*, be a feasible means of encouraging social reform in his own time, but the cyclicality of the epic-romance looks towards repetitions that extend through time, to a future state.

Following the Serpent’s passive descent into the sea, it is described as being ‘lifeless’ but reappears as ‘wounded’ four stanzas later (1.14.122 and 1.18.154). John Donovan suggests that the Serpent dies and then comes back to life, since ‘death followed by rebirth would be a natural analogy with that casting of its old skin and growing a new one which made the serpent a symbol of immortality’,[[343]](#footnote-343) while Peter Finch reads the Serpent as falling already ‘wounded into the sea’.[[344]](#footnote-344) Following the representation of Laon and Cythna’s resurrections in the afterlife, Donovan’s reading of the lines comes to seem accurate. The Serpent’s inextricable blending with the Eagle, coupled with its apparent descent and rebirth, likens it to a phoenix: the double-sexed mythical creature, ‘at once its own father and its own mother’,[[345]](#footnote-345) that continually rebirths itself from its own ashes. The Serpent’s death is essential in order to access the afterlife. However, a separate, individual spirit cannot enter the afterlife, for solitude and solipsism lead to a finite death. Alone, the Serpent cannot be reborn into eternity. Throughout the lengthy aerial battle, another solitary being has been gazing upwards, watching the violent display. ‘There was a Woman,’ the Narrator informs us, ‘Sitting beneath the rocks, upon the sand / Of the waste sea’ (1.16.136-138). The poem’s ‘terrestrial-celestial’ dichotomy, noted by Donovan, is key in analysing the scene’s ‘essential duality’.[[346]](#footnote-346) This duality is implicit in the Serpent and the Eagle’s earthbound and airy natures, and is compounded by the scene being set in the evening while the Woman is likened to the morning. Although the Narrator is watching the Woman, her own eyes have drifted from the now darkened sky down to the sea. The Woman is visibly distraught, with tears streaming down her face; however, she remains seated upon the sand. She could easily leap into the ocean and swim out to the Serpent’s rescue, or she could at least shout out to it, as it is later revealed that they speak the same otherworldly language. Yet, she remains physically immobile. Physical touch and spoken words are merely mortal acts, Shelley suggests, as the empathetic gaze is the only portal into the afterlife. The Woman’s eyes become the focus of the Narrator’s attention:

It seemed that this fair Shape had looked upon

That unimaginable fight, and now

That her sweet eyes were weary of the sun,

As brightly it illustrated her woe;

For in the tears which silently to flow

Paused not, its lustre hung: she watching aye

The foam-wreathes which the faint tide wove below

Upon the spangled sands, groaned heavily,

And after every groan looked up over the sea.

(1.17.145-153)

The Woman remains watching ‘The foam-wreathes which the faint tide wove below’, enabling an act of mingling between her own eyes and the sea-submerged Serpent. What follows is a miraculous and imaginative act of childbirth: The Woman ‘groaned heavily, / And after every groan looked up over the sea’. A plausible Orphic source for the Woman and the Serpent may be Eurynome and Ophion: the Oceanide goddess and her serpent consort who ‘had first the rule / Of high Olympus’ (*Paradise Lost*, 10.582-583).[[347]](#footnote-347) In *Paradise Lost*, Milton’s invocation of Eurynome and her comparison to Eve emphasises the hope for ‘pure human sympathy’.[[348]](#footnote-348) Similarly, Shelley’s Woman and Serpent perform a sympathetic act of regeneration.

And when she saw the wounded Serpent make

His path between the waves, her lips grew pale,

Parted, and quivered; the tears ceased to break

From her immoveable eyes

(1.18.154-157)

Notably, it is not the Narrator who first sees the Serpent being born from the waves but rather the Woman, for it is her sympathy conveyed through her ‘immoveable eyes’ which has revived and united the Serpent with herself.

Shelley continues to reveal the affinity between the Serpent and the Woman by describing the Serpent laying himself across the Woman’s exposed breast, resting with ‘His head…on her heart’ in an image of maternal or affectionate, rather than simply sexual, union (1.22.194). The Woman’s affinity with the Serpent conjures up a maenadic image, and Shelley may be recalling Euripides’ *Bacchae*, wherein the maenads have ‘writhing snakes that licked their cheeks’, or Horace’s ‘Hymn to Bacchus’ wherein the god binds benevolent snakes into maenads’ hair ‘with no evil intent’.[[349]](#footnote-349) Teddi Lynn Chichester asserts that the Serpent, which she identifies as ‘the great Spirit of Good’, is undergoing a ‘decidedly unspectacular transformation from “mighty Serpent” to “wounded Serpent”’ in order to be reunited ‘with his beloved woman’ and to ‘access her lovely breast’.[[350]](#footnote-350) Finch reads the Serpent’s interaction with the Woman’s ‘bare breasts’ in a similar way, considering it as a ‘strange and suggestive union’.[[351]](#footnote-351) While not straightforwardly ‘suggestive’ under the sexual premises that Chichester and Finch insinuate, Finch’s sense of the Woman and Serpent’s interaction resulting in a ‘union’ is apt. The poem’s first critic, Leigh Hunt, stresses this sense of union: ‘the woman and serpent are seen no more, but…a cloud opens asunder, and a bright and beautiful shape, which seems compounded of both, is beheld sitting on a throne’.[[352]](#footnote-352) Stuart Sperry, following Hunt’s reading, confirms that ‘the scene is to be understood as an androgynous ideal, a perfect union of the male and female sexes’. Sperry goes on to assert that, although ‘the symbolism of Shelley’s first canto is both complex and elusive’, it ultimately posits ‘a union of the sexes’ resulting in the precedence of ‘the androgynous ideal’.[[353]](#footnote-353) Following Sperry, it would be a misreading to perceive the merging of the male Serpent and the Woman as an eroticized and solely physical act.

She spake in a language whose strange melody

Might not belong to earth. I heard, alone,

What made its music more melodious be,

The pity and the love of every tone;

But to the Snake those accents sweet were known,

His native tongue and hers; nor did he beat

The hoar spray idly then, but winding on

Thro’ the green shadows of the waves that meet

Near to the shore, did pause beside her snowy feet.

(1.19.163-171)

The Woman ‘unveiled her bosom’ and ‘the Serpent did obey / Her voice, and, coiled in rest in her embrace it lay’ (1.20.176 and 1.20.179-180). The Serpent lays himself across the Woman’s breast, not in an attempt at masculine domination or possession, or as a sexual advance, but in order to be pressed against her heart. Chichester and Finch neglect to consider that it is the Woman who revives the Serpent, and it is she who ‘unveil[s] her bosom’ and takes the Serpent ‘in her embrace’. The Serpent, acting again in a moment of sympathetic passivity, is obedient and submissive to the Woman. The two are equal halves of one unified ‘androgynous ideal’, to quote Sperry, for neither are able to access the eternal realm without the other.

Once the Narrator has felt the power of sympathy, he must learn passivity, in order to act as an imaginative vessel for the epic story of the revolution that will follow. It is his task to receive the story of revolution and to guide the reader’s reaction. The love between the author and reader is mirrored by the empathetic exchange between the Narrator and the Woman when

she bent

Her looks on mine; those eyes a kindling beam

Of love divine into my spirit sent

(1.24.213-215)

The Woman commands the reader vis-à-vis the Narrator to

Speak not to me, but hear! much shalt thou learn,

Much must remain unthought, and more untold,

In the dark Future’s ever-flowing urn

(1.25.217-219)

She proceeds to tell two separate, but similar, creation stories of ‘Twin Genii, equal Gods’ (1.25.224), beginning with ‘The earliest dweller of the world alone’ standing above an apocalyptic scene of chaos (1.26.226). Here, the image of the ‘blood red Comet and the Morning Star’ first appears (1.26.230). The ‘earliest dweller’, and particularly his action or inaction in the midst of this scene, becomes significant to the dualism embedded in the poetry. As he watches the two celestial spheres ‘Mingling their beams in combat’, an image cyclically resonant of the Woman’s own bearing witness to the battle between the Eagle and the Serpent, his mind is active with ‘dreadful sympathy’ (1.26.231 and 1.26.233). Although he is both gazing and sympathising with this scene, he abruptly turns away after, like the Serpent, ‘That fair Star fell’ into the waters below (1.26.234); by averting his eyes and disengaging his gaze, he is unable, or unwilling, to resurrect the fallen body from the flood, and failing to enact the process of empathetic androgynous union.

This failure results instead in the arrival of violence and evil into the world. The Woman proceeds to recount the history of humanity’s ‘chain of torment’ inflicted by an array of oppressors including the ‘King, and Lord, and God’, all directed by ‘the conquering Fiend’, and how this chain may only be shattered when ‘pure hearts…assemble’; then, ‘The Snake and Eagle meet’ and ‘the world’s foundations tremble’ in revolution (1.28.252 and 1.33.296-297). The second story is the Woman’s own: she reveals herself to be human, born in a time long after the ‘earliest dweller’ first glimpsed the seminal celestial battle. However, she, too, leads a solitary existence, as ‘a free and happy orphan child’ (1.36.317). Her first attempt at sympathizing with another being is unsuccessful, for her friend, the ‘dying poet’—recalling the Poet of *Alastor*—can express himself only through the language of books and ‘holy talk’; so, she ‘watched him as he died away’ (1.37.328-330). Her next attempt is a triumph, and she succeeds where the ‘earliest dweller’ could not, in gazing amorously upon the Morning Star, whose ‘eye…seemed to smile on me’ (1.41.361). Not only does this mark a progression in the Woman’s ability to empathise, it also indicates a movement away from physical, bodily love and towards the power of the imagination, channelling Diotima’s ladder of love in the *Symposium*. The repetition of the Woman’s first lover’s ‘mortal’ and ‘dying’ state emphasises the impermanence of earthly, corporeal love, whereas the light exuded by the Morning Star’s empathetic eye ignites the transcendent power of her imagination. She recalls that ‘from its beams deep love my spirit drank,’ emphasising the spiritual rather than physical nature of this union, and continues to reveal that ‘to my brain the boundless world now shrank / Into one thought—one image—yes, for ever!’ (1.41.364-366). The exclamatory nature of this final line suggests an orgasmic union, but significantly, it is one in thought, not of the body, in apparent ascension to the Neoplatonic One. This is a process which Shelley reiterates in his translation of the *Symposium*, wherein Aristophanes explains of the divided lovers: ‘it is not merely the sensual delights of their intercourse for which they dedicate themselves to each other with such serious affection; but the soul of each manifestly thirsts for, from the other, something which there are no words to describe’ (*The Banquet*, p. 432). Taken together, the Woman’s cry and Aristophanes’ speech anticipate Demogorgon’s utterance that ‘the deep truth is imageless’ (*Prometheus Unbound*, 2.4.116). Language and physical intercourse similarly fall short of expressing pure love. The re-union of the two souls can only occur through the empathetic gaze, and the Shelleyan soul, as Baker aptly observes, is innately androgynous: ‘It is in itself as sexless as an angel, for on the spiritual plane where Shelley is standing, sexual distinctions are of no consequence’.[[354]](#footnote-354) It is through this union through the gaze, which Shelley will laconically express within the dedication ‘To Mary’,[[355]](#footnote-355) that the Morning Star and the Woman become androgynously amalgamated into one everlasting, ever-loving entity.

Within the dedication, Mary is not portrayed, nor even considered, as the ‘adoptive pet’ which Gelpi claims her to be, or as the unequivocally masculine Shelley’s ‘feminine second self’, as Teddi Chichester Bonca asserts.[[356]](#footnote-356) Instead, the rhyme of ‘thy’ and ‘I’, repeated throughout the dedication but appearing most strikingly in stanza eleven, attests to the melding of the two into one harmonious, and above all, equal entity. The empathetic gaze, essential to the enmeshment of the two equally loving souls, is best portrayed in stanzas eleven and fourteen, wherein the eyes are likened to guiding lamps, and then, through the process of transference, to ‘Two tranquil stars’, eternally burning ‘with unextinguished light’ (124 and 126). Mary’s ‘soul’ is depicted as a permeating, igniting force;[[357]](#footnote-357) it is she who endows the fearful Shelley with ‘tranquillity’ and the passive acceptance of humanity’s ‘fury’, a characteristically blind emotion (98, 122, and 120). As the androgynous amalgamation of the Woman and the Serpent ‘vanished slowly from sight’, her frame is quickly replaced by ‘two glittering lights’, circling across the floor (1.55.492 and 1.56.496). The Narrator witnesses the fusing of two souls into one with his own eyes, as ‘They round each other rolled, dilating more / And more—then rose, commingling into one’ (1.56.500-501). Here, the repetition of ‘more’ and then ‘one / One clear and mighty planet’ mirrors the unifying process during which two become one (1.56.502-503). The androgynous Form, as an imaginative commingling of souls rather than a corporeal being, begins to dissolve, conveyed in the successive stanza as a lingering hand ‘Whose touch was magic strength’ and a single ‘eye of blue’ (1.58.516). The hovering eye, re-enacting the union between the Morning Star and the Woman, sympathetically gazes into the Narrator’s own eyes, ‘like moonlight’, simultaneously androgynous and celestial, yet imparting power upon the earth (1.58.517). While the sympathetic gaze has previously served to unite the lovers’ divided souls, it acts here to ignite the Narrator’s, and by association, the reader’s, imagination. Love and the imagination are allied forces, since the ‘power of love is produced by the imagination, the specifically moral, strongly willed, and creative sympathy which projects us into the situation of other beings’.[[358]](#footnote-358) For Shelley, moral goodness emanates from the imagination, and ‘[t]he great secret of morals is Love’ (*A Defence of Poetry*, p. 682).

Laon and Cythna’s mutuality is not predicated upon a dependence where the ‘Shelleyan hero’ is ‘unable to cope with his environment effectively unless he is able to establish a connection with some epipsychological counterpart, through whom he is completed and strengthened, wakened to energy…and directed’, as Carlos Baker has suggested of their relationship.[[359]](#footnote-359) Though Baker’s assumption is drawn from Shelley’s letter to Mary in which he claims that her ‘thoughts alone can waken mine to energy’, this reading posits one individual as a sole creator and the other as a ‘directed’ object (*PBS Letters*, I, p. 414). Baker initially describes the ‘epipsychological’ concept in terms of the psyche ‘seek[ing] to possess what it does not have (epipsyche)’.[[360]](#footnote-360) Not only does this analysis focus upon one’s objectification and possession of another, it also neglects to consider that Shelley actively makes the decision to become passive, pliable, and receptive to Mary. The masculine possession of the feminine Other is faced with self-conscious scrutiny in *Epipsychidion*, where the speaker’s repeated efforts to mix and meld with Emily are forced to fail. But *Laon and Cythna*, replete with hope and clinging to Godwinian perfectibility, exalts the potential for self and Other to attain a unified state of equality. Laon and Cythna’s relationship depends upon the equal exchange of intelligence. When one is passively listening, the other actively speaks, and vice versa. Within the body of the poem, this equal exchange between Laon and Cythna allows the narrative to unfold. Although Laon is now acting as the narrator, his eyes are ever-locked with Cythna’s as she fuels his memory. The first-person narration in Canto 2 at times dips into moments of third-person recollection, notably in stanzas 17 and 20, indicating that these memories are shared between both Laon and Cythna, since they have already attained everlasting unity as the androgynous Form in the Temple of the Spirit.

Cythna makes her first appearance in this narrative in Canto 2, stanza 21, where she is again described by the power of her eyes, here ‘loadstars of delight, which drew me [Laon] home’ (2.21.182). This is an image which Shelley revisits in the dedication ‘To Mary’ where he describes returning to Mary, ‘mine own heart’s home’ (‘To Mary’, 2). This image of Laon departing and returning to Cythna echoes Shelley’s return to Mary and serves to embed the dedication within the body of the poem. It also solidifies Shelley’s perceived connection between the eyes and the heart, synonymous with love. Hogle further elucidates this pattern of departing and returning, whether literal or figurative, in his definition of love in Shelleyan terms as ‘transference as felt and extended emotionally’. Hogle goes on to question if love can be ‘limited to or coming forth from a single figure’, or rather, ‘a “going out” from anyone who can transport his or her thinking into someone else’s situation’.[[361]](#footnote-361) An application of love as ‘going out’ from one individual and empathetically entering another seems apt both in light of the dedication and stanza 21, and sets a precedent for Laon and Cythna’s relationship throughout the events of the poem. Shelley’s extension of Laon and Cythna’s separation and reunion coupled with the empathetic gaze to his own relationship with Mary in the dedication bolsters the poem’s structural balance and sense of cyclicality, ensuring that these hopeful repetitions will extend into the future.

Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi describes Laon and Cythna as an ‘“androgynous” pair’ whom she studied while ‘considering the viability of androgyny as a feminist concept’. Yet, by describing Cythna in shadow-like terms, as Laon’s Jungian ‘“anima”’, she negates the prospect of Laon and Cythna sharing power equally.[[362]](#footnote-362) However, Carlos Baker describes Laon as Cythna’s ‘mere shadow’, a pawn who is ‘more acted upon than acting’.[[363]](#footnote-363) Although these analyses are in disagreement over which character is ‘shadowing’ the other, they both posit that one sibling/lover is subservient to the other.[[364]](#footnote-364) This perceived hierarchy may be reconceptualised through attention to Canto 2, although it is seemingly dominated by Laon’s first person narration. The fact that Cythna exists for seventeen stanzas without uttering a single word aside from murmuring her brother’s name in her sleep also seems to bely any notion of equality between the siblings (2.28.244-245); however, the hierarchy crumbles when Cythna asserts her own selfhood by announcing her desire to take up Laon’s revolutionary task (20.38.334-335), rendering him silent—‘I smiled, and spake not’—over the remaining eleven stanzas of the canto.[[365]](#footnote-365) Laon’s passive narration gives way to Cythna’s seemingly spontaneous speech; she has spent her silent days passively listening to her brother’s revolutionary plans, and now she is prepared to pursue them. The reciprocity between Laon and Cythna’s dialogue in this scene marks the first step in their quest for revolution and, ultimately, unification. While Cythna’s eyes bade Laon to return to her in stanza 21, it is now Laon’s eyes which reciprocally empower Cythna in stanza 37. Laon, ‘gazing on that glorious child’, Cythna, is the first one to speak of sexual equality, in proclaiming that ‘“Never will peace and human nature meet / Till free and equal man and woman greet”’ (2.37.328-329). Following Laon’s statement, ‘From Cythna’s eyes a light of exultation’ shone forth, and ‘She replied earnestly’ in the following stanza: ‘“It shall be mine, / This task, mine, Laon!”’ (2.37.333-38.335). While William Ulmer acknowledges an empathetic process at play in the siblings’ relationship, he overlooks the reciprocity of their connection, claiming instead that, ‘Cythna acquires her selfhood through an empathic concentration on Laon’.[[366]](#footnote-366) This reading fails to recognise the siblings’ shared gaze and solidarity in the revolutionary task of bringing about sexual equality. This is an ideal which is symbolically conveyed through the appearance of the androgynous Form in the Temple of the Spirit, igniting the poem’s subsequent events, and it is ‘“the lamp”’ which Laon ‘“hast kindled in my [Cythna’s] heart”’ that leads her to proclaim: ‘“Can man be free if woman be a slave? / Chain one who lives, and breathes this boundless air / To the corruption of a closed grave!”’ (2.44.389-390 and 2.43.379-381). Cythna confidently reveals to Laon that ‘“We part to meet again”’, not on earth or even in ‘“cold vacant Heaven”’, but rather ‘“Within the minds of men, whose lips shall bless / Our memory, and whose hopes its light retain”’ (2.48.424 and 2.48.429-431). For sexual equality to occur in reality the idea must first be conceived imaginatively, ‘since reality is an imaginative construct, only the mind can determine if reality is to be harmonious’.[[367]](#footnote-367) *Laon and Cythna* performs a successful mental revolution where androgyny is central to Shelley’s vision of reform.

Laon and Cythna’s intellectual and emotional division is emphasized by Cythna’s premonition that they must part and Laon’s subsequent inability to respond to her impassioned speech: ‘I could not speak’, he admits, and the two silently return home, ‘Like evening shades that o’er the mountains creep’ (2.49.433 and 2.49.439). For now, ‘Each from the other sought refuge in solitude’, and though they remain physically together, they are emotionally and intellectually distanced (2.49.441). Canto 3 opens by reiterating this mental detachment, wherein Laon laments his inability to know Cythna’s thoughts. Though he does not consciously understand his sister’s prophetic proclamation that they shall be parted and reunited in human thought, he experiences a visionary dream that echoes Cythna’s speech. This marks the escalation of the siblings’ bond from one based on corporeality, through the sympathetic interlocking of their eyes, to one centred in the mind. The strength of the human imagination is the key to achieving successful revolution; for Shelley, ‘the imagination is both the source of revolutionary energy and the fulfilment of the perfect revolution’, where minds are aligned in androgynous unity and where thoughts are sparks to kindle the flames of change.[[368]](#footnote-368) By refuting the eminence of the ‘established power’, whether that establishment be the incest taboo, the gender binary, or the establishment of a single monotheistic religion, the awakened imagination is able to break free from its restrictive bonds and bask in ‘universal toleration and benevolence’ (Preface to *Laon and Cythna*, p. 114). The siblings’ loving union, ultimately resulting in their souls being melded into the androgynous Form in the Temple of the Spirit, imaginatively awakens and unites ‘the common sympathies of every human breast’ (Preface to *Laon and Cythna*, p. 113). Androgyny becomes a means of dissolving distinctions in favour of the unity of the individual mind.

Laon and Cythna’s idyllic earthly existence is jeopardized when Othman’s soldiers invade the siblings’ sanctuary. Upon perceiving this unwelcome presence, Laon brandishes ‘a small knife’, eliciting Freudian readings of the scene, such as Stuart Sperry’s assertion that Laon wielding his knife and the soldiers raising their swords implies a ‘manifestly phallic’ incident that indicates Laon’s sexual maturation (3.7.59). Sperry goes on to posit that Shelley’s implementation of phallic weaponry in this scene poses that ‘aggression is the inevitable outgrowth of masculinity’.[[369]](#footnote-369) Sperry is right to note the inevitability of the scene, for Laon and Cythna’s androgynous reunification requires a violent division to precede it. The violence of this scene serves to evoke Jupiter’s slicing of the Aristophanic androgyne into two disfigured halves.[[370]](#footnote-370) Cythna’s illuminating eyes have no power to divert her brother away from attack, as Laon concedes that ‘I started to behold her’, indicating an incomplete moment (3.8.64). Distracted by the intruders, Laon’s eyes quickly move to ‘the motions of the crew’ and he slaughters three of them ‘with one impulse’ (3.10.83 and 87). This act of aggression results in a rift between Laon and Cythna’s sympathetic union, their senses are no longer synchronised and Cythna’s imploring ‘words had fallen on my unheeding ear’ (3.10.82). Though Laon’s decision to actively engage in physical force seems to disrupt the sympathetic passivity that had previously driven the poem’s events, rather, Laon’s aggression is a necessary counterpart to Cythna’s enlightened decision to remain passive, ‘calm as truth’, and allow the soldiers to abduct her (3.8.72). Had Laon heeded Cythna’s words and remained subdued, it is doubtful that the soldiers would have taken him prisoner, and he would have remained free while Cythna was made a slave. Laon’s actions ensure that his fate resembles his sister’s.

While the narrative of Canto 2 serves to introduce the purity and strength of Laon and Cythna’s bond, it also documents their seemingly ceaseless wanderings, through the ruins of past civilisations to ‘where earth and ocean meet’ (2.25.221). When the pair have not been traversing the earth, side by side, they have been sleeping entwined in each other’s arms. Canto 3 shatters this physical bond, not only by their forced separation, but also by their ensuing imprisonment. Laon is stripped naked and shackled to an exposed column overlooking the sea. Restricted of movement and incapable of sleep—‘I sought to close mine eyes, / But like the balls, their lids were stiff and stark’—incapable of any sort of physical action, Laon is forced to retreat into his mind, until his ‘brain began to fail’ and reality and temporality began to undulate with uncertainty until both of these earthly concepts become ‘dead within me’ (3.28.159-160, 3.22.190, and 3.24.209). At the fullest extent of his madness, Laon attempts an act of cannibalism, for Othman’s soldiers have left the corpses of their murdered colleagues hanging in his presence. It at first seems that there are three corpses, and that the fourth ‘very fair’ cadaver is not actually present but is instead an apparition, since Laon claims that ‘it seemed that Cythna’s ghost’ appeared atop its ‘withered form’ (3.25.221, 3.26.231, and 3.26.230). However, this overlooks the fact that while Laon killed three of the soldiers with his knife in one continuous movement, he subsequently ‘grasped a fourth by the throat’, indicating the slaughter of not three, but four men (3.10.89). Significantly, it is the ‘radiance’ of the fourth corpse’s eyes which precedes Laon’s ghastly vision of his sister. Laon’s return to sanity is predicated on his ability to reconnect with another’s eyes, and he consequently feels his spirit transposed ‘Beyond the sun, beyond the stars’, to the celestial realm of the androgynous and eternal (3.27.237). While it is true that the ensuing appearance in Canto 4 of the benevolent hermit results in Laon’s bodily rehabilitation, he is initially restored to sanity and strength by the power of empathy, of recognizing his sister’s radiant gaze in the eyes of the corpse, and later in his own reflection in a lake. Laon’s downward gaze echoes a similar scene involving the Poet of *Alastor*;[[371]](#footnote-371) however, while the Poet finds the emptiness of his own reflection, Laon sees beyond his withering mortal frame, ‘The brightest woof of genius’: Laon sees Cythna’s own eyes staring back from the mirror of his own face (4.30.265). Whereas Laon had previously been unable to ascertain his sister’s ideas, he has now become empathetically attuned to ‘The mirror of her thoughts’ (4.30.269). Baker is apt in his assertion that, at least in this instance, ‘the central agent of unification is the heroine, Cythna’ for, ‘even when she is not present,’ she is ‘a positive dynamic force, a kind of matrix of revolution’; however, it seems an oversimplification to posit that ‘Laon is a mere shadow, a bearer of news, an observer and reporter’ since he ignites his sister’s fervour for revolution and sexual emancipation.[[372]](#footnote-372) Canto 4 serves not simply to restore Laon physically, but to purge him of overt and overpowering masculinity and reshape his empathetic unity with Cythna. This is emphasised in Canto 5 by the androgynous moon ‘hanging low’ over the Golden City, casting its light upon ‘The City’s moon-lit spires and myriad lamps,’ which ‘Like stars in a sublunar sky did glow’ (5.1.2 and 5.1.6-7). Shelley seamlessly foreshadows the protagonists’ fate in this one image, where the proximity of the moon to the earth indicates Laon and Cythna’s approaching ascension from the terrestrial sphere to the realm of the eternal Temple of the Spirit, while the simile of lamps and stars recalls the dedication ‘To Mary’ in addition to the androgynous assimilation of the Woman and the Serpent of Canto 1. Laon and Cythna’s pending union and destruction are simultaneously conceived within the juxtaposition of the ‘springs of flame’ which are visible beneath the low-hanging moon’s glow (5.1.9).

Before Laon and Cythna can be re-united into androgynous wholeness, they must re-join themselves, mentally and physically. Hoeveler locates this re-joining in the ‘exact midpoint of the poem’, in Canto 6, but contends that ‘they achieve psychic and physical balance here only symbolically, briefly, tenuously’.[[373]](#footnote-373) However, their psychic reunion seems to occur prior to their sexual union, which is ‘a small part of that profound and complicated sentiment, which we call Love’ (‘A Discourse on the Manners of the Ancient Greeks’, p. 408). When Laon first beholds Cythna again, she has taken the name ‘Laone’ in an attempted reclamation of her purportedly dead brother’s name. Bonca reads Cythna’s transformation into ‘a kind of compound being’, where ‘“Laone” allows Cythna to enwomb her brother and transmute him into a sister-spirit, while at the same time he-she enables Laon, via his narrative, to enwomb his sister’. Bonca’s reading—although asserting a ‘compound being’— rejects androgyny and its ‘fusion of gender attributes and roles’ in favour of what she terms ‘imaginative transsexualism’ or ‘a crossing over from one distinctly defined gender to the other’.[[374]](#footnote-374) However, this reading maintains the binary oppositions—the categories of male and female—that Shelley seeks to dissolve through androgynous union, while also overlooking the sexual ambivalence that pervades *Laon and Cythna*. Instead, the veiled and statuesque Laone seems to recall Spenser’s Venus.

The cause why she was couered with a vele,

Was hard to know, for that her Priests the same

From peoples knowledge labour’d to concele.

But sooth it was not for womanish shame,

Nor any blemish, which the worke mote blame;

But for, they say, she hath both kinds in one,

Both male and female, both vnder one name:

She syre and mother is her selfe alone,

Begets and eke conceiues, ne needeth other none.

(*The Faerie Queene*, 4.10.41)

The structural balance that Stuart Curran praises in Laon and Cythna is evident in Laone’s appearance, which acts as a counter-weight to the appearance of the androgynous Form in Canto 1. The ‘cone of flame’ from which the Form emerges is visually echoed by the Pyramid upon which Laone sits, where her femininity—‘a female Shape upon an ivory throne’—balances the Form’s masculinity. Laone’s veil recalls Spenser’s veiled Venus, where, in both instances, the veil accentuates the Form or Shape’s sexual ambivalence. Where the Form materialises within the Temple of the Spirit—in the realm of imagination—Laone, although emitting an ethereal light, is earthbound. Shelley seems to be engaging in an early experiment with androgynous and hermaphroditic states through the Form and Laone’s doubled figurations. He may also be drawing upon ancient Greek and Roman accounts of hermaphroditism, wherein the hermaphrodite is forced to choose one sex and to alter their name to the masculine or feminine variant accordingly,[[375]](#footnote-375) or upon myths such as that of the princess Cainis who, after being raped by Poseidon, asks that he transform her into a man so that she can never again be violated. Poseidon agrees and Cainis becomes Caineus, transforming both her body and her name from the feminine into the masculine form.[[376]](#footnote-376) Cythna’s rape by Othman and her confinement in a submarine cave accord with this myth, as does her subsequent, retributive transformation albeit not from female to male but from female to sexually ambivalent or hermaphroditic Shape. Upon seeing Laone, Laon turns ‘in sickness, for a veil shrouded her countenance bright’ (5.44.396). Incapable of making eye contact with his sister, Laon is also unable to engage in mental communion with her, ‘—alone / With thoughts which none could share’ (5.44.394-395). Eyes are ‘soul-enwoven labyrinths’ that reveal the ‘deep and intricate…workings of the mind’ for Shelley, so that by veiling her eyes, Cythna denies her onlookers any possibility of intellectual communion or empathic mingling (‘A Discourse on the Manners of the Ancient Greeks’, p. 408). Unable to share each other’s gaze, much less each other’s thoughts, Cythna appears to Laon as a ‘Form’, not unlike the sculptures that surround her, while Laon feels himself become ‘a breathing corpse’, destined for a mortal death (5.44.388 and 5.45.403). Laon and Cythna cannot be reunited, despite their physical proximity to one another, until their empathetic gaze has been restored. This moment occurs in Canto 6, preceded by Laone’s triumphant speech praising the restoration of gender equality, the peaceful feast, and Laon’s return to battle with the tyrant’s soldiers. Laone rescues Laon from a certain death on the battlefield, and is finally recognised as Cythna in stanza 24 where:

the two who stood beneath that night,

Each only heard, or saw, or felt the other;

As from the lofty steed she did alight,

Cythna, (for, from the eyes whose deepest light

Of love and sadness made my lips feel pale

With influence strange of mournfullest delight,

My own sweet sister looked)

(6.24.209-215)

Shelley reunites the siblings’ senses, particularly focusing upon sight by visually centring it in line 210, offset by commas. The eyes’ goodness-giving light, synchronising Platonic extramission with innate light, reappears in line 212, where its importance is emphasized by enjambment. Shelley’s employment of synaesthesia in line 213, where Laon’s ‘lips feel pale’, serves to foreshadow the siblings’ impending deaths by implying a corpse’s pallor, while the subsequent line’s ‘mournfullest delight’ implies the simultaneous sadness of death interwoven with the ecstasy of achieving an eternal androgynous union. The siblings’ reunion of the senses culminates in the penultimate display of corporeal commingling, a scene which, according to Shelley’s preface, ‘was intended to startle the reader from the trance of ordinary life’, to ‘break through the crust of those outworn opinions on which established institutions depend’ (Preface to *Laon and Cythna*, p. 120). Read in this light, it becomes significant that the couple’s lovemaking takes place within the neglected ruins of a hall, itself once a manmade institution, now overgrown with intertwined tangles of ivy.[[377]](#footnote-377) Sperry and Bonca agree that this ‘climactic earthly union is actually, within the temporal sequence of events the work lays out, much closer to their death and reawakening in eternity’ since the ‘final erotic union in Canto XII liberates Laon and Cythna from the material bodies that obstruct their perfect commingling’; to read this scene solely as a sensuous description of lovemaking would be an error.[[378]](#footnote-378) Finch, in examining Shelley’s exploration of language and sexuality, isolates lines 290-294 for a discussion of the conveyed ‘intimate interiority which is yet above and beyond the self and its transience’, indicated in these lines by Laon gazing into Cythna’s eyes.[[379]](#footnote-379) Laon perceives ‘her dark and deepening eyes’ likened to ‘twin phantoms of one star’ (6.33.292-293). The reappearance of astral imagery indicates the couple’s mental and physical union and also foreshadows their fiery melding into one androgynous and eternal entity. The spectral imagery of ‘twin phantoms’ indicates that their androgynous amalgamation into ‘one star’ has already begun; already, their corporeal frames are preparing to dissipate. Their incestuous union shakes the chains of convention so as to shock and then stimulate the reader into a new, creative frame of mind.

Their crossing over into the realm of the eternal is made possible by Cythna’s empathetic decision to join Laon on the pyre, where:

She smiled on me, and nothing then we said,

But each upon the other’s countenance fed

Looks of insatiate love; the mighty veil

Which doth divide the living and the dead

Was almost rent, the world grew dim and pale

(12.15.130-134)

Although Baker claims that Cythna unnecessarily joined Laon ‘as a token of her love and sympathy’ this is not entirely true,[[380]](#footnote-380) for their transcendence into eternity relies upon their ‘twin stars’ becoming melded into one; additionally, Cythna’s act of empathy ignites the emotions of the onlooking civilians, whose ‘warm tears burst in spite of faith and fear’ (12.14.118). Politically, the Revolution of the Golden City is a failure. The tyrannical King Othman resumes his place on the throne and oversees the continuation of his subjects’ suppression and enslavement while Laon and Cythna’s bodies are set alight at the stake. However, in the midst of the destruction and despair, Shelley’s hope of inspiring sympathy and universal emotion in his readers is reflected in the eyes of the impassioned onlookers. The death and androgynous reunification of the protagonists is echoed in the reader’s mind by the formation of ‘a being within our being’ after ‘It creates anew the universe after it has been annihilated in our minds’ (*A Defence of Poetry*, p. 698). This new universe is one free from oppositional hierarchies of language and gender, indicated by Laon and Cythna’s mutual decision to remain speechless in their final seconds on earth, and the simultaneous dissolution of ‘I’ and ‘you’, or ‘he’ and ‘she’, into the unified, sexless ‘we’, anticipating Shelley’s claim that ‘The words *I*, *you*, *they*, are not signs of any actual difference…but are merely marks employed to denote the different modifications of the one mind’ (12.15.130; ‘On Life’, pp. 635-636).

This unification is indicative of Laon and Cythna’s freedom, and draws a close parallel to Levine’s examination of gender hierarchy, in which she reveals that ‘[f]reedom thus meant not an escape from all constraints, but a strategic deployment of the allied pair’.[[381]](#footnote-381) The alliance is implicated by the switch from singular to plural pronouns, thereby not escaping from or destroying language and gender altogether, but finding a space to exist in unity and equality. In the case of Laon and Cythna, this space is portrayed by the siblings’ ascension to the Temple of the Spirit, and in the intervening moment when their boat reaches its destination, but before they have disembarked:

The torrent of that wide and raging river

Is past, and our aërial speed suspended.

We look behind; a golden mist did quiver

When its wild surges with the lake were blended:

Our bark hung there, as on a line suspended

Between two heavens, that windless waveless lake;

(12.40.352-357)

Temporality and the very essence of being become blended and suspended in this moment of mediation. The ethereal landscape, previously described by scenes of rapid movement and fluctuations of light, sound, and colour, seems to stand still all at once. Natural forces of action, the wind and the waves, cease to move. By becoming lovingly unified, Laon and Cythna have achieved a power over their environment, indicated not only by stillness but also by Shelley’s use of the past tense, of a landscape that ‘did quiver’ and was ‘blended’. Contrastingly, Laon and Cythna’s actions are described in the present tense, endowing them with the ability to stand, and turn, and gaze around their motionless surroundings. The sense of sight that has hereto served as a locus of sympathy and union now also binds together past and present, ensuring a changed future. Michael J. Neth’s observation that Shelley’s imaginative revolution depends upon the ability ‘to *re-vise* (revisit, look back) and rewrite the past’ seem apt, in order ‘to alter the course of the future in the mundane world’ (author’s emphasis).[[382]](#footnote-382) Laon and Cythna ‘look behind’, seeing the events that have lead them to this space, ‘Between two heavens’, and thus ensuring the memory and repetition of their story through their soon to be unified ‘oracular mind’ (1.59.529).

The dedication ‘To Mary’ serves as an instruction to the experiment that is the poem, where Shelley and Mary’s sympathetic reunion is produced by Laon and Cythna’s textual union. In this way, the poet evades the strictures of didacticism by adopting a means of subtle instruction from Plato. Shelley’s repetition of the sympathetic gaze within each stage of *Laon and Cythna*, from the dedication ‘To Mary’ to the battle between the Eagle and the Serpent, and from the Woman’s interaction with the Narrator to Laon and Cythna’s deaths upon the pyre, all seem to engage the inward-seeking Platonic soul, which in the *Phaedo* ‘is divine, immortal, intelligible, uniform, indissoluble, unvarying, and constant in relation to itself’.[[383]](#footnote-383) Marlon B. Ross writes that, following Laon and Cythna’s apparently failed revolution and their immolation, ‘[r]evolutionary desire itself becomes hypostatized, stripped of its fundamental temporality, and made into a Platonic form of potentiality, existing in a state of stasis rather than in a process of becoming’.[[384]](#footnote-384) The singularity of the ‘monoeidic’ soul, like the ‘individual mind’ of the poem’s preface, is ultimately reflected by the reappearance of the pronoun ‘I’ in the culminating stanza of the poem, where it indicates Laon and Cythna’s reunion into the androgynous Form, where ‘Form’ is weighted with a cognate Platonism, within the shining moon-like Temple of the Spirit. Through its allusiveness and implication of poets and readers in its narrative, *Laon and Cythna* becomes approximated to the ‘episodes of that cyclic poem written by Time upon the memories of men’ (*A Defence of Poetry*, p. 688). The poem’s reader, drawn into the text through the Narrator of Canto 1, sees into the poet’s ‘oracular mind’ and animates Laon and Cythna who ‘woke / Memories which found a tongue’ (1.59.529 and 1.60.539-540). ‘Glances of soul-dissolving glory’ (1.60.538) are shared between Laon and Cythna, and by extension between poet(s) and reader(s), as Shelley’s work to dissolve binaries across the text extends outwards and through time.

**Chapter Three: Androgyny as Mental Revolution in *Prometheus Unbound***

*Prometheus Unbound* is the apotheosis of Shelley’s revolutionary aesthetic. The lyrical drama sees the poet testing androgyny as a ‘psychic unity’,[[385]](#footnote-385) or a mental compact with the reader, in order to encourage and embody the dissolution of hierarchical forms of thought. These hierarchical constructs include the binaries of poet and reader, man and woman, and also original composition and translation. The final act of the drama witnesses its revolutionised universe becoming harmonised in collective unity: the ‘All’ that responds to Demogorgon and exalts ‘Man, oh, not men! a chain of linked thought’ (4.394).[[386]](#footnote-386) Shelley’s reimagining of ‘Man’ as ‘one harmonious soul of many a soul, / Whose nature is its own divine control’ frees ‘Man’ from its masculine connotations, positing instead a unified and ungendered soul indicated by the neuter pronoun ‘it’ (4.400-401). ‘No signifier can be radically representative, for every signifier is the site of a perpetual *méconnaisance*’, Judith Butler writes, ‘it produces the expectation of a unity, a full and final recognition that can never be achieved’; and yet, this failure is paradoxically ‘what opens the signifier to new meanings and new possibilities for political resignification’, ultimately allowing for ‘a radical democratic notion of futurity’.[[387]](#footnote-387) Resignification is precisely what Shelley aims to arouse in his readership’s collectively unified mind. In reimagining ‘Man’ as freed from the word’s patriarchal and hierarchical connotations, Shelley promotes the reader’s active participation in poesis by putting into practice the expressions of the poet’s mind which ‘communicates itself to others, and gathers a sort of reduplication from that community’ (*A Defence of Poetry*, p. 676). In the lyrical drama, Prometheus and Asia’s androgynous reunion gives way to the harmonious mingling of Act 4, where the Earth and Moon’s reciprocal interpenetration promotes an imagined universe freed from the constraints imposed by the gender binary. The androgynous union that pervades *Prometheus Unbound* is inclusive of the poet and reader’s mental mingling through what Ross Wilson terms ‘interanimation’, wherein ‘the poem only lives in the reader’s reading, but that, at the same time, the reader is brought more fully to life by the poem’.[[388]](#footnote-388) Androgyny, embodied by poetry, vitalises self and Other through the poet and reader’s shared utopian vision of an imaged universe freed from hierarchical constructs.

*Prometheus Unbound*, following Shelley’s translation of Aeschylus’ *Prometheus Bound* in July 1817, is composed immediately after his translation of Plato’s *Symposium* into *The Banquet* in July 1818. In assuming the doubled state of reader-cum-creator through the act of translating Plato’s work, with Plato cast as ‘essentially a poet’ (*A Defence of Poetry*, p. 679), Shelley envisages a similar psychic union between himself and the reader of his text, where ‘Every man’s mind…is the mirror upon which all forms are reflected, and in which they compose one form’ (Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, pp. 231-232). *The Banquet* equips Shelley with the construction of androgyny as a mental compact between poet and reader, constituting this Platonically-inflected ‘one form’.[[389]](#footnote-389) Where Laon and Cythna’s union into the androgynous Form in the Temple of the Spirit images Shelley’s most explicit example of androgyny as a symbol of revolution, *Prometheus Unbound* strives, through its polyphonic universe, to implicate the reader in its unbinding of hierarchical constructs. It does this in no small part through Plato’s example of ‘kindl[ing] a harmony in thoughts divested of shape and action’ and thereby rejecting ‘determinate forms’ (*A Defence of Poetry*, p. 679); *Prometheus Unbound*’s composite form of ‘lyrical drama’ strives to combine the poet’s lyrical subjectivity with the dramatic audience’s collective subjectivity, refusing dramatic action within the text in favour of the intersubjective activity of the poet and reader’s harmonised mind. Improving upon the epic aims of *Laon and Cythna*, *Prometheus Unbound* is epic in its ability to ‘elevate and transform not oneself but the collective audience’, sharing in, as Stephen C. Behrendt notes, the aims of ‘epic art’.[[390]](#footnote-390) Declaring that ‘Didactic poetry is my abhorrence’ (Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, p. 232), Shelley shifts from showing his reader how change may be achieved in society, as in *Laon and Cythna*, to instead subtly encouraging the reader’s mind to work alongside his own, as Coleridge encourages his ideal readers to ‘think[ing] with the author’.[[391]](#footnote-391) In doing so, poet and reader become psychically unified and capable of imagining the same revolutionary vision as androgyny harmonises self and Other. Starting from Ross Woodman’s assertion that ‘[t]he androgyne [is] the archetype of social, moral, and political revolution’ in *Prometheus Unbound*,[[392]](#footnote-392) I will expand this claim to reveal how Shelley uses androgyny as strategy for enacting a mental revolution that is inclusive of his readership. *Prometheus Unbound* extends *Laon and Cythna*’s interest in reconciling binary oppositions in order to promote sexual equality through androgyny, and this aim is also carried through *The Banquet* wherein Shelley’s deliberate ‘confusion of genders’ emphasises his desire for ‘a gender-equal readership’, as Benjamin Sudarsky has it.[[393]](#footnote-393) But making two classes of genders equal still preserves their binary division; instead, Shelley’s ungendering of ‘the beautiful’ in *The Banquet* underscores the genderlessness of Plato’s Forms while also recalling his desire in 1812 for ‘a future state of being’ wherein ‘these detestable distinctions [of male and female] will surely be abolished’ (*PBS Letters*, I, p. 195).[[394]](#footnote-394) *Prometheus Unbound* tests androgyny as a process that dissolves the distinctions between male and female, and between poet and reader, through ‘Love, which found a worthy poet in Plato alone of all the ancients’ and whose ‘music has penetrated the caverns of society’ (*A Defence of Poetry*, p. 691). Harmony and lyricism accompany androgynous union in *Prometheus Unbound*, as Prometheus and Asia’s union models the androgynous perfection that the renovated universe of Act 4 extends to all of the poem’s participants, where the demarcations between hierarchical ‘classes’ dissolve into union.[[395]](#footnote-395)

While *Laon and Cythna* depicts androgyny as a process occurring dramatically within the limits of the text, *Prometheus Unbound* involves the reader in the process of androgyny as a ‘psychic unity’ in what Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi describes as being ‘either potential or actual, conceived as existing in all individuals’.[[396]](#footnote-396) Shelley expands the limits of a conception of androgyny to encompass not simply a reunion of male and female halves, but the Aristophanic unification of disparate selves, making the process initially presented in *Laon and Cythna* now include the relationship between the reader and the poet. His earlier epic tracks the process of androgyny where *Prometheus Unbound* presents an achieved union. *Prometheus Unbound* ultimately recasts *Laon and Cythna*’s attempt at evoking human sympathy by requiring the reader’s participation in the text to enact the union of its co-equal protagonists, Prometheus and Asia. This reunion, the motivating force of action in *Prometheus Unbound*, occurs offstage, so to speak, in the reader’s mind. It consequently achieves androgyny in a way *Laon and Cythna* cannot, for Laon acts as the narrator for much of the epic poem, often recounting Cythna’s words to the reader and thus depriving the work of feminine subjectivity. *Prometheus Unbound* corrects this through its introduction of Panthea and Ione, female characters serving as intermediaries between Asia and Prometheus, and also between the poet and the reader. Panthea and Ione do not act as diminutions of Asia and Prometheus, but rather imitate Diotima’s daemonic love at the centre of the *Symposium* who ‘“fills up that intermediate space between…two classes of beings, so as to bind together…the whole universe of things”’ (*The Banquet*, p. 442).[[397]](#footnote-397) In *Prometheus Unbound*, androgyny is achieved through the union of Prometheus and Asia and, by extension through Panthea and Ione, the mental meeting of the poet and the reader.

*Prometheus Unbound* seeks to open a psychological dialogue between the poet and the reader in an effort to reveal that the ‘great secret of morals is Love; or a going out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action or person, not our own’ (*A Defence of Poetry*, p. 682). Love functions as the force propelling androgyny through its encouragement of identification, or union, with an Other. In Shelley’s poetry of revolution, this revelatory communication between poet and reader is achieved ‘through a combination of theme and structure’, Marlon B. Ross notes, ‘in which characters are embedded in the text to serve as model readers’.[[398]](#footnote-398) The characters most clearly serving this purpose are Panthea and Ione, who through their dissolving and merging dialogues Ross Wilson observes as performing a ‘dramatisation’ of ‘interanimation’, a term he employs to describe the sense of reciprocity in which ‘the poem only lives in the reader’s reading, but that, at the same time, the reader is brought more fully to life by the poem’.[[399]](#footnote-399) Love, by ‘going out’, flows ceaselessly between the poet and reader in moments of this ‘interanimation’, and becomes exceptionally androgynous in the orgiastic scene of merging between Asia, Panthea, and Prometheus in Act 2, in what Teddi Lynn Chichester labels ‘Shelley’s greatest—and sexiest—love scene’.[[400]](#footnote-400) This amorous event is psychological rather than physical, as it occurs in Panthea’s dream, where she perceives the feminine Prometheus’ ‘soft and flowing limbs, / And passion-parted lips’ enfold her in an atmosphere of ‘all-dissolving power’ (2.1.72-73 and 76). Panthea and Prometheus are ‘condensed’ into one being, while Asia’s name resounds above a cacophony of sound, enveloping her into this wholly androgynous form (2.1.86). As this scene reveals, androgyny becomes Shelley’s primary strategy to embody the revolutionary reciprocity between reader and poet in *Prometheus Unbound*.

Building on *Laon and Cythna*’s earlier attempt to create a portrait of empathetic identification as a process occurring within the narrative limits of the text, *Prometheus Unbound* implements and expands this process with greater success. In his lyrical drama, Shelley promotes the characters’ ability to identify with one another as a means of imaging the transference of empathy between poet and reader. *Prometheus Unbound*’s Panthea and Ione serve a similar purpose to *Laon and Cythna*’s Narrator by involving the reader in the text. While the Narrator of the earlier poem saw the work as grounded in his ‘place and time’ by proclaiming that ‘the last hope of trampled France had failed’ (*A Defence of Poetry*, p. 682 and *Laon and Cythna* 1.1.1),[[401]](#footnote-401) Panthea’s name, ‘the *panthea*, the goddess partaking of the qualities of all the other deities’,[[402]](#footnote-402) implies a more universal bent to both the character and the work. She and her sister Ione transport the reader throughout the text, engaged in a dialogue wherein they convey their observations to one another, mirroring the simultaneously receptive and creative nature of the ideal reader. Their dialogue transcends the spoken word in a manner that Ellen Brown Herson terms ‘elemental synaesthesia’, which she defines as ‘a projection of the senses through phenomena onto the elements’.[[403]](#footnote-403) *Prometheus Unbound* encourages the reader’s mental dexterity, requiring them to make leaps through an imaginative universe, while the boundaries and hierarchies implicit in language are challenged and surmounted. Thoughts, spoken words, and actions are interchangeable, emphasising the poet’s assertion that ‘the existence of distinct individual minds’ is ultimately a ‘delusion’ (‘On Life’, p. 635). Demarcations of form soften and become pliable in this space of collaborative creativity where ‘[poetry] subdues under its light yoke all irreconcilable things’ (*A Defence of Poetry*, p. 698). This ‘light yoke’ offers a form without forcing divisions and promotes a psychic union between characters, and by extension, between poet and reader, that is intrinsically androgynous, in that it melds together two disparate entities. Poetry becomes a space, like Prometheus and Asia’s cave, unhinged from time, ‘Where we will sit and talk of time and change, / As the world ebbs and flows, ourselves unchanged’ through which the poet and the reader may imaginatively merge (3.3.23-24). The spatial divide between Prometheus, bound to the Caucasus precipice, and Asia, exiled in a vale below, mirrors the spatial and temporal gap between the poet and the reader. Panthea’s ability to traverse the gaps between the lover and beloved is reflective of the reader’s ability to mentally reunite the divided pair, where the reunion of Prometheus, who embodies ideals of compassion and pity, and Asia, a goddess of love, becomes a common aim towards moral good in the minds of the poet and the reader.

Shelley’s belief in the ability of love and the imagination to combine into one empowered androgynous force is evident, years before composing *Laon and Cythna* and *Prometheus Unbound*, from his letter to Mary in 1814:

How divinely sweet a task it is to imitate each others [*sic*] excellencies—& each moment to become wiser in this surpassing love—so that constituting but one being, all real knowledge may be comprised in the maxim γνῶθι σεαυτόν, (know thyself) with infinitely more justice than in its narrow & common application.

(*PBS Letters*, I, p. 414)[[404]](#footnote-404)

*Prometheus Unbound* enacts this same desire of the poet to androgynously amalgamate—‘constituting but one being’—with his intimate audience, in order for all involved parties to ‘become wiser in this surpassing love’. Mary Shelley communicates her awareness of her husband’s desire to engage with an empathetic audience in her ‘Note on *Prometheus Unbound*’, wherein she writes that the lyrical drama

requires a mind as subtle and penetrating as his own to understand the mystic meanings scattered throughout the poem. They elude the ordinary reader by their abstraction and delicacy of distinction, but they are far from vague.[[405]](#footnote-405)

Shelley and Mary, although divided, nonetheless maintain an empathetic correspondence through the juxtaposition of his letter and her notes. They each ‘imitate each others [*sic*] excellencies’, alternating between the roles of reader and writer, and in doing so, both encourage the creative engagement of their audiences. ‘In Shelley’s view’, Behrendt writes, ‘readers must, ideally, extend this love first to the authors they read, in a gesture of charity and friendship that reciprocates the author’s own gesture of giving, of sharing’ so that Mary, through her position as reader, transcriber, collaborator, and, ultimately, editor reciprocates and extends Shelley’s ‘invitation to the mutually creative interpersonal activity implied by the acts of writing and reading’.[[406]](#footnote-406) Mary’s prototypical relationship with Shelley as ideal reader, made explicit in *Laon and Cythna*, is extended outside of the pair’s relationship, and outside of time, to include the collective imagination of all readers.

Although divided, Prometheus and Asia appear in the text already acting as a psychically unified, and therefore androgynous, whole. The couple’s union would seem to predicate equality; however, this is a point that several critics overlook or deny. For instance, Tilottama Rajan asserts that Asia ‘must be seen psychologically as a force within Prometheus’ while Ross Woodman defines the pair’s androgyny as ‘the feminine deity inhabiting the unconscious constellated for a moment in a male consciousness’.[[407]](#footnote-407) These readings presuppose a hierarchy of dominance and subservience, activity and passivity, rather than both parties being equally empowered. But Asia and Prometheus are mutually dependent upon one another; one cannot inhabit or possess the other. Early in Act 1, Prometheus, in his disoriented state, is able to recall how he ‘wandered once / With Asia, drinking life from her loved eyes’ (1.122-23), and Panthea later reminds Prometheus that ‘the ether / Of her [Asia’s] transforming presence…would fade / If it were mingled not with thine’ (1.831-33). This enmeshment is reminiscent of Marlon B. Ross’s theory of absorption and adsorption, which he employs to analyse Coleridge’s ‘To William Wordsworth’, but which is also pertinent to the examination of human relationships in Shelley’s works. Ross explains that absorption and adsorption, unlike passivity and activity, are ‘different conceptions of the same process’ where ‘[t]he harder intrusive agent…permeates the softer one, overpowering the medium by adding to itself (adsorption) can also be seen as the inverse: the taking in of the harder agent by the softer medium (absorption)’.[[408]](#footnote-408) The two concepts, through influencing one another, are in harmony. When one power asserts itself, such as when Cythna takes up Laon’s task of freeing women from their enslavement, or when Prometheus calls out for Asia and, in doing so, propels Panthea into action, the other power is receptive. Receptivity is a deliberate action. Asia and Prometheus’ relationship, propelled by the harmony between absorption and adsorption, anticipates *Epipsychidion*’s depiction of ‘One passion in twin-hearts’ that is ‘Burning, yet ever inconsumable: / In one another’s substance finding food’ (*Epipsychidion*, 575 and 579-80). Each one is nourishment for the other and their intertwinement forms a self-sustaining whole. The two are equal because they are mutually dependent upon one another for life.

Woodman recognizes that Prometheus, on his own, is incapable of creating real change: ‘He must, instead, withdraw completely from his own limited maleness to permit the unknown female to assume control’.[[409]](#footnote-409) This reading, while acknowledging that action relies upon the pair rather than the individual, nevertheless maintains that Prometheus is in total control at all times. Because Prometheus makes the decision to ‘permit’ Asia to ‘assume control’, he maintains authority while Asia’s control is simply performative. Woodman’s androgyne, defined as ‘man’s…unending union with his own feminine nature’,[[410]](#footnote-410) is far from a creature of equal substance because its union maintains a hierarchy of power. This view of Prometheus and Asia’s relationship upholds Caroline Levine’s definition of gender as ‘an organizing principle by which social groups come to be organized into a hierarchy, one high and one low, one wielding power and the other coerced into service’.[[411]](#footnote-411) Levine maintains that gender’s power lies in its simplicity and transportability across time, space, and spheres. The aim of *Prometheus Unbound*, then, is to resist hierarchal forms by encouraging this power to operate equally rather than divisively. In the poem’s preface, Shelley describes the electrifying capacity of ‘The cloud of mind’, a singular force composed of a myriad of molecules, capable of achieving ‘equilibrium between institutions and opinions’ (Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, p. 231). This instance of ‘elemental synaesthesia’ emphasises the poet’s conviction in the ability of the collective imagination, ‘the source and power of progress’,[[412]](#footnote-412) to revolutionise the world. Shelley’s vision of poetry as a ‘light yoke’ is in itself an ‘organizing principle’, one which is androgynous in its ability to ‘subdue’ and equate rather than negate differences. The distinctions between maleness and femaleness which Woodman perceives as being ‘limited’ hold power in their constrained simplicity, and are necessary for an androgynous union to occur ‘so that one should be made out of two’ (*The Banquet*, p. 432). The androgynous form is an entity defined by its doubleness. Rather than one inhabiting or controlling the other, the two halves are united by their rectifying capacity to merge into one: to adsorb and absorb in synchronicity. One is limited by the other only in that without their harmonisation action is impossible.

The action in *Prometheus Unbound* seems elusive to critics who approach the text as pure drama. However, the action should be understood as being performed collaboratively by the reader and the poet in the union of their imaginations. Milton Wilson, for example, perceives the work as being ‘static’, and claims that ‘its only dramatic act occurs in Prometheus’ opening speech. The drama, per se, is over before it has begun’.[[413]](#footnote-413) When the lyrical drama is examined while considering androgyny as Shelley’s subversive strategy, it shows that the poet ‘empowers chiasmus as the source of energy and change’, and he does this through what William A. Ulmer terms ‘the erotic double as antitype, or other’.[[414]](#footnote-414) Considering that love is the moral centre of the poet’s revolutionised universe, it seems appropriate that the chiastic action of the drama hinges upon this empathetic emotion. While Wilson considers the climax of the drama to occur in Act 1 with Prometheus’ recalling of his curse, Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi and Stuart Curran maintain the view that ‘the turning point of the play occur[s] at Asia’s meeting with Demogorgon’ in Act 2.[[415]](#footnote-415) By employing Ulmer’s notion of chiasmus as the force of energy, we can see that action occurs reflexively in both Acts 1 and 2, where it is produced by the power of love.

In Act 1, Prometheus is visited by a Chorus of Spirits, each one communicating a vision of love. The Chorus of Spirits represents the dormant power residing in the readers’ collective imagination where ‘The cloud of mind’ is indicated by their ‘cloudlike’ presence:

Voyaging cloudlike and unpent

Through the boundless element:

Thence we bear the prophecy

Which begins and ends in thee!

(1.688-691)

In considering a similar instance of end rhyme in Pope’s *Rape of the Lock*, Simon Jarvis describes this seemingly simplistic rhyming as ‘a kind of prosodic weather formation gathering in the poet’s peculiar handling of verbal music’. These ‘clouds’ or ‘phonotextual clusters’, as Jarvis terms them, appear in the Spirits’ speech as the repeated ‘e’ of lines 688-689 and the repeated ‘i’ of lines 690-691, and function for Jarvis as a ‘prosodic idiom, a widely understood convention of response which poets and readers can become used to manipulating’. These bear a reciprocal quality in that the poet’s performance of these ‘prosodic idioms’ ‘calls for an answering performance from the reader’.[[416]](#footnote-416) The poet ‘bear[s] the prophecy’ that he seeks to instil in his readership while it is ultimately up to the reader to ‘begin’ or ‘end’ their mental revolution. Prometheus’ receptivity to the succession of Spirits demonstrates the reaction that the poet hopes to receive from his audience. Prometheus and the reader are both drawn deeper into understanding love’s revolutionary potential with each Spirit’s speech. The beauty of the Spirits’ language intensifies with each successive speech and casts a dizzying spell over Panthea and Ione. Laura Wells Betz discusses Shelley’s use of ‘poetic spell-casting’ as an effort to ‘overwhelm the reader with a physical experience of the text, but also, crucially, to instill the drama’s primary revolutionary values in the reader through the dynamics of sensory language’.[[417]](#footnote-417) Betz argues that Act 1 ‘constructs a negative model of spell-casting’ through its depiction of Jupiter’s tyranny, although she misattributes the Chorus of Furies’ negativity to the Chorus of Spirits.[[418]](#footnote-418) While the Chorus of Furies casts a negative spell over Prometheus, the Chorus of Spirits benevolently guides Prometheus to a space of hope where the potential for love remains. Love, in Shelley’s work, is bound up with androgyny, as it is the motivating force driving two to become one. This concept, indebted to the poet’s reading of Plato’s *Symposium* and translation into *The Banquet*, is described in depth in the essay ‘On Love’ where love is the sensation of ‘another’s nerves…vibrat[ing] to our own, that the beams of their eyes should kindle at once and mix and melt into our own’ (‘On Love’, p. 631). In *The Banquet*, the divided lover seeks to ‘mix and melt and to be melted together with his beloved, so that one should be made out of two’ (*The Banquet*, p. 432). Prometheus’ closing remark in Act 1 that ‘all hope [is] vain but love’ (1.824) is also an admission of androgyny’s ability to sustain hope, by extending one’s thoughts, ‘the airy children of our brain’, to another, where they are ‘born anew’ (‘On Love’, p. 631).

Extending Betz’s concept of the overwhelming sensations produced through ‘poetic spell-casting’, Shelley uses the appearance of the Chorus of Spirits to mark the turn between the unfolding dramatic events and the reader’s initiation into the poet’s creative sphere. Prior to the Chorus of Spirits’ appearance, the reader has been an observer of the drama’s action: Prometheus’ recalling of his curse. The Chorus of Furies’ grim narration of mankind’s fall offers no hope for the future: ‘Past ages crowd on thee, but each one remembers, / And the future is dark, and the present is spread / Like a pillow of thorns for thy slumberless head’ (1.561-563). The failures of history and religion swarm upon Prometheus, until the Earth summons forth the Chorus of Spirits ‘Whose homes are the dim caves of human thought’: the realm of the imagination (1.659). Prometheus, who has been forced to gaze upon history’s misery, is now offered the chance to ‘behold / Beyond that twilight realm, as in a glass, / The future’ (1.661-663). Panthea and Ione’s cries to look ‘And see!’ (1.666) direct the reader’s attention away from the past and toward the possibilities of a future where minds are aligned under the ‘light yoke’ of imagination.

The captivating quality of the Spirits’ language is indicated by the dramatic increase in rhythm and intensity of imagery. The First Spirit’s speech is composed in neat lines of iambic pentameter and employs repetition to emphasise a scene of physical movement, where it ‘fled hither, fast, fast, fast / ’Mid the darkness upward cast’ (1.695-696). The contrast between the intentional action of ‘fle[eing] hither’ and the forced movement of being propelled, ‘upward cast’, by an external presence recalls Ross’s theory of absorption and adsorption, where two seemingly imbalanced forces are actively engaged in equal participation.[[419]](#footnote-419) Here, the two forces are the poet and the reader’s imaginations, the first propelling the other forward and the second urging it to take flight. To assist the reader in understanding the nuances of ‘abstraction and delicacy of distinction’ that the poem employs,[[420]](#footnote-420) Shelley intentionally simplifies the imagery of the First Spirit’s speech. Like the prefatory scene of *Laon and Cythna*, the First Spirit’s speech similarly recalls a revolutionary battle, coloured by ‘a battle-trumpet’s blast’ and ‘the tyrant’s banner torn’ (1.694 and 1.698). Where the specificity of his allusion to the failed French Revolution in *Laon and Cythna* impedes the reader’s power to imagine the events of the poem outside of time, Shelley purposefully maintains an air of ambiguity around this battle scene, where the revolutionaries are notably victorious. Additionally, the revolutionaries are resolutely united in their cause. Shelley indicates this harmony by overlaying singular and plural verb formations: ‘There was mingled many a cry—’ (1.700). The multitude of voices roll together into ‘many a cry’—an ambiguously singular and plural phrase—that is suggestive of the androgynous cast of the poetry. In the following lines, the revolutionaries’ shouts become amalgamated into one disembodied sound, no longer emanating from individual human mouths but pouring forth from all directions:

And one sound above, around,

One sound beneath, around, above,

Was moving; ’twas the soul of love;

‘Twas the hope, the prophecy,

Which begins and ends in thee.

(1.703-707)

The ‘soul of love’ resonates ‘above, around’ and again ‘beneath, around, above’. The repetition of these lines emphasises the cyclical, ever returning ‘prophecy, / Which begins and ends in thee’. The spinning layers of repetition in these lines have a captivating and disorientating effect on the reader, so as to ready them before entering the sphere of imagination. The simple rhyme makes this transition comfortable, and prepares the reader for the increasing complexity of each succeeding speech. ‘The cloud of mind’ reappears in the Second Spirit’s speech, where it is portrayed negatively, having been corrupted by violence and opposition:

And the triumphant storm did flee,

Like a conqueror, swift and proud,

Between, with many a captive cloud,

A shapeless, dark and rapid crowd,

Each by lightning riven in half:

I heard the thunder hoarsely laugh.

(1.710-715)

Here, the revolutionary leader is no different from ‘a conqueror’, forcibly capturing rather than guiding and empowering minds. The Second Spirit reveals that revolutions lacking a shared vision are doomed to fail, but not without reminding us that the spirit of love lives on, here represented by the selfless act of sympathy of ‘one who gave an enemy / His plank, then plunged aside to die’ (1.721-722). In the Third Spirit’s speech, the reader is finally raised into the imaginative sphere. Sound, which dominated the previous two speeches, gives way to sight. Recalling Ianthe’s out of body experience in *Queen Mab*, where ‘Sudden arose / Ianthe’s Soul’ while ‘Upon the couch [her] body lay / Wrapt in the depth of slumber’ (*Queen Mab*, 1.130-131 and 1.139-140), the reader peers upon their sleeping self in the form of the sage, recently satiated by a book near his bed. The imagination is described in torch-bearing Promethean terms, as ‘a Dream with plumes of flame’ (1.726). Now equipped with the powers of love, sympathy, and the imagination, the Fourth Spirit demonstrates how the poet can use these forces to create ‘Forms more real than living man, / Nurslings of immortality!’ (1.748-749). The Fourth Spirit additionally offers what Gelpi describes as the ‘ambiguous, bisexual’ image of ‘bees i’ the ivy-bloom’ (1.745), which, in their ‘creative—but non-genital—merging’ enact both an androgynous and propagating process.[[421]](#footnote-421) This solitary poet who ‘watch[es] from dawn to gloom’ (1.743) recalls the Poet of *Alastor*, who ‘ever gazed / And gazed’ (125-126); however, while the Poet of *Alastor* meets an ‘untimely tomb’ (50) and perishes in solitude, the Fourth Spirit’s poet ‘seeks nor finds he mortal blisses’ (1.740), and is sustained by his own thoughts. He engages in a similarly ‘creative—but non-genital—merging’ by ‘feed[ing] on the aerial kisses / Of shapes that haunt thought’s wildernesses’ (1.741-742), and producing the immortal forms of poetic ideas.

Following the Fourth Spirit’s speech, Ione catches sight of ‘two shapes’ descending from the sky:

Behold’st thou not two shapes from the east and west

Come, as two doves to one beloved nest,

Twin nurslings of the all-sustaining air,

On swift still wings glide down the atmosphere?

And hark! their sweet, sad voices! ‘tis despair

Mingled with love and then dissolved in sound.

(1.752-757)

This scene recalls Shelley’s depiction of the ‘androgynous ideal, a perfect union of the male and female sexes’ in Canto 1 of *Laon and Cythna*,[[422]](#footnote-422) where:

two glittering lights were seen to glide

In circles on the amethystine floor,

Small serpent eyes trailing from side to side,

Like meteors on a river’s grassy shore,

They round each other rolled, dilating more

And more—then rose, commingling into one

(*Laon and Cythna*, 1.56.496-501)

In *Laon and Cythna*, the mingled lights give substance to ‘a Form’ which Shelley designates with a male pronoun but describes as sensually feminine: ‘Fairer than tongue can speak or thought may frame, / The radiance of whose limbs rose-like and warm / Flowed forth, and did with softest light inform’ (*Laon and Cythna*, 1.57.507-509). However, the androgynous entity that Ione perceives is described more subtly. The idea of two becoming one is repeated both within the image of ‘two doves to one beloved nest’ and later when ‘Their soft smiles light the air like a star’s fire’ (1.762), where the singularity of the star indicates unity between the two floating shapes. Ambiguity pervades *Prometheus Unbound* in order to encourage the reader’s imagination to participate in the act of co-creation that drives the drama’s action from this point onward. ‘Hast thou beheld the form of Love?’ (1.763), the Chorus of Spirits rhetorically enquires. The absence of a reply insinuates that this question is directed to the reader; by engaging with the reader directly, the poet ensures their imaginative participation in the text.

Having allowed the reader space to imaginatively respond to the Chorus of Spirits, the poet is able to give shape to the ‘form of Love’ within the Fifth Spirit’s speech. The form is described as ‘That planet-crested shape’ that is ‘Scattering the liquid joy of life from his ambrosial tresses’ (1.766-767). Recalling the androgynous Form in *Laon and Cythna*, this form is also imbued with a masculine pronoun while being described as feminine in appearance. Zachary Leader and Michael O’Neill describe the ‘form of Love’ as ‘wear[ing] the crest of Venus’, a goddess equated to Asia.[[423]](#footnote-423) The ‘form of Love’ is androgynous, being composed of equal portions of Prometheus and Asia. This androgynous conception of love is bound up with Shelley’s intellectual activity contemporaneous with *Prometheus Unbound*. The form of Love occupies an intermediary space between the heavens and earth, at once sweeping past ‘on lightning-braided pinions’, and yet also leaving ‘footsteps’ that ‘paved the world with light’ (1.766; 768). Moving on both wings and feet enables it to mediate between the sky above and the earth’s surface below, yet, by remaining a ‘shape’ rather than a bodied entity, it maintains its ethereality while touching ‘the world with light’. This depiction echoes Agathon’s vision of love in the *Symposium*, wherein ‘the winged Love rests not in his flight on any form’, for he is ‘moist and liquid’ (*The Banquet*, p. 435). Agathon concludes his speech on Love’s divine goodness, its ‘overflowing sympathy’, by proclaiming that it is the god ‘in whose footsteps everyone ought to follow’ (*The Banquet*, p. 437). This is significant, not only because ‘[t]he single most important source for Shelley’s treatment of love was Plato’s *Symposium*’,[[424]](#footnote-424) but also because the Sixth Spirit’s speech explicitly ‘[d]raws on Plato’s *Symposium*’ in its description of Love’s ‘soft and busy feet’ (1.777). Timothy Webb also observes that ‘[t]his is one of the most remarkable examples of the direct influence of Shelley’s reading and translation of Plato’.[[425]](#footnote-425) It is not only this allusion, but, as shown above, the speech of the Fifth Spirit as well as the entirety of the Sixth Spirit’s speech that recalls the *Symposium*. For instance, the Sixth Spirit’s description of ‘[t]he tender hopes which in their hearts the best and gentlest bear’ (1.775) is resonant of Agathon’s assertion that Love has ‘established his habitation within the souls and inmost nature of Gods and men; not indeed in all souls—for wherever he chances to find a hard and rugged disposition, there he will not inhabit, but only where is most soft and tender’ (*The Banquet*, p. 435). Shelley hopes that his poetry, like love, will find communion with the morally good element of his readership, writing that his ‘purpose has hitherto been simply to familiarize the highly refined imagination of the more select classes of poetical readers with the beautiful idealisms of moral excellence’ (Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, p. 232). If Shelley’s poetry up until this point has aimed at familiarising his readership with ‘the beautiful idealisms of moral excellence’, then *Prometheus Unbound* grants them the autonomy to recognise these ideals. The Chorus of Spirits departs without offering Prometheus clear guidance on how the prophecy will be fulfilled, and yet, their visions of love instil him with hope for the future. The empathetic reader is similarly empowered by the imaginative exercise the Spirits have provided, and feels, like Panthea, that:

Only a sense

Remains of them, like the omnipotence

Of music, when the inspired voice and lute

Languish, ere yet the responses are mute

Which through the deep and labyrinthine soul,

Like echoes through long caverns, wind and roll.

(1.802-807)

The Spirits’ voices resonate in Panthea’s mind, allowing the reader to recognise how the poet’s words are similarly sustained within their own mind, and accentuating the lyrical quality of the poem. The harmony inherent in *Prometheus Unbound* is emphasised by how the Chorus erupts into song, with Shelley imaging a mass of voices rising, falling, and echoing in unison. Such music encourages the listener’s involvement, either through sound or in mute response. ‘[T]he omnipotence / Of music’ represents the poet’s own all-seeing, omnipotent nature: ‘he beholds the future in the present’ (*A Defence of Poetry*, p. 677). The lines he sends forth into the universe at this moment are not tethered to time, so long as the work continues to come into contact with a receptive readership. The limits of the text are extended through contact with the empathetic reader, whose ‘deep and labyrinthine soul’ offers an unending space for imaginative co-creation; Shelley’s claim that the ‘Poet participates in the eternal, the infinite and the one’ reveals that he achieves this through the mingling of the poet and the reader. The poet’s imagination transforms into an echo, eternally sustained by its engagement with the reader. The melding of the two parties’ imaginations is indicated by the verbs describing the echoes’ movement: ‘wind and roll’. Both verbs suggest, not only a form of movement, but a method of combining two or more things. Through this process, the poet and reader are androgynously amalgamated through the union of their imaginations, for ‘the mind of the creator’, Shelley postulates, ‘is itself the image of all other minds’ (*A Defence of Poetry*, pp. 679-680).

The form of *Prometheus Unbound* immediately indicates its communal nature: a lyrical drama, where the internal and private mode of lyric works alongside the dramatic genre, which presupposes a receptive audience.[[426]](#footnote-426) By choosing to write a drama, the poet has already imaginatively incorporated the reader’s presence into the text. David Taylor observes that *Prometheus Unbound*’s shape as a specifically ‘lyrical’ drama results in its ‘intrinsic unstageability’.[[427]](#footnote-427) The composite form of lyrical drama serves to emphasise the harmony between the reader and poet by rejecting the limitations, spatial and temporal, of the staged performance. As a conventional drama, *Prometheus Unbound*’s moral reformation would rely upon its audience’s visual receptivity rather than imaginative creativity. ‘Sight thrives on boundaries’, Marlon B. Ross writes, so that in making the work accessible to readers rather than viewers, Shelley exerts an ‘effort to force readers to create boundaries of their own making’.[[428]](#footnote-428) The imagination must engage in the process of reading, a solitary exercise within the individual’s mind, but one that is in communion with the poet’s mind, and by extension, every other mind capable of such empathy. Shelley investigates a similar process in his consideration of reverie in his essay, ‘On Life’. Although he does not explicitly discuss reverie in association with reading, he nonetheless describes the sensation in terms of the self being ‘dissolved into the surrounding universe, or as if the surrounding universe were absorbed into their being’, revealing that we all ‘constitute one mass’, or ‘one mind’ (‘On Life’, pp. 635-636). ‘On Life’ establishes Shelley’s belief in the plasticity of boundaries and the oneness of existence, should we choose to open our eyes and see it: to ‘grow dizzy to look down the dark abyss’ to the deep-down realm of Demogorgon (‘On Life’, p. 636). As Panthea and Asia approach Demogorgon’s realm, the Chorus of Spirits from Act 1 reappears, now transformed into the Song of Spirits. The Spirits’ alteration from a chorus into a song is indicative of the unity that is being achieved, since, while a chorus is composed of a group of individuals, a song is a singular, cohesive whole. This transformation from a chorus to a song points to the poet’s belief that ‘distinct individual minds’ are false constructions, as we are all portions of ‘the one mind’ (‘On Life’, pp. 635-636). Panthea describes the aural amalgamation as: ‘A countenance with beckoning smiles—there burns / An azure fire within its golden locks! / Another and another—hark! they speak!’ (2.3.51-53). The tenuousness of the Spirits’ presence is gleaned by the interchangeability of singular and plural pronouns, so that between Asia’s occluded vision and dizzy brain and the uncertainty of Panthea’s language, we are again shaken from reality and prepared to embrace Demogorgon’s limitlessness. Panthea’s exclamations are interspersed with gasping dashes and excited repetition—‘Another and another—hark!’—mimicking the voice of an excited child, gazing in wonder upon a hereto unseen sight that anticipates ‘On Life’. The fluctuation between pronouns is a device not limited to *Prometheus Unbound*, but appears throughout Shelley’s works. ‘Shelley is able to make pronouns dance to the tune of pipings that wish to celebrate states of excited unknowingness, scenes of potential discovery’, Michael O’Neill writes.[[429]](#footnote-429) Here, upon encountering the great, unknowable entity at the centre of the lyrical drama, Demogorgon, O’Neill’s reading of the ‘excited unknowingness’ conveyed by the interchangeability of pronouns is entirely apt. Behrendt offers an additional interpretation of Shelley’s intermixing of pronouns by claiming that in ‘an ideal state pronouns (and all normative terms) are rendered irrelevant because what is known is indistinguishable from the aggregate “one” who knows’.[[430]](#footnote-430) In both of these analyses, the poet’s interchanging of pronouns indicates his belief in the ‘one mind’. In *Prometheus Unbound*, the ‘one mind’ is androgynous. For Woodman, ‘Shelley’s One Mind’ appears in the scene of Asia and Prometheus’ reunion; however, I contend that the ‘one mind’ is revealed throughout the poem, at one moment being expressed through Asia and Prometheus’ reunion, but also appearing within the Spirits’ transformation from a chorus to a song.[[431]](#footnote-431)

Shelley’s ‘one mind’, when considered in conjunction with the lyrical drama’s composite form, is reminiscent of Socrates’ assertion in Plato’s *Republic* that ‘when a beautiful soul harmonizes with a beautiful form, and the two are cast in one mould, that will be the fairest of sights to him who has an eye to see it’.[[432]](#footnote-432) The Neoplatonic gaze, through which seeing is sympathy, and its combination with Platonic extramission symbolises androgynous union in *Laon and Cythna*. In *Prometheus Unbound*, the gaze is coupled with harmony, as Shelley’s act of translating the *Symposium* sees his own poetic thoughts and language becoming ‘melted by the splendour and harmony of [Plato’s] periods into one irresistible stream of musical impressions’ (Preface to *The Banquet*, p. 402). This image of two being melted and forged into one perfected form is inherently androgynous in its alluding to Vulcan’s willingness to ‘melt you [divided androgynous beings] together, and make you grow into one’ (*The Banquet*, p. 432), and is particularly relevant to *Prometheus Unbound* in its description of the harmonisation between soul and form. Asia encapsulates the idea of a ‘beautiful soul’ by being consistently described as an ethereal, luminous, and transient entity, whereas Prometheus embodies the physicality of a ‘form’ by being described in terms of corporeality in his being bound to the precipice, the pains of his flesh, his immobility. While Plato maintains that only narrative art, and not mimetic art, is capable of bestowing moral goodness upon society, he places the highest value upon ‘rhythm and harmony’, due to their shared ability to ‘find their way into the inward places of the soul, on which they mightily fasten, imparting grace, and making the soul of him who is rightly educated graceful’.[[433]](#footnote-433) In *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley adopts and adapts Plato’s conviction in art’s ability to affect positive moral change on society by imbuing song, harmony, and lyrical beauty into the drama.

Shelley’s claim that the ‘great secret of morals is Love’ is followed by his statement that ‘The great instrument of moral good is the imagination’ (*A Defence of Poetry*, p. 682). The poet scrutinizes the ‘moral aim’ of his works where imagination becomes the guarantor of moral rectitude. *Prometheus Unbound* subtly leads the reader through a temporally uninhibited space where understanding is gleaned through the imaginative discourse between the poet and the reader. Marlon B. Ross examines these distinctions: ‘Shelley wants to distinguish between poetry with a didactic aim…and poetry with didactic content’,[[434]](#footnote-434) and *Prometheus Unbound* employs the latter in order to align the visionary mind of the poet with the imaginative perception of the reader. The mingling of the poet and reader’s imaginations ultimately offers the chance of creating more moral good than the poet’s instruction of the reader could. Revolution is understood as a communal rather than individual effort and can only occur when free minds are in pursuit of the same objective. Poetry with a ‘didactic aim’ forcefully pushes the reader towards a goal that exists solely in the poet’s mind, and such visionary tyranny would rob the reader of their free will. Earl R. Wasserman encapsulates the poet’s creation of moral good in stating that ‘[m]oral good, like esthetic experience, is the effect of form; should the poet attempt a moral aim he would be interpreting the consequence instead of participating in the cause’.[[435]](#footnote-435) Wasserman’s mention of the poet’s participation ‘in the cause’ exemplifies the reciprocal relationship between the poet and his audience, as both parties are imaginatively engaged in the same space. The didactic mode of poetry is susceptible to reinforcing hierarchies of thought and form, of accentuating the lines marking ‘good’ and ‘evil’, ‘right’ and ‘wrong’, ‘self’ and ‘other’, as it works so fiercely to see its aim met. However, in poems of ‘didactic content’, in Ross’s terms, the poet creates a purposeful yet pliable space for the reader to co-inhabit, where the poet relinquishes total control in favour of encouraging the reader’s mind to freely wander through wonder. Within *Prometheus Unbound*, the ‘didactic content’ of the work hinges upon the meeting of Asia, accompanied by Panthea, and Demogorgon, whose essence is one of formlessness:

rays of gloom

Dart round, as light from the meridian sun,

Ungazed upon and shapeless; neither limb,

Nor form, nor outline; yet we feel it is

A living Spirit.

(2.4.4-8)

Demogorgon attests to the power of possibility and the strength of the ‘one mind’ imaginatively unified through love. The implicit androgyny of the ‘one mind’ is indicated by the ungendered Demogorgon’s sexlessness: it is an ‘it’. Although the majority of critics, with the exceptions of Michael O’Neill and Jerrold E. Hogle,[[436]](#footnote-436) have gendered Demogorgon with a masculine pronoun, Shelley maintains its formless ambiguity through the use of the neuter pronoun. Presumably, critics have made this assumption due to the Song of Spirits’ mention of ‘*his* throne’ (emphasis added) immediately preceding Asia and Panthea’s entry into Demogorgon’s cave; however, a close inspection of the Spirits’ prophetic chant reveals that this is a misreading. Guiding Asia and Panthea down to Demogorgon’s realm, the Spirits proclaim:

That the Eternal, the Immortal,

Must unloose through life’s portal

The snake-like Doom coiled underneath his throne

By that alone.

(2.3.95-98)

There are two entities being described in these lines: Demogorgon and Jupiter. Demogorgon, inhabiting the chthonic realm, is spatially ‘underneath [Jupiter’s] throne’. Demogorgon’s latent power, the ‘Doom’ it will unleash upon Jupiter, is waiting to be aroused by Asia, indicated by its ‘coiled’ presence. Leader and O’Neill confirm that ‘the Eternal, the Immortal’ is Demogorgon,[[437]](#footnote-437) and these terms are reinforced by its being described as ‘snake-like’. Stuart Curran explains: ‘To the Egyptians, as Shelley acknowledges in the fragmentary “On the Devil and Devils,” the great serpent Cneph was a symbol of eternity’.[[438]](#footnote-438) And, as Wasserman confirms, ‘among [Demogorgon’s] various roles *he* is Eternity’ (author’s emphasis).[[439]](#footnote-439) The final line of the Spirits’ chant confirms the prophecy: Demogorgon alone will cast Jupiter from his heavenly throne down to the Tartarian depths. Upon entering Demogorgon’s domain, Panthea initially perceives a ‘veilèd form’ seated upon a throne (2.4.1); however, this is a figment roused by ‘[r]eligious and political tyranny, perverting every truth’, to use Wasserman’s words.[[440]](#footnote-440) Panthea, embodying the reader, sees a form sitting on a throne, because, according to Shelley’s notes for *Queen Mab*, God, or ‘the unknown cause of known events’ was mistakenly ‘endowed with human qualities’ and believed to be ‘governing the universe as an earthly monarch governs his kingdom’ (*Queen Mab*, 6.198n).[[441]](#footnote-441) The vision of Demogorgon seated upon a throne is an illusion, for as a primal force acting outside of time and temporality, it cannot possibly preside as a monarch. Additionally, as Leader and O’Neill note, Shelley is marking the Platonic ‘distinction between shadows and reality’ in a mythopoeic reworking of the allegory of the cave.[[442]](#footnote-442) Upon entering Demogorgon’s subterranean lair, Panthea’s vision remains occluded and her perception of reality distorted until Asia exclaims: ‘The veil has fallen!’ (2.4.2). Once the veil has fallen from view, both the form and the throne vanish, revealing Demogorgon’s true nature as a shapeless ‘unknowable Power’.[[443]](#footnote-443) The scene is one of didactic content, where the poet encourages the reader, through Panthea, to see past the limitations of societal constraints and to perceive things not as they ‘seem’ but as they ‘are’ (2.3.60).

Woodman draws parallels between *Paradise Lost* and *Prometheus Unbound* by locating an androgynous correlation between Demogorgon’s cave and Milton’s angels, and also by observing that ‘Shelley’s description of Demogorgon echoes Milton’s depiction of Death’: [[444]](#footnote-444)

If shape it might be called that shape had none

Distinguishable in member, joint, or limb,

Or substance might be called that shadow seemed,

For each seemed neither; black it stood as night,

Fierce as ten Furies, terrible as hell,

(*Paradise Lost*, 2.667-671)[[445]](#footnote-445)

W. B. Yeats seems to have been similarly conscious of an echo of Death in Demogorgon when he ponders: ‘Why, then, does Demogorgon, whose task is beneficent…bear so terrible a shape…?’.[[446]](#footnote-446) Woodman considers this similarity to Death to be an indication of the poet’s ‘suicidal desire’,[[447]](#footnote-447) a claim from which I depart, although I concur with the sense that Demogorgon, like Milton’s angels, is wholly androgynous. Yeats’ recognition of the incongruity between Demogorgon’s form and actions demonstrates its undefinable nature. Its ‘task is beneficent’ in that its action, set forth by Asia’s empathy, results in Prometheus’ unbinding and the restoration of goodness to the earth but it is simultaneously the Death-like harbinger of doom, ‘the terror of the earth’ (3.1.19). If it seems contradictory, this is due to the incomprehensible, intangible, and impenetrable nature of its being. It transgresses elemental law, assuming a perceivable form, and yet, remaining incorporeal, described in sensory terms by Jupiter as ‘float[ing], felt’ and ‘linger[ing]’ (3.1.45 and 3.1.64). Its disembodied nature serves to exemplify the poet’s conviction in the imagination’s power to create real change. Demogorgon is divested of physical attributes, and, although capable of inciting terror and destruction, its power is achieved by its words, or rather its evocation of a verbal response, instead of its deeds. Shelley’s allusion to Milton serves the additional purpose of reinforcing the reciprocity between poet and reader. ‘[A]llusions draw attention to the writer’s role as reader’, Lucy Newlyn writes, and ultimately allow ‘poets [to] awaken in their readers a combination of critical awareness and creative potential’.[[448]](#footnote-448) By alluding to both Milton’s Death and, potentially, Socrates’ conception of Love via Plato, Shelley at once reveals the integrative potential of the reader and writer, and also demonstrates his propensity for mythopoeic creativity ‘by reconstituting the imperfect [myths] that already exist’.[[449]](#footnote-449) This is evident in the preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, wherein Shelley writes of extracting Aeschylus’ Prometheus from the ‘catastrophe so feeble as that of reconciling the Champion with the Oppressor of Mankind’, and also comparing Prometheus to Milton’s Satan, albeit possessing ‘the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature’ (p. 229). Shelley’s perfecting of myth demands that the reader occupy two minds at once, as he insists upon in *Alastor*’s balancing, both recalling the original myth and imaginatively recasting it under the poet’s guidance. This ‘equally ambiguous frame of mind’,[[450]](#footnote-450) as Wasserman terms it, is essentially androgynous in both its duality and quest for perfection.

Although Demogorgon is shapeless, in Act 2, it is not depicted with the terror or ferocity that Milton attributes to Death. It is an ambiguous form and bears a striking similarity to Diotima’s description of Love in her dialogue with Socrates:

‘Do not then say,’ she continued, ‘that what is not beautiful is of necessity deformed, nor what is not good is of necessity evil; nor, since you have confessed that Love is neither beautiful nor good, infer therefore, that he is deformed or evil, but rather something intermediate.’

(*The Banquet*, p. 441)

Stuart Curran writes that, ‘[i]n discovering [Demogorgon] at the center of consciousness, Asia discovers him throughout the universe’, resulting in a change from ‘a universe of domineering objective law [to] a universe ubiquitous in love’.[[451]](#footnote-451) Asia does not only discover Demogorgon, she empathises with it, and it with her. In doing so, the central action of the drama unfolds, spurred forth by the meeting between love and moral goodness. Asia and Demogorgon’s meeting, figured as a Socratic dialogue, spotlights the poet and reader’s shared activity of mind. When Asia and Demogorgon recognise the similitude between their words and feelings, they ‘awaken in all things’, to adopt the language of ‘On Love’, the moral goodness of love through this act of empathy (‘On Love’, p. 631).

At this juncture, Demogorgon assumes the role of the poet and Asia that of the reader. Asia demands knowledge from Demogorgon and, dissatisfied with the repetitive replies she receives, the intensity of her desire to know provokes her to revisit the past verbally, weaving together the threads of meaning as she speaks. When Asia asks Demogorgon to reveal who is responsible for all of the pains and terrors of existence, already knowing the answer but refusing to name Jupiter, Demogorgon curtly replies:

*Demogorgon.* He reigns.

*Asia.* Utter his name: a world pining in pain

Asks but his name: curses shall drag him down.

*Demogorgon.* He reigns.

*Asia.* I feel, I know it: who?

*Demogorgon.* He reigns.

(2.4.28-33)

Asia then proceeds to ask herself: ‘Who reigns?’, and answers her own question by recounting the history of the universe, beginning with ‘There was the Heaven and Earth at first’ (2.4.34). Shelley reverses the Socratic method of questioning, so that the teacher, Demogorgon, responds only with abrupt replies, while the student, Asia, takes up the role of questioner. Demogorgon’s inability or unwillingness to answer Asia’s enquiries finds resonance in Jacques Derrida’s consideration of Western religion, wherein:

the demonic is originally defined as irresponsibility, or, if one wishes, as nonresponsibility. It belongs to a space in which there has not yet resounded the injunction to *respond*; a space in which one does not yet hear the call to explain oneself [*répondre de soi*], one’s actions or one’s thoughts, to respond to the other and answer for oneself before the other.[[452]](#footnote-452)

Shelley’s allusion to Milton’s Death in his depiction of Demogorgon is testament to its demonic nature, and this is bolstered by the priestess Diotima’s remark to Socrates at the centre of the *Symposium* that Love ‘“is neither mortal nor immortal, but something intermediate…A great Daemon”’; she continues to elaborate on the demonical quality of Love in stating that ‘“He fills up that intermediate space between these two classes of beings [the mortals and immortals], so as to bind together, by his own power, the whole universe of things”’ (*The Banquet*, pp. 441 and 442). While it would be an oversimplification to assume that Demogorgon is an allegory for love, Shelley’s indebtedness to the *Symposium* seems evident in his construction of this chthonic entity that is capable of enacting love, among other things. While the demonic Demogorgon is capable of making itself heard, it is unable or unwilling to ‘explain [it]self’, using Derrida’s phrase, to Asia; frustrated with the repetitive, echoing replies she receives from Demogorgon, Asia must ‘answer for [her]self before the other’. Although invested with power, Demogorgon cannot take responsibility for events or possess the ability to act independently. For M. H. Abrams, Demogorgon ‘simply acts as he must without knowing why’.[[453]](#footnote-453) Abrams’ explanation seems vague, although his assertion that Demogorgon is ‘the principle, or power, behind all process’ is more precise,[[454]](#footnote-454) considering that Demogorgon, as a primal force rather than an anthropomorphised, sentient being is divested of ‘knowing’ or decision-making; it is ‘nonresponsible’, to use Derrida’s term. It is a neutral force that may be aroused, directed, and implemented, but, as is elucidated by Derrida, Demogorgon lacks the ability to ‘answer for oneself before the other’, hence the ambiguity and insufficiency of its replies to Asia’s questions. Asia becomes self-empowered through her interaction with Demogorgon, awakening her own intellect and imagination, and, in doing so, rousing Demogorgon into action. Had Demogorgon provided Asia with the knowledge she sought, it would have served no purpose in enlarging her imagination, and would have simply provided a moral aim rather than encouraging the pursuit of moral good. The seemingly ambiguous dialogic intercourse between Asia and Demogorgon finds a gloss in *A Defence of Poetry* and its central claim that the ‘great secret of morals is Love’, when Demogorgon reveals that ‘All things are subject’ to the external forces of temporality ‘but eternal Love’ (*A Defence of Poetry*, p. 682 and 2.4.120). Demogorgon goes outside of itself to identify with Asia and proclaims: ‘I spoke but as ye speak’ (2.4.112). Asia reciprocates by echoing, ‘my heart gave / The response thou hast given’ (2.4.121-122), thereby ‘going out of [her] own nature’ (*A Defence* *of Poetry*, p. 682). The chthonic scene between Asia and Demogorgon emphasises the reader’s power to engage in textual communication with the poet, not by extracting moral aims as clear guidance, but by gaining understanding through empathising with the poet’s imagination. The power of ‘revolutionary poetry’, according to William Ulmer, rests in its capacity to ‘alter readers to the extent that it differs from them, but can engage them only insofar as they discover themselves in the mirror of art’.[[455]](#footnote-455) An inspection of Asia and Demogorgon’s use of personal pronouns to empathise with one another reveals the dramatisation of this power where Demogorgon acts as the mirror, at first ‘shapeless’, bearing no ‘form, nor outline’, undefinable but distinctly disparate, until Asia intently stares into its darkened depths and reveals the intricacies of her own mind, recalling Shelley’s claim that every mind ‘is the mirror upon which all forms are reflected, and in which they compose one form’ (Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, pp. 231-232). Asia’s discovery of herself within Demogorgon, in whom she finds echoes of her own ‘heart’ and ‘soul’ (2.4.121 and 2.4.125), ultimately brings about Jupiter’s dethronement; similarly, the poet hopes, the morally good reader will see their own self imbued with revolutionary potential, eyes awakened to change.

Shelley’s directing of the characters’ eyes, and along with them, the reader’s mental sight, reveals unity within the text and between the poet and the reader. The mirror imaging indicated by Asia’s encounter with Demogorgon finds a precedent earlier in Act 2, when Panthea, acting as an intermediary between Prometheus and Asia, raises her eyes to Asia’s and enquires, ‘what canst thou see / But thine own fairest shadow imaged there?’ (2.1.112-113). Panthea becomes the transcendent mirror through which Asia and Prometheus are androgynously mingled. Asia perceives her own reflection within Panthea’s eyes, and beyond her reflection is Prometheus. While androgynous mingling is being achieved through the characters’ gaze, it is equally enacted by the poet and reader through the text: ‘Asia looks into Panthea’s eyes and…registers a condition of seeing that may stand for the reader’s encounter with the lines of text themselves’, William Keach writes.[[456]](#footnote-456) Panthea’s presence ensures the reader’s participation in the text, since her questioning of her fellow characters reflects the reader’s own curiosities, enacting androgyny on both textual and mental levels. This scene is also reminiscent of Laon’s description of Cythna’s eyes. Cythna’s ‘dark and intricate eyes / Orb within orb’ (*Laon and Cythna*, 11.5.38-39) are recast as Panthea’s, which Asia observes are:

like the deep, blue, boundless heaven

Contracted to two circles underneath

Their long, fine lashes: dark, far, measureless,

Orb within orb, and line through interwoven

(2.1.114-117)

The similarities between Shelley’s images of eyes in *Laon and Cythna* and *Prometheus Unbound* reveals how highly he values them as indicators of empathy. In *Laon and Cythna*, the act of gazing into another’s eyes is also the act of transporting oneself into the other’s soul, creating empathy in the fullest sense. Shelley describes Laon gazing upon Cythna’s eyes, and evokes the universal unity that becomes possible through their androgynous melding:

—her dark and intricate eyes

Orb within orb, deeper than sleep or death,

Absorbed the glories of the burning skies,

Which, mingling with her heart’s deep ecstasies,

Burst from her looks and gestures;—and a light

Of liquid tenderness like love, did rise

From her whole frame, an atmosphere which quite

Arrayed her in its beams, tremulous and soft and bright.

(*Laon and Cythna*, 11.5.38-45)

This scene anticipates Shelley’s creation of Asia, particularly in her being described in both liquid and celestial terms. In *Prometheus Unbound*, Asia appears as a mythopoeic reconceptualization of Venus, the goddess of love, ‘the daughter of the Ocean…rising from the sea’, and also ‘the great goddess who is the evening star’.[[457]](#footnote-457) These attributes are conveyed by the ‘light / Of liquid tenderness like love’ rising from Cythna’s form, where, in this instance, she is at one with the surrounding universe. This scene also anticipates Asia’s transformation following her meeting with Demogorgon. Panthea, gazing upon Asia, professes that she can ‘scarce endure / The radiance of thy beauty’, and recounts how Asia’s transformation resembles her glorious birth (2.5.17-18). Panthea proclaims,

That on the day when the clear hyaline

Was cloven at thine uprise, and thou didst stand

Within a veined shell, which floated on

Over the calm floor of the crystal sea,

Among the Aegean isles, and by the shores

Which bear thy name, love, like the atmosphere

Of the sun’s fire filling the living world,

Burst from thee, and illumined earth and heaven

(2.5.21-28)

In both scenes, the juxtaposition of the sun’s burning beams and fluid quality of light and sea offers an image of reconciled opposites, which, when compounded with the repetition of love bursting forth into the atmosphere, is androgynous in its mingling of the elemental halves, ‘earth and heaven’. The female forms, Cythna and Asia, absorb and reflect light, thereby altering the onlooker’s vision. While *Laon and Cythna* lacks an intermediary character between the two lovers for the reader to imaginatively inhabit, excepting the Narrator of Canto 1 and thereby wavering in its ability to inspire the reader’s empathetic response, Panthea draws the reader into *Prometheus Unbound* through her observations. When Panthea proclaims that ‘nor is it I alone, / Thy sister, thy companion, thine own chosen one, / But the whole world which seeks thy sympathy’ (2.5.32-34), the reader becomes aware of their own participation within the text. The lyrical drama’s inclusivity is emphasised even more by Asia’s reply: ‘Thy words are sweeter than aught else but his / Whose echoes they are: yet all love is sweet, / Given or returned. Common as light is love’ (2.5.38-40). We are to assume that the masculine pronoun Asia is referring to is Prometheus. However, the reappearance of the echo recalls Panthea’s reaction to the Chorus of Spirits in Act 1, where it seems to indicate the poet’s presence in the text. Ambiguity gives way to Asia’s morally good observance that: ‘all love is sweet / Given or returned’, emphasising the centrality of empathy to the text, and also to Shelley’s poetry of revolution as a composite whole.

Tilottama Rajan notes the importance of eyes within *Prometheus Unbound* in positing that ‘the language of the eyes suggests to us how the reader too can break the hermeneutic circle by moving beyond a grammatical and semiological reading that decenters vision to a psychological reading that allows us unmediated access to the inner core of the work’.[[458]](#footnote-458) The gaze becomes a revolutionary method of reading, and one that is predicated upon receptivity as the reader is drawn deeper into the poet’s imagination. Rajan’s assertion that *Prometheus Unbound* necessitates a ‘psychological reading’, empowering the reader’s mental capacities, seems apt; however, she deems Asia and Demogorgon’s meeting ‘inconclusive’, and labels Demogorgon an ‘empty’ character whose ‘eyes cannot be read’.[[459]](#footnote-459) And yet, their meeting cannot be considered inconclusive when it results in Asia’s restorative transformation and the arrival of the chariot that will escort her to Prometheus’ release. Demogorgon does not participate in the gaze because it, like Diotima’s description of the ideal form of love, cannot ‘be figured to the imagination like a beautiful face’; it is ‘eternally uniform and consistent, and monoeidic with itself’ (*The Banquet*, p. 449). It is ‘the primal god in Boccaccio’s *Genealogie Deorum Gentilium*’ whose ‘feminine counterpart’ is Eternity.[[460]](#footnote-460) When the mythologically masculine Demogorgon names itself ‘Eternity’ during its encounter with Jupiter in Act 3,[[461]](#footnote-461) Shelley posits Demogorgon as androgyny achieved.

Demogorgon’s shapelessness exemplifies androgyny as a psychological state. It is also indicative of Shelley’s commitment to passive revolution,[[462]](#footnote-462) as is evidenced by its non-violent overthrow of Jupiter in Act 3. It ends Jupiter’s tyrannical reign, not by destroying him, but by coercing him into submission: ‘we must dwell together / Henceforth in darkness’, it states (3.1.55-56). This is a subversive reversal of Jupiter’s original act of violence against the androgynous beings of the *Symposium*. Jupiter ferociously reacts, lashing out and attempting to trample the shapeless Demogorgon. Finding it impossible to fight against the formless, undefeatable force, Jupiter begs for mercy, before finally accepting his doomed union with Demogorgon. ‘Sink with me then, / We two will sink’, Jupiter concedes, ‘Dizzily down, ever, forever, down’ (3.1.70-71 and 3.1.81). Harmony prevails, even in this moment of potential violence, as Demogorgon and Jupiter continue the give and take process of absorption and adsorption.

Act 3 closes with the appearance of the Spirit of the Hour who recounts the universal transformation she has witnessed in the wake of Jupiter’s overthrowal. The Spirit of the Hour’s lines have the quality of narrative rather than lyric poetry, and seem to explain the scene instead of encouraging imaginative involvement. This suggests, in part, why Shelley deemed the work incomplete. Stuart Curran observes that Act 3 ‘is the only act without lyric effusions’ and reasons that ‘[t]heir quiet absence prepares for the astonishing proliferation of lyric forms in the fourth act’.[[463]](#footnote-463) While critics have not unanimously agreed on the reasoning behind Shelley’s decision to end the work with Act 3, only to later deem the work incomplete, Curran’s assumption seems valid. Following Jupiter’s dethronement, contraries are resolved and Prometheus and Asia are physically reunited. Curran observes that the first reunion is between Apollo and Ocean. The former, responsible for assisting Jupiter in the disfigurement of the severed androgynous beings of the *Symposium*, redeems himself by peacefully engaging in conversation with his elemental opposite.[[464]](#footnote-464) Asia and Prometheus are then reunited, following Hercules’ release of the Titan from his shackles, and the Earth, who had been unable to communicate with her son in Act 1, lamenting that he ‘canst not hear: / Thou art immortal, and this tongue is known / Only to those who die’, is brought into communion with Prometheus by his kiss conveying ‘the warmth of an immortal youth’ to her ‘withered, old, and icy frame’ (1.149-151 and 3.3.88-89). The Spirit of the Hour closes Act 3 with what William Keach observes is ‘the longest speech in the poem’ at 106 lines, and although Keach mistakenly asserts that ‘the Spirit’s gender is unspecified’,[[465]](#footnote-465) his awareness of the ambiguity, especially of gender, permeating the poem suggests Shelley’s subtle use of androgyny. The length of the Spirit of the Hour’s speech is notable given her gender, which is revealed when Prometheus instructs Ione to ‘Give her that curved shell’ (3.3.65). When Shelley assigns the Spirit of the Hour, not only the final speech of Act 3, but also the lengthiest speech of the work, he is resetting the universal equilibrium between the sexes. Her speech contrasts with the masculine Jupiter’s violent proclamation of his tyrannical glory and omnipotence at the opening of Act 3, where his relationship with Thetis is a perversion of the androgynous equality Prometheus and Asia share. Jupiter commands Thetis to ‘Ascend beside me, veiled in the light / Of the desire which makes thee one with me’ (3.1.34-35). The repetition of ‘me’, and particularly the positioning of ‘me’ at the end of the line, reveals the inequality of this relationship. Shelley had previously employed pronouns as indications of androgynous achievement and equality in *Laon and Cythna*, notably in the dedication ‘To Mary’ where, in stanza 9, the end rhyme of ‘we’, ‘me’, and ‘thee’ has a harmoniously merging quality (‘To Mary’, 78 and 80-81). Jupiter’s masculine vision leaves no space for the feminine, or the androgynous, as he designates Demogorgon with the masculine pronoun ‘his’ before seeing it (3.1.50). As the genderless Demogorgon descends from its chariot, Jupiter recoils before it, gasping, ‘Awful shape, what art thou?’ (3.1.51). Equality is indicated by the androgynous Prometheus’ proclamation being centrally positioned between Jupiter and the Spirit of the Hour’s speeches. ‘We feel what thou hast heard and seen’, Prometheus informs the Spirit, where the use of the plural pronoun may reveal androgynous unity, ‘yet speak’ (3.4.97). Prometheus’ foreknowledge or feeling of already knowing what the Spirit is about to say is indicative of the collective psychic unity that is unfolding. In the wake of Jupiter’s dethronement, the barriers between self and Other begin to dissipate, culminating in a mental collectiveness between the characters, and notably also between the poet and the reader. The significance of this unified subjectivity is echoed in Shelley’s essay ‘On Life’, in his description of the ‘one mind’ wherein ‘distinct individual minds’ are delusory (‘On Life’, p. 635). *Prometheus Unbound* imaginatively evokes what ‘On Life’ seeks to explain. Prometheus’ use of the verb ‘feel’ to describe the characters’ collective knowledge of the events the Spirit has witnessed is poignantly emotive, and also finds resonance in ‘On Life’ within Shelley’s portrayal of children, whose perceptive abilities are heightened by a sustained sense of wonder, who ‘feel as if their nature were dissolved into the surrounding universe, or as if the surrounding universe were absorbed into their being’ (‘On Life’, p. 635). Shelley admits that as we grow older, ‘this power commonly decays’; however, for the ‘more select classes of poetical readers’, those Mary Shelley describes as bearing ‘mind[s] as subtle and penetrating as his [Shelley’s] own’, the sensation of ‘reverie’, as the poet terms it, refuses to fade with age (Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, p. 232).[[466]](#footnote-466)

The poem’s source of mystifying wonder, Demogorgon, reappears within the Spirit of the Hour’s speech as the serpentine ‘sense of love’ which ‘Had folded itself round the sphered world’, a beneficent reversal of its depiction in Act 2 as the coiled ‘snake-like Doom’ (3. 4.102-103 and 2.3.97). A second serpentine image appears soon after, in the compelling ‘amphisbaenic snake’ (4.119). Its head at either end indicates movement unrestrained by time, as well as the androgynous combination of two into one, not unlike Aristophanes’ description of the original androgynous beings who, with ‘two faces fixed upon a round neck, exactly like the other’ moved ‘in whatever direction he pleased’ (*The Banquet*, p. 429). For Wasserman, the amphisbaenic snake ‘represents the retention of the perfect present during the course of moving time’.[[467]](#footnote-467) This description is reminiscent of Prometheus and Asia’s androgynous reunion in the cave: ‘A simple dwelling, which shall be our own; / Where we will sit and talk of time and change, / As the world ebbs and flows, ourselves unchanged’ (3.3.22-24). Having achieved perfected equality through their androgynous reunion, Prometheus and Asia are able to calmly observe the peaceful effect of love, defined in the *Symposium* by its liquid nature, on the world. The liquidity of love is implied by Shelley’s metaphorical imaging of the world’s ‘ebb[ing] and flow[ing]’, and this fluid transformation also recalls Asia’s rebirth following her meeting with Demogorgon, where she is ‘Borne to the ocean’, and ‘float[s] down, around, / Into a sea profound, of ever-spreading sound’ (2.5.83-84). The sonorous, simplistic repetition in these lines has a harmonising effect, synthesising sound and liquid into a single pervading sensation, as Asia, empowered by love, embarks on her journey to see Prometheus unbound. Asia perceives:

Realms where the air we breathe is love,

Which in the winds and on the waves doth move,

Harmonizing this earth with what we feel above.

(2.5.95-97)

The earth that Asia has transformed through her self-empowering meeting with Demogorgon becomes liberated by love and freed from elemental limitations, as the air and sea meet, becoming indiscernibly amalgamated. The earth’s tidal movements surrounding Prometheus and Asia’s cave are indications of love’s sustained presence.

While Demogorgon’s presence is implied in the Spirit’s speech by the image of the amphisbaenic snake, it must ultimately return to the text in Act 4 in order to provide a wholly unified conclusion that is inclusive of the reader. In Act 4, by addressing each elemental entity, ‘Thou Earth’, ‘Thou Moon’, ‘Ye elemental Genii’, and finally, mankind itself, as it has earlier addressed Asia, Demogorgon engages in a final act of reciprocal sympathy. The united audience, indicated by the collective pronoun ‘All’, finally echoes Demogorgon’s first line of the work: ‘Ask what thou wouldst know’ by stating: ‘Speak: thy strong words may never pass away’ (2.4.9 and 4.553). Shelley’s decision to add Act 4 remains open to speculation, but it seems reasonable that, for a work aiming to achieve equality between its characters and audience, its acts should also be equally balanced. The poem’s expansion from three acts to four may also be indebted to John Frank Newton’s influence on Shelley, as is suggested by Woodman who posits that, ‘Newton’s mythical vision of the universe with its notions concerning the four ages of man…appeal[ed] to the imagination [and] it allowed the consciousness of man to expand and thus prepared him inwardly for outward change’.[[468]](#footnote-468) This change of consciousness seems in line with the didactic content of the work, and it would be reasonable to assume that Newton’s ‘four ages of man’ should be represented in *Prometheus Unbound*. Continuing on the subject of numerical harmony, Stuart Curran recognises that, during her introspective speech in Demogorgon’s cave, Asia divides ‘the universal forces into four—Heaven, Earth, Light, and Love’, where ‘Love [acts] as an original power in the universe’. Curran continues to elaborate on the significance of ‘Asia’s quaternity’ by explaining that, ‘like Shelley’s act structure, [it] reflects Pythagorean numerology, as well as the balance of primary elements in early Greek philosophy: earth, air (heaven), fire (light), and water (love)’.[[469]](#footnote-469) Acts 1 and 3 mirror each other in that both open with masculine voices and close with feminine ones: Prometheus and Jupiter are the first to speak in each act, respectively, while Panthea and the Spirit of the Hour provide the final lines. The poet’s desire to create harmony between the acts is bolstered by the repeated image of the fawn and hound in Acts 2 and 4. The Song of Spirits, beckoning Panthea and Asia down to Demogorgon’s lair in Act 2, exclaims: ‘Down, down! / As the fawn draws the hound’ (2.3.64-65). The reversal of power in this image, where the prey actively directs the predator, is indicative of Panthea’s, and the reader’s, inversion of expectations when confronted with Demogorgon. Where we would expect to find a mythical monarch, a ruler of the underworld, or an ancient oracle, we are faced with shapeless darkness, an imperceptible presence defined by its lack of definition. The image reappears in Act 4 within the song of the Chorus, who proclaim:

Once the hungry Hours were hounds

Which chased the day like a bleeding deer,

And it limped and stumbled with many wounds

Through the nightly dells of the desert year.

(4.73-76)

The Hours, indicative of time, and the deer or fawn, representing eternity through its proximity to Demogorgon,[[470]](#footnote-470) are brought into unison by the following stanza’s call for the ‘shapes of light’ to, ‘Like the clouds and sunbeams, unite’ (4.78; 80). The image gains androgynous implications when considered in light of W. B. Yeats’ assertion that the fawn, as a poetic and prophetic symbol, is emblematic of the Morning Star and the Evening Star,[[471]](#footnote-471) ‘the great goddess…Venus’, mythopoeically recast as Asia in *Prometheus Unbound*.[[472]](#footnote-472) The ‘bleeding deer’ with its ‘many wounds’, unable to heal and yet also unable to die, is evocative of Prometheus’ ‘quivering wounds’, seeping unceasingly through the ‘sleep-unsheltered hours’ (1.39; 12) while also alluding to the myth of Actaeon. The Chorus’ description of the deer does not only echo the Song of Spirits’ beckoning fawn in its cervine simile, but also in its rhyme, the ‘cloud’ of sound, to return to Jarvis’ discussion on the phonotextual reciprocity between reader and writer.[[473]](#footnote-473) In Act 2, the Song of Spirits’ *aabbccdd* rhyme, interrupted by the repeated exclamation: ‘Down, down!’, evokes a footfall-like pattern, marking Asia and Panthea’s physical descent and the feeling of descending toward ‘the steps of the remotest throne’ (2.3.61). In Act 4, the Chorus’ *rime riche* is indicative of the poet urging the reader’s response, his desire to ‘weave the mystic measure / Of music’ around his audience’s mind (4.77-78). The ‘one mind’, comprised of both the poet and his audience, is encapsulated in Panthea’s vision of ‘the Spirits of the human mind / Wrapped in sweet sounds’ who proceed to ‘join the throng / Of the dance and the song’ (4.81-84). With Prometheus and Asia’s reunion achieved, for although the final act is set in proximity to their cave, they do not appear nor speak again, the reader is empowered to take the stage, indicated by the inclusivity of the ‘cloud’ of rhyme that saturates the entirety of the act, only pausing between Panthea and Ione’s blank verse interjections. The Earth and the Moon lovingly turn their gazes upon each other, and the lunar orb finds itself becoming a mirror image of its terrestrial ‘brother’, imbued with plant and animal life, as its ‘solid oceans flow’ and it exclaims (4.358):

Gazing on thee I feel, I know

Green stalks burst forth, and bright flowers grow,

And living shapes upon my bosom move:

Music is in the sea and air,

(4.363-366)

As Panthea and Ione’s lines decrease in frequency, and they too fade from view as Prometheus and Asia have done, the human audience becomes the focal point of the poem. The Earth’s exclamation ‘Man, oh, not men! a chain of linked thought, / Of love and might to be divided not’ positions ‘Man’, now far more than merely masculine, at the centre of the universe (4.394-395). Finally, Demogorgon reappears from the Tartarean depths and commences in invoking the elements of the universe, ranging from the ‘happy dead’ to the ‘elemental Genii’, and concludes by addressing ‘Man’, the collective reader, now empowered by their exercised imagination and prepared to engage in revolution: ‘To defy Power, which seems omnipotent; / To love, and bear; to hope’ (4.572-573). The harmonious rhyme and emphasis on musicality that flourishes in Act 4, combined with the instructive, yet imaginative, addressing of ‘Man’, the reader, find resonance in Derrida’s assertion that ‘every revolution, whether atheistic or religious, bears witness to a return of the sacred in the form of an enthusiasm or fervor, otherwise known as the presence of the gods within us’, positioning ‘us’, the collectively united ‘one mind’, not only at the forefront of revolution, but as the embodiments of divinity, and by inference, eternity.[[474]](#footnote-474) Asia’s meeting with Demogorgon, the acknowledged turn and centre of action within *Prometheus Unbound*, is the point of amalgamation between empathy and androgyny, serving to incite revolution while the operatic ‘enthusiasm’ and ‘fervor’ of Act 4 similarly enable the reader to act. The withdrawal of the universe from the liminal constraints of time is simultaneously a freeing of being from sexual differentiation into a space of androgynous reverie and eternity, for, as Judith Butler asserts: ‘“sex” is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time’.[[475]](#footnote-475) Demogorgon’s naming itself as eternity, ‘the absence of time’, [[476]](#footnote-476) in addition to its gender neutral pronoun and unbodied presence renders it one of Shelley’s most fully-realised images of androgyny as a vehicle of mental revolution.

*Prometheus Unbound* forms the foundation for Shelley’s following compositions confronting the issue of freedom from mental and physical tyranny, and achieves in its scope what *Laon and Cythna* had attempted in its form: the condition of epic, capable of awakening its morally good readership to the possibility of inciting real change. The lyrical drama’s focus on achieving unity, in form, between characters, and mentally between the poet and the reader, renders it Shelley’s most ambitious representation of androgyny as a ‘psychic unity’. The lyrical quality of the poem, along with its orchestral overlapping of sound and speech, encourages the reader’s imaginative participation on a level hitherto unwitnessed in Shelley’s works. *Prometheus Unbound* is inclusive of the reader’s imaginative involvement, where Shelley tests androgyny as a process to affect mental revolution outside the bounds of the text.[[477]](#footnote-477) The lyrical drama’s cast of female characters, most notably the self-empowered Asia, strives to address the oppressive sexual inequality that Shelley saw as inhibiting societal progress and improvement, where the ancient Greeks’ division of mankind into male and female resulted in classes of ‘the highest cultivation and refinement’ in the case of the former while the latter, ‘so far as intellect is concerned, were educated as slaves’ (‘A Discourse on the Manners of the Ancient Greeks’, p. 409).[[478]](#footnote-478) Asia’s self-empowerment in the presence of the genderless Demogorgon, and the successive unbinding of Prometheus, himself ‘an avatar of revolution against specific oppressions: civil, racial, sexual, and religious’,[[479]](#footnote-479) addresses the question that incited revolt in *Laon and Cythna*: ‘Can man be free if woman be a slave?’ (*Laon and Cythna*, 2.43.1045). In *Prometheus Unbound*, sexual inequality is redressed by the poet’s unbinding of the reader’s imagination from the socially imposed constraints of gender. Hierarchical divisions of male and female collapse, and revolution is imaged as an androgynous process occurring in the mind: ‘till Hope creates / From its own wreck the thing it contemplates’ (4.573-574). The conflation of ungendered pronouns with unified mental power that ends Act 4 marks *Prometheus Unbound* as Shelley’s preeminent representation of the revolutionary potential of the poet and the reader’s androgynously intermingled minds. *Prometheus Unbound* embodies poetry’s ‘light yoke’, its beatific and beneficent ability to unite ‘all irreconcilable things’ (*A Defence of Poetry*, p. 698), and thereby offers the reader a way to affect positive moral change by androgynously engaging with the poet’s imagination.

**Chapter Four: ‘Our course unpiloted’: Poetic Autonomy in *The Witch of Atlas***

Like Cythna and Asia before her, the Witch of Atlas is a female protagonist engaged in the traditionally masculine role of active questing.[[480]](#footnote-480) In *The Witch of Atlas* Shelley reveals the isolation that lurks beneath the freedom experienced by Asia through the Witch’s lack of a companion. Companionless, for her creation, Hermaphroditus, does not prove to be satisfactory, the poem sees Shelley reject the need for a masculine counterpart since the Witch herself, despite being gendered as female, is ‘like a sexless bee’ (68.589).[[481]](#footnote-481) *The Witch of Atlas* poses the prospect and faces the failures of the autonomous and self-sustained androgynous imagination. The epyllion exercises the ‘pursuit of autonomy’ noted by Michael O’Neill as occurring in Shelley’s lyrics, where this pursuit ‘is more a question of seeking to organize their figurative inventions into imaginative structures that give the impression, possibly the illusion, of being self-sustaining’.[[482]](#footnote-482) It pursues autonomy by experimenting with androgyny as a process that isn’t reliant on the reader’s imaginative participation. Though lamenting its limits, there is also a celebration of the imagination’s creative capacity. *The Witch of Atlas* vitalises the poetic process by testing the limits of the androgynous imagination. The epyllion experiments with poetic creation as a self-serving rather than reciprocal act of aesthetic production and posits the poet, textually embodied by the Witch,[[483]](#footnote-483) as an autonomous and wholly androgynous creator, engaging with but not reliant upon the reader’s mental participation. Unlike *Laon and Cythna* and *Prometheus Unbound*, revolutionary aims and moral amelioration have no place in *The Witch of Atlas*. The poem proceeds as Asia had following her self-empowered transformation in the lyrical drama, ‘without a course, without a star’ (*Prometheus Unbound*, 2.5.79), vacillating between doubt and resigned hope under the detached guidance of the ‘lady-witch’ (47.419) whose self-serving immortality paradoxically exalts the power and criticises the impossibility of the self-sustained androgynous imagination.

In *The Witch of Atlas*, Shelley self-consciously experiments with what Diane Long Hoeveler sees to be the problematic situation of androgyny in male Romantic poetry:

[T]he Romantic poets came face to face with the limitations of language, images, tropes, symbols, and all literary devices. They sought to use the imagination’s capacity to transcend ontology, or “being-ness”, but they found themselves reduced to ironic postures, or nonbeing-ness. In idealizing androgyny, in seeking to unify the masculine and the feminine within the male psyche, they came to the realization that there never was and never could be an escape from the limited self. The self can never transform itself—can never unify with the nonself—because a part can never grasp the whole. Platonic metaphysics notwithstanding, the Romantic poet found himself, as well as his poetry, in an abyss from which there was no escape, where language and imagery failed.[[484]](#footnote-484)

Because ‘a part can never grasp the whole’, by making the autonomous, androgynous Witch ‘the whole’ herself, and ostensibly affording himself the same androgynous complexities he grants this most independent of female protagonists, Shelley experimentally abandons androgyny as a process towards textual and intersubjective unity between the poet and the reader. Instead, androgyny comes to function in *The Witch of Atlas* as a test of the limits of the self’s ‘being-ness’ in the analogous androgyny of the poet and the Witch. This ultimately allows for a consideration of the implications and effects of poetry that is produced by and for itself. Facing the prospect of an unattuned and unsympathetic readership in 1820, Shelley begins to experiment with the creation of poetry as an isolated and autonomous process no longer reliant on the reader’s receptivity. *The Witch of Atlas* experimentally posits the poet, textually embodied by the Witch, as an autonomous creator in an attempt to allay the fear that his poetry will not be met by a sympathetically receptive readership. He considers the effect of poetry that is capable of creating change, but not reliant on an audience’s receptivity to do so. This fear of finding no fit audience surfaces in the essay ‘On Love’, penned concurrently with his translation of Plato’s *Symposium* in 1818, wherein Shelley confides: ‘I know not the internal constitution of other men, or even of thine whom I now address’; continuing, ‘I have thought to appeal to something in common and unburden my inmost soul to them, [and] I have found my language misunderstood’ (‘On Love’, p. 631). Mary responds to and echoes this disappointment in her ‘Note on *The Witch of Atlas*’ in revealing that ‘Shelley did not expect sympathy and approbation from the public; but the want of it took away a portion of the ardour that ought to have sustained him while writing’.[[485]](#footnote-485) Prior to *The Witch of Atlas*, Shelley’s primary tactic of imaginative unification through androgyny is inclusive of the reader, escaping the confines of the self through empathic intermingling, and this textual and intersubjective process reaches its apotheosis in *Prometheus Unbound*. However, the cooperative creation of a mentally renovated universe in the lyrical drama overexerted Shelley’s optimism in the androgynous imagination. Shelley’s resolution to create an empathic interaction between poet and reader wavers in the wake of his masterpiece, and his fears over the limitations of ‘being-ness’ that he originally explored in 1815 through *Alastor* seem to resurface in 1819, spilling into the epyllion of 1820. Hoeveler affirms that: ‘Although Shelley’s poetry has been accused of expressing egoism, Shelley himself waged a personal campaign against the dominion of self’, citing Shelley’s letter of 1819 to Leigh Hunt in which the poet writes of ‘*self*, that burr that will stick to one. I can’t get it off yet’ (*PBS Letters*, II, p. 109).[[486]](#footnote-486) *The Witch of Atlas* acknowledges and explores the limitations of the poetic self. This shift in poetic aim recalls the poet described by the Fourth Spirit of *Prometheus Unbound* who, reclining in the oneiric depths of his own reverie, ‘Nor seeks nor finds he mortal blisses, / But feeds on the aerial kisses / Of shapes that haunt thought’s wildernesses’ (1.740-742).[[487]](#footnote-487) Ceasing to seek nor to even expect the receptivity of a sympathetic readership, Shelley breaks from a yearning for imaginative union with the Other and enters into a space of autonomous creation. This change is marked by Bloom’s assertion that ‘*Prometheus* is made out of hopes and desires that still seek their object, but the more perfectly structured later poems seek no resolution beyond their own form’.[[488]](#footnote-488) It seems fitting in light of this comment that the free and flowing lyricism of *Prometheus Unbound* should convey the poet’s hopes of empathic interactivity, while the tightly wound *ottava rima* of *The Witch of Atlas* accentuates its autonomous self-containment. Autonomous and yet alienated, the Witch as poet experiments with and doubts the necessity of an empathic union Shelley had previously envisaged through the textual representations of reunited masculine and feminine entities and through the concurrent mental mingling of the poet and the reader.

Although the reader is not implicated within *The Witch of Atlas* as they had previously been through the ‘interanimation’ of *Prometheus Unbound*,[[489]](#footnote-489) Shelley is still cognisant of, though not dependent upon, their participation in its reception. In denying the reader a proxy of the kind he had offered in the lyrical drama, Shelley’s attention to the reader vacillates between doubt, disregard, and fleeting glimmers of hope. In moments when the reader is acknowledged, they are held at a sceptical and doubtful distance from the poet’s creative process. Asia, Ione, and Panthea, the Oceanides who serve as the reader’s proxy in *Prometheus Unbound*, are alluded to in *The Witch of Atlas* as ‘The Ocean-nymphs and Hamadryades, / Oreads and Naiads’ who adoringly gather around the Witch and ‘Offered to do her bidding’ ‘So they might live forever in the light / Of her sweet presence—each a satellite’ (22.217-219 and 223-224). Stanza 22 ends on this image of hope where the internal rhyme of the tenuous ‘might’ optimistically chimes with ‘light’. The metaphorical metamorphosis of these allegorical readers into ‘satellite[s]’[[490]](#footnote-490) anticipates the infinitude of ‘a great Poem’ in *A Defence of Poetry*, when ‘after one person and one age has exhausted all its divine effluence which their peculiar relations enable them to share, another and yet another succeeds’ (*A Defence of Poetry*, p. 693). The eternal endurance of ‘a great Poem’ is predicated upon the way in which the poem lives on in the reader’s reading. The poet, through their poetry, becomes an attracting and illuminating force around which readers orbit for eternity. The optimistic image of the reader as an illuminated satellite engaged in the reciprocal assurance of immortality through cyclical communion with the poem is abruptly snuffed by the Witch’s address that begins the successive stanza: ‘This may not be’ (23.225). Here, Shelley’s dismayed doubt in his readership’s imaginative involvement is evident. The Witch proceeds to describe an apocalyptic vision in which ‘the surviving Sun’ parches the earth, where ‘The boundless ocean, like a drop of dew / Will be consumed—the stubborn centre must / Be scattered, like a cloud of summer dust—’, (23.230-232) tearfully conceding to her audience: ‘And ye with them will perish one by one’ (24.233). The poet confronts the fear of entrusting his visionary poetry to an audience incapable of or unwilling to participate in imaginative involvement. Instead, he places any trace of hope solely in the endurance of the poem as an isolated object through the image of ‘the surviving Sun’, cognisant that the sun in *The Witch of Atlas* is consistently equated with Apollo, poetry’s deity. This contrasts starkly with the shared eternity offered to the imaginative elect who are textually embodied by the Oceanides, in their joyful withdrawal to Prometheus’ cave where ‘Henceforth we will not part’ (*Prometheus Unbound*, 3.3.10). Despite the Witch’s dismissal of the nymphs there remains a lingering sense of reciprocity. For Michael O’Neill, ‘[t]he mastery [of these lines] is such that the writing threatens to leave the reader unmoved. The poetic impact is richly indeterminate; we hear the sombre reverberations, and yet they are muffled by the very patness of rhyme and rhythm’.[[491]](#footnote-491) Refusing to wallow in fruitless dejection, Shelley ironically lights upon the potential to arouse a similar strain of doubt in his audience’s mind. The Witch may not be willing to entrust her audience with the act of creative co-creation but, Shelley suggests, the reader is not entirely shut out from the poem’s paradise either. The empathic love essential to androgyny in *Laon and Cythna* and *Prometheus Unbound* lingers on in *The Witch of Atlas*. Shelley’s conception of love is predicated upon man ‘put[ting] himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own’ (*A Defence of Poetry*, p. 682). While *Prometheus Unbound* exalts the pleasures of imaginative engagement with an empathic readership for the purpose of conceptualising mental revolution, *The Witch of Atlas* acknowledges and attempts to overcome the pains of poetry met with unresponsiveness and misunderstanding.

The interwoven ambiguities and indeterminacies of *The Witch of Atlas* are reflective of its ‘visionary cynicism’, to employ Bloom’s term, and while Bloom sees the poem as setting ‘deliberate traps’ for ‘even its most sympathetic critics’ and readers, it seems more likely that the poem seeks to test its ideal readership rather than to ensnare or deceive its audience.[[492]](#footnote-492) As Jack Donovan asserts, ‘the *Witch* is addressed to a cultivated literary intelligence, and Shelley knew that the close and informed attention it calls for not all readers would be willing or able to give’.[[493]](#footnote-493) This narrowed focus on a select audience recalls ‘the highly refined imagination of the more select classes of poetical readers’ referred to in the preface to *Prometheus Unbound* (p. 232) and also anticipates the limited readership, the ‘cognoscenti’, of *Epipsychidion*. Such a challenge is the poet’s aim in his most obvious implication of the reader, the dedication to Mary: Shelley’s ideal reader. While not recreating the revolutionary content of *Laon and Cythna* nor the mental revolution of *Prometheus Unbound*, in *The Witch of Atlas*, ‘Shelley’s importance and achievement as a poet derive from the way in which he tests, dramatises, anatomizes and enacts the processes involved in belief or, indeed, doubt’.[[494]](#footnote-494) Both belief and doubt are put to the test here, as the narrator makes clear in the abrupt truncation of the Witch’s tale, wherein they claim:

I will declare [the rest of her pranks] another time; for it is

A tale more fit for the weird winter nights

Than for these garish summer days, when we

Scarcely believe much more than we can see.

(78.669-72)

For O’Neill, the epyllion’s atmosphere of ambivalence ‘allow[s] the reader’s mind to be the final courtroom of the poetry’s appeal’.[[495]](#footnote-495) But Shelley adopts a posture of Witch-like ambivalence when it comes to the prospect of being delivered with a verdict.

Aware of but not dependent on his reader’s receptivity, Shelley casts a sceptical spotlight on androgyny as a psychically unifying strategy, exploring the extent to which poetry can successfully synthesise subjectivities and to what ends. In this sense, *The Witch of Atlas* exposes and experiments with what Laura Claridge perceives in *Epipsychidion* as Shelley’s ‘know[ledge] that to rest in achieved meaning is to stop writing; one need not deliver the whole truth more than once’.[[496]](#footnote-496) While Claridge rejects androgyny in Shelley’s works, her Lacanian reading of poems including *Epipsychidion* and *Alastor* offers a valuable approach to androgyny as the ‘psychic unity’ defined by Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi and the similar ‘merger of psychic characteristics within the imagination’ described by Diane Long Hoeveler.[[497]](#footnote-497) The self-aware poet of *The Witch of Atlas* uneasily reconsiders the implications of finitude—of achieving perfect and whole union—conveyed by androgyny as a state to be achieved through intersubjective mingling as it had previously been in *Prometheus Unbound*. Unlike Prometheus and Asia who attain androgynous unification in their cave, ‘Where we will sit and talk of time and change, / As the world ebbs and flows, ourselves unchanged’ (3.3.23-24), the Witch is not content to resign herself to her own cave and exists instead in a state of perpetually wakeful activity, flitting between the worlds of myth and mortality and settling in neither. For Ross Woodman, the cave is key to the creation of ‘the androgyne as Shelley’s “ideal prototype” of political revolution’ in *Prometheus Unbound* and *Epipsychidion*, and ‘[b]y constellating the androgyne as the “divinity in man” who presides in “the still cave” of the poetic mind, Shelley in *Prometheus Unbound* believed he had unveiled to the imagination the true source of its creative power’.[[498]](#footnote-498) The Witch, then, resists the finitude of androgyny as an achieved state by refusing to confine herself to her own cave.

The Witch is the offspring of elemental opposites: ‘Her mother [is] one of the Atlantides’ (2.57) and her father is Apollo in the form of the sun. The Witch is born from an act of androgynous intermingling within a cave, where her father ‘kissed [her mother] with his beams, and made all golden / The chamber of grey rock in which she lay— / She, in that dream of joy, dissolved away’ (2.62-64). The ‘dream of joy’ that precedes the Witch’s birth recasts Panthea’s dream of Prometheus, where:

the overpowering light

Of that immortal shape was shadowed o’er

By love; which, from his soft and flowing limbs,

And passion-parted lips, and keen, faint eyes,

Steamed forth like vaporous fire; an atmosphere

Which wrapped me in its all-dissolving power,

As the warm ether of the morning sun

Wraps ere it drinks some cloud of wandering dew.

(*Prometheus Unbound*, 2.1.71-78)

The elemental intermingling of Panthea’s dream culminates in her feeling Prometheus’ ‘presence flow and mingle through my blood / Till it became his life, and his grew mine’ (2.1.80-81), where the synthesising of fire and water, masculine and feminine, offers an explicitly androgynous image of union. However, William Crisman, considering the Witch to be a product of ‘bad…childhood experiences’ finds the act of ‘dissolving’ in *The Witch of Atlas* to be one of overpowering sexual aggression rather than androgynous union.[[499]](#footnote-499) Crisman writes that ‘the Witch suffers from her mother’s loss. Her inclination to think of sexual relations as “repugnant” bestiality seems psychologically only natural, since her mother “dissolved away” at her father’s touch’.[[500]](#footnote-500) Despite the clear similarity between Panthea’s ‘all-dissolving’ dream of Prometheus and the Witch’s mother’s ‘dream of joy’ in which she ‘dissolved away’, Crisman neglects to consider this association; however, Crisman does observe a correlation between *Prometheus Unbound* and *The Witch of Atlas* in the ‘moth-and-taper’ image present in both poems. Reading ‘dissolving’ as a destructive rather than uniting act, Crisman posits a link between the Witch’s mother and the Song of Spirits’ chant beckoning Asia and Panthea ‘Down, down!’ to Demogorgon’s cave ‘As a weak moth the taper’ (2.3.55 and 67). Of the Witch’s matrilineage, the poem’s narrator informs us that:

’Tis said, she first was changed into a vapour,

And then into a cloud, such clouds as flit,

Like splendour-winged moths about a taper,

Round the red west when the sun dies in it:

And then into a meteor, such as caper

On hill-tops when the moon is in a fit;

Then into one of those mysterious stars

Which hide themselves between the Earth and Mars.

(3.65-72)

The Witch’s mother is imaged as a cloud which is in turn likened to a moth. The dizzying transference of transformations marking the above lines are indicative of the ‘shape and motion’ accompanying the Witch’s birth into a ‘living form / Of…embodied power’ (4.79-80). Jerrold E. Hogle asserts that ‘the Power is not a fixed Presence visible in evanescent matter. It is constituted as a force by its ardent metamorphosis from one metaphor into another, its transfer of identity from vestiges of light into a “dream of joy” (l. 66)’; Hogle continues by stating that ‘this is the very sort of process that fashions a poetic text out of signs and mythographies already in the language’.[[501]](#footnote-501) The Witch’s mother as cloud is juxtaposed against ‘the red west when the sun dies in it’, further emphasising the uniting synthesis of fire and water, masculine and feminine. Rather than the mother being destroyed by the father, in this image it is the father sun who ‘dies’, but not without being further synthesised with the mother through her transformation ‘into a meteor’ that retains the father’s fiery illumination. The Witch’s mother’s ‘ardent metamorphosis’ anticipates the epyllion’s vitalisation of the poetic process, its interweaving and playful leaping ‘from one metaphor into another’. Prior to the Witch’s birth, her mother takes the form of ‘one of those mysterious stars / Which hide themselves between the Earth and Mars’. Rubin identifies this star, ‘the “folding-star”’, ‘with its double identity (as both Lucifer and Vesper)’.[[502]](#footnote-502) This ‘double identity’ recalls Act 3 of *Prometheus Unbound*, notably in the peaceful meeting of Apollo and Ocean who represent the elemental opposites of fire and water, and their mutual observation of Lucifer, ‘the day star, [who] becomes indistinguishable from the great goddess who is the evening star, Venus’.[[503]](#footnote-503) The Witch’s mother’s metamorphosis into the ‘folding star’ emphasises an androgynous union of the masculine Lucifer or Vesper and the goddess Venus into one illuminated celestial body, and her achievement of this unified state gives way to the Witch’s birth as a whole and autonomous being complete in and of herself. William Keach observes that ‘[t]he cavern where the Witch is born and where she lives in the early stanzas of the poem is more thoroughly infused with self-reflexiveness than any other Shelleyan setting’, and this ‘self-reflexiveness’ underscores both the poem’s self-consciousness and its protagonist’s appearance as whole and autonomous creator.[[504]](#footnote-504) The Witch is first described as ‘A lovely lady garmented in light / From her own beauty’ (5.81-82), recalling her mother who first ‘lay enfolden / In the warm shadow of her loveliness’ (2.60-61). She adopts her mother’s self-reflexivity with the addition of her father’s luminosity, and Rubin affirms that: ‘Her birth keeps the two elements of fire and water united, for she takes shape out of dew, but her “embodied Power” generates warmth in the cave. Now the sun (or the supernatural) is permanently fused with the mist (or natural) in the luminous form of her being’.[[505]](#footnote-505) I concur with Rubin that the Witch is a product of the union of elemental opposites, and his assertion that the Witch is ‘permanently fused’ with mist and luminousness brings attention to the problematic permanence of an achieved androgynous state. A permanent fusion uncomfortably positions the poem in a state of achieved finality, a state that Shelley repeatedly tests and attempts to avoid both by means of his Witch’s restlessness and his narrator’s withholding of a conclusion. To reach a state of permanence is to deny poetry its ‘vitally metaphorical’ power (*A Defence of Poetry*, p. 676). Poetry is predicated upon a process of reflexivity and receptivity, where ‘the pleasure resulting from the manner in which [poets] express the influence of society or nature upon their own minds, communicates itself to others, and gathers a sort of reduplication from that community’ (*A Defence of Poetry*, p. 676). The self-reflexivity permeating the epyllion is emphasised by how the Witch’s ‘vest of flowing metre’ emanates ‘From her own beauty’ (‘To Mary’, 5.37 and *The Witch of Atlas* 5.82). There is, as Madeleine Callaghan observes, ‘a parallel between the poet weaving his words as his Witch weaves her garment’.[[506]](#footnote-506) The Witch is born from a synthesising succession of transformations, and she in turn spins her ‘visionary rhyme’ (‘To Mary’, 1.8) from an unending amalgamation of myth and imagination.

The process of elemental synthesis resulting in the Witch’s birth contrasts with Crisman’s reading of the ‘moth-and-taper’ image as an eroticised ‘emblem of death that comes from unwitting attraction’.[[507]](#footnote-507) This reading overlooks the subtle inversions at play in the Song of Spirits’ chant in Act 2 of *Prometheus Unbound*. Preceding the ‘moth-and-taper’ image, the Spirits beckon the Oceanides

Down, down!

As the fawn draws the hound,

As the lightning the vapour,

As a weak moth the taper;

Death, despair; love, sorrow;

Time both; today, tomorrow;

As steel obeys the Spirit of the stone,

Down, down!

(*Prometheus Unbound*, 2.3.64-71)

The succession of similes in these lines paints, not a picture of destruction, but of mutual action and attraction. Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi notes that these lines are ‘unusual’ and are marked by a ‘mutual attraction that brings these opposites into unity’, continuing to state that ‘the lines describe strange reversals of strength and weakness. The fawn (“stag” in an earlier version, a revision that proves “weakness” the quality Shelley wanted to emphasize [*SPU* 132]), weak in itself, has power over the hound’.[[508]](#footnote-508) The active verb ‘draws’ is implied within the lines that follow it, so that, as Stuart Sperry acknowledges, it is ‘impossible to read [the lines] initially except in the order that the preceding syntax has established’, thereby ‘inverting our customary sense of cause and effect’.[[509]](#footnote-509) The result is that the fawn actively entices the hound, the lightning draws the vapour, and the ‘weak moth’ controls the taper. The seemingly antithetical magnetism in this series of images is bolstered by the final comparison: ‘As steel obeys the Spirit of the stone’. This series of paradoxical inversions is finally acknowledged by the Spirits’ cry to ‘Resist not the weakness— / Such strength is in meekness’ (*Prometheus Unbound*, 2.3.93-94). In *Prometheus Unbound*, the ‘moth-and-taper’ image is not the case of ‘unwitting attraction’ resulting in destruction that Crisman considers it to be. The inversion of attraction occurring within this image is active and intentional. The moth finds strength in its weakness as it draws nearer to and enticingly attracts the flame. Similarly, the reappearance of the ‘moth-and-taper’ image in *The Witch of Atlas* does not simply imply a destructive act of ‘unwitting attraction’. Rather, dissolving should not be read as synonymous with destruction, but with a transformation through synthesis. Rubin’s reading of the Witch’s conception considers the metamorphosis active in the water cycle: ‘The Sun, which does not change its shape or nature, unites with one of the Atlantides. The union becomes successively mist, cloud, meteor, star, and ultimately coalesces into that perfect marriage of fire and water, the Witch. Clearly,’ Rubin states, ‘it is the union of the changeless with the changing, in which changing watery cycles undergo a metamorphosis into changeless light (fire)’. Dissolving is a process of change and union, and in consideration of Rubin’s reading, the Witch’s mother as water is not actually destroyed, but is rather ‘[v]aporized by the heat of the sun, it rises into clouds, and ultimately returns to earth as rain or dew, such as the “dewy splendour” that condenses within the cave’.[[510]](#footnote-510) While Crisman’s psychological reading of the Witch’s relationship with her mother is one predicated on childhood damage and sexual violence and destruction, thereby neglecting to consider elements of synthesis and unity, he ultimately posits that ‘the poem’s plot’ plays out in an ‘atemporal state nevertheless having the appearance of constant, fluid change’,[[511]](#footnote-511) and this reading demonstrates an awareness of the poem’s buoyant vacillations between movement, mutability, and a venturing towards but denial of finality.

Aware that ‘one need not deliver the whole truth more than once’,[[512]](#footnote-512) the epyllion tests the creative process as an ever-unfolding activity and considers if and how the androgynous imagination may retain a state of synthesis without submitting to stasis. The Witch is not content to watch the world pass by from the confines of her cave. The androgynous synthesis of fire and water from which she was conceived is juxtaposed in a state of flux within her cave. A fire burns on her hearth, and ‘Each flame of it is as a precious stone / Dissolved in ever moving light’ (27.260-261). The fire is oxymoronically solid and dissolving into the ‘ever moving light’ that is emblematic of the poem itself. The epyllion’s swiftly cycling stanzas of *ottava rima* rhythmically dance upon the page like flames, refusing to submit to stasis. The ‘ever moving light’ of the fire is followed by a stanza detailing the Witch’s fountain, where ‘Through the green splendour of the water deep / She saw the constellations reel and dance / Like fire-flies’ (28.268-270). Elements confound their intrinsic properties in the Witch’s cave, challenging the reader to delight in the poem’s disorienting images. The presiding effect of the juxtaposition of fire and water in the Witch’s cave is one of intermingling; Rubin notes that ‘whether the Witch is gazing upward or downward, the waters are in conjunction with the stars; and, though the Witch is distinct from both, she partakes of both’.[[513]](#footnote-513) The ambiguity of the images populating the poem emphasises the state of mind required to conceive of or receive its vision. The Witch is an androgynous whole, a ‘sexless bee’ who paradoxically also flits between being a masculine ‘wizard lady’ and a feminine ‘lady-witch’ (68.589; 43.385; 47.419). Although androgynous, the Witch cannot rest in the achieved finality implied by the word ‘androgyne’, for as soon as ‘words…become through time signs for portions and classes of thoughts, instead of pictures of integral thoughts…language will be dead’. Androgyny must remain a vitally active force in Shelley’s poetry, and to do this the poet must ‘create afresh the associations which have been thus disorganized’ (*A Defence of Poetry*, p. 676).

In *The Witch of Atlas*, Shelley condenses Panthea’s dream of androgynous intermingling with Prometheus and Asia’s retirement to the cave where their union as the ‘androgyne’, to employ Ross’ term, is consummated. The Witch is born into the poem as a product of an androgynous union that borrows from *Prometheus Unbound*, where ‘in that cave a dewy splendour hidden, / Took shape and motion: with the living form / Of this embodied Power, the cave grew warm’ (4.78-80). However, whereas Prometheus and Asia’s cave is a space of social activity, a utopian haven where the androgynously united Prometheus and Asia and their accompanying audience may ‘sit and talk of time and change, / As the world ebbs and flows, ourselves unchanged’ (*Prometheus Unbound*, 3.3.23-24), the Witch’s cave is more akin to a hermitage ‘stored with magic treasures’ (14.154) where:

At first she lived alone in this wild home,

And her own thoughts were each a minister,

Clothing themselves or with the ocean-foam,

Or with the wind, or with the speed of fire,

To work whatever purposes might come

Into her mind; such power her mighty Sire

Had girt them with, whether to fly or run,

Through all the regions which he shines upon.

(21.209-216)

The autonomous act of poetic creation celebrated and tested in *The Witch of Atlas* is imaged in these lines. The Witch’s ‘mighty Sire’, Apollo, the god of poetry, casts his illuminations on his daughter’s surroundings, and, as Milton Wilson states, ‘her allegiance is more to her father than to her mother’.[[514]](#footnote-514) The poet Witch finds more pleasure in interacting with her personified thoughts than in engaging with the animals and mythological entities who seek her companionship. She revels in her own company, and this is mirrored by the self-illuminating poetical instruments that are arranged within her cave: ‘Carved lamps and chalices, and phials which shone / In their own golden beams’ (20.205-206). Though emanating from or acted upon by the Witch, the objects touched by ‘the enchantment of her father’s power’ maintain an air of self-reflexivity (20.202). While the thoughts that minister to her are possessively ‘her own’, they also maintain a degree of autonomy indicated by the reflexive pronoun in ‘cloth[e] themselves’, which also recalls the way in which the Witch weaves her own veil.

Beginning with the paradoxical claim to ‘tell no story, false or true’, and abruptly ending with the narrator’s truncating statement: ‘I will declare [the rest of her pranks] another time’ (1.4; 78.699), the poem plays out in a state of seemingly detached ambivalence. The epyllion sees Shelley playfully chiding what he considers will be the doubtful or disengaged audience while delighting in his own imaginative virtuosity, and perhaps subtly winking to the imaginatively attuned readers who participated in the renovated universe of *Prometheus Unbound*.[[515]](#footnote-515) In the lyrical drama, the readership’s imaginative engagement with the poet’s vision results in mental and potentially social change, but in *The Witch of Atlas*, Shelley seems to frolic in a purely poetic world. Despite its air of ambivalent detachment, *The Witch of Atlas* is a highly self-aware poem and retains cognizance of its potential to affect the reader. It encourages experimentation with the poet-reader relationship through imaginative exercise and entertainment. Deflated by the dashed hopes of attracting a wider audience through previous works of intended public appeal, such as *Laon and Cythna* and *The Cenci*, the prefatory dedication ‘To Mary’ sees Shelley lamenting, ‘O, let me not believe / That any thing of mine is fit to live!’ (3.23-24). However, the dedication does not dwell in despondency; rather, it tenuously proposes a challenge to the ideal reader while also pressing the poet’s own ability to create ‘Forms more real than living man’ (*Prometheus Unbound*, 1.748). The synthesising potential of the ideal reader and poet’s imaginations previously exalted in the lyrical drama is now met with sceptical circumscription in *The Witch of Atlas* where Shelley tests the affective limits of poetry.

*The Witch of Atlas*’ challenge to its ideal readership commences prior to the poem proper, beginning with the prefatory stanzas ‘To Mary’. Anticipating Mary’s disapproval of the ‘visionary rhyme’ due to its lack of ‘human interest’ (1.8) and fearing her consequent disengagement from imaginative participation in Shelley’s poeticised universe, the prefatory stanzas playfully mock the poet’s lofty aims. Shelley’s self-satirizing is an empathic attempt to regain imaginative union with Mary, his ideal reader. The poet strives to practice what he will later postulate in *A Defence of Poetry* that: ‘A man to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others’ (*A Defence of Poetry*, p. 682). Shelley mirrors Mary’s stance by making light of his conviction in the imagination’s ability to affect positive change; ironically, by exercising his ability to mirror another’s mind in order to encourage reconciliation, Shelley proves his point about the imagination’s ability to affect goodness. This position of being in two minds at once—projecting the poet’s ideals while also undercutting them in order to mirror the reader’s reaction—is emblematic of *The Witch of Atlas*. Michael O’Neill points up the poem’s duality in positing that the epyllion ‘shapes the reader’s awareness…by “double takes” which involve us in seeing at the same time the human meaning of an experience or idea and the meaning the experience or idea possesses for the Witch’.[[516]](#footnote-516) Whereas William Hazlitt responds to Shelley’s *Witch* as being ‘full of fancy and of fire, with glowing allusions and wild machinery, but which it is difficult to read through, from the disjointedness of the materials, the incongruous metaphors and violent transitions, and of which, after reading them through, it is impossible, in most instances, to guess the drift or the moral’, claiming that the contents of the poem are ‘huddled together in a strange and hurried dance of words’,[[517]](#footnote-517) his review overlooks the necessity of those ‘incongruous metaphors’ in order to enact the androgynous doubling that encourages empathy. *The Witch of Atlas* embodies androgyny in a new and previously untested manner through one central character, emblematic of the poet: The Witch. In doing so, Shelley is able to consider both the potential and limitations of poetry.

The ‘hurried dance of words’ that Hazlitt notes is created by the poem’s *ottava rima*, the brisk pace of which complements its quick wit. The editors note that the form of *The Witch of Atlas* ‘draws more on the characteristics of the Italian exponents of *ottava rima* than on the overtly comical tone of their English imitators’, citing Ugo Foscolo’s assertion in ‘Narrative and Romantic Poems of the Italians’ that ‘“The English author has filled his poem with sprightly humour, whilst the Italian romantic poets only laugh now and then”’.[[518]](#footnote-518) The ambiguity of laughter is essential to the doubled quality of *The Witch of Alas*; rather than being wholly comic, the poem flits between moments of lightness and gravitas. While Shelley’s manipulation of *ottava rima* maintains moments of comedy and emphasises the Witch’s restless wanderings and playful escapades, its pace also belies the urgency of imaginative commingling: the achievement of the ‘psychic unity’ on which androgyny is predicated.[[519]](#footnote-519) The form simultaneously mocks and maintains Shelley’s conviction in poetry, flitting between sympathetic laughter and steadfast integrity. These ‘double takes’ are further emphasised by the form’s rhyme scheme, where the speedily alternating *ababab* is synthesised by the quick shift into a uniting couplet. The poem handles rhyme in a manner that mirrors its doubling of vision, in what O’Neill describes as the human meaning or experience and the meaning or experience for the Witch. The tightly winding rhyme of the *ottava rima* mirrors Shelley’s enchanting Witch: ‘Rhyme is an idol, it is witchcraft’.[[520]](#footnote-520) This rhythmical mediation also embodies androgyny as a unifying process by emphasising two distinct entities and ushering forth their union. The closing couplet is emblematic of the self putting themselves in the place of the other, and vice versa. However, the comic quality of this form seems to play with the notion of androgyny as a completed and fulfilled state of union. The repetition of this union, compounded with the poem’s lack of a ‘story, false or true’ (1.4), and its withholding of an ending without ever achieving any sense of revolutionary meaning or conclusion breeds a sense of futility. In the epyllion, Shelley seems aware that ‘to rest in achieved meaning is to stop writing’, as per Claridge’s assertion.[[521]](#footnote-521) If the aim of androgyny is to reach a finite state of whole and perfect union, the poet ponders how the creative imagination can continue to actively exist and affect its audience after having reached the melioristic heights of androgynous intermingling in *Prometheus Unbound*.

This attempt at repeatedly encouraging androgynous union through empathy facilitated by the melding quality of the *ottava rima* recalls the dedication ‘To Mary’ prefacing *Laon and Cythna*, wherein Mary and Shelley are united and eternalised in the image of ‘Two tranquil stars’ ‘That burn from year to year with unextinguished light’ (14.123 and 126). Empathic union is emphasised elsewhere in the dedication prefacing *Laon and Cythna* through the chiming end rhyme of ‘we’, ‘me’, and ‘thee’ in the ninth stanza, where the modulating first-person plural and singular pronouns harmoniously meld (9.78 and 80-81). Considering the ‘prosodic tunes’ of Pope’s *Rape of the Lock*, Simon Jarvis notes how the melodic virtuosity of prosody allows for ‘a seduction in which I do not know where the other is, and in which I therefore do not know what it would take to please her, and in which I therefore take the risk that my pleasure can also be hers: in other words, in which I can seduce the other only by relinquishing myself into my own art’.[[522]](#footnote-522) The desire for harmony between self and Other, poet and reader, results in an empathic process where ‘the pains and pleasures of his species must become [the poet’s] own’ (*A Defence of Poetry*, p. 682). However, as Bloom concedes, the interval between the dedications to *Laon and Cythna* and *The Witch of Atlas* is marked by a shift ‘[f]rom idealistic dream-making of the fulfillment of desire…to fully conscious mythopoeia with its knowledge that desire is unfulfillable’.[[523]](#footnote-523) The persevering hope imaged as the ‘unextinguished light’ in the dedication to *Laon and Cythna* is forlornly recast in the prefatory stanzas to *The Witch of Atlas* as ‘The lucent eyes, and the eternal smile, / Serene as thine, which lent it life awhile’ (2.15-16), which in turn recalls the ‘Two starry eyes’ that ‘hung in the gloom of thought, / And seemed with their serene and azure smiles / To beckon him’ (490-92), the doomed Poet of *Alastor*. Like the Poet, the ephemeral ‘silken-winged fly’ is also ‘doom[ed] to die’ (2.9;13). The ‘silken-winged fly’ anticipates the ‘winged Vision’ in the third stanza, alluding to *Laon and Cythna*, as Michael O’Neill has noted.[[524]](#footnote-524) However, this stanza also overtly alludes to *Laon and Cythna* in its likeness to the epic’s dedication ‘To Mary’:

To thy fair feet a winged Vision came,

Whose date should have been longer than a day,

And o’er thy head did beat its wings for fame,

And in thy sight its fading plumes display;

The watery bow burned in the evening flame,

But the shower fell, the swift sun went his way—

And that is dead.—O, let me not believe

That any thing of mine is fit to live!

(3.17-24)

The first line recalls Shelley’s exclamation in the dedication prefacing *Laon and Cythna* that ‘the fruit is at thy feet!’ (2.11), revisiting the delivery of the long poem to the poet’s ideal reader. Shelley’s active role of creator and deliverer in the dedication to *Laon and Cythna* is subverted in the prefatory stanzas to *The Witch of Atlas* where the Vision of the poem presents itself to Mary, flaunting its fiery plumage in hopes of receiving her praise. Rubin observes that ‘[h]ere the failure of vision is ascribed to the failure of Mary’s imagination to impose unity on the opposing elements’; the reader’s imaginative impotence contrasts with the Witch’s and poet’s autonomous androgyny, as Rubin continues: ‘The sun and water which fall asunder before Mary’s ineffectual imagination will be successfully united in Shelley’s creation of the Witch’.[[525]](#footnote-525) The poet wavers between a self-sustained poeticised universe, a place of play where the reader’s lack of imagination is of no consequence, and the acknowledgement that the poem’s endurance depends upon its finding a receptive audience. This, after all, is what Shelley implies when he proclaims in *A Defence of Poetry* that ‘A Poet participates in the eternal, the infinite and the one’, in the sense that poetry ‘acts in a divine and unapprehended manner, beyond and above consciousness: and it is reserved for future generations to contemplate and measure the mighty cause and effect in all the strength and splendour of their union’ (p. 677 and p. 680). As Marlon B. Ross observes while discussing *Prometheus Unbound*, the reader has the power to ‘influence [the poem’s] shape and outcome’.[[526]](#footnote-526) *The Witch of Atlas* tests the repercussions of the poem being given free rein to seek out receptive readers who may shape or reject it at their will. There also exists the sceptical doubt that the poem may find no receptive readership at all and be disinterestedly disregarded by those the poet has hoped would embrace it. This is the premise the dedication ‘To Mary’ in *The Witch of Atlas* sets up, situating the poet as ambivalent observer rather than the imaginatively interactive participant he had previously been in *Prometheus Unbound*, or the controlling guide of *Laon and Cythna*.

The poem’s parading of itself to Mary, ‘o’er thy head’ and ‘in thy sight’, recalls Shelley’s description of Mary in the dedication prefacing *Laon and Cythna*, ‘in the light thine ample forehead wears’ ‘And thro’ thine eyes, even in thy soul I see / A lamp of vestal fire burning internally’ (11.94 and 98-99). Whereas fire functions as a unifying fuel in the dedication prefacing *Laon and Cythna*, shining from Mary’s eyes and igniting Shelley’s creative capacity, and culminating in the image of Mary and Shelley shining inextinguishably ‘Like lamps’ in the final stanza, in the dedication to *The Witch of Atlas* Mary is unresponsive to the poet’s flames of inspiration. The Vision flaps its wings over Mary’s head and across her range of vision in an image that anticipates the Witch’s tamed Visions that ‘beat their vans’ like ‘bats at the window of a dairy’ (16.174 and 173), where the bats seeking shelter within the dairy is akin to the Vision yearning for Mary’s protection. However, the Vision’s efforts are futile, as Mary either ignores or is unaware of it ‘beat[ing] its wings for fame’ ‘in thy sight’. These lines are followed by the ambiguous image of ‘The watery bow burned in the evening flame’, a seemingly contradictory conflation of elemental opposites. Despite their oppositions, water and fire are synthesised through the mediating rainbow, to follow the editors’ gloss of ‘bow’, where the rainbow itself is ‘a source of unity’.[[527]](#footnote-527) Alternatively, ‘bow’ in this instance could also refer, not to a rainbow, but to the crescent moon. This usage of ‘bow’ would accord with the fourth stanza, where ‘Ten times the Mother of the Months had bent / Her bow beside the folding-star’ (4.73-74) and would be reasonable considering that it appears ‘in the evening’. Additionally, its being described as ‘watery’ echoes the Moon of *Prometheus Unbound*, whose ‘solid oceans flow, and sing, and shine’: a loving reflection of her counterpart, the Earth (*Prometheus Unbound*, 4.358). The reflexivity of the Earth and Moon in *Prometheus Unbound* is recast in *The Witch of Atlas*’s conflation of moon and sun, where both celestial bodies share the verb ‘burned’, a fiery force emanating from the moon’s white light and the sun’s heat. Tenuously positing the harmonious intermingling of opposites, the line occupies the middle of the stanza where it teeters between a hopeful return to Mary and Shelley’s union while also anticipating her rejection of the poet’s Vision. Shelley’s scepticism in his ideal reader is confirmed by the stanza’s final lines: ‘But the shower fell, the swift sun went his way— / And that is dead.’ Yet death is impermanent in *The Witch of Atlas*, where a coffin is later tossed ‘with contempt into a ditch’, letting ‘the body lay, age after age, / Mute, breathing, beating, warm, and undecaying’ (70.608-10). As Hugh Roberts posits, the Witch’s ‘“immortality,” her so-called inability to die, is actually an openness to “death” so constant and complete that no moment can be singled out as “her death”’.[[528]](#footnote-528) Resistant to finalities, the poetic universe of *The Witch of Atlas* rolls in a fiery Heraclitan flux. Despite Mary’s rejection of Shelley’s Vision, the Witch defies destruction in the third stanza of the poem, which reflexively recasts the third stanza of the dedication; therein, the description of her mother anticipates her own mutable qualities:

’Tis said, she first was changed into a vapour,

And then into a cloud, such clouds as flit,

Like splendour-winged moths about a taper,

Round the red west when the sun dies in it:

And then into a meteor, such as caper

On hill-tops when the moon is in a fit;

Then into one of those mysterious stars

Which hide themselves between the Earth and Mars.

(3.65-72)

The regeneration of imagery from the third stanza of the dedication to the third stanza of the poem is compounded by the Vision being birdlike and imbued with flames, likening it to a phoenix.[[529]](#footnote-529) Regardless of its readership’s reaction, the poet places hope in the poem’s ability to regenerate itself, to eternally wind and roll through time until it meets an audience who will empathically embrace the poet’s vision. This regenerative potential is akin to Paul Valéry’s definition of poetry as that which ‘does not die for having lived: it is expressly designed to be born again from its ashes and to become endlessly what it has just been’, where the reader is implicated in ‘that it tends to get itself reproduced in its own form: it stimulates us to reconstruct it identically’.[[530]](#footnote-530) Shelley’s strategy of employing androgyny as a vehicle of mental revolution undergoes experimentation in *The Witch of Atlas*; rather than embodying the poet and reader’s selves within the text, wherein they may become imaginatively united through intersubjectivity, such as in *Prometheus Unbound*, the Witch solely embodies the poetic process. Like a poet, she weaves the poem’s structure with the threads of her own being, but she is also a portion of the poem’s universe and is not averse to inviting the reader’s participation. Michael O’Neill lights upon this ambiguity in stating that Shelley ‘is torn between two attitudes to poetic invention’;[[531]](#footnote-531) and yet, it is this fluctuating doubleness that grants the poem its self-propelled power.

As a poem that self-consciously embodies the poetic process, *The Witch of Atlas* crystallises the unfolding act of creation without ever reaching a state of finality. Like the immortal androgynous beings of Aristophanes’ speech in Plato’s *Symposium*, ‘[p]oetry is “immortal” because it is always dying’; Roberts posits that, ultimately, ‘the poet’s context of production and the reader’s context(s) of consumption…give us a “perpetual[ly renewed] sympathy” with a universe in becoming’.[[532]](#footnote-532) Roberts’ description of the epyllion as ‘“immortal” because it is always dying’, oscillating between the interdependent process of consumption and production, recalls the primal power of *Prometheus Unbound*, the genderless Demogorgon, in its approximation to ‘the great tail-eating serpent, the Ouroboros’.[[533]](#footnote-533) The cyclically consuming and regenerating symbol that Shelley imaged in the lyrical drama is embodied by the epyllion. The poem circles upon itself, ‘tell[ing] no story’ and ever delaying its end. By likening itself to the Ouroboros, Shelley emphasises its androgynous quality: ‘the serpent with its tail in its mouth…is one of the earliest of the androgynous symbols…it represents eternity, being circular, but because it contains in itself the male and female members, it is also androgynous: male in its serpent shape, female in its mouth which receives or surrounds’.[[534]](#footnote-534) The Witch, although feminine, resists the constrictions of a single gender. As the poem eludes finalities, the Witch also evades the stability of a single gender by shifting from being described as a ‘wizard lady’ to a ‘lady-witch’, and later ‘like a sexless bee’ (43.385; 47.419; 68.589). The masculine connotations of ‘wizard’ are androgynously coupled with ‘lady’, only to be subverted by the overtly feminine oxymoronic moniker of ‘lady-witch’. The likening of the Witch to a ‘sexless bee’ is ironic, as the majority of bees ‘are neuter females, as Shelley knew (*Queen Mab*, LXVIII, 5). At the same time, the fertile—and sexual—queen-bee historically has dual sexuality’. The Witch as ‘sexless bee’ emphasises her ‘dually sexed’ androgyny. Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi’s analysis of the bees in *Prometheus Unbound* is equally relevant to *The Witch of Atlas*, where the bee, like the Witch, is ‘self-fertilizing; and source of all creative energy and production, including the honey of verse’.[[535]](#footnote-535) The doubleness inherent to androgyny permeates *The Witch of Atlas* on multiple and often interconnected levels. This androgynous doubleness is crucially central to Gaston Bachelard’s conception of poetic reverie, the application of which offers insight into *The Witch of Atlas* as autonomous aesthetic object, as poet caught in the act of creation, and as reader invited to interact with both the poem as a consumer and co-producer.

For Bachelard, the state of poetic ‘reverie idealizes both its object and the dreamer at the same time. And when the reverie lives in a dualism of the masculine and the feminine, the idealization is concrete and limitless at the same time’.[[536]](#footnote-536) As a celebration and exploration of the imagination, *The Witch of Atlas* engages with Bachelard’s conception of poetic reverie: ‘limitless’ as ‘a universe in becoming’, to return to Roberts’ phrasing. While Bachelard’s notion of poetic reverie as ‘liv[ing] in a dualism of the masculine and the feminine’ is suggestive of Shelley’s use of the androgynous imagination, it seems that Shelley’s aim throughout his oeuvre from *Queen Mab* to the *Triumph of Life* is to reach a state of equality through balance, to overcome the hierarchical limitations of the socially-imposed gender binary. The Witch’s immortality exemplifies the ‘dualism’ of androgyny. Her life, both as an immortal character and as the textually-embodied poet, is itself emblematic of Shelley’s conception of poetry as immortal in that ‘it is reserved for future generations to contemplate’, and in this way it is limitless (*A Defence of Poetry*, p. 680). Rejecting the stasis of a finite state, she shuns the company of her mythological companions with the same amount of detachment she displays towards the humans she performs pranks on, even nonchalantly discarding her only progeny and companion, Hermaphroditus. The abruptly inconclusive ending to the epyllion indicates that the Witch’s pranks know no end. Seemingly incapable of change, and yet destined for eternity, there is an undercurrent of tragic futility to this otherwise comic poem. For, while Shelley attests in the *Defence* that ‘Poetry is the record of the happiest and best moments of the happiest and best minds’ (p. 697), ‘poetry—summit of all aesthetic joy’,[[537]](#footnote-537) pours forth from the poet who ‘sings to cheer its own solitude’ (*A Defence of Poetry*, p. 680). Lamenting a lack of sympathetic receptivity in his real readership, including his ideal reader, Mary, Shelley ‘unburdens [his] inmost soul to them’, only to ‘[find] [his] language misunderstood’ and must consign the hope of his efforts at being sympathetically received instead to the imagined ideal readers of the future (‘On Love’, p. 631).

In the dedication ‘To Mary’, Shelley both chides and attempts to empathise with his ideal reader, revolving between self-satirising play while still urging Mary’s imaginative involvement. In her own form of dedication to Shelley, the fastidiously collected and edited texts and notes that accompany Shelley’s published works, Mary dialogically engages her husband. In particular, she takes up Shelley’s ‘two attitudes to poetic invention’ in her ‘Note on *The Witch of Atlas*’. The note is often derided due to her claim that the poem’s inspiration is rooted in nature and flights of fancy, overlooking its indebtedness to literary tradition and its imaging of the poetic process. For instance, Carlos Baker voices frustration at Mary’s lack of regard for *The Witch of Atlas*’ breadth of literary allusions and influences in his emphatic assertion that ‘[e]ither Mary was filling editorial space or intentionally spreading yellow moonshine, for *The Witch of Atlas* is not a nature poem at all. It is the most completely and obviously literary poem Shelley ever wrote’.[[538]](#footnote-538) However, what has frequently been viewed as a misinterpretation of the epyllion is actually Mary’s effort to paratextually engage with *The Witch of Atlas* on its own ambiguous grounds. Samuel Lyndon Gladden affirms that in Mary’s notes, her frequently submissive and apologetic language seemingly ‘aimed at self-protection (from the reading public’ ‘also works to subvert submission into subjectivity—for here we see exactly who Mary Shelley is—her own person—as well as who she is not—her husband’s echo’.[[539]](#footnote-539) Mary clearly delineates between her own intentions and Shelley’s in the ‘Note on *The Witch of Atlas*’, boldly asserting ‘Even now I believe that I was in the right’ in regards to her objection to *The Witch of Atlas* on the grounds of it lacking human interest.[[540]](#footnote-540) Mary asserts her subjectivity through the repeated use of first-person declarative statements, and in doing so, marks a bold contrast between many of her other notes which are presented in the first-person plural, to align herself with Shelley’s readership, or in the objectively detached third-person. By defending her position, Mary defiantly assumes the posture of the Witch, indifferent to and unaffected by others’ opinions, and this is in line with Michael O’Neill’s assertion that Shelley ‘deftly identifies Mary with his Witch’ in the dedication.[[541]](#footnote-541) While critical attacks on Mary’s note, such as Baker’s, discredit it on the grounds of Mary’s painting the epyllion as a ‘Nature’ poem, little attention has been paid to the bulk of the note’s content which is not on nature, but rather, on the poet’s sympathetic relationship with his readership. Mary’s repeated acknowledgement of Shelley’s desire to engage sympathetically with his readers, and her own desire for ‘the chord of sympathy between him and his countrymen [to be] touched’, reveals her awareness of the importance of empathic engagement to Shelley.

The epyllion explores the fleeting frustrations of inspiration, composition, and reception. However, its self-consciousness should not be mistaken for escapist self-absorption into the ‘airiest flights of fancy’.[[542]](#footnote-542) Commonly agreed to be the most literary of Shelley’s poems, *The Witch* *of Atlas* offers a poetical playground rich in allusions and saturated with wit, where the *ottava rima* provides a comic structure on which the Witch may weave her measure. The epyllion dazzlingly dresses itself in allusions and mythopoeia, and in doing so, it ‘draw[s] attention to the writer’s role as reader’,[[543]](#footnote-543) which in turn arouses empathic recognition from the imaginatively attuned reader. Empathic recognition is contrasted with satiric jest and nowhere more than in the falsely androgynous character of Hermaphroditus, whose vacant mind and sealed eyes mock the poet and reader’s empathy: the motivating force of androgyny as ‘psychic unity’ in Shelley’s poetry. The allusive intersections and mythical adaptations rife in *The Witch of Atlas* anticipate Shelley’s claim in *A Defence of Poetry* that ‘A Poet participates in the eternal, the infinite and the one’, and that ‘All high poetry is infinite’ (pp. 677 and 693); however, the infinitude conveyed by the Witch’s immortality is contrastingly met by the sudden snap back into the finite present in the final stanza, underscoring Shelley’s wavering hope in his poetry’s ability to profoundly affect his contemporary readers.

Stephen C. Behrendt notes that ‘in his final years Shelley devoted himself more consciously to writing primarily for an audience of posterity, for virtual readers of the future who might yet prove to be ideal readers’.[[544]](#footnote-544) The poet’s participation in eternity is optimistically predicated upon his future readers’ receptivity. After the revolutionary aims and harmonising heights of *Prometheus Unbound*, Harold Bloom concedes, ‘Shelley wrote nothing so hopeful again’.[[545]](#footnote-545) To this I would add that Shelley wrote nothing so hopefully aimed at an existing body of readers. His scope narrowed to affecting and interacting with individual readers such as Emilia Viviani and Jane Williams, with additional focus set optimistically upon a future audience; as Kelvin Everest poignantly acknowledges: ‘The means of [Shelley’s] political agency as a force for change were poetic, and, as he rightly understood, posthumous’.[[546]](#footnote-546)

Diminished hopes do not give way to stark dejection; rather, in *The Witch of Atlas* Shelley finds solace in satiric scrutiny, where sympathy endures by way of the poem’s balanced mockery of the poet’s capacities and aims and the ideal reader’s ability to engage with and reciprocate these aims. Timothy Webb observes a similar equilibrium being achieved in the explicitly satirical *Mask of Anarchy*, on which he comments: ‘[Shelley’s] principles are not satisfied till that satiric vision has been qualified by a vision of hope’.[[547]](#footnote-547) The satirical self-mockery that runs throughout *The Witch of Atlas* is mediated by sympathy. As Shelley pokes fun at himself, he seems to expect his imaginatively attuned ideal readers to do the same. The epyllion acts as a retrospective of the poet’s career thus far, entertainingly intertwining elements of *Alastor*, *Laon and Cythna*, and *Prometheus Unbound* with an array of allusions to philosophic and literary influences. Shelley chides and satirises his own oeuvre by condensing the miniature epic into the image of a ‘silken-wingèd fly’, ‘doom[ed] to die’ (‘To Mary’, 2.9 and 13). And yet, in contrast to this self-deprecation, love, the empathic ‘identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action or person, not our own’ (*A Defence of Poetry*, p. 682), remains the presiding power of *The Witch of Atlas*. The self-chastising dedication ‘To Mary’ culminates in the poet’s admonition to his reader: ‘If you unveil my Witch, no Priest or Primate / Can shrive you of that sin,—if sin there be / In love, when it becomes idolatry’ (6.46-48). Veiling and unveiling play out as mutual processes in the epyllion as the reader attempts to unravel the poem in search of an underlying moral or meaning, recalling Hazlitt’s frustrated inability ‘to guess the drift or the moral’,[[548]](#footnote-548) and overlooking the possibility that there may not be one. ‘As “love” becomes “idolatry”’, Michael O’Neill writes, ‘the reader participates in a process that mimes the poet’s own Pygmalion-like discoveries’.[[549]](#footnote-549) The poet continues to weave, delighting in his own creation and its effect on its audience, and the poet and reader share in the joy of poetic discovery, even if that discovery is the lack rather than the presence of a core truth or meaning. As Hogle writes: ‘The entire development of the mind towards poetry, culminating in the imagination’s urging towards greater transference, reveals itself as a self-rethreading texture that keeps reconnecting its vestiges of what is never entirely there’.[[550]](#footnote-550) The closer the Witch’s literal and figurative audience approaches to her illuminating presence, the more necessary it becomes for her to weave ‘a subtle veil’ in order to ‘shadow…the splendour of her love’ (13.151-152).

Shelley tests the power of the poem as an aesthetic object rather than the vehicle of moral revolution, delighting in a self-sustained universe where poetry feeds off of its own ever-renewing embers. In this state, the poet finds that ‘[r]everie sacralises its object. […] Soon the object is an amulet which helps us and protects us in life’.[[551]](#footnote-551) The veil as protection recalls the dedication ‘To Mary’ prefacing *Laon and Cythna*, where the young poet describes his ‘forbidden mines of lore’ from which he ‘Wrought linked armour for [his] soul, before / It might walk forth to war among mankind’ (5.38 and 41-42). This armour was deemed unnecessary and cast off following the poet’s union with his equal; but now, fearing Mary’s imaginative departure and lamenting the lack of a sympathetic readership, Shelley again seeks to don a protective garment. This time, it is not masculine armour, but a feminine veil. The chivalrous connotations of the dedication prefacing *Laon and Cythna*, wherein Shelley images himself as a ‘victor Knight of Faery, / Earning bright spoils for [his Queen]’ (1.3-4), anticipates Shelley’s assertion in the *Defence* that ‘The freedom of women produced the poetry of sexual love. Love became a religion, the idols of whose worship were ever present’ (*A Defence of Poetry*, p. 690). The concept of love as idolatry is contingent upon women’s liberation. The Witch’s femininity, compounded with her embodying the poem and acting as the poet, ensures her freedom and autonomy. As a character, the Witch needs no male counterpart because she finds love in the act of transforming and creating. Since the Witch is synonymous with the poet, her femininity complements Shelley’s masculinity, and vice versa, ensuring their shared androgynous state. The poet self-reflexively becomes his own ideal reader.

Bachelard emphasises the equality inherent to androgyny by stating that ‘in man as in woman, harmonious androgyny keeps its role of maintaining the calming action of reverie’.[[552]](#footnote-552) *The Witch of Atlas* invites the reader’s participation but does not necessitate it in order to achieve androgynous unity. Unlike *Prometheus Unbound*, there is no ultimate act in which the poet and reader’s minds must align in order to achieve mental revolution. ‘*Prometheus Unbound* exhausted Shelley’s drive toward the realization of his humanist quest’, Bloom writes; ‘*The Witch of Atlas* makes light of finalities’.[[553]](#footnote-553) Instead of reaching a final, celebrated state, such as Prometheus and Asia find in their marital cave, the poet-as-narrator and reader, indicated by the plural first-person pronoun, are passively voyaging voyeurs in a poeticised universe of the Witch’s creation. We are subject to being tossed across seas of which only the Witch may navigate with any sense of certainty.

We, the weak mariners of that wide lake

Where’er its shores extend or billows roll,

Our course unpiloted and starless make

O’er its wild surface to an unknown goal—

But she in the calm depths of her way could take

(63.546-550)

The ‘unpiloted and starless’ course echoes Shelley’s Witch-like lamentation to Maria Gisborne, wherein ‘I have been lately voyaging in a sea without my pilot’ (*PBS Letters*, II, p. 154), underscoring the poet’s strains of sympathy that are self-reflexively woven into verse. The Witch revels in her self-sustained androgynous state; in doing so, she ‘maintain[s] the calming action of reverie’, offering an enduring and limitless space of solace and protection to herself as poet. Aware of his contemporary readership’s determination to draw meaning and human truth from his poetry, Shelley consigns his vision to the unknowable depths of the future, choosing solace in ‘the calm depths’ of infinite reverie rather than chancing another attempt at engaging in empathic reciprocity with the restless tides of his living audience.

Shelley’s hope for future receptivity is expressed in *A Defence of Poetry*, which seems to recast in poetic prose what the poet had previously embodied in his Witch:

Veil after veil may be undrawn and the inmost naked beauty of the meaning never exposed. A great Poem is a fountain forever overflowing with the waters of wisdom and delight; and after one person and one age has exhausted all its divine effluence which their peculiar relations enable them to share, another and yet another succeeds, and new relations are ever developed, the source of an unforeseen and an unconceived delight.

(*A Defence of Poetry*, p. 693)

As Madeleine Callaghan writes, ‘*The Witch of Atlas* [is] a poetic prelude to the prose poetry of *A Defence of Poetry*’, and that in both works ‘[i]mages…of veiling and unveiling’ mingle with ‘meditations on the nature of poetic inspiration and the problem of creating a living poetry’.[[554]](#footnote-554) The scepticism of *The Witch of Atlas* gradually gives way to hope in poetry’s endurance in the *Defence*. For Bachelard, ‘the whole of Romanticism….can be relived as a humanism of idealized love. If one could also detach it from its history, if one could grasp it in its abundant life and transport it into an idealized life in the present, he would recognize that it retains an ever available psychic action’.[[555]](#footnote-555) The poem as ‘an ever available psychic action’ is a central tenet of Shelley’s *Defence*; notably, androgyny, as conceived by Bachelard, Gelpi, and Hoeveler is itself a ‘psychic action’ propounding unity: ‘The androgynous…is a merger of psychic characteristics within the imagination’.[[556]](#footnote-556) The ‘Horatian view that poetry teaches through delight’,[[557]](#footnote-557) significant to *The Witch of Atlas*, resurfaces in the *Defence* through the effusive repetition of ‘delight’ as the principle to be experienced within and gained by poetry. The reader intent on finding a factual narrative, human truth, or a meaningful moral in *The Witch of Atlas* misses out on the poem’s desire to delight.

This desire to delight is vital to the Witch’s character; while the *Defence* describes poems as provoking delight their readership, the Witch desires only to delight herself. Introduced into the poem as a child, her youthful animation manifests itself through her pranks and juvenile recklessness. Like a child, unconcerned with consequences and unburdened by fear, ‘She would often climb / The steepest ladder of the crudded rack’, ‘Ride singing through the shoreless air’, and ‘Following the serpent lightning’s winding track, / She ran upon the platforms of the wind / And laughed to hear the fire-balls roar behind’ (55.481-82; 485; 486-88). In contrast to this childlike play, Christine Gallant characterises ‘the Witch [as] an ambivalent Mother who never takes any responsibility for her ambivalence’, where her maternity is predicated on her creation of Hermaphroditus: her ‘child’.[[558]](#footnote-558) While the Witch’s creative capacity as both the embodiment of the poet and the creator of Hermaphroditus has maternal connotations, she is also childlike in her figuration of the poet’s creative process. Callaghan points up this confusion around the Witch’s identity in stating that the Witch is a ‘figure representing poetry or its effects, [and] is complicated by appearing as a kind of poet in parts of the poem’.[[559]](#footnote-559) The Witch’s ambivalence seems to be predicated not upon her detached attitude toward motherhood but on her dual position as both creator and creation. Bachelard’s conception of poetic reverie as founded in childhood also emphasises the Witch’s youthfulness; her childlike quality is bound up with her creation and sustainment of a poetic universe predicated on reverie. In his own consideration of childhood, closely anticipating Bachelard’s, Shelley declares:

Let us recollect our sensations as children. […] We less habitually distinguished all that we saw and felt from ourselves. They seemed as it were to constitute one mass. There are some persons who in this respect are always children. Those who are subject to the state called reverie feel as if their nature were dissolved into the surrounding universe, or as if the surrounding universe were absorbed into their being.

(‘On Life’, p. 635)

Shelley goes on to posit that ‘As men grow up, this power commonly decays, and they become mechanical and habitual agents’, a statement bearing close resemblance to Bachelard’s own claim that ‘[c]hildhood knows unhappiness through men’, although, ‘[b]y certain of its traits, *childhood lasts all through life*’ (author’s emphasis); for Bachelard, ‘from the moment he is master of his reveries, the child knows the happiness of dreaming which will later be the happiness of the poets’.[[560]](#footnote-560) The states of dream and reverie are gendered; borrowing Jungian terminology, Bachelard posits that ‘in general the dream (*rêve*) issues from the *animus*, and reverie from the *anima*’,[[561]](#footnote-561) respectively masculine and feminine sources. While the idealised state of reverie is androgynous, the presiding gendered force of reverie is feminine.

Bachelard’s gendering of dream and reverie illuminates the relationship between the Witch and Hermaphroditus, and offers an insight into how Shelley implements, subverts, and tests androgyny as a psychically unifying strategy between poet and reader. Critical discussions of androgyny in Shelley’s poetry frequently hinge upon *The Witch of Atlas* due to its character of Hermaphroditus, with multiple studies conflating hermaphroditism and androgyny. For instance, A. J. L. Busst asserts that ‘it is preferable to consider the two terms [‘androgyne’ and ‘Hermaphrodite’] exactly synonymous’, and Nathaniel Brown reads Hermaphroditus as being ‘unequivocally androgynous’.[[562]](#footnote-562) This conflation of terms overlooks crucial differences between androgyny and hermaphroditism, notably that hermaphroditism refers to a bodily state, whereas androgyny is a ‘psychic unity’,[[563]](#footnote-563) existing in the imagination rather than in flesh. Hoeveler’s statement that ‘the creation of the Hermaphrodite is a mockery of the Witch’s androgynous perfection’ seems to be a more apt description of Hermaphroditus’ purpose in the poem, and clearly demarcates hermaphroditism from androgyny. In terms of Hermaphroditus’ role, Cronin reads Hermaphroditus as the Witch’s ‘alter ego’,[[564]](#footnote-564) a reading I depart from because it grants Hermaphroditus more autonomy than it actually possesses, which is to say, none at all. Jean Watson Rosenbaum describes Hermaphroditus as ‘a full and beautiful poetic creation’, curiously allegorising the relationship between the Witch and Hermaphroditus as ‘imaginative vision and poetry’, and describing this relationship as ‘not merely one-way, however, but reciprocal’.[[565]](#footnote-565) This reading of Hermaphroditus as a ‘full and beautiful poetic creation’ clashes with wider critical opinion deeming Hermaphroditus an artificial ‘companion of sorts, but a highly inadequate one, being little more than a robot’, to adopt Bloom’s description.[[566]](#footnote-566) Yet, Rosenbaum’s observation of a reciprocal relationship is more reflective of the idealised relationship between the reader and the poet than between the Witch and Hermaphroditus. However, Bloom’s sense that ‘[t]he limitations of art are involved here, for the Witch has rejected the love of every mortal being, and has chosen instead an automaton of her own creation’ seems more apt.[[567]](#footnote-567) Hermaphroditus is a ‘highly inadequate’ companion because it lacks the autonomy and agency that its creator, the Witch as textually embodied poet, exercises in its creation and dismissal. Andelys Wood also reads Hermaphroditus as an ironic creation criticising the poet’s craft, positing it as ‘a symbol of the synthesizing imagination expressed in a created form’ exposing ‘the limitations of [Shelley’s] art’, where the ‘union of opposites produces in the Hermaphrodite a “sexless thing,” perfect in its purity and immortality but lacking the ability to love, or even to act without the Witch’s commands’.[[568]](#footnote-568) The Witch’s creation of Hermaphroditus, ‘A living Image’ (35.326), seems a parody of poetry’s vitality. Hoeveler’s reading of *The Witch of Atlas* hones in on Shelley’s self-satirising strategy at play in the poem; however, her view that Shelley is presenting the Witch as ‘a self-created fiction of the male mind’, mocking his own ‘poetic failures to achieve erotic apotheosis’, neglects to consider the reader’s role that is so crucial to Shelley’s use of androgyny as mental mingling.[[569]](#footnote-569) The self-satirising strategy at play in the poem arouses amusement in both its creator and attuned audience, which, as Matthew Ward claims, strives to allow for a sympathetic connection to occur between poet and reader.[[570]](#footnote-570) As Wood observes, Hermaphroditus, though heeding the Witch’s commands, is itself unable to respond, being mute and blind by way of its ‘unawakened eyes’ (40.362). Despite the ‘two rapid wings, / Fit to have borne it to the seventh sphere, / Tipped with the speed of liquid lightenings’ hanging from its shoulders, it is more or less immobile and is moved by means of the Witch’s boat and command (37.337-339).

Hermaphroditus is a mockery of both poetry and androgyny; it embodies Shelley’s fear in the dedication ‘To Mary’ that no ‘thing of mine is fit to live!’ (3.24). Although imbued with the winged lightning of the former and the sexlessness—‘no defect / Of either sex, yet all the grace of both’—of the latter, Hermaphroditus is incapable of engaging in the psychic activity that is essential to both (36.330-331). While the Witch exists in a state of poetic reverie, Hermaphroditus is consigned to the lesser state of dream:

And ever as she went, the Image lay

With folded wings and unawakened eyes;

And o’er its gentle countenance did play

The busy dreams, as thick as summer flies,

Chasing the rapid smiles that would not stay,

And drinking the warm tears, and the sweet sighs

Inhaling, which, with busy murmur vain,

They had aroused from that full heart and brain.

(40.361-368)

The poetic power of reverie is linked to its active quality of consciousness: ‘reverie is an oneiric activity in which a glimmer of consciousness subsists. The dreamer of reverie is present in his reverie’.[[571]](#footnote-571) Hermaphroditus’ unawakened state is one of passivity in which dreams act upon it. The eerie imaging of ‘The busy dreams, as thick as summer flies’ upon Hermaphroditus’ face causes one to question whether it is even alive and plays upon the Shelleyan similitude of sleep and death. Lacking consciousness, Hermaphroditus is incapable of attaining androgynous reverie. This contrasts with the Witch who ‘never slept, but lay in a trance / All night within the fountain—as in sleep’ (28.265-266), where through the night:

She saw the constellations reel and dance

Like fire-flies—and withal did ever keep

The tenor of her contemplations calm,

With open eyes, closed feet and folded palm.

(28.269-272)

As Cronin has it, it seems that the Witch’s meditative posture ‘suggest[s] perfect self-completeness, and contemplative self-absorption’.[[572]](#footnote-572) Her self-completion complements the self-reflexivity of the poem, which is in turn emphasised by the dazzling array of reflections that reel across the walls of her cave. Recalling her birth from the synthesis of elemental opposites, the Witch crafts her poesy beneath ‘the cavern’s fountain-lighted roof’ while the flames of her hearth ‘Dissolv[e] in ever moving light’ (26.251 and 27.261). The fountain projects the illuminating properties of fire while the flames dissolve like liquid vapours. Her reverie is marked by a state of controlled consciousness: ‘The tenor of her contemplations calm’. The Witch’s synthesised surroundings and mentally active state underscore androgyny as a mental act. While Hermaphroditus is submerged in sleep, unable to exercise any form of conscious psychic activity, the Witch attempts a form of mental mingling with the dreaming mortals she encounters during her ‘pranks’. Beneath the Witch’s gaze, the sleeping mortals ‘Move in the light of their own beauty’ (65.566), mirroring the Witch’s self-reflexivity and embodying the reciprocal act necessary to poetry’s eternal existence.[[573]](#footnote-573) The Witch is also in possession of ‘a charm of strange device, / Which, murmured on mute lips with tender tone, / Could make that spirit mingle with her own’ (66.574-576). This device emulates Panthea’s dream of Prometheus, wherein the two become androgynously amalgamated as Panthea ‘felt / His presence flow and mingle through my blood’ (*Prometheus Unbound*, 2.1.79-80). This instance of incorporeal mingling between the Witch and the dreaming mortals she visits seems representative of the poet’s effect upon the reader. While it implicates the mingling involved in androgyny as a union of self and Other, it is not a reciprocal act. The dreamers’ lips are ‘mute’ and unable to respond to the Witch’s words, just as the reader is incapable of communicating with the poet. And, rather than becoming equally intermingled, the Witch forcefully ‘make[s] that spirit mingle with her own’. The dreamer, or reader, is entirely passive, submitting to the poet’s reveries rather than co-creating their own. The playfulness of the Witch’s pranks is undercut by the poet’s resigned acknowledgment that the reader cannot be expected to respond to or reciprocate the poet’s imaginings. The ironic overtones of *The Witch of Atlas* become most apparent here, when the Witch is apparently at her most playful, and where the poet’s idealisations of empathic reciprocity are faced with dismayed futility. ‘For irony to be effective, the reader must be aware of its presence’, Wood concedes, noting that the poem’s narrative voice encourages doubt.[[574]](#footnote-574) The voice interrupts its account of the Witch’s pranks with the most effective instance of an empathic attempt to engage the reader in stanza 63, where, for the first time, it addresses and associates with the reader by means of the plural first-person pronoun, in ‘We, the weak mariners of that wide lake’ (63.546). Ambivalence rolls through this stanza as the poet assumes the doubled position of poet-Witch and poet-as-narrator. Shelley maintains his doubtful distance from his readership while offering a nod of acknowledgement. The ‘weak mariners’, in consideration of Asia and Panthea’s descent into Demogorgon’s cave, reminds the imaginatively attuned reader who participated in the lyrical drama to ‘Resist not the weakness— / Such strength is in meekness’ (*Prometheus Unbound*, 2.3.93-94). The reader who fights against the epyllion’s current, attempting to grasp for a moral or meaning, will miss the imaginative freedom created by the poem’s ‘unknown goal’ (63.549). The poem as aesthetic object is emphasised by the image of the lake’s ‘wild surface’; and, a few stanzas earlier, Shelley images ‘the surface of a river’ upon which ‘The shadows of the massy temples lie, / And are never erased—but tremble ever / Like things which every cloud can doom to die’ (59.513-516). The poem can never fully embody the ‘original purity’ of the imagination, for ‘the most glorious poetry that has ever been communicated to the world is probably a feeble shadow of the original conceptions of the poet’ (*A Defence of Poetry*, p. 697). Crisman asserts that the lines quoted above perfectly correlate with the poem, and here, Shelley condenses the fears and hopes addressed in *The Witch of Atlas* into a single image. The poem is the surface of an ever-moving body of water where its words and images are shadows of forms; poetry, being divine, can never be ‘erased—but tremble[s] ever’, remaining vitally active. Readers pass over its surface like clouds, and each one ‘can doom [it] to die’, echoing Shelley’s address to his ideal reader: ‘Thou knowest ‘tis its doom to die’ (2.13).

The Witch is Shelley’s most independent female protagonist, for, unlike Cythna and Asia, who, although more independent and active than their male counterparts require counterparts nonetheless, the Witch is an autonomous entity who exemplifies androgyny through her analogousness to the poet, rather than the unfolding, empathetic process Shelley previously imaged in *Laon and Cythna* and *Prometheus Unbound*. She affects but is not affected by the others who populate the poem. Instead of imaging androgyny as a reconciliatory process occurring between divided masculine and feminine entities as Shelley had in previous works, *The Witch of Atlas* embodies an ‘aesthetic processing’ of androgyny.[[575]](#footnote-575) This veiled approach on part of the playful poet may lead the unengaged reader to accept Hermaphroditus as an image of androgyny. This misconception reveals the importance of the imagination to Shelley’s employment of androgyny as a mental strategy achieved by poet and reader. Whereas *Laon and Cythna* and *Prometheus Unbound* embody imaginative commingling by way of mental revolution, *The Witch of Atlas* exalts the poet’s imagination as a self-sustained force, cognisant of and sympathetic to, but not necessarily reliant on, the reader’s reciprocity. The poet affords himself the androgynous intricacies he grants his ‘sexless bee’ of a Witch, ‘Tasting all blossoms, and confined to none’ (68.589-590), as he frolics in the freedom of a self-sustained poetic universe. Strains of scepticism and dejection intermix with imaginative virtuosity. Ultimately, *The Witch of Atlas* sees Shelley turning away from the optimistic desire to achieve a ‘psychic unity’ with an engaged and empathic readership, and the epyllion instead tests the limits and faces the failures posed by the autonomous androgynous imagination.

**Chapter Five: ‘a Symposium of my own’: *Epipsychidion*** **and *erōs***

*Epipsychidion* sees Shelley struggling to sustain androgyny by invoking and involving the Other in the process of poetic creation. In the wake of *The Witch of Atlas* Shelley readmits his limited though ideal readership—the *Σύνετοι* (cognoscenti)—to the ‘proper Paradise’ of the poem through Emily: the textual figuration of Teresa ‘Emilia’ Viviani (*PBS Letters*, II, p. 363 and ‘On Love’, p. 632).[[576]](#footnote-576) *Epipsychidion* spotlights the ideal and idealised reader in an effort to overcome the boundaries of the poet’s isolated subjectivity as Emily becomes a doubled reflection of creator and creation. Shelley’s sceptical testing of androgyny as an autonomous process in *The Witch of Atlas* reaches its epitome in *Epipsychidion*, where the poet acknowledges that to achieve desired union with the Other is to accept stasis, and where to worship ‘one form’ risks building ‘A sepulchre for its eternity’ (172 and 173). But *Epipsychidion* can only attempt to reintegrate the Other into the poetry; this effort at reintegration is blasted by the realisation that to write the Other is, potentially, to oppress them through the imposition of the self’s own subjectivity. The fictionalised Poet’s attempt to liberate Emilia through the language of courtly romance paradoxically reinforces the same patriarchal structure that has resulted in her captivity. In the effort to liberate the female through the androgynous interweaving of self and Other, the poet simultaneously exposes the androgynous union’s capacity to constrain and control. A truly equal ‘psychic unity’,[[577]](#footnote-577) Shelley fears, is unachievable under the poet’s subjective sway. In *Epipsychidion*, androgyny, instead of being the object of desire, seems dangerously tyrannical.

Such fears surrounding androgyny coupled with desire and tyranny speak to Shelley’s readings and translations from Plato, notably where ἔρως (*erōs*) is the primary motivator of tyranny in the *Republic*. While shades of the *Republic*, the *Phaedo*, the *Phaedrus*, and the *Ion* colour *Epipsychidion*,[[578]](#footnote-578) the poem comes to evocatively embody the multivocal *Symposium*, translated by Shelley as *The Banquet*,[[579]](#footnote-579) through its shifting and seemingly instable interrogations of the nature of ἔρως. The multivocality of *The Banquet* is channelled in *Epipsychidion* through the speaker’s fragmented and recollected past self, and Emily comes to mirror the speaker’s fragmentation through her own multiplicity, or metaphorical transference.[[580]](#footnote-580) While biographical readings of the poem seek to identify the presence of real women from Shelley’s life, namely Harriet, Mary, and Claire, *Epipsychidion*’s concern is not principally biographical.[[581]](#footnote-581) Rather, the poem’s primary preoccupation is with reconciling an androgynous union into oneness without jeopardising the Other’s subjective autonomy. Like ἔρως in *The Banquet*, Emily remains the sole object of desire, although this is a desire confronted with pained self-awareness and scepticism. The instability of Emily’s metaphorical figuration looks toward potentiality while also admitting failure in acknowledgment of the Platonic rift between things as they seem and things as they are. Ambivalence and uncertainty pervade *The Banquet*, where each speaker’s professed knowledge of the beauty of love is undermined, problematised, and even entangled with the speeches that precede and follow any apparent definition of love. *Epipsychidion* becomes a subtle and painstakingly crafted versification and development of *The Banquet* as Shelley ventriloquises his former self through the repurposing of fragments, replicating this process through the fictionalised Poet’s recollections and the fictionalised Advertisement author’s locating and publishing of the fragmentary materials. Emily stands as both Other and a doubled self as she fluctuates between the substantiality of a human form and the ethereality of an incorporeal outline, and her figured transferences follow the transubstantiations of ἔρως in Plato’s immensely influential dialectic on love.

‘In idealizing androgyny’, Diane Long Hoeveler writes, ‘in seeking to unify the masculine and the feminine within the male psyche, [the Romantic poets] came to the realization that there never was and never could be an escape from the limited self. The self can never transform itself—can never unify with the nonself—because a part can never grasp the whole’.[[582]](#footnote-582) Shelley’s acknowledgement of the limitations of androgyny as an equal psychic unity, tested in *The Witch of Atlas*, is pressed further in *Epipsychidion* by the reintegration of the body into Shelley’s conception of androgynous mingling. The reintegration of the body reveals Shelley’s ongoing engagement with Platonic philosophy, and particularly the dichotomy of body and soul as explored in the *Phaedrus*, the *Phaedo*, and the *Symposium*. Hoeveler’s critique of Romantic androgyny makes an exception for ‘Platonic metaphysics’ and *Epipsychidion* sees Shelley’s self-conscious engagement with this very exception.[[583]](#footnote-583) In reintegrating the body into the process of androgynous unification, the poet seeks to escape the subjective confines of the ‘male psyche’ through his self-cancelling substitution for Emilia and the idealised Emily: ‘How beyond refuge I am thine. Ah me! / I am not thine: I am a part of *thee*’ (51-52). Shelley, in affording Emily the conflated status of androgynous Witch and fleshly Hermaphroditus, struggles for and sustains a doubled state of failure and freedom. Potentiality becomes a locus of the poem’s movements toward and away from success and failure. In contrast with the androgynous cycle of union and division that defines *Laon and Cythna*, or the culminating reunion of Prometheus and Asia, *Epipsychidion* acknowledges androgyny’s potential while admitting its failures.

The tangible and the eternal are pitted against one another to striking effect in Plato’s *Symposium*, where, ‘[e]ven before the symposium is under way, precautions are taken to guarantee serious, philosophical discussion: wine and the flute girls are banned, thereby eliminating whatever might influence the body and deter the working of the mind’.[[584]](#footnote-584) The *Symposium* remains ‘[t]he single most important source for Shelley’s treatment of love’,[[585]](#footnote-585) and is at the forefront of an examination of the poet’s juxtaposition of body and soul, or hermaphrodite and androgyne, through the figuration of Emily. Madeleine Callaghan notes that, ‘[r]ather than ascending the Platonic ladder of love at a measured pace, Shelley’s deliberately erratic poetry returns to the sensual body’,[[586]](#footnote-586) and while the sexual desire for the physical body accords with the *Phaedrus*, Emily’s recurrent vacillations between seeming to be a corporeal woman and suggesting an etherealised shape are evocative of *The Banquet*’s struggle to escape from physical sensuality in favour of mental and intellectual intercourse. *The Banquet* becomes transmuted into poetry in *Epipsychidion*, where Emily’s seemingly unstable metaphorical transferences and fluctuations between the physical and the spiritual seek to capture in verse what *The Banquet* presents in prose. As the symposium at the centre of the eponymous work is accessible only to an elite group of thinkers, so too does Shelley intend his *Epipsychidion* to be interpreted by the *Σύνετοι*. Writing to John Gisborne in October 1821, Shelley confides:

The Epipsychidion is a mystery — As to real flesh & blood, you know that I do not deal in those articles, — you might as well go to a ginshop for a leg of mutton, as expect any thing human or earthly from me. I desired Ollier not to circulate this piece except to the *Σύνετοι*, and even they it seems are inclined to approximate me to the circle of a servant girl & her sweetheart. — But I intend to write a Symposium of my own to set all this right.

(*PBS Letters*, II, p. 363)

Shelley’s self-abasing characterisation belies the magnitude of his poetic achievement, but his noted intention of ‘writ[ing] a Symposium of my own’ subtly gestures toward the possibility that the poet’s own *Symposium* already exists in *Epipsychidion*, and Mary Shelley’s description of the poem as the ‘story of Shelley[’s] Italian platonics’ supports this reading.[[587]](#footnote-587) What many of Shelley’s readers too readily accept as fact—the poet’s unwillingness to produce ‘any thing human or earthly’—veils Shelley’s wry wit. Nancy Moore Goslee draws attention to the subtle wit of the fictional editor’s declaration that ‘the poem needs no “matter-of-fact history of the circumstances to which it relates”, noting that ‘[a]ctual editors and critics of Shelley’s work…have only recently come to realize how fully and teasingly ironic this statement is’.[[588]](#footnote-588) Shelley’s letters to John Gisborne repeatedly underscore the distinction between ‘the poet & the man’ while also revealing Shelley’s awareness of his multifaceted readership: an audience ranging from the vulgar populace to the *Σύνετοι*. Shelley implicitly values Gisborne as a reader ‘who can feel, and understand me’, and his privileged position is made clear when Shelley enquires after Gisborne’s opinions on Byron’s *Cain*: ‘You don’t tell me what you think of “Cain”. You send me the opinion of the populace, which you know I do not esteem’ (*PBS Letters*, II, pp. 310, 435, and 436). Newell Ford’s comment that ‘[s]cholars have had little to say on the subject of wit in Shelley’ continues to ring true, and that Shelley’s dry remarks in the above quoted excerpt from his letter to Gisborne remain largely unacknowledged is testament to this. For Ford, Shelley is ‘an unrecognized poet of wit’, and this unacknowledged attribute is exercised most effusively in *Adonais* and *Epipsychidion*, where wit is defined as ‘the perception and expression of resemblances or relationships—especially relationships that, not previously discerned, surprise the reader and elicit his admiration for the penetration, ingenuity, subtlety, or artifice of the writer’.[[589]](#footnote-589) *Adonais* and *Epipsychidion*’s statuses as ‘highly wrought *piece*[s] *of* *art*’ seem to coincide with the poet’s employment of wit, and both poems demand the reader’s depth of engagement with ‘the before unapprehended relations of things’ (*PBS Letters*, II, p. 294 and *A Defence of Poetry*, p. 676). A surface reading of Shelley’s intention to ‘write a Symposium of my own to set all this right’ fails to register the sardonic undertone of ‘set[ting] all this right’ and also overlooks the poet’s indifference to the ‘ridiculous mistakes’ of an imperceptive audience (*PBS Letters*, II, p. 434). *Epipsychidion*’s explicit indebtedness to Dante’s *Convito* as expressed in the Advertisement shrouds the pervasive influence of *The Banquet* on Shelley’s ‘own Symposium’. I do not discount the poem’s Dantean import and impact, but rather encourage a reading that is alert to how Shelley ‘fuses the *Symposium*, the *Phaedrus*, and the Dantean’ by adopting and adapting the Platonic wit and doubleness of *The Banquet* within *Epipsychidion*.[[590]](#footnote-590) *Epipsychidion* becomes a testing ground for Shelley to experiment with imbuing a single figure with multiplicity, as Plato does with ἔρως in the *Symposium*, in the hope that the potentiality afforded by multistability will stave off stasis.

Androgyny can no longer function as a process reaching completion afforded by an equally balanced union of the masculine and the feminine in *Epipsychidion*. In contrast to the ouroboros, an emblem of eternity and androgyny, D. J. Hughes associates *Epipsychidion* with the ‘amphisbaenic snake’ (*Prometheus Unbound*, 3.119).[[591]](#footnote-591) ‘Shelley’s two-headed serpent’, Hughes writes, ‘cannot be understood as a symbol of completion; the form is left open, brought to order by repetition and by a series of mirrorings as in this strange figure we arrive back at the beginning without an image of an end’.[[592]](#footnote-592) The snake’s phallic tail is replaced by a second, feminine head: ‘female in its mouth which receives or surrounds’.[[593]](#footnote-593) The snake’s masculine connotations are obliterated in the case of the amphisbaena, and its association with Clytemnestra underscores this.[[594]](#footnote-594) Angela Leighton notes that ‘[t]he feminisation of this aesthetic of writing and erasing belongs to Shelley’s last years, particularly the years after the composition of *The Witch of Atlas*’.[[595]](#footnote-595) The ‘feminisation’ of Shelley’s writing in and after *The Witch of Atlas* coincides with the poet’s growing awareness of his lack of a real sympathetic readership and his turning instead toward ‘an invented audience of ideal readers’.[[596]](#footnote-596) Emily’s status as both the compositional process and a figuration of the poet recalls the Witch who is also the poet, and permits for what Leighton describes as Shelley’s ‘authorial self-deconstruction’.[[597]](#footnote-597) Shelley builds and unbuilds his androgynous ‘ideal prototype’ (‘On Love’, p. 632) in order to avoid the finality afforded by ‘one form’ (172), and this conflated process of creation and cancellation evocatively echoes *The Banquet* as it ‘dismantles oppositions between the sensuous and the spiritual in the act of creating them’.[[598]](#footnote-598) Emily becomes a rewriting of the conflated Witch and Hermaphrodite: an embodying of a potentially flawed form of androgyny that builds and unbuilds itself in conjunction with the poet’s own self-cancelling process of creation. The failure to achieve union in *Epipsychidion* attains a strange success through resisting stasis.

The amphisbaena is a symbol of activity through its resistance to the stasis that would result from the completion of a unifying process. In order to resist the tyranny of the author’s subjective sway, Shelley urges his reader to maintain their own mental activity, and there is something serpentine about this desire for mental movement. Michael O’Neill draws a comparison between Shelley’s prose style in *A Defence of Poetry* and *The Banquet* to ‘Coleridge’s description of the way a reader should be affected by “a just poem”’, where the reader’s mental movement resembles ‘“the motion of a serpent, which the Egyptians made the emblem of intellectual power”’.[[599]](#footnote-599) The serpentine mental motions of Coleridge’s reader, who ‘“pauses and half recedes, and from the retrogressive movement collects the force which again carries him onward”’, seem also to be active in *Epipsychidion*. Shelley draws attention to his attempted conflation of reader and writer in *Epipsychidion* by underscoring this very mental movement. The potential appeal of the amphisbaena as a symbol for the reader’s mental activity is found in its relentless pulling towards opposites as the snake’s coiling propulsion in one direction is upset by its sudden ‘retrogressive movement’. The poem’s rhyming couplets add to this pattern of movement as rhyme propels the mind forward in anticipation while simultaneously beckoning it backwards.[[600]](#footnote-600) The couplets, rather than emphasising a successive and integrative doubling, instead underscore a forced and false form of androgynous unification. The cloying rhymes of ‘see’ and ‘Emily’, ‘thee’ and ‘eternity’, culminating in ‘me’ and ‘*thee*’ in the sixth stanza seem to emphasise the poet’s acknowledgement of futility through repetition (41-42; 47-48; 51-52). The poet contorts Emilia’s name in order to force it to fit it into his poetic creation, and in doing so, draws attention to the violent rending that is associated with androgyny in *The Banquet*. Rhyme vexes rather than resolves in this poem, and in places where the reader would expect the lulling of doubles into harmonious unity, Shelley instead evokes a troubled struggle that risks collapsing into discord, through what Nancy Moore Goslee rightly describes as the poem’s ‘couplet satire’.[[601]](#footnote-601) The poem forces its reader to remain self-consciously aware of doubleness in an effort to stave off the stasis of unity. ‘Me’, ‘thee’, and ‘Emily’, rather than encouraging the mingled harmony of the rhymed pronouns ‘we’, ‘me’, and ‘thee’ in the dedication ‘To Mary’ prefacing *Laon and Cythna*, instead seem discordant through their forcedness, where the syllabic excess of ‘Emily’ draws attention to the poet’s rending of Emilia’s name. In contrast to the prefatory verses to *Laon and Cythna*, these reminiscent lines of ‘Me’, ‘thee’, and ‘Emily’ in *Epipsychidion* stress the lack of union through the absence of the first-person plural pronoun, ‘we’. In her analysis of Shelley’s manuscripts, Nancy Moore Goslee draws attention to the disingenuity of these lines in *Epipsychidion* and their contrast to the prefatory dedication to Mary in *Laon and Cythna* by stating that ‘Shelley may be creating a mock-revision of his own provocative dedication to Mary for *The Revolt of Islam*’.[[602]](#footnote-602) Goslee reveals how this ‘mock-dedication’ originates in an address to a hermaphroditical figure:

Here my dear friend, is a new book for you

I have already dedicated two

To other friends, one female & one male

An [? e] which you are, is a thing that I must veil[[603]](#footnote-603)

Goslee posits that these lines are written in response to the *Quarterly Review*’s 1819 attack on *The Revolt of Islam*, the dating of which precedes Shelley’s first encounter with Emilia Viviani.[[604]](#footnote-604) Goslee notes how the ambiguity of the addressee’s identity makes it seem ‘as if [Shelley is] leaving a space for multiple, serial substitutions’.[[605]](#footnote-605) And yet this space remains open as Emily, in the published poem, becomes herself a figure of ‘multiple, serial substitutions’. Shelley’s meeting with Viviani in 1820 does not result in a filling in of blanks in *Epipsychidion*. Her textually rendered identity becomes a figure of transference as Shelley resists the desire to confine her to a single form. She remains, like the mock addressee, ‘a thing that [Shelley] must veil’ for fear of subjecting her to a forced or appropriative union. *Epipsychidion* highlights the danger of desire to give way to tyranny, a concern addressed in Plato’s *Republic*, and a subject meditated upon by Emilia and Shelley.[[606]](#footnote-606) The fictional poet’s yearning for union is repeatedly denied, emphasising Shelley’s fear of subjecting the Other to the same form of patriarchal oppression that has resulted in the real Emilia’s confinement to the convent where she awaits a form of death.[[607]](#footnote-607) Rather than celebrating androgyny, *Epipsychidion*’s sceptical approach to a truly equal ‘psychic unity’ manifests itself in Emily’s hermaphroditical figure, where the hermaphrodite, as in *The Witch of Atlas*, embodies a failed and flawed gradation of androgynous union.

*Epipsychidion* examines the potential failure of androgyny to achieve equal intersubjective union between the self and the Other through Emily’s bifurcated condition as hermaphrodite and Witch-like androgyne. Hoeveler writes that, in *The Witch of Atlas*, the Witch as ‘androgyne is the true reconciliation of masculine and feminine, spirit and psyche’ while ‘the hermaphrodite is all flesh, a mockery of the possibility of spiritual transcendence’.[[608]](#footnote-608) Shelley’s idealism lies in his belief in the potential for mental and sexual harmony through androgyny, and his scepticism expresses itself through his doubt that the self and Other can maintain a state of harmonious equilibrium without succumbing to tyrannous subjection. These opposing drives of idealism and scepticism become enmeshed in the figure of Emily. Shelley’s self-reflective ‘veiled commentary’ in *The Witch of Atlas* as ‘a poem that self-consciously deflate[s] the creative process’ is carried on with an intermixture of hope and doubt in *Epipsychidion*.[[609]](#footnote-609) The manuscript’s periods of compositional collapse become embodied in the published poem as descents into doubt that are nonetheless mingled with periods of prolonged optimism when Shelley gives new life and purpose to previously neglected fragments associated with earlier poems. Shelley’s ‘veiled commentary’ in *The Witch of Atlas* is carried over into a means of veiling through transference and reaches a peak in the seventh verse paragraph of *Epipsychidion*, immediately following the poet’s struggle to blend ‘thee’ and ‘eternity’ (47-48). Emily’s metaphoricity is radically transferred as the speaker weaves and unravels a dizzying procession of figurations, starting with the seemingly assertive statement: ‘Young Love should teach Time, in his own grey style, / All that thou art’ (55-56). However, this statement becomes disrupted by doubt as the physicality of ‘Young Love’ recalls Agathon’s Love: ‘the youngest of the Gods’, and also the most ‘beautiful’, ‘tender and soft’—a potential self-reflection of the young and beautiful Agathon himself (*The Banquet*, pp. 434 and 435). Despite Shelley’s own softness and sympathy towards Agathon’s speech,[[610]](#footnote-610) Agathon’s speech on love is ultimately picked apart and undermined by Socrates’ pointed questions.

In *Epipsychidion*, such Socratic disruption is visually embodied on the page by Shelley’s use of chiasmus followed by a dizzying succession of questions:

All that thou art. Art thou not void of guile,

A lovely soul formed to be blessed and bless?

(56-57)

The chiasmus on line 56 marks a simultaneous point of disruption and momentarily suspended unity, where the repetition of ‘art’ enacts both beingness through the statement, ‘thou art’, and the disruption and doubting of that very beingness through the question, ‘Art thou’. Shelley decisively blends the literal and figurative in this word as he poses it in the middle of the line, where, in appearance, the chiastic effect of ‘thou art. Art thou’ seems to create a nearly perfect mirror image that is shattered as Emily’s affirmed beingness begins to rupture under the speaker’s doubt. The isolation of ‘art’ in this line also underscores Shelley’s self-conscious artistry: his careful crafting of *Epipsychidion* into poetic artifice. There is a Platonic awareness to Shelley’s employment of chiasmus here, a signification of totality or agreement ‘which Plato paraphrased in the *Symposium* as “the one in conflict with itself is held together” (*En diapheron eauto*)’.[[611]](#footnote-611) Rodolphe Gasché notes that the use of chiasmus traditionally ‘allows oppositions to be bound into unity in the first place. It is a form that makes it possible to determine differences with respect to an underlying totality. The chiasm, so to speak, cross-bandages the crosswise incision by which it divided a whole into its proper differences’, and here the device recalls the *Symposium*, as Gasché’s language evocatively echoes Aristophanes’ speech, and particularly Apollo’s slicing and moulding of the androgynous beings.[[612]](#footnote-612) However, Shelley employs chiasmus to upset this unification or holding together in an effort to underscore the futility of achieving unified oneness where one will always be subjected to the Other. In doing so, Shelley’s employment of the device anticipates Paul de Man and Jacques Derrida’s analyses of the chiasm as a rhetorical figure that embodies asymmetry, thereby denying any state of final unification. Gasché summarises de Man’s position on the chiasm as such: ‘the chiasm, as a rhetorical structure, suspends the totalizing functions of the literal and the figural in a text and, as a figure, endlessly defers…the closure of the text—by either its content or its form—through the infinite substitutability implied by its asymmetry’. Like de Man’s endless deferral, ‘Derrida’s notion of the chiasm [is] the possibility of an essential unfinishedness of totalities’.[[613]](#footnote-613) Shelley’s employment of chiasmus to mark Emily’s radically transferred series of figurations both evokes the totalising unity of Aristophanes’ reunited androgynous beings in the *Symposium* while also underscoring the movement away from finality and unification that is necessary in order to prevent the total and tyrannous subsumption of the one by the Other. Shelley’s anticipation of de Man and Derrida’s similar conceptions of the chiasm as an asymmetrical and unfinished device is brought forth in Emily’s rapidly deferred figurations. These occur throughout the poem, most contentiously in the solar system sequence, or ‘planet-tempest passage’,[[614]](#footnote-614) but most effusively in the seventh verse paragraph following the instance of chiasmus discussed above. In the seventh verse paragraph, the speaker becomes self-associated with the ‘dying swan who soars and sings’ as his ceaseless questioning of Emily’s very essence creates a lilting measure, his questions aurally mimicking the weakened drop and momentary ascent of the dying swan of Plato’s *Phaedo* (54). Emily’s presence becomes compromised as soon as the speaker begins to question her form: ‘A lovely soul formed to be blessed and bless?’ (57). The speaker, propelled by his own doubt and desire, struggles to appropriately clothe Emily in an array of images that shift from an ethereal ‘Star’, to the disembodied ‘smile amid dark frowns’, to the abstract ‘cradle of young thoughts of wingless pleasure’ (60, 62, and 68). But ultimately, his attention falls back upon the narrow confines of his own self:

I measure

The world of fancies, seeking one like thee,

And find—alas! mine own infirmity.

(69-71)

Here, Madeleine Callaghan writes that ‘[t]he rhyme of “thee” and “infirmity” (ll. 70-1) creates a connection that underscores the problem of pursuing an impossible ideal, even as “infirmity” confirms such weakness as part of the mortal constitution’.[[615]](#footnote-615) Shelley’s idealism is self-consciously weakened by his own scepticism, the knowledge that the desire for androgynous union with the Other risks a descent into tyrannical subjection. These tandem movements toward and away from desire mimic the motion of the double-headed snake.[[616]](#footnote-616) Progression implies futurity, and futurity is denied in *Epipsychidion* by the deceased Poet leaving the work in a fragmented state.[[617]](#footnote-617) Rather than failing, however, Bernard Beatty reads the poem as ‘an instance or working model of the potentiality which it celebrates’,[[618]](#footnote-618) and this seems accurate: *Epipsychidion* is highly concerned with, though perhaps not quite celebratory of, potentiality. The poem as a ‘working model’ allows Shelley a testing grounds for experimentation on the affective limits of androgyny. This is an experiment without a final conclusion. The poem maintains a sense of active movement through its refusal to achieve finalised unity, choosing instead to confront the difficulty of ‘seeking in a mortal image the likeness of what is perhaps eternal’ (*PBS Letters*, II, p. 434), where Callaghan aptly notes that ‘[t]he “perhaps” seems indicative of the action of the poem’.[[619]](#footnote-619) The movements of the amphisbaena are unpredictable and limitless, and it is through the acknowledged futility of androgynous unity that Shelley may explore and test his poem’s active process of unbuilding.

The poem’s acknowledgement of limitations is not an acceptance of failure. Instead, *Epipsychidion* situates itself between the recognition of finitude and the hope for potential. The certainty of the future may be denied to the poem, but optimism lingers in its emphasis on potentiality. This refusal to reach for finalised unification also reveals the subtle ways in which the poem transmutes *The Banquet* into verse. *The Banquet*’s speakers’ escalating discourses on the subject of ἔρως seem to reach a crescendo in Socrates and Diotima’s discussion of love, an aptly elevated dialogue that seems to offer a compelling conclusion to the initial and competitive aim for each participant to ‘praise Love with as much eloquence as he can’ (*The Banquet*, p. 419). However, no sooner has Diotima’s eloquent speech been recounted by Socrates than the entire convivium is disrupted by Alcibiades’ uproarious and unexpected entry. David K. O’Connor, adopting Shelley’s language of the ‘ideal prototype’ (‘On Love’, p. 632), posits that Socrates is in fact Alcibiades’ own ‘prototype of [his] idealized self’ and ventures to posit Shelley as ‘a kind of Alcibiades, suspended in the demoniacal intermediate of a vulgar humanity and an evanescent divinity’.[[620]](#footnote-620) It is the energy of Alcibiades’ multifaceted ambivalence, his Dionysian androgyny symbolised by his crown of ivy and violets, and his contradictory desire for and repulsion from Socrates, that Shelley harnesses.[[621]](#footnote-621) Alcibiades both desires to have and to be Socrates, and it is this subjective struggle that Shelley magnifies in *Epipsychidion* through the fictional Poet’s desire to have and to be Emily.

Shelley emphasises the desire to escape from the confines of subjectivity through substitution in the speaker’s imploring imperative to be ‘Not mine but me’ (392). *Epipsychidion* highlights this ‘vexed relation’ to ‘be my body for me’, as Judith Butler and Catherine Malabou term this situation in relation to the absent, implied, or disembodied body of Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*. If Shelley is shifting androgyny away from a union in *Epipsychidion* to function as a process of self-cancelling and substitution of the Other for the missing or cancelled portion of the self, then, Butler and Malabou note, ‘the demand produces a perpetual bind: although there is no body that is mine without the other’s body, there is no final expropriation of one’s own body, and no final appropriation of another’s body’.[[622]](#footnote-622) Malabou postulates ‘that Hegel must have understood both attachment and detachment as operations of *delegation* and *doubling*’ (author’s emphasis).[[623]](#footnote-623) In the effort to stave off stasis, Shelley seems to invoke these same operations of ‘delegation and doubling’ through his self-cancelling and substitution of Emily. In contrast to the amorous mental mingling of Asia, Panthea, and Prometheus in Act 2 of *Prometheus Unbound*—‘Shelley’s sexiest love scene’,[[624]](#footnote-624) according to Teddi Lynn Chichester, but nonetheless an incorporeal one—critics emphasise the physicality of sex in *Epipsychidion*.[[625]](#footnote-625) And yet, Emily resists complete corporealization through her approximation to Intellectual Beauty.[[626]](#footnote-626) Embodying both the androgynous Witch and Hermaphroditus, Emily shifts between the doubled state of presence felt and form beheld.

It is the sexualised and fleshly material body and the ethereal or evanescent form that Shelley oscillates between in *The Banquet* and *Epipsychidion*. The attention to the sexual body distinguishes Shelley’s figuration of Emily from Dante’s Beatrice. Stuart Curran notes how ‘Shelley distinguishes himself from Dante by emphasizing the physical dimensions of love’, drawing attention to the ‘extraordinary sexual imagery of his imagined island paradise’. In contrast with biographical readings of *Epipsychidion* that seek to draw out evidence of a carnal, sexual encounter between Shelley and Emilia, Curran aptly observes how ‘the physical is not meant to be equated with mere carnality. Rather, it is seen as a means to a higher unity, of the sort that Shelley had painstakingly rendered in his translation of Plato’s *Symposium* in his first year in Italy’.[[627]](#footnote-627) Shelley reinvokes the inspirational process of translation that he experienced while giving life to Plato’s language in English through *The Banquet* during the long and fragmented compositional process of *Epipsychidion*. In repurposing earlier, abandoned fragments such as ‘Fiordispina’ for use in *Epipsychidion*,[[628]](#footnote-628) Shelley readopts the transmutational process of composition that motivated his translation of Plato’s *Symposium* into *The Banquet*. James A. Notopoulos discerns two stages of translation, the first of which ‘involves a re-creative exercise in the assimilation of meaning’, and the second of which involves a ‘recreative process of transmuting the form in which meaning is expressed’.[[629]](#footnote-629) In *Epipsychidion*, Shelley is able to experiment with the transmutations of form to a further degree by turning from prose into verse Plato’s ‘Pythian enthusiasm of poetry’ (‘Preface to the Banquet of Plato’, p. 402). The form of *Epipsychidion* comes to embody the very fears that it addresses. As Shelley endeavours to imbue his poem with ‘the splendour and harmony of [Plato’s] periods into one irresistible stream of musical impressions’,[[630]](#footnote-630) he faces the risk of tyrannically subjugating the philosopher’s thoughts to a single, concrete form. Shelley praises the ‘truth and splendour of [Plato’s] imagery’ in his *Defence*, affirming that ‘the melody of [Plato’s] language is the most intense that it is possible to conceive. He rejected the measure of the epic, dramatic and lyrical forms, because he sought to kindle a harmony in thoughts divested of shape’ (*A Defence of Poetry*, p. 679). The *Defence*, composed in close proximity to Shelley’s completion of *Epipsychidion*,[[631]](#footnote-631) puts forth in prose Shelley’s concerns over the confinement of ideas to a single form or shape by praising Plato for seeking to ‘kindle a harmony in thoughts divested of shape’. This concern is also one of Diotima’s central precepts in *The Banquet*, where the lover

might look upon the loveliness of wisdom; and that contemplating thus the universal beauty, no longer like some servant in love with his fellow would he unworthily and meanly enslave himself to the attractions of one form…but would turn towards the wide ocean of intellectual beauty

(*The Banquet*, p. 449)

Similarly, the poet seeks to reconcile Emilia as an autonomous individual and Emily as a subjected ideal by repeatedly ‘divest[ing her] of shape’ and exalting instead her approximation to, but not straightforward embodiment of, ‘intellectual beauty’. Yet *Epipsychidion* exposes the speaker’s struggle to ascend Diotima’s ladder of love without subjecting an ideal to a single form. Rather than offering liberation through mental unification, as in *Prometheus Unbound*, the lyrical form of *Epipsychidion* admits to the narrow confines of the self and the self’s failure to achieve ‘harmony in thoughts’. *Epipsychidion* sees Shelley moving closer to the poetic ‘immortal spirit’ of Plato by building upon the ‘re-creation akin to poetry’ of *The Banquet*, doing so through the transmutation of Plato’s poetical language into poetry.[[632]](#footnote-632) But by transforming Plato’s language into heroic couplets, Shelley undermines that which he admires in the philosopher’s ability to reject forms. The poem’s confined and controlled form contends with the physical bodies and etherealised shapes that are ever merging and disuniting in *Epipsychidion* as Shelley explores the futility of giving form to that which should remain, like ‘the wide ocean of intellectual beauty’, formless (*The Banquet*, p. 449).

While Shelley’s manuscript copy of *The Banquet* has long been lost, comparative analyses of Mary Shelley’s fair copy—the text that supplies Shelley’s published translation—with the original Greek and Dacier’s French and Ficino’s Latin translations reveals the extent to which Shelley vacillates between ‘bodies’ and ‘forms’, and not without deliberation. In addition to Notopoulos’ preeminent study, Stephanie Nelson, David K. O’Connor, and Michael O’Neill provide detailed analyses of Shelley’s largely intentional and subtly nuanced shifts in wording and phrasing.[[633]](#footnote-633) In his reading of the intricate mechanics of *The Banquet*, O’Neill writes that ‘“Forms” is Shelley’s preferred single equivalent for what in Plato are different words (including “bodies”) for the object of the lover’s attention; in its capacity to suggest both the physical and the spiritual, the choice by Shelley of “forms” here shows an unsupine responsiveness to the Greek’.[[634]](#footnote-634) The substitution of ‘forms’ for ‘bodies’ in *The Banquet* is reapplied in *Epipsychidion* where this verbal shifting again captures what O’Neill rightly observes as the ‘capacity to suggest both the physical and the spiritual’. However, the consistency of the substitutional ‘forms’ in *The Banquet* is revisited with hesitation and weighted revision in *Epipsychidion*, as both the published poem, and even more tellingly, the manuscripts reveal. Shelley’s struggle between the bodily and the ethereal in his figuration of Emily is emphasised early on in the poem:

Seraph of Heaven! too gentle to be human,

Veiling beneath that radiant form of Woman

All that is insupportable in thee

Of light, and love, and immortality!

Sweet Benediction in the eternal Curse!

Veiled Glory of this lampless Universe!

Thou Moon beyond the clouds! Thou living Form

Among the Dead! Thou Star above the Storm!

(21-28)

The poet’s efforts to image Emily are complicated by the complexities of her ‘form’. Immediately distinguished from the merely human, she is nonetheless encased in the ‘radiant form of Woman’; however, this encasement proves unsatisfactory as the ‘Veiling’ of her ‘radiant form’ gives way to the illuminating and incorporeal ‘Veiled Glory’ that visually marks her presence midway through the stanza. Light solidifies into the celestial body of the ‘Moon beyond the clouds’, where the contrast between the physicality of the moon and the insubstantiality of the clouds seems to emphasise Emily’s own tenuous physicality. As a ‘living Form’, Shelley returns to convey a sense of physical human mortality to Emily, and yet, this too is disrupted by the end rhyme of ‘Form’ and ‘Storm’, where the poet’s mental maelstrom ultimately upsets each and every form that Emily would assume. The manuscript offers further evidence of the poet’s awareness of the problematic desire to subjectively confine Emily, or the Other, to a singular form, where in adds. e. 8 the lines ‘Seraph of Heaven, too gentle to be human / Veiling within those radiant limbs of woman’, ‘that’ has been written atop ‘those’ with ‘form’ carefully squeezed between the lines so that it falls above ‘limbs’ in a lighter shade of ink.[[635]](#footnote-635) Shelley’s decision to replace the corporeal ‘limbs’ with the ambiguous ‘form’ reveals his careful avoidance of a strictly bodily presence, instead allowing for a figuration that blends the physical and spiritual as in *The Banquet*. Discarded lines at the bottom of the following page also seem to recall *The Banquet*, and specifically Aristophanes’ speech on the division of the androgynous being. Shelley writes,

My undiminishable love could be

Divided[[636]](#footnote-636)

‘Undiminishable’ does not appear in *Epipsychidion*, nor in *The Banquet*, but makes a single appearance in Shelley’s oeuvre within the fragmentary *Prince Athanase*, to adopt the title first afforded to the poem by Mary in her 1824 edition of Shelley’s *Posthumous Poems*; Shelley, desiring for Ollier to publish the fragment in 1819, titles it *Athanase*.[[637]](#footnote-637) In his revisiting and revising fragmentary material for repurposing in *Epipsychidion*, notably from ‘Fiordispina’, it seems plausible that Shelley also revisited the fragments of *Prince Athanase*. Thomas Hutchinson’s editorial notes bolster this idea when he mentions that the fragments of ‘Prince Athanase’, which Mary claims were composed in 1817, ‘were probably rehandled in Italy during the following year’.[[638]](#footnote-638) Shelley’s first recorded reading of Plato’s *Symposium* in 1817 accords with *Prince Athanase* being a direct response to Plato’s *Symposium*.[[639]](#footnote-639) Kelvin Everest notes that ‘the Platonic interests of lines 185ff., particularly in the *Symposium*, which Shelley translated at Bagni di Lucca in the early summer of 1818, plausibly constitute a continuation and new inflection of the Hellenism cultivated in the Shelley-Peacock circle at Marlow in the summer of 1817’,[[640]](#footnote-640) and Mary Shelley’s note to the poem speaks to the *Symposium*’s influence:

In the first sketch of the poem, he named it *Pandemos and Urania*. Athanase seeks through the world the One whom he may love. He meets, in the ship in which he is embarked, a lady who appears to him to embody his ideal of love and beauty. But she proves to be Pandemos, or the earthly and unworthy Venus; who, after disappointing his cherished dreams and hopes, deserts him.[[641]](#footnote-641)

In *The Banquet*, Pausanias offers a speech that seeks to dichotomise Love through the hierarchical differentiation of Venus Pandemos and Venus Urania, where the former denotes a ‘vulgar’ form of love attentive to ‘the body rather than the soul’ and implicative of male and female relations. Venus Urania, conversely, possesses a ‘nature [that] is entirely masculine’ and is motivated by love for ‘the intellectual faculties’ of males (*The Banquet*, p. 422). O’Connor offers insight into Plato’s intentions around Pausanias’ speech by noting that although ‘[Pausanias] intends to make a sharp distinction between a higher spiritual love that is exclusively male and a lower love that is bodily and androgynous’, ‘each successive speaker complicates and unsettles some aspect of Pausanias’ easy dichotomies’. This unsettling culminates, for O’Connor, in Diotima’s ‘extraordinary image’ of the men ‘whose souls are far more pregnant than their bodies’. In her mingling of masculinity and maternity, O’Connor claims, ‘Diotima retrieves androgyny from Pausanias’ manly opprobrium’.[[642]](#footnote-642) In potentially revisiting the fragmentary materials of *Prince Athanase* after the experience of translating the *Symposium* into *The Banquet* in 1818, it is likely that Shelley sought to repurpose elements of the discarded work after having gained a deeper understanding of Plato’s ‘subtle logic’.[[643]](#footnote-643) The rapid vacillations between bodies and forms in *Epipsychidion* underscores the poet’s refusal of ‘easy dichotomies’. Bodily love and intellectual love are not so easily demarcated in *Epipsychidion*, where Emily is at one moment a seemingly convincing depiction of a real woman, and in the next a highly metaphorical figuration of an intellectual ideal. *Prince* *Athanase* anticipates *Epipsychidion*, not only in its Platonism, but in its compositional struggle. Hutchinson notes that one of the sources of the text is ‘a much-tortured draft’.[[644]](#footnote-644) Goslee observes how Shelley’s own ‘compositional collapse’ repeatedly accompanies failure within his poems, particularly noting how, in *Laon and Cythna*, Shelley’s unease with a depiction of Cythna as Laon’s ‘epipsyche’ results in heavy cancellations in order to restore her autonomy.[[645]](#footnote-645) *Epipsychidion*, in its acknowledgment of the self’s failure to offer the Other true autonomy untainted by the poet’s subjective control, becomes Shelley’s most successfully self-aware experimentation with the limits of androgyny as a textual and mental processing. The poem’s penultimate stanza, culminating in the fictional Poet’s final cry of ‘I pant, I sink, I tremble, I expire!’ (591), is a mark of failure, but one that Callaghan notes ‘show[s] Shelley make failure beautiful’.[[646]](#footnote-646) It is a stark recognition of the finitude of the poet’s ‘undiminishable love’.

Shelley’s self-cancelling also enacts the processes of reading and translating that accompany the poem’s composition. The poet places himself in the position of the reader and implores the reader to assume the position of writer through Emily. The ‘going out of our own nature’, or self, that is intrinsic to Shelley’s conception of love becomes a returning to self (*A Defence of Poetry*, p. 682). Timothy Webb notes that ‘reading involves transplanting the thoughts of another into our own mind’, a form of ‘imaginative sympathy’;[[647]](#footnote-647) however, while androgyny and imaginative sympathy, or empathy, operate concurrently in works such as *Laon and Cythna* and *Prometheus Unbound*, *Epipsychidion* seems to interrogate androgyny’s overtones of violence, the rending and substitution of mind for, or into, mind. Emilia’s ‘own words’ become ventriloquised through Shelley’s deceased Writer in a subtle nod to the ‘mechanism[s] of the [*Symposium*’s] drama’.[[648]](#footnote-648) Ross Wilson rightly notes that the details of Agathon’s celebration are related through a ‘bewildering series of narrative transferrals. The narrator, Apollodorus, is in one sense not the narrator at all but the retailer, so to speak, of an already retold narrative’ of a long-past event. We glean a similar sense of retelling, or retailing as Wilson has it, through the translations and transformations in *Epipsychidion*.

The poet’s writing, like the work of Hegel’s *Phenomenology*’s slave, is ‘a marking which regularly unmarks itself, a signatory act which puts itself under erasure at the moment in which it is circulated’.[[649]](#footnote-649) Shelley emphasises the desire to escape from the confines of subjectivity through substitution in the speaker’s imploring imperative to be ‘Not mine but me’ (392). The poet concedes that a truly equal mental union is unachievable, as the writer’s desire to escape from the limits of their own subjectivity through communion with the reader is met by the reader’s own subjective substitution. The image of the ‘amphisbaenic snake’, considered by Hughes to be symbolic of *Epipsychidion* itself, becomes, more precisely, representative of the poem’s self-conscious acknowledgement of subjective substitution. Rather than becoming a cyclical, unified, and self-contained shape, as in the case of the ouroboros, the amphisbaena embodies two minds while maintaining their separateness and thereby withholding their union. In an effort to unite outside of the self, the self risks cancelling the Other.

The poem’s amphisbaenic shape denies temporal linearity while also avoiding the unity of the ouroboros’ cyclical rotations. Critical readings of *Epipsychidion* commonly concur that the poem is divided into three distinct sections. However, readings that ground these sections in temporal movements from the past, to the present, to the future overlook the disruptive violence that ripples throughout the poem.[[650]](#footnote-650) Leighton observes that the poem is undercut by ‘an awkward split’ that denies ‘doubleness’.[[651]](#footnote-651) This ‘awkward split’ recalls Jupiter’s splitting of ‘human beings in half, as people cut eggs before they salt them, or as I have seen eggs cut with hairs’ in *The Banquet* (p. 430). Doubleness motivates union through the androgynous process of intersubjective mingling in *Laon and Cythna* and *Prometheus Unbound*, where the masculine and feminine characters each actively integrate with their counterparts, but it is a state to be pursued with sceptical self-consciousness in *Epipsychidion*. Rending and rendering become similar acts of (dis)figuration. In attempting to unify with the Other, the self risks becoming a tyrannical oppressor, forcing the Other to comply. Self-cancellation, rather than union, becomes an equally violent, but, Shelley hopes, freeing alternative to oppression. *Epipsychidion*’s three sections, rather than denoting temporal shifts, instead demonstrate the poem’s subtle interpretation of Plato’s *Symposium*. Emily becomes, like Plato’s ἔρως, the central subject that is conceptualised and questioned in a series of movements from speaker to speaker, culminating in the significantly tripartite structure of Alcibiades’ final speech. The beauty of Agathon’s Love and the desire for the beautiful that defines Diotima’s vision of ‘intellectual beauty’ are brought under scrutiny in Alcibiades’ lustful interrogation of Socrates’ body and mind, and it is this final and potentially undermining conception of ἔρως, presented by the hermaphroditical Alcibiades, that Emily becomes a figuration of in *Epipsychidion*.

The poem’s prefatory Advertisement complicates a reading that would clearly delineate between past, present, and future. As Suzanne L. Barnett notes, ‘[b]y turning *Epipsychidion* into a posthumous fragment…Shelley rejects the possibility that a fragment symmetrically reflects both an “idealized past” and a “transformed future”’.[[652]](#footnote-652) The poem’s intentionally fragmentary state is ultimately reflective of the poet’s rejection of the finalising and limiting union offered by androgyny, and also recalls the similarly fragmentary or truncated nature of *The Banquet*, where the narrative’s initiators, Apollodorus and Glaucon, never reappear to conclude their own dialogue. As a fragment never to be completed by its author, the poem evades completion akin to the manner in which Shelley withholds the poet and Emily’s unification. The language of *Epipsychidion*’s Advertisement hovers and hesitates between vague indeterminacies: ‘The present poem appears to have been intended by the Writer as the dedication to some longer one’ (p. 512). The completed poem is left unrealised, and the text we are presented with is but a prefatory dedication. This vacancy emphasises *Epipsychidion*’s status as ‘a poem about poetry’ in the way in which ‘[t]he poem’s Dantean legacy stresse[s] the inability of language to represent or actualize referents’.[[653]](#footnote-653) *Epipsychidion* works into verse the doubts and hopes of ‘On Life’, where ‘[i]t is difficult to find terms adequately to express so subtle a conception as that to which the intellectual philosophy has conducted us’ (p. 636). The poem’s uncompletedness recalls Shelley’s footnote to ‘On Love’, where ‘words [are] inefficient and metaphorical—Most words so—No help’.[[654]](#footnote-654) *Epipsychidion* reaches for the desire for equality through union while recognising the futility of such a gesture while tethered to patrilineal language, and it is in this activity that it succeeds in staving off stasis. The poet’s self-cancellation and substitution for Emily imbues the verse with an active vitality that chooses to forfeit both finality and futurity.

Shelley’s ‘authorial self-deconstruction’ works alongside the interrogation of androgyny as a process of liberation and equality,[[655]](#footnote-655) and his self-cancelling is most evident on visual and figurative levels within the draft manuscripts. In MS. d. 1, the melding and mingling of Shelley’s creative process contrasts with his self-cancellation in the drafts of the Advertisement to *Epipsychidion*. Greek, Italian, and English become interposed through a palimpsestic process of translation and creation. In translating Plato and Dante, two of Shelley’s greatest predecessors, *Epipsychidion* becomes interfused with the mingled strains of Platonic love and harmony and Dante’s religious faith in the feminine. However, as Barnett notes, Shelley’s scepticism refuses Dante’s Neoplatonic optimism in the One.[[656]](#footnote-656) Goslee offers a provocative study of Emily as a rhetorical figure through examination of Shelley’s drafts,[[657]](#footnote-657) and her study proves a useful starting point to examine Emily as a conflated androgynous and hermaphroditic figure. ‘In a complicated series of revisions through and beyond d. I,’ Goslee writes, ‘[Shelley] also decides to affirm physical love as a model for transcendental knowledge of the good and the beautiful, and yet to make the collapses of composition a model for the inadequacy of sustaining such ecstatic vision’.[[658]](#footnote-658) This shift away from the androgynous ‘psychic unity’ of *Prometheus Unbound* and towards the ‘physical love’ that accompanies the hermaphrodite’s bodily state is most apparent in the discarded stanza of *Epipsychidion*, wherein:

To other friends, one female and one male,—

What you are, is a thing that I must veil;

[…]

And others swear you’re a Hermaphrodite;

Like that sweet marble monster of both sexes,

With looks so sweet and gentle that it vexes

The very soul that the soul is gone

Which lifted from her limbs the veil of stone.

(‘Fragments Connected with *Epipsychidion*’, 3-4 and 57-61)[[659]](#footnote-659)

Goslee comments that ‘[w]hat begins, then, as a mock-dedication addressed to a fictional, playfully unspecified person who may be “friend or lover,” male, female, or simultaneously both at once, begins as [Shelley] plays with the couplets to create the emotions of a desire yearning to fill a lack’.[[660]](#footnote-660) Goslee’s observation that the addressee may be ‘simultaneously both [male and female] at once’ seems apt and supports a reading of Emily’s hermaphroditism. Cancelled passages of the Advertisement within d. 1 also reveal Shelley’s conscious rendering of a hermaphroditic figure, where the deceased poet’s ‘favourite idea was, that love, whether of man woman or’ (p. 33). Here, the absence of a comma between ‘man’ and ‘woman’, and the truncation of the sentence resulting in the lack of an additional subject, offers a reading of ‘man woman’, or ‘manwoman’, as a compound noun. ‘Manwoman’ accords with translated descriptions of the androgynous beings in Plato’s *Symposium*, as K. D. Verma reveals: ‘Shelley’s word for this “manwoman” is “androgynous”’.[[661]](#footnote-661) Shelley seems to hover between a figuration of Emily as physically embodying the characteristics of both the male and female sex, and as imaging her as a genderless androgyne as she seems in a later draft of the Advertisement. Here, Shelley enacts a process of visually cancelling Emily’s sex and substituting her femaleness with androgynous ambiguity: ‘He was accompanied by his wife a lady, who might have been […] appeared to be his wife, effeminate looking youth, to whom he shewed an attachment so singular excessive an attachment as to give rise to the suspicion, notion that she wa[s]s a woman –’ (p. 37). ‘[T]hat she was a woman’ appears in a slightly larger hand and in darker ink than the lines surrounding it, seeming to convey the sense that Shelley is grappling with Emily’s femaleness. This series of cancellations that see the poet substituting Emily’s femaleness for a more ambiguous gendering is further intensified by the appearance of ‘Emilia’ in pencil, contrasting with the rest of the page’s ink, and offset to the upper righthand side of the page, obscured by a scribbled series of waves. Ultimately, Goslee notes, it is through a ‘depersoning’ process of ‘compositional collapse’ that Shelley ‘constructs Emily deliberately as “Metaphor”’.[[662]](#footnote-662) This process presents the ‘vexed relation’ that Butler and Malabou note as occurring in Hegel’s *Phenomenology.*[[663]](#footnote-663) The poet tries, through his cancellation and substitution for the creation of Emily as poetry, to enact ‘a marking which regularly unmarks itself’: an escape from self by means of ‘wingéd words’.[[664]](#footnote-664) And yet this hope is repeatedly undercut by the words’ metaphorical transference into ‘chains of lead’ (588; 590). There are echoes of androgyny’s aspiration towards a process of mental revolution in *Prometheus Unbound*, where the confused voices of a disunited universe become harmoniously unified in the singular address to Demogorgon: ‘Speak: thy strong words may never pass away’ to which the genderless shape responds with an image of Love’s ‘fold[ing] over the world its healing wings’ (*Prometheus Unbound*, 4.553; 561). However, the hope instilled within the words that ‘defy Power, which seems omnipotent’ in the final act of the lyrical drama are transmuted into ‘chains of lead’ in *Epipsychidion*, revealing Shelley’s plummeting descent into doubt around androgyny’s capacity to liberate and unite the masculine and feminine psyche without succumbing to the oppositional and hierarchical power it seeks to defy (*Prometheus Unbound*, 4.572; *Epipsychidion*, 590). Rather than promoting liberation through androgyny as a process of mental revolution, *Epipsychidion* underscores Shelley’s fear of setting into motion a process that would ultimately posit the self as tyrant over the Other.

In *Epipsychidion*, the fictional Poet’s demise and Shelley’s authorial self-cancellation stem from Shelley’s evocation of fear: specifically, the fear-as-desire of the loss of subjective control. Shelley’s acknowledged lack of a sympathetic readership from 1819 onwards, a readership capable of participating in reciprocal intersubjective mingling, allows for, to apply Butler’s reading of the body in Hegel, ‘self-recognition’ through ‘the experience of *absolute fear*’ (author’s emphasis).[[665]](#footnote-665) This fear is derived from the tenuousness of his poetry’s capacity to endure through the receptivity of sympathetic minds. Where the lyrical drama of *Prometheus Unbound* demonstrates Shelley’s engagement with Plato’s adoption of dialectic as a pedagogical technique to permit the reader or listener a privileged position of power and refuse straightforward didacticism by instead encouraging the reader’s powers of interpretation, *Epipsychidion*, like *The Witch of Atlas*, sees Shelley doubting his audience’s interpretive abilities. This is most apparent in adds. e. 8 where Carlene Adamson ‘sees Shelley confidently entering a new phase in composition’ as he reintegrates fragments from ‘Fiordispina’ into *Epipsychidion*. At the top of the manuscript draft, Shelley writes: ‘She met me stranger reader’, and this line is duplicated and cancelled lower down on the page: ‘She met me, stranger’, underscoring the unease between self and Other that is scrutinised in the published poem.[[666]](#footnote-666) For Adamson, this narrative shifting allows Shelley ‘to address directly the audience; he enjoins the reader to gaze upon his “Seraph of Heaven” with him. The complicity of the poet and reader now frames the descriptive passage’.[[667]](#footnote-667) However, this sense of ‘complicity’ between poet and reader is rejected in the published poem as Shelley ultimately writes: ‘She met me, Stranger’ (72), revealing his distrust of a decidedly unsympathetic readership. Shelley enforces a gap between himself and his audience in the address of ‘Stranger’, and this distrust is echoed in the published poem’s Advertisement where the fictional poet’s friend admits that ‘the present Poem…must ever remain incomprehensible’ to a portion of the poet’s readership while being ‘sufficiently intelligible’ though not sympathetically received by another class of readers (p. 512).

*Epipsychidion* anticipates Shelley’s professed desire to ‘devote either to oblivion or to future generations the overflowings of my mind’ (*PBS Letters*, II, p. 339). Self-recognition paradoxically results from the complete disavowal of the self, the condemnation of the self to oblivion, from the acknowledgment that the poet’s very being-ness will be determined, not by himself, but by those who receive him through his poetry. The poet, in recognising that his subjective self-assertion risks eclipsing any Other’s own subjectivity, finds that union must be replaced by erasure, or self-cancellation. Butler’s reading of Hegel’s *Phenomenology* concedes that ‘[t]o disavow one’s body, to render it “Other” and then to establish the “Other” as an effect of autonomy, is to produce one’s body in such a way that the activity of its production—and its essential relation to the lord—is denied’.[[668]](#footnote-668) In *Epipsychidion*, the poet’s premature death denies futurity and enacts a cancellation of Shelley’s textually substituted body, while Emily’s fragile figuration, through an unending series of metaphorical transferences, paradoxically produces and denies her embodiment. Her bodily presence is marked by instability. *Epipsychidion* is a self-consciously wrought experiment in erasure, to extend Webb’s reading.[[669]](#footnote-669) It is an attempt to excise the self from its own production in an effort to liberate and grant autonomy to the Other. Unlike Shelley’s other ‘intellectual children’ (*PBS Letters*, II, p. 263), *Epipsychidion* is an orphan, separated from its parent-poet through an experimentation with autonomy. The poem’s disavowal by its creator is a mark of its success. It is testament to the poet’s removal of himself from his work. In presenting the poem to Ollier, Shelley writes:

[*Epipsychidion*], I desire, should not be considered as my own; indeed, in a certain sense, it is a production of a portion of me already dead; and in this sense the advertisement is no fiction.

(*PBS Letters*, II, pp. 262-63)

Shelley’s epistolary self-identification with the deceased Poet, rather than the existing Narrator, reveals his conscious effacement of the self that must occur in order to prevent the tyrannical subjection of the Other.

Geoffrey Ward writes that ‘the speaker and his subject in *Epipsychidion* stem from what is nakedly subjective’,[[670]](#footnote-670) and this comment offers a compelling starting point for a consideration of the very being-ness of speaker, subject, and subjectivity in what is perhaps Shelley’s most self-conscious interrogation of language and selfhood. To begin with, the poem’s Advertisement conflates the roles of ‘speaker’ and ‘subject’. The speaker within the poem is differentiated from the speaker of the Advertisement, recalling *Alastor*,[[671]](#footnote-671) and this doubling allows for the poem’s speaker to become the subject of the Advertisement’s speaker’s discourse. ‘The Writer of the following Lines’ thereby comes to occupy the simultaneous position of speaker and subject, and this enmeshing of roles accords with the poem’s underpinning awareness of the flaws of an androgynous union that hinges upon doubleness. The sympathetic reciprocity that fuels androgyny in works such as *Laon and Cythna* and *Prometheus Unbound* faces scrutiny in *Epipsychidion*. The conflation of speaker and subject in *Epipsychidion* draws attention to sympathy-over-solipsism in a continuation of the theme of *Alastor*; however, it also focuses upon the struggle to employ intersubjectivity as a means of liberation. The Advertisement draws the distinctly separate voices of Emilia, Dante, the deceased poet, and the speaker into a single composition, and in doing so, it demonstrates an awareness of the appropriative dangers of voicing the self through the Other. The Advertisement’s epigraph from Emilia Viviani’s *Il vero amore* in untranslated Italian is undercut by the appended note: ‘Her own words’.[[672]](#footnote-672) Authenticity veers into appropriation as the reader’s attention is quickly drawn to ‘[t]he presumptuous application’ of Dante’s lines, ‘*Voi, ch’intendendo, il terzo ciel movete*’, ‘to the concluding lines of [the deceased poet’s] own composition’. The rift between authorial intention and readerly reception is highlighted in the Advertisement’s language of uncertainty: ‘The present poem *appears* to have been intended by the Writer as the dedication to some longer one’ (emphasis added). Michael Rossington and Andrew Lacey note that Geoffrey Matthews ‘suggests intriguingly that this sentence may be a coded allusion to the word *Epipsychidion*’.[[673]](#footnote-673) If so, a focus upon potentiality rather than unity seems key to deciphering the poem’s elusive title. Rossington and Lacey note that ‘[t]he meaning of the title has been much debated’ and acknowledge that ‘[t]here is no such word…in Greek’. The title continues to attract speculation due to its prefix’s ‘range of meanings including “over” and “upon” attached to a ‘diminutive noun meaning “little soul”’.[[674]](#footnote-674) An effort to locate meaning within the body of the poem arrives at the following lines: ‘this soul out of my soul’ and ‘a soul within the soul’ (237; 455). The ‘soul within the soul’ recalls the ‘ideal prototype’ of ‘On Love’: ‘a soul within our soul that describes a circle around its proper Paradise’ (p. 632). Stopford A. Brooke posits that ‘*epipsyche* would mean “a soul upon a soul,” just as *epicycle* in the Ptolemaic astronomy, meant “a circle upon a circle”’.[[675]](#footnote-675) While this reading seems to accord with the ‘ideal prototype’ described in ‘On Love’ through its imaging of circular orbits—the ‘circle around its proper Paradise’—the ‘epipsyche’ of *Epipsychidion* seems concerned, not with the encompassing union suggested by bodies united in a gravitational orbit, but with the struggle to escape from the limits of selfhood. This struggle becomes most evident through a closer reading of the lines surrounding the ‘soul out of my soul’.

Whither ’twas fled, this soul out of my soul;

And murmured names and spells which have control

Over the sightless tyrants of our fate;

But neither prayer nor verse could dissipate

The night which closed on her; nor uncreate

That world within this Chaos, mine and me,

Of which she was the veiled Divinity

(237-243)

The poet yearns to ‘uncreate’ his subjective apprehension of life, the ‘mine and me’ that denotes masculine ownership and selfhood, and yet this erasure fails because it is enacted through the same patrilineal language that both figures and conceals Emily’s own being-ness. Curiously, Ward observes that Emilia willingly participates in a similar self-conscious rendering of herself through the language of another: ‘Her letters to Shelley seem to have been consciously Petrarchan, and so she was in a sense a literary artefact from the outset, a self-conscious prototype of the poetic ideal both in her own and the poet’s eyes’.[[676]](#footnote-676) Shelley’s translations of careful selections from his own works into Italian become efforts to cast off the shackles and bounds of his own language. Webb notes that ‘[t]hrough this exercise Shelley reassimilated his own work, so that *Epipsychidion* is in part the product of the passages he translated’.[[677]](#footnote-677) Emily stands as both Other and a doubled self as she fluctuates between the substantiality of a human form and the ethereality of an incorporeal outline, and as such she mimics the way in which Michael Rossington notes that ‘[t]ranslation acts as poetry’s double, enabling not simply the “carrying over” of words from one language to another, but a dialogue with the original that generates originality’.[[678]](#footnote-678) In these early stages of its composition, the poem becomes a highly self-conscious and carefully crafted rending and reintegration of self, duplicating the original compositional process of translating the *Symposium*. This self-reintegration sees Shelley testing and tentatively renegotiating an intersubjective androgynous processing of, rather than self with Other, self with an earlier and fragmented self.

This reintegration of self sponsors the hermaphroditism of *Epipsychidion*, and this hermaphroditism lends to an alternative reading of the poem’s title offered by O’Connor, who writes that *Epipsychidion*, a ‘*Symposium*-influenced poem’, takes its title meaning ‘miniature soul within’ from Alcibiades’ likening of Socrates to Silenuses.[[679]](#footnote-679) The hermaphroditism of this image is apparent through the overtly phallic appearance of the Silenus coupled with their being ‘pregnant’, or filled with smaller statues. Comprised of pre-existing fragments, the poem tempts its reader into perceiving a lyrical unity in a fractured fragment, recalling ‘Ovid’s account…that at the origin of desire is, not wholeness, but an unstable and frightening confusion’.[[680]](#footnote-680) In the *Metamorphoses*, following Salmacis’ violating advances, Hermaphroditus becomes, not a product of amorous union, but a changed and confused shape: ‘these two bodies [were] knit in close embrace: they were no longer two, nor such as to be called, one, woman, and one, man. They seemed neither, and yet both’.[[681]](#footnote-681) Ovid’s account is echoed in *Epipsychidion*, where

Our breath shall intermix, our bosoms bound.

And our veins beat together; and our lips

With other eloquence than words, eclipse

The soul that burns between them, and the wells

Which boil under our being’s inmost cells,

The fountains of our deepest life, shall be

Confused in passion’s golden purity,

As mountain-springs under the morning Sun.

We shall become the same, we shall be one

Spirit within two frames, oh! wherefore two?

(565-574)

This passage, masquerading as amorous unification, is pinpricked with hints of Hermaphroditus’ forced and confused transformation. The seemingly pure ‘mountain-springs’ overtly alludes to Salmacis’ cursed fountain and the lines’ metaphorical waters burn and boil, seemingly capable of scorching and disfiguring any who would immerse themselves there. The speaker’s desire confronts collapse in the final two lines, and Madeleine Callaghan notes how ‘[t]he longing for oneness in Shelley’s lines finds their separation a wound that cannot be healed as “oh! wherefore two?” registers a pained questioning that admits of its own rhetorical quality’.[[682]](#footnote-682) Disunion is emphasised as enjambment forces the division of ‘one’ and ‘Spirit’, visually enacting a split that shifts from Ovid’s myth to Aristophanes’. However, Hermaphroditus and Salmacis’ non-consensual union differs from Aristophanes’ androgynes, who are motivated into union through love: ‘that reconciler and bond of union of their original nature, which seeks to make two, one, and to heal the divided nature of man’ (*The Banquet*, p. 431).

When [Hermaphroditus] saw now that the clear waters which he had penetrated as a man, had made him a creature of both sexes, and his limbs had been softened there, Hermaphroditus, stretching out his hands, said, but not in a man’s voice, “Father and mother, grant this gift to your son, who bears both your names: whoever comes to these fountains as a man, let him leave them half a man, and weaken suddenly at the touch of these waters!”.[[683]](#footnote-683)

Kari Weil’s analysis of mythical and literary representations of the androgyne lends itself to an examination of the hermaphroditic figure of Emily in *Epipsychidion*. For Weil, ‘[t]o examine the figure of the androgyne…is to discern the absent presence of another figure, that of the hermaphrodite, haunting the ideal of androgyny and its ordered, symmetrical opposition of male and female with the notion of an original confusion or chaos of sexes and desires’.[[684]](#footnote-684) Salmacis’ desire leads to her absorption into rather than union with Hermaphroditus. Ovid’s myth offers a striking contrast to Aristophanes’ account, as Hermaphroditus becomes disfigured through the Other’s desire, and consequently desires to inflict a similar disfiguring upon all of those who approach him and his fountains. Ovid and Aristophanes’ differing accounts of the mythological origins of dually-sexed beings would have been familiar to Shelley. In 1813, Shelley implored Hogg to provide Harriet with a copy of the *Metamorphoses* to make translations from, and he reread it with Mary in 1815. Shelley’s reading of Plato’s *Symposium* in 1817 and subsequent rereading and translation in 1818 is followed by Mary’s rereading of the *Metamorphoses* in 1820 in Shelley’s presence.[[685]](#footnote-685) Ovid’s Hermaphroditus is an obvious influence on Shelley’s character of the same name in *The Witch of Atlas*, although Shelley notably and intentionally departs from Ovid’s masculine Hermaphroditus in favour of an ambiguously ungendered creature. Water gleams and entices its onlooker in Ovid’s myth. Vanity, for Salmacis who ‘bathes her shapely limbs in her own pool’ and ‘often looks in the mirror-like waters to see what best becomes her’,[[686]](#footnote-686) becomes a punishment for those that would gaze upon their own reflections in Hermaphroditus’ enchanted waters. Narcissistic desire rather than selfless love permeates Ovid’s myth, and this narcissism prevails over the unified harmony of androgyny in *Epipsychidion* as the poem’s concluding couplets embody the disruption of Emily and the poet’s intersubjective union:

One hope within two wills, one will beneath

Two overshadowing minds, one life, one death,

One Heaven, one Hell, one immortality,

And one annihilation. Woe is me!

(584-587)

The poet’s struggle to maintain his and Emily’s subjective autonomy through androgynous intermingling is indicated by the insistency on ‘[t]wo overshadowing minds’—two distinct psyches—united in ‘one life, one death’. Callaghan writes that here Shelley is ‘[h]eavy-handed in his attempt to force the perfect symbiosis of the lovers’, and consequently the ‘poem begins to show signs of strain’.[[687]](#footnote-687) This strain becomes felt by the reader in the off-rhyme of ‘beneath’ and ‘death’ as these lines underscore the disharmony and instability of this seemingly perfect union. The caesura of ‘one immortality, / And one annihilation’ visually marks this disharmony or disunion as the poem spirals back upon the poet’s self-loathing and self-lamenting cry, ‘Woe is me!’. Shelley forces the poet’s self-annihilation in fear of the androgynous union’s susceptibility to succumb to tyranny of self over Other.

In *Epipsychidion*, Shelley seems acutely aware of love’s susceptibility to descending into tyranny through desire to possess the Other. Salmacis’ gaze renders Hermaphroditus an object to be possessed, likening him to ‘an ivory statue, or bright lilies behind clear glass’.[[688]](#footnote-688) In a cancelled stanza, Emily is likened to ‘that sweet marble monster of both sexes’ (‘Fragments Connected with *Epipsychidion*’, 58), revealing the lover’s inclination to transform the gazed upon beloved into a material object of desire. Goslee offers biographical insight into Shelley’s ‘sweet marble monster’ by noting the poet’s viewing of ‘the very beautiful Hellenistic sculpture of a hermaphrodite, one version of which was in the Museo Nazionale Romano in Rome’.[[689]](#footnote-689) Emily as an actual person, Emilia Viviani, and the ‘marble monster’ as an actual object coalesce into the transfigured Hermaphrodite in this fragment. The hermaphroditical state is one potentially corrupted through physicality and tyrannical desire and contrasts with the idealised perfection of Aristophanes’ androgynes’ union. In seeking androgynous mental union with Emilia Viviani through the composition of *Epipsychidion*, whether with amorous or ‘platonic’ intentions,[[690]](#footnote-690) Shelley rends and repurposes his own fragmented textual bodies in an effort to transmute his imaginative vision into an alchemy of ideal imaginative vision and reality with hermaphroditical results. Emily’s bifurcated figuration becomes an extension of the poem’s compositional process. The poem emerges from existing fragments that bear but slight resemblance to the real woman, Emilia Viviani, and, seemingly by extension, Emily is crafted into a figure that resembles a real, mortal woman while simultaneously evoking an unembodied and idealised form. Tatsuo Tokoo reveals that ‘Shelley incorporated, almost word for word, passages he had apparently composed for other purposes’, leading ‘to the conviction that in this most characteristic of his poems Shelley was not so much of a rapturous lyricist as has often been assumed but rather a highly conscious artist’.[[691]](#footnote-691) Goslee observes how, ‘[i]n the middle of page 62, transcendent and physical responses begin to merge’ as Shelley repurposes lines from ‘Fiordispina’ by transposing the description of a fictional woman onto the textual figuration of Emilia: Emily.[[692]](#footnote-692) Bodily descriptions of lips and hair are repeatedly cancelled on this manuscript page with seemingly increasing intensity as Shelley’s hand moves down the page, moving from cancelling single words to cancelling out entire lines in thick, linear strokes. The cancellation of entire lines on this page begins with Shelley’s dissatisfied description of Emily’s hair:

Out of her loose hair,

[…]

Out of our her fair <flows>

From loose hair odours <flow forth>

[…]

limbs

In the Odours are presence issuing

spirit fingers flowing thence

[…]

The keen life in her arms

a soft fire

Stains the cold blank chill blended

<air> light

dead blank cold air with <fire>

A never <to be> <—>

The outline disentagled the <fire> & so

<love>

<…….> a warm ) & light

<A folding Making the> intermixture shade

A inperceptible <confusion> made[[693]](#footnote-693)

Shelley’s compositional collapse in these lines sees him turning from the physical to the incorporeal as he works to form Emily from fragments of ‘Fiordispina’. In the manuscript, the bodily attributes of Emily’s ‘hair’, ‘fingers’, and ‘arms’ are successively cancelled with the etherealities of her ‘presence’ and ‘spirit’ substituted and left in their place. While the verse continues for an additional three levels on this page (17-17b), Adamson asserts that, due to the change in ink colour and pen-cut, these three final levels on the page indicate ‘the moment when PBS was transferring the rough draft here into fair copy elsewhere’.[[694]](#footnote-694) Prior to these emendations, the page ends with ‘inperceptible <confusion>’: a state of disorientation between imaging Emily as a bodily form and an incorporeal shape as Shelley visually and figuratively cancels her bodily presence in favour of the incorporeal substitutions. The alliterative weight of ‘fingers flowing’ is cancelled during a moment of revision as Shelley carefully substitutes the sibilant ‘presence issuing’ in its place in a lighter and finer hand.[[695]](#footnote-695) The ‘Shelleyan master-tone’,[[696]](#footnote-696) ‘folding’—so pivotal to *Prometheus Unbound*’s scene of universal harmony in Act 4 where the Moon and Earth become androgynously united—is also cancelled while ‘intermixture shade’ remains untouched at the end of the line, becoming in the published poem:

The glory of her being, issuing thence,

Stains the dead, blank, cold air with a warm shade

Of unentangled intermixture, made

By Love

(91-95)

These lines subtly anticipate the artistry of *Adonais* where ‘Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass, / Stains the white radiance of Eternity’ (*Adonais*, 52.462-463) and *The Triumph of Life*, where the ‘warm shade’ looks ahead to the ‘shape all light’ who stands ‘Amid the Sun, as he amid the blaze / Of his own glory’ (*The Triumph of Life*, 352; 349-350). However, the androgynous imagery of the conflated feminine ‘shape all light’ and masculine Sun in *The Triumph of Life* is not to be found in *Epipsychidion* where the speaker’s desired union with Emily repeatedly fails. Their union, like the published poem itself, is consigned to a decidedly fragmentary state. The conscious figuration of Emily within the poem is, in effect, an extension of the poem’s emergence from discarded fragments. In adds. e. 8, Goslee notes, ‘[r]ededicating his description of a fictional woman—Fiordispina—to an actual one—Teresa or Emilia Viviani—[Shelley] then intensifies the process of making her less and less actual’.[[697]](#footnote-697) This process of de-actualising is visually manifested within the manuscript as Shelley creates and cancels Emily’s physical presence. Elsewhere in adds. e. 8, Shelley visually conflates the words ‘shapes’ and ‘shades’ into ‘sha[d]pes’ in a struggle to find an appropriate substitution for the cancelled ‘forms’.[[698]](#footnote-698) This conflation seems to prefigure the ‘intermixture shade’ of adds. e. 8, p. 61 where ‘shade’ bears implications of doubleness, recalling Milton’s Death, who Sin addresses as ‘Thou my shade / Inseparable must with me along’ (*Paradise Lost*, 10.249-250).[[699]](#footnote-699) In *Epipsychidion*, it seems to be this very shackling and subordination of the Other that Shelley fears may result from an androgynous union. In gathering and melding together fragments that precede his first meeting with Emilia Viviani, Shelley’s Emily becomes a strikingly artificial figure rather than an effusive rendering of a real woman.

The Platonic duality of body and soul is present in the fragments anticipating *Epipsychidion*’s composition. Carlene Adamson notes that, in ‘Fiordispina’, ‘Fiordispina’s and Madeline’s spirituality and other-worldliness are in contrast with their nurses’ prosaicness and vulgarity’, and Alan Weinberg draws a convincing parallel between *The Witch of Atlas* and ‘Fiordispina’ through a reading of ‘the Petrarchan refiguration of Fiordispina as a Witch of Atlas-like transubstantiation into shadow, metaphor and vision’.[[700]](#footnote-700) These links substantiate the process of refiguration apparent in *Epipsychidion*, as Emily becomes much more than a characterisation of Emilia Viviani. In her examination of the poem’s cancelled Advertisements in adds. e. 12, Goslee notes how ‘allusions to Agathon and Diotima recall the *Symposium*, suggesting not only multiple objects of desire but also a transfiguration of desire’s objects toward more transcendent ones that may fill the lack felt by the lover. Yet the structure of Shelley’s dedicatory draft remains empty, itself lacking or waiting for an appropriate object of desire’.[[701]](#footnote-701) As Emily shifts between being represented as a corporeal presence and an imagined or seemingly glimpsed shadow or reflection, so does she avoid being confined to any one characterisation, and, in doing so, she becomes, like the speakers of the *Symposium*, representative of a series of interpretations of love. Stuart Curran affirms ‘that the several conflicting accounts of the nature of Love in Plato’s *Symposium*, which he translated in 1818, must have come to his mind as reinforcing such emphatic diversity’ as is found in Shelley’s solar system, where Emily is transfigured as Moon, Sun, and Comet.[[702]](#footnote-702) Goslee notes that the ‘draft remains empty’, and here it seems that Emily comes to function akin to a Silenus statue or an *agalma*: the imageless and hollow vessel Alcibiades likens Socrates to in order to emphasise the subjective nature of philosophic enquiry. This comparison is conveyed through the poem’s most overt physical materialisation of Emily: ‘See where she stands! a mortal shape indued / With love and life and light and deity’ (112-13), recalling ‘those Silenuses that sit in the sculptors’ shops, and which are carved holding flutes or pipes, but which, when divided in two, are found to contain withinside the images of the Gods’ (*The Banquet*, p. 453). Emily’s physical ‘mortal shape’ harbours the ‘light and deity’ of Platonic Being where the transposition of ‘shape’ and ‘light’ anticipates the feminine ‘shape all light’ of *The Triumph of Life* (352). Robert N. Essick comments that here, in the lines following the deictic ‘She where she stands!’, ‘[t]he successive clauses, each prefaced by an unvoiced “she is,” offer multiple definitions which are never resolved into a single image. The “shape” we are offered at the beginning of the passage dissolves into serial displacements changing the very nature of the initial form’, and this results in a process whereby ‘the very multiplicity of images distances and diffuses the object, curiously reversing the normative direction of sign functions’.[[703]](#footnote-703) Emily’s physical figuration is lost within the overwhelming velocity of a series of metaphorical transferences posing her as

An image of some bright Eternity;

A shadow of some golden dream; a Splendour

Leaving the third sphere pilotless; a tender

Reflection of the eternal Moon of Love

Under whose motions life’s dull billows move;

A Metaphor of Spring and Youth and Morning;

A Vision like incarnate April, warning,

With smiles and tears

(115-122)

Emily’s bodily presence in line 112 is hurriedly obscured by the succession of visual metaphors, where shadows and reflections emphasise the futility of the struggle to constrain the beloved within a single image. Curran notes here how ‘Metaphor’ ‘represents in its Greek roots a carrying across—which is to say once again, a transformation, a going out of one’s nature’.[[704]](#footnote-704) The visual metaphors recall Shelley’s ‘On Love’, where ‘We dimly see within our intellectual nature’, and the poet’s appended footnote: ‘These words inefficient and metaphorical—Most words so—No help—’ (pp. 632 and 821). The Greek implication of ‘carrying across’ recalls the similar crossing over of chiasmus, which, as has been discussed earlier, results not in predicted symmetry or completion but an infinite unfinishedness. The poet’s admission of Emily as ‘Metaphor’ becomes a recognition of insubstantiality and the futility of an infinite chain of transferred figurations.

The multistability of Emily’s figurative processing is disrupted by the poet’s interjection: ‘Ah, woe is me!’ (124), as his focus returns to the narrow confines of the self:

What have I dared? where am I lifted? How

Shall I descend, and perish not? I know

That Love makes all things equal: I have heard

By mine own heart this joyous truth averred

(125-128)

The often-overlooked wry wit of the poem spills forth in these lines as the precept that ‘Love makes all things equal’ is overshadowed by an excess of self through the hammering repetition of ‘I’, thereby disturbing any sense of equality. *Epipsychidion*’s concern with the self’s susceptibility to adopting a posture of tyranny in the pursuit of intersubjective mingling is brought to the forefront through this solipsistic interjection. The successive stanza returns to figuring Emily’s multistability through a series of denominative exclamations: ‘Spouse! Sister! Angel! Pilot of the Fate’ (130). Emily’s presence as a real and mortal woman is etherealised in gradations that slowly strip away her femaleness and corporeality in an effort to unbind her from the limitations of the male-created text. The legally-binding and possessive implications of ‘Spouse’ give way to the incestuous ambiguities of ‘Sister’, until ‘Angel’ marks Emily’s ascension from the female and corporeal into the androgynously ungendered and etherealised, recalling that Milton’s angels ‘Can either sex assume, or both’ and are ‘Not tied or manacled with joint or limb’ (*Paradise Lost*, 1.424 and 426). This series of figurations culminates in the ‘Pilot of the Fate’, an ultimately contradictory image that seems to grant Emily autonomy and control through her designated role as pilot, but also subjects her to being ruled by a preconceived fate. Shelley demonstrates his awareness that any and all efforts to confer equal status to the Other through intersubjective mingling will be slighted by the inescapable tyranny of selfhood. In *Epipsychidion*, Shelley finds an analogous relationship between his own solipsistic entrapment within the bounds of language and selfhood, and Emilia’s actual imprisonment, both within the confines of the convent and within the mandates of patriarchal society. There is a sympathetic similitude to the pair’s differing degrees of imprisonment, but Shelley continuously returns his and the reader’s awareness to the ultimate inability for all things to be made truly equal.

Futility also resonates in *The Banquet*, where the speakers’ ever-escalating exaltations of the divine and intellectual beauty of ἔρως are ultimately disrupted by Alcibiades’ lustful vulgarity. No sooner has Socrates shared Diotima’s speech on ‘“the supreme beauty itself, simple, pure, uncontaminated with the intermixture of human flesh and colours”’ than Alcibiades noisily enters the vestibule, ‘excessively drunk and roaring out:—“Where is Agathon? Lead me to Agathon!”’, desiring to recline ‘“beside the most beautiful person of the whole party”’ and thereby returning the focus of desire onto the fleshly body (*The Banquet*, pp. 450 and 451). Alcibiades offers a drunken speech on the beauty of Socrates’ wisdom, and his failed attempts at seducing the older man, to the uproarious laughter of the guests, are followed by a jealous squabbling over Agathon’s position on the couch beside Socrates. As much as Alcibiades disrupts the pure and wholly intellectual conception of ἔρως arrived at by Socrates through his recollected discourse with Diotima, he comes to figure as an intermediary character not completely unlike Diotima’s ‘daemoniacal’ Love (*The Banquet*, p. 441). The ‘thick crown of ivy and violets’ atop Alcibiades’ head lends itself to the bisexuality of his Dionysian demeanour—the sudden uproar of his entrance coupled with his excessive drunkenness and lust—where ivy is inherently bisexual and violets are associated with Aphrodite (*The Banquet*, p. 451). For Weil, Alcibiades ‘makes a travesty of the Socrates-Diotima duo, as well as of Aristophanes’ “halves.” In Alcibiades, male and female, self and other, body and mind are intertwined into their confused and hermaphroditic paradoxism’. Weil also observes that as ‘he transfers the wreath from his own head first to Agathon’s, then to Socrates’s’, Alcibiades ‘indicat[es] the interchangeability of their positions and infect[s] both with his own epicenism’.[[705]](#footnote-705) This infectious epicenism may also be seen in ‘Alcibiades’ comparison of Socrates to a Silenus-statue containing images of gods inside’, where Angela Hobbs notes how Plato combines ‘the images of the pregnant female with the vigorously erect male’.[[706]](#footnote-706) Alcibiades, through his metaphorical bisexuality and the moving positions of his crown and his body, seems to serve as a distorted double of Diotima’s demoniacal Love who ‘“fills up that intermediate space between…two classes of beings, so as to bind together, by his own power, the whole universe of things”’ (*The Banquet*, p. 442). As Diotima’s Love is figured as an intellectual intermediary force, drawing opposites together into androgynous psychic unity, Alcibiades’ daemonism is expressed through his desiring to forcefully embrace and be embraced by Socrates, and through his physically trying to divide Socrates and Agathon with the placement of his body upon their shared couch. This combination of bisexuality and physicality results in Alcibiades’ hermaphroditism in contrast to the androgyny of Aristophanes’ immortal beings and the ‘bind[ing] together’ enacted by Diotima’s ‘great Daemon’, Love (*The Banquet*, pp. 442 and 441). The doubleness under scrutiny in *Epipsychidion* seems to draw upon this clash between Alcibiades’ disruptive, sexualised, and hermaphroditical character and the ‘intellectual beauty’ of Diotima’s ‘great Daemon’ through the figuration of Emily (*The Banquet*, pp. 449 and 441). At moments seeming an embodiment of ‘intellectual beauty’, she is nonetheless ‘figured to the imagination’ unlike the real and ‘eternally uniform’ Form of Love (*The Banquet*, p. 449). Her beauty wavers between the transience of a bodily form and the permanence of an intellectual conception in a continuously self-cancelling process that denies stasis but also prevents union. She is an

unentangled intermixture, made

By Love, of light and motion: one intense

Diffusion, one serene Omnipresence,

Whose flowing outlines mingle in their flowing

Around her cheeks and utmost fingers glowing

With the unintermitted blood, which there

Quivers (as in a fleece of snow-like air

The crimson pulse of living morning quiver),

Continuously prolonged, and ending never,

Till they are lost, and in that Beauty furled

Which penetrates and clasps and fills the world;

Scarce visible from extreme loveliness.

(93-104)

Thomas Pfau notes how the above ‘images rapidly disintegrate in relation both to one another and to the vision they are meant to identify’, and his misreading of ‘entangled’ for ‘unentangled’ in line 93 reveals just how unexpected and disorienting the effect of this disintegration is.[[707]](#footnote-707) The ‘unentangled intermixture’ seems to cancel the very unifying act it is imaging. This negation is echoed by the corporeality of Emily’s glowing and pulsating body, where her vital presence, ‘Continuously prolonged, and ending never’, is temptingly elongated ‘Till they are lost’: paradoxically, that which is at one moment seemingly eternal and ‘ending never’ is ‘lost’ on the next line. Alcibiades’ hermaphroditism seems present in this figuration of Emily, too, as her approximation to ‘Beauty’ is endowed with the masculine attribute of ‘penetrat[ing]’ and ‘fill[ing]’, overtly forceful and physical acts that contrast with the ethereal ‘flowing outlines’ of her earlier figuration.

*Epipsychidion*, like *The Banquet*, ‘dismantles oppositions between the sensuous and the spiritual in the act of creating them’ by testing the ambiguous liberties of ‘forms’ in Shelley’s translation of ‘what in Plato are different words’.[[708]](#footnote-708) This dual process of dismantling and creating is figured in the published poem by Emily’s metaphorical transferences and the poet’s repeated movements towards union with her, as time and again these desired movements towards union are upset by the poet’s self-annihilation. The poet’s self-annihilation grows out of Shelley’s own repeated compositional collapse in the manuscript drafts as he struggles to excise himself from an intersubjective union between poet and reader, self and Other, that would risk tyrannical subjection. In *Epipsychidion*, androgyny, rather than being the object of desire, is tested with sceptical circumscription. Emily is, like ἔρως in *The Banquet*, both object and motivator of a desire that multifacetedly unbuilds and enforces hierarchical oppositions between flesh and spirit, masculine and feminine. Androgyny, as the Aristophanic ideal form of love in *The Banquet*, and as an intersubjective merging between self and Other in promotion of harmonious equality in Shelley’s poetic corpus, becomes displaced by Emily’s hermaphroditism in *Epipsychidion*, drawing upon Alcibiades’ disruptive hermaphroditism in *The Banquet*. Painstakingly rendered and carefully crafted, *Epipsychidion* subtly and successfully transmutes *The Banquet* into verse in an effort to test the repercussions of ‘seeking in a mortal image the likeness of what is perhaps eternal’ (*PBS Letters*, II, p. 434).

**Conclusion: ‘An echo in another’s mind’: Shelley’s Last Lyrics**

Throughout Shelley’s poetic corpus, androgyny expands from the traditional union of masculine and feminine to include the mental mingling of poet and reader, and poet as reader, as he tests the bounds of selfhood in acts of imaginative sympathy propounded through poetry. The binary divisions of ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ are reconciled through the ‘psychic union’ afforded by androgyny in promotion of sexual and intellectual equality.[[709]](#footnote-709) Textual figurations of androgyny model or involve the reader through ‘interanimation’ as the poet, drawing upon Platonic dialogism, implicates the reader as interlocutor or shared creator of meaning.[[710]](#footnote-710) Androgyny is figured as a completed process in Shelley’s great works of hope, *Laon and Cythna* and *Prometheus Unbound*, through Laon and Cythna’s transformation into the androgynous Form in the Temple of the Spirit and Asia and Prometheus’ reunion as the androgyne at the close of Act 3, but following the melioristic heights of *Prometheus Unbound*, androgyny is tested with sceptical circumscription, reflecting Shelley’s admission that ‘It is impossible to compose except under the strong excitement of an assurance of finding sympathy in what you write’ (*PBS Letters*, II, p. 436). The ideal reader is challenged in *The Witch of Atlas* through Shelley’s testing of poetic autonomy in the wholly androgynous figure of the Witch, while *Epipsychidion* enacts a radical transference of androgyny through the poet’s self-cancellation and Emily’s metaphorical shiftings. Alongside his attention to his audiences and the dynamic reciprocity of reading, Shelley’s manipulation of the categories of masculine and feminine that underly androgyny are extant throughout his epistolary, prose, and poetic compositions. *Queen Mab*’s division between the female Ianthe’s soul and Henry’s male body anticipates the ambivalence of *Alastor*, where both masculine Poet and feminine veiled maid vacillate between corporeal and ethereal forms, where soul and body, masculine and feminine, undergo indeterminable interfusions and divisions. Throughout his career, Shelley’s manuscripts reveal deliberate cancellations and substitutions of masculine, feminine, and ungendered pronouns, and his intentional ungendering of *Prometheus Unbound*’s Demogorgon and *The Witch of Atlas*’ Hermaphroditus remains largely unnoticed or ignored by critics.[[711]](#footnote-711) Androgyny develops as a process that exists within and outside of the text through the poet and reader’s psychic union, and its mingling of the masculine and the feminine, the self and the Other, extend throughout Shelley’s compositions.

From as early as 1811, in his epistolary posing as the feminine ‘Jenny’, altered to the ambiguously gendered ‘Jennyings’, Shelley seems to share the sense of ‘playfulness’ that ‘help[s] Plato to break down the distinctions between the male and the female, and the masculine and the feminine’ in the *Symposium*.[[712]](#footnote-712) Shelley’s study of Plato remains present from 1811 up until his accidental death in 1822, reaching a transformative peak in his composition of *The Banquet* in 1818, and in the philosopher’s works Shelley finds a poetic language that is vitalised and unbound from generic form, adopting Plato’s subtle implication of the reader as interlocutor. The myth of the androgyne voiced by Aristophanes becomes a ‘subject-rhyme’ for Shelley’s own poetic thoughts on love, selfhood, and sexual equality, where moral amelioration for Shelley as for Plato is possible through the poet and reader’s imaginative union.[[713]](#footnote-713) ‘[T]he process of achieving wisdom’ is for Plato ‘a creative one’, and one that eventually ascends towards the ideal ‘realm of ungendered and human-transcendent Forms’.[[714]](#footnote-714) But Shelley’s idealism, like Plato’s, is one that is coupled with scepticism, and androgyny is tested with sceptical circumscription in *The Witch of Atlas* and *Epipsychidion*, as Shelley’s hope for finding sympathy in his contemporary readership dwindles.

Inasmuch as Shelley finds in Plato’s androgyny a ‘subject-rhyme’ for his own intuitions, he finds in his relationship with Mary a prototype of the ideal compact between poet and reader, where there is an equal and shared reciprocity in ‘imitat[ing] each others [*sic*] excellencies’ (*PBS Letters*, I, p. 414). Following Shelley’s death, Mary assumes the conflated position of reader and co-creator of poetic meaning through her self-designated role of editor. Through her editorial framing of her husband’s works, Mary shapes Shelley with measured degrees of his own Platonic subtlety.[[715]](#footnote-715) Her intermediary position between reader and editor comes to resemble Diotima’s description of Love in the *Symposium*, ‘interpret[ing] and mak[ing] a communication between what is divine and what is mortal’ (*The Banquet*, p. 442). Mary’s editing of Shelley’s works not only aims to ensure the poet’s immortality, it also rekindles a readership for Plato,[[716]](#footnote-716) and Mary’s affirmation that ‘Shelley commands language splendid and melodious as Plato’ reinforces Shelley’s high estimation of Plato as a poet (Preface to *Essays, Letters from Abroad*, p. viii). Michael O’Neill rightly notes that her careful editing and publication of *The Banquet* ‘served a long-term strategy of ensuring for P. B. Shelley the continuing admiration of the new readership that she had built up for him’,[[717]](#footnote-717) and by intertwining Shelley’s genius with Plato’s, Mary ensures their endurance, lauding Shelley’s translation of the *Symposium* as the English language’s most ‘brilliant composition’ (Preface to *Essays, Letters from Abroad*, p. xii). ‘No people need so much sympathy as poets’, Mary writes in 1815. ‘The interchange of thought and feeling, the fresh spirit of inquiry and invention, that springs from the collision or harmony of different minds, are for them a necessity and a passion’.[[718]](#footnote-718) Shelley finds in the *Symposium* a textual representation of the ‘harmony of different minds’ that propels his own poetic composition. Agathon’s speech, redeemed in Shelley’s translation as lyrical prose poetry imbued with ‘rapt and golden eloquence’ rather than a source of laughter,[[719]](#footnote-719) is published by Mary in *The Westminster Review* as a separate and complete composition.[[720]](#footnote-720) Mary’s extraction of Agathon’s speech chimes with Shelley’s reported conversation with Byron, recorded and anonymously published as a Socratic dialogue, wherein Shelley asks: ‘Is not a line, as well as your outspread heroics, or a tragedy, a whole, and only as a whole, beautiful in itself?’.[[721]](#footnote-721) Mary’s high esteem of Agathon’s speech, and her publication of Shelley’s rendering of it as a complete composition, serves as a subtle reminder that all of Agathon’s works were lost to time, and this is a calamity that Mary hopes to prevent in Shelley’s case by collecting, editing, and publishing the poet’s extant compositions.[[722]](#footnote-722)

‘The decision of the cause whether or no *I* am a poet is removed from the present time to the hour when our posterity shall assemble’, Shelley writes in 1821, later lamenting in the month before his death that ‘It is impossible to compose except under the strong excitement of an assurance of finding sympathy in what you write’ (*PBS Letters*, II, pp. 310 and 436). Shelley’s hope for his readers’ sympathy is extended through Mary’s own hope to preserve Shelley’s poetry ‘for future generations to contemplate and measure’ (*A Defence of Poetry*, p. 680), a hope she makes a reality through her careful editing of the poet’s works. The process of transcribing, arranging, and framing the poet’s works alongside her notes and prefaces becomes a way for Mary to extend her privileged experience as Shelley’s reader to ‘the lovers of Shelley’s poetry’ to whom she ‘consecrate[s]’ her edited volumes (Preface to *Posthumous Poems*, p. xvi).[[723]](#footnote-723) Furthermore, she emphasises *The Banquet*’s importance by, as Michael O’Neill points out, concluding the volume of *1840* with Shelley’s ‘comment in a postscript, “I have found the translation of the Symposium”’.[[724]](#footnote-724) O’Neill stresses the ‘tactical’ rather than personal nature of Mary’s editorial decision, writing that ‘the decision to close with this letter and this postscript serves a less oppressively egotistical motive; it reminds the reader that among the material made newly available by *1840* is *The Banquet*’.[[725]](#footnote-725) By making Shelley’s penultimate letter seem to appear as his last written words, Mary exercises her editorial authority in order to promote Shelley’s translation of the *Symposium*, thereby emphasising her, and Shelley’s, high estimation of the composition. Mary’s editorial decision stresses the *Symposium*’s importance to Shelley and also enacts his hope for *The Banquet* to be published. Mary uses her editorial authority to promote Shelley’s authorial aims, materially enacting androgyny through the publication of *The Banquet*.

Shelley’s last two letters are addressed to his ideal reader, Mary, and his idealised muse, Jane Williams. The first letter to Mary contains a swift relaying of news on the Hunts, Byron, and *The Liberal*, with the added postscript: ‘I have found the translation of the Symposium’. Its tone is brusque, and its contents are rushed along by the dashes that visually mark Shelley’s ‘hurried & occupied’ state (*PBS Letters*, II, p. 444). But, despite speculations on Mary’s estrangement from Shelley, the poet’s inclusion of the note on the *Symposium* emphasises not only the importance of his translated composition to himself, but also to Mary, recalling that Shelley originally described its composition as an exercise ‘to give Mary some idea of the manners & feelings of the Athenians’ (*PBS Letters*, II, p. 20). Throughout the Shelleys’ shared lifetimes, and after Shelley’s death, ‘[s]tudying Greek was, in some way, to metonymically consummate [Mary’s] love for Percy Bysshe’, Jennifer Wallace writes, enabling an erotic, intellectual mingling between the couple while also championing the radical politics of studying Plato in the early nineteenth century, and studying Greek as a woman.[[726]](#footnote-726) The poet’s last letter to Jane adumbrates the intimacies of Shelley’s early letters to Mary, where Mary was not only lover but also reader and co-creator of meaning, engaged in ‘reciprocal translation’.[[727]](#footnote-727) Shelley’s final letter to Jane, irrespective of whether or not it suggests a romantic relationship, more pointedly emphasises Jane’s position as Shelley’s selected reader: ‘I only write these lines for the pleasure of tracing what will meet your eyes.—Mary will tell you all the news’ (*PBS Letters*, II, p. 445). The privileged position of ideal reader seems to shift from Mary to Jane, but Shelley’s final words emphasise Mary’s position as co-communicator of his words, and this is a position she upholds with inestimable bravery and diligence in ‘undertak[ing] a virtually impossible task’ as Shelley’s editor.[[728]](#footnote-728) If the position of ideal reader seems to shift from Mary to Jane in Shelley’s final year, Shelley’s last words in the letter to Jane stress Mary’s status as co-communicator. In editing Shelley’s works, Mary extends the pair’s shared role as co-communicator, and her appended notes and prefaces intersubjectively and androgynously mix and meld with Shelley’s compositions.

Decisions to read Shelley’s lyrics to Jane as evidence of a romantic relationship risk occluding the poems’ masterful artistry, allusivity, and their heightened self-consciousness of their own performativity. There exists in the poems a doubled sense of intimacy and detachment that should not necessarily be ascribed to Shelley’s relationship with Jane, but instead rises from the poet’s increasing preoccupation with posterity, and with the ways in which the self is constructed by and through the Other. Madeleine Callaghan writes that, in the Jane poems, ‘Jane becomes “one dear image” (“The Recollection”, 5. 84) of the fair form sought throughout Shelley’s poetry’, ‘once again finding in “a mortal image the likeness of what is perhaps eternal” (*Letters: PBS* II. p. 434)’.[[729]](#footnote-729) Jane, as she is figured through Shelley’s final lyrics, becomes an embodiment of the feminine Other that pervades his poetry, at once complementing and complicating the poet’s masculine self-identification. The desire for androgyny, to dissolve binary oppositions into achieved harmony, persists throughout Shelley’s poetic corpus, where the textual mingling of masculine and feminine mirrors the psychic union between poet and reader. If *Epipsychidion* closes itself off to all but the *Σύνετοι*, Shelley’s last lyrics seem to direct themselves performatively to a universal audience. For William Keach, ‘Jane Williams was Shelley’s muse, lyric focus and—with her husband Edward—primary audience’,[[730]](#footnote-730) but Shelley’s letters in his last years reveal his attention to a wider, anticipated audience. In January 1822, Shelley describes Jane to John Gisborne as ‘a sort of spirit of embodied peace in our circle of tempests’, spotlighting the Shakespearean allusivity that is threaded throughout his final lyrics (*PBS Letters*, II, p. 376). The doubled sense of conflict and unity that underlies androgyny surfaces in Shelley’s metaphorical description of Jane’s influence, where the tempestuous risk of division is nonetheless contained within the wholeness of the circle. There are also implications of androgyny in Shelley’s overt allusion to Shakespeare, in whose works ‘[a]ndrogyny reaches widely and deeply’. In particular, *The Tempest*’s ‘vision of the potential for achieving unity, wholeness, harmony, and perfection within the confines of the human’ offers Shelley an intimately allusive space where the minds of reader and poet, and poet as reader, are harmonised, but not without the risk of subjection.[[731]](#footnote-731) Ultimately, Shelley ‘recognize[s] in [Shakespeare] something that we cannot but love and sympathize with’,[[732]](#footnote-732) and his final lyrics self-referentially project this love and sympathy by encouraging the reader’s own sympathetic projection through androgyny.

Richard Cronin rightly observes that ‘With a Guitar. To Jane’ ‘takes its place within a courtly tradition, characteristic of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries’,[[733]](#footnote-733) and as such its appearance as private lyric cloaks its performativity, channelling the sense of artifice that pervades *The Witch of Atlas*, the subtly glinting wit of *Epipsychidion*, and the ‘infinitely comical’ *Hymn to Mercury* (*PBS Letters*, II, p. 218). The lyrics are self-consciously concerned with the presence of an audience extending far beyond the Williamses’ readerly gaze. ‘The social context of these performances is more than a little complicated’, Susan Wolfson writes, ‘involving not only Shelley’s sense of himself as a *poet* in doubt of a public audience, but also…of Jane and Edward as audiences to be addressed with a difference, and of Mary as a rhetorically alienated reader’.[[734]](#footnote-734) But, by implicating a wider audience than Shelley’s contemporary circle, the poet explodes the bounds of the private lyric. This sense is also picked up by Cronin, who locates in ‘With a Guitar. To Jane’ ‘the cooperative enterprise of [the guitar’s] maker and its player’ a metaphor for the ‘cooperative enterprise between reader and writer’,[[735]](#footnote-735) where the creation of music chimes with the co-creation of meaning. The musicality of Shelley’s final lyrics draws upon his appreciation for Jane’s musicianship, at least in part, but close reading the lyrics in the confines of biography shuts out Plato’s pervasive influence, and particularly the influence of the *Symposium*. In ‘With a Guitar. To Jane’, Thomas Frosch identifies the motifs of ‘reincarnation, harmony, music, the music of the spheres, the priority of the soul, the body as a prison, stars and especially stars of destiny’ as ‘elements of Pythagoreanism’,[[736]](#footnote-736) elements transfused by Plato into the music of his dialogues.[[737]](#footnote-737) Androgyny is a form of *αρμονία* in the *Symposium*, literally a joining or fitting together, where *harmonia* involves a range of forms of blending that includes but is not limited to the English association of ‘harmony’ with music. Eryximachus’ speech introduces *harmonia* as ‘a philosophical term of art’ meaning ‘the blending of two opposites’, and J. B. Kennedy illustrates how an ‘underlying musical scale’ informs each symposiast’s speech. In Aristophanes’ account of the androgynes, ‘[e]ach major step in his speech is lodged at a musical note’, from the introduction of the ‘primitive wholes’, to Apollo’s slicing of the androgynes in half, to ‘the halves…seeking re-unification through love’, and finally to the apotheosis when ‘Hephaestus envisages the unity or “harmonization” of the lovers’, the mixing and melting that chimes with Shelley’s conception of love as an empathic mingling of selves.[[738]](#footnote-738)

‘With a Guitar. To Jane’s opening direction, ‘*Ariel* to *Miranda*’ combines the dialogism of Plato’s works with Shakespeare’s drama, and indicates the intricacies that underly androgyny as a psychic union between poet and reader (‘With a Guitar. To Jane’, 1). In *The Tempest*, the disembodied Ariel’s asides indicate a form of psychic communication with Prospero, a privileged but limited form of discourse. In his self-figuration as Ariel, Shelley mingles the lyrical and the dramatic while also rupturing the bounds and binds of the patrilineal discourse established and upheld by Prospero. Madeleine Callaghan, following Paul Weller’s suggestion that the capitalisation of ‘The Tempest’ in Shelley’s manuscript of ‘The Recollection’ suggests a continuing sense of allusivity, writes that ‘Shelley’s suggestive use of *The Tempest* calls attention to “The Recollection” as part of a group of lyrics’ wherein Shelley maintains his mask as Ariel.[[739]](#footnote-739) The ‘magic circle’ of ‘The Recollection’ widens to encompass ‘With a Guitar. To Jane’ and the accompanying lyrics to Jane as a collective whole as Shelley strives to unite, but potentially circumscribes, himself and his audience. Frosch’s admission that ‘*The Tempest* embodies what is perhaps the poem’s deepest secret: a dream of using poetry to control reality’ points towards this conflicted sense of union and circumscription, where poetry uses androgyny, it hopes, to alter reality, anticipating Shelley’s androgynous ‘future state’ (*PBS Letters*, I, p. 195).[[740]](#footnote-740) But, as Shelley had earlier tested in *Epipsychidion*, intersubjective, androgynous union risks subjecting the Other to the self’s Prospero-like control.

‘To Jane. The Invitation’ reworks the ‘couplet satire’ of *Epipsychidion*,[[741]](#footnote-741) mocking androgynous union through its very performativity on the page. The poet’s beckoning of Jane—at once Jane Williams and a feminised readerly figuration, not unlike Emily—into the woods ‘Where the pine its garland weaves / Of sapless green and ivy dun’ invites the poem’s participant into an embodied union with the poet, but one that confines as much as it combines (‘To Jane. The Invitation’, 52-53). Shelley-as-Ariel invites the reader to share in his entrapment, amongst the pines, recalling Shakespeare’s Ariel’s pine tree imprisonment, where the weaving of pine with Dionysian ivy suggests an androgynous union that may risk enclosing the Other within the self’s confines. Rejecting Harold Bloom’s reading of the Jane poems as suffused with despair,[[742]](#footnote-742) the lyrics seem to playfully delight in renewed potential as much as they recall and recast the dejection of Shelley’s ‘Stanzas’ written in 1818. Their dirge is Dionysian, inviting the reader to participate in the poet’s pains as well as pleasures. The Jane poems recast in verse Shelley’s definition of love as a projection of ‘fear or hope beyond ourselves’ (‘On Love’, p. 631), mingling hope and despair with renewed poetic power, and admitting that ‘the soul need not repress / Its music lest it should not find / An echo in another’s mind’ (‘To Jane. The Invitation’, 24-26). These are lyrics that seek but do not depend upon the reader’s sympathy. Shelley’s self-figuration as the bee-like Ariel casts him as ‘a sexless bee’ (*The Witch of Atlas*, 68.589), a self-sustaining poet.

Susan Wolfson describes ‘The Recollection’ as a ‘fantasy [that] seduces language itself into its unities’, noting that ‘*multitudinous*’ in the final verse paragraph ‘does not merely rhyme with *us* but contains in it a punning “multitude in us”’.[[743]](#footnote-743) But the poem is only superficially concerned with unity, and the elemental mingling of its final lines, ‘Where the earth and ocean meet’, is undone by its pithily crafted closing couplet:

And all things seem only one

In the universal Sun.—

(‘To Jane. The Recollection’, 67-69)

The Shelleyan master verb of ‘seem’ subverts the sense of union afforded by ‘only one’, and the rhyming of ‘one’ and ‘Sun’, instead of indicating ‘the sign of unity’ floated by Wolfson,[[744]](#footnote-744) instead reveals the patrilineal limitations of language. The sun is resolutely masculine in Aristophanes’ account in the *Symposium*, and this sense, combined with Yeats’ estimation of the sun in Shelley’s works as the ‘source of all tyrannies’, supports an antithetical union, one in which the masculine element subjects the Other to its tyrannous sway.[[745]](#footnote-745)

Madeleine Callaghan lights upon ‘the allusive play of gestures that add touches of calculated though subtle artifice to memory’ in ‘To Jane—The Recollection’, noting that ‘Shelley’s use of the word “interfused” draws Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey” and its memory of “a sense sublime / Of something far more deeply interfused” (“Tintern Abbey”, 96-97) into “the Recollection” and its poetic magic circle’.[[746]](#footnote-746) If Shelley despairs of finding a ‘fit audience’ in his readers, his voicing of Wordsworth and his ‘interfusing’ of the Lake poet in Shakespearean allusion reveals his sustained union with poets as a reader. Although I depart from Paul Vatalaro’s claims of Shelley’s ‘obsession with maternal power’ in the Jane poems, his sensing of the ‘magic circle’ as ‘a zone of lyrical unity which functions as a figurative space’ seems apt.[[747]](#footnote-747) Androgyny shifts from an outward projection of the poetic self into the receptive reader to an internalised ‘lyrical unity’ in ‘The Recollection’, which is as much a recollection of memory as it is a re-collecting and harmonising of poetic influence. William Keach rightly discerns in ‘The Recollection’ ‘one of those arenas of reflexive self-involvement reaching all the way back through Shelley’s career to *Alastor*’,[[748]](#footnote-748) and the polyphonic voicing of influence in Shelley’s first experiment with androgyny resounds throughout ‘The Recollection’, enmeshing his former self with the former Wordsworth of the *Immortality Ode* by ‘trac[ing] / The epitaph of glory fled’ (‘The Recollection’, 6). If ‘The Invitation’ satirizes androgyny in the vein of *Epipsychidion*, ‘The Recollection’ reinstates its potential. ‘Shelley’s last invitation to Jane is as inspired as his lyrics are by the imagination of this palimpsest’,[[749]](#footnote-749) Susan Wolfson writes, where Shelley’s eliding of his name urges Jane—the reader—to palimpsestically reinscribe him into the text. It is a performative gesture, but one that visually and materially shifts poetic authority to the reader by sharing in the poem’s creation.

Shelley’s final lyrics are infused with a subtle Platonism, where the reader’s voicing or inscribing of the poet’s name suggests Plato’s implication of his reader as interlocutor. Judith Chernaik locates in the poem’s ‘magic circle’ the ‘perfection and truth as well as the illusory character of dream or vision; it strangely approximates a Platonic absolute—“purer,” “more boundless,” “more perfect”—to which the “upper world,” “our world above,” is but a dim shadow’, and this reading, taken with Madeleine Callaghan’s and Paul Weller’s identification of the ‘magic circle’ as allusively invoking ‘Prospero’s enchanted circle in *The Tempest* (5. 1. 32 [stage direction])’, demonstrates Shelley’s blending of the poetic and the Platonic.[[750]](#footnote-750)

And still I felt the centre of

The magic circle there

Was *one* fair form that filled with love

The lifeless atmosphere.

(‘To Jane. The Recollection’, 49-51)

In locating the centre of the poem’s magic circle, Shelley self-allusively recalls poetry as ‘something divine’, ‘at once the centre and circumference of knowledge’ (*A Defence of Poetry*, p. 696). Shelley’s emphasis upon ‘*one* fair form’ corrects the illusion of union between ‘one’ and ‘Sun’ in ‘The Invitation’ through love, and this, combined with the Platonically-inflected ‘form’, suggests a similar ‘magic circle’ in the *Symposium*. The symposiasts’ arrangement of their couches within a circle visually embodies the circularity of their speeches and the *harmonia* that pervades the dialogue,[[751]](#footnote-751) and also recalls that the bodies of the prelapsarian androgynes are ‘circularly joined’ (*The Banquet*, p. 429). The ‘Sweet views, which in our world above / Can never well be seen’, when taken as evidence of Shelley’s failed idealism and his turning instead towards the earthly and human (‘The Recollection’, 69-70), overlooks the necessity of the earthly and human to the ideal in the *Symposium*. Jerome McGann quotes Trelawny’s recording of Shelley as evidence of his failed idealism: ‘“My mind is tranquil. I have no fears and some hopes. In our present gross material state our faculties are clouded”’, claiming that ‘[t]he visual metaphor indicates the shift that Shelley’s thought had begun to take on the question of the capabilities of the visionary-perceptor and the poet-speaker’.[[752]](#footnote-752) But McGann crucially misses the overt Platonism of this recorded statement, and of the poet’s final lyrics, where the material and the ideal, the body and the soul, are ambiguously enmeshed. Diotima’s account of ascendance to the monoeidic Form of Beauty is dependent upon the beauty of the body, and as Frisbee Sheffield explains, ‘if we view the beautiful bodies and souls solely as a means to the form—as defective and imperfect—then we are not really seeing the beauty of the form embodied in them’. Rather, ‘[i]t is being enraptured by the beauty around us—the beauty of individual bodies and souls—that we *also* come to appreciate beauty’.[[753]](#footnote-753) In voicing Wordsworth’s ‘glory fled’ Shelley seems to echo the older poet’s despair that ‘The things which I have seen I now can see no more’ (*Immortality Ode*, 9), but Shelley’s mention of ‘the mind’s too faithful eye’ recalls, not straightforwardly the *Symposium*, but the Platonic dialogue that first captured his imagination, and the dialogue that informs Wordsworth’s great *Ode*, the *Phaedo*, where the soul’s intellectual sight depends upon the loss of the body. Transmuted through poetry, this loss enables androgyny to enact a mingling between self and Other that is unconstrained by earthly limitations.

Shelley’s final lyrics self-consciously trace a ‘magic circle’ around both reader and poet, allusively invoking and interfusing influences from Shakespeare to Wordsworth to Plato, to Shelley’s own former selves, as he shifts from the position of reader to poet and encourages his audience to do the same. Poetic authority is playfully tested in these lyrics, recalling that Shakespeare subverts Prospero’s seemingly omnipotent authority by shifting power to the audience at the end of *The Tempest*. The categories of masculine poet and feminine addressee, invoked through the guise of courtly lyric or Shakespearean drama, reveal Shelley’s extended testing of androgyny as a process that implicates the reader as Platonic interlocutor, and this is ultimately a position that Mary assumes with Platonic subtlety by collecting, editing, and preserving the range of Shelley’s compositions ‘as [they] had been shadowed out in the poet’s mind’.[[754]](#footnote-754)

‘[P]oetic self-awareness in Shelley…is always bound up with awareness of otherness, since the dialectic between self and world is essential to the utopian transformations which Shelley’s poetry often imagines’, Michael O’Neill writes,[[755]](#footnote-755) and this pervasive binding of self-awareness and awareness of otherness underscores Shelley’s experiments with androgyny. Shelley’s hope for a ‘future state’ freed from the oppressive distinctions of ‘male’ and ‘female’ is imaged through androgynous transformations in his poetry (*PBS Letters*, I, p. 195), where the masculine and the feminine are harmoniously blended into union rather than held in opposition. Shelley’s final lyrics work to assert the audience’s involvement through their Shakespearean allusivity and rhetorical manoeuvres, recognising not only that ‘the poem only lives in the reader’s reading’ and that ‘the reader is brought more fully to life by the poem’,[[756]](#footnote-756) but that the poet is equally brought into being by the reader. The poet’s elided name in ‘The Recollection’ materially and visually draws attention to the reader’s imaginative involvement, so that in naming Shelley the reader becomes more self-aware of their own co-creative activity. Romantic self-consciousness is explored through androgyny throughout Shelley’s works, where ‘[t]he androgyne will not be discovered by turning outward into the world, but by turning inward into ourselves’,[[757]](#footnote-757) where the plurality of selfhood afforded by androgyny offers the potential to evade egotism. Through his ‘immersion’ in Plato,[[758]](#footnote-758) Shelley finds a form of selfhood that is dialogic, multifaceted, and inclusive of otherness, where Plato’s self is at once diffused and brought into being through the Others that populate and read his texts. Returning to read the *Symposium* with rekindled interest in 1817, Shelley writes:

ἔρως neither loved nor was

loved but is the cause of love in others – A subtlety

to beat Plato[[759]](#footnote-759)

Shelley’s poetic thoughts are coloured by Plato’s influence, where androgyny, working through poetry in its daemonic mediation between the divided minds of self and Other, is not merely a reflection of the poet’s mind, but is an active, vitalising ‘cause of love in others’.

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1. Diane Long Hoeveler, *Romantic Androgyny* (University Park, PA and London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990), p. 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This phrase is Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi’s definition of androgyny. See ‘The Politics of Androgyny’, *Women’s Studies*, 2 (1974), 151-160 (p. 151). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Michael O’Neill, *Shelleyan Reimaginings and Influence: New Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), p. 28 and *Romanticism and the Self-Conscious Poem* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 133. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. My use of the phrase ‘poetic thoughts’ is indebted to Richard Cronin’s eponymous monograph, itself a phrase borrowed from Coleridge and carrying, as Cronin discerns, ‘a useful ambiguity: it means both “thoughts within poetry” and “thoughts about poetry”’. Richard Cronin, *Shelley’s Poetic Thoughts* (New York, NY: St Martin’s Press, 1981), p. xi. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Nathaniel Brown, *Sexuality and Feminism in Shelley* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 225. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. ‘The Sunset’ is quoted from *The Poems of Shelley*, ed. by Geoffrey Matthews and Kelvin Everest, 5 vols (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2014; first published Longman, 1989), I, 509-512. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *The Poems of Shelley*, I, p. 511n. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. F. S. Ellis, *A Lexical Concordance to the Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1892), p. 450. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Diane Long Hoeveler, *Romantic Androgyny: The Women Within* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990), pp. 251 and 4. The word ‘androgyny’ appears for the first time in Plato’s *Symposium*, but androgyny as the perfect union of masculine and feminine is traceable to Orphic theogony wherein the dual sexed ‘Phanes, the god who separates and makes distinctions, is also the one who unifies and intermingles’. Luc Brisson, *Sexual Ambivalence: Androgyny and Hermaphroditism in Graeco-Roman Antiquity*, trans. by Janet Lloyd (Berkley and Los Angeles, CA and London: University of California Press, 2002), p. 93. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See James A. Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley: A Study of Platonism and the Poetic Mind* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1949), for this distinction. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. See Michael O’Neill, ‘“The Whole Mechanism of the Drama”: Shelley’s Translation of Plato’s *Symposium*’, *Keats-Shelley Review*, 18.1 (2004), 51-68 (p. 54). My assertion of Aristophanes’ androgyny as a ‘subject-rhyme’ for Shelley’s sense of mingling contrasts with William A. Ulmer’s argument that ‘the Aristophanic and Shelleyan accounts of love (themselves each other’s antitype) also differ significantly.  Their differences can be summed up by observing that the words “likeness,” “portrait,” “mirror,” “resemble,” and “correspond”—so crucial to Shelley’s sense of the relationship of self and antitype—are entirely missing from the relevant passages of *The Symposium* as he translated it’. Ulmer’s selection of ‘crucial’ Shelleyan words are distinctly superficial and discount the psychic and physical enmeshing that ‘mingle’, or mixing and melting in Shelley’s translation of Aristophanes’ myth, allows for. William A. Ulmer, *Shelleyan Eros: The Rhetoric of Romantic Love* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 6.  [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. All of Shelley’s translations from Plato, including accompanying prose, are cited from James A. Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley: A Study of Platonism and the Poetic Mind* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1949), unless stated otherwise. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
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15. Mary Shelley in Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments*, ed. by Mary Shelley, 2 vols (London: Edward Moxon, 1852), I, p. viii. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. This phrase is Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi’s definition of androgyny. See ‘The Politics of Androgyny’, *Women’s Studies*, 2 (1974), 151-160 (p. 151). For a detailed account of androgyny in Western myth and culture, see Kari Weil, *Androgyny and the Denial of Difference* (Charlottesville, VA and London: University Press of Virginia, 1992). For nineteenth-century accounts of androgyny and androgyny in Judeo-Christian religion, see A. J. L. Busst, ‘The Image of the Androgyne in the Nineteenth Century’ in *Romantic Mythologies*, ed. by Ian Fletcher (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967), pp. 1-95. For a survey of androgyny, psychoanalysis, sexuality, and world religion, see June Singer, *Androgyny: Towards a New Theory of Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1977). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Ronald Tetreault, *The Poetry of Life: Shelley and Literary Form* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), p. 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Stephen C. Behrendt, building upon the compact between reader and poet floated by Walter J. Ong, confirms that ‘[t]he dialogic form of this intellectual program is explicitly represented in Plato’s dialogues’, *Shelley and His Audiences* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), p. 5. For a systematic study of Romantic hermeneutics see Tilottama Rajan, *The Supplement of Reading: Figures of Understanding in Romantic Theory and Practice* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 1990). Rajan discerns that, in Plato’s dialogues, ‘[t]he role of the interpreter thus involves a deconstructive hermeneutic’, p. 87. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. by Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002; repr. 2009), p. 70. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. ‘Every great Poet is a Teacher: I wish either to be considered as a Teacher or, as nothing’, William Wordsworth, in *The Cambridge Companion to William Wordsworth*, ed. by Stephen Gill, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. xvi. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. William Keach, *Shelley’s Style* (New York, NY and London: Methuen, 1984), p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Michael O’Neill, *Shelleyan Reimaginings and Influence: New Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), p. 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Cited in A. K. Cotton, *Platonic Dialogue and the Education of the Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Keach, *Shelley’s Style*, p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
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26. Jerrold E. Hogle, *Shelley’s Process: Radical Transference and the Development of His Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Keach, *Shelley’s Style*, p. 3. See also O’Neill, *Shelleyan Reimaginings*, p. 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Nancy Moore Goslee, *Shelley’s Visual Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Stuart Sperry, *Shelley’s Major Verse: The Narrative and Dramatic Poetry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. x. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Hoeveler, *Romantic Androgyny*, p. 4 and Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. by H. M. Parshley (London: Vintage Books, 1997), p. 735. Shelley’s letters are quoted from *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. by Frederick L. Jones, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964). [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Brown, *Sexuality and Feminism in Shelley*, p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. See Colin Carman, ‘“Freedom Leads it Forth”: Queering the Epithalamium in *Prometheus Unbound*’, *European Romantic Review*, 24.5 (2013), 579-602 for Shelley’s encouragement of sexual reform and anticipation of same-sex marriage in *Prometheus Unbound* and the *Symposium*. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. *Laon and Cythna* is quoted from *The Complete Poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. by Donald H. Reiman, Neil Fraistat, and Nora Crook, 3 vols to date (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000-), III, unless stated otherwise. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Brown, *Sexuality and Feminism in Shelley*, p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. See Weil, *Androgyny and the Denial of Difference*. Teddi Chichester Bonca, Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi, and Diane Long Hoeveler’s analyses also grow out of and respond to this tradition. See Teddi Chichester Bonca, *Shelley’s Mirrors of Love: Narcissism, Sacrifice, and Sorority* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998), Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi, *Shelley’s Goddess: Maternity, Language, Subjectivity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), and Hoeveler, *Romantic Androgyny*. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. O’Neill, *Shelleyan Reimaginings*, p. 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Gelpi, *Shelley’s Goddess*, pp. ix and viii. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Bonca, *Shelley’s Mirrors of Love*, pp. 260n and 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Judith Chernaik, *The Lyrics of Shelley* (Cleveland, OH and London: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1972), p. 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. See Hoeveler, *Romantic Androgyny* and Warren Stevenson, *Romanticism and the Androgynous Sublime* (Teaneck, NJ: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1996). [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Hoeveler, *Romantic Androgyny*, p. 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Hoeveler, *Romantic Androgyny*, p. 139. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley*, p. 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Ross Wilson, ‘Shelley’s Plato’ in *The Routledge Handbook of Translation and Philosophy*, ed. by Piers Rawling and Philip Wilson (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2019), p. 354 and Benjamin Sudarsky, ‘*The Banquet*, Gender, and “Original Composition”’, *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 66 (2017), 160-165. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Sudarsky, ‘*The Banquet*, Gender, and “Original Composition”’, p. 160. See also Mary Shelley’s prefatory comment to *The Banquet* in *Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments* that ‘Shelley commands language splendid and melodious as Plato, and renders faithfully the elegance and the gaiety’, quoted in Michael O’Neill, ‘“The Whole Mechanism of the Drama”: Shelley’s Translation of Plato’s *Symposium*’, p. 58. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Michael O’Neill, *Romanticism and the Self-Conscious Poem* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 159. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 735 and Megan M. Burke, ‘Beauvoirian Androgyny: Reflections on the Androgynous World of Fraternité in *The Second Sex*’, *Feminist Theory*, 20.1 (2019), 3-18 (p. 5). [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Catherine Malabou, *Changing Difference: The Feminine and the Question of Philosophy*, trans. by Carolyn Shread (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011; repr. 2012, 2014, 2015, and 2016), pp. 27-28. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Michael O’Neill, ‘“The Whole Mechanism of the Drama”: Shelley’s Translation of Plato’s *Symposium*’. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. O’Neill, *Shelleyan Reimaginings*, p. 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Harold Bloom, *Yeats* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Cited in Stuart Peterfreund, *Shelley among Others: The Play of the Intertext and the Idea of Language* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), p. 247. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Stephen C. Behrendt, positing Shelley’s poetry as prophecy, writes: ‘For Shelley, prophecy should elevate and transform not oneself but the collective audience, as *Prometheus Unbound* makes clear, and in this it shares important links with epic art.  When the real apocalypse occurs the prophet is so subsumed into the audience—or the audience into the prophet—that apparent distinctions between them become irrelevant’, *Shelley and His Audiences* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), p. 3. For Ronald Tetreault, ‘[t]he locus of literary meaning resides in the mutual implication of reader and author in the experience of the text’ and ‘dialogical interchange over meaning decentres authorial subjectivity and establishes an intersubjective basis for knowledge which allows an individual to transcend the self and become a social being’, Ronald Tetreault, *The Poetry of Life: Shelley and Literary Form* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), pp. 7 and 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Ross Wilson, *Shelley and the Apprehension of Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Carlos Baker, *Shelley’s Major Poetry: The Fabric of a Vision* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1948), p. 48 and Mary Shelley, ‘Note on *Alastor*’ in Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. by Mary Shelley, 4 vols (London: Edward Moxon, 1839), I, p. 141. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Chernaik, *The Lyrics of Shelley*, p. 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Cotton, *Platonic Dialogue and the Education of the Reader*, p. 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Michael O’Neill notes that, ‘[i]f we were to think this was versified Platonism, we would be missing the multiple pulls in the writing’, and demonstrates how in *Adonais* ‘the discarded self is necessary for the poetic triumph’; in extinguishing the self, *Adonais* leaves little room for the Other. ‘*Adonais* and Poetic Power’, *The Wordsworth Circle*, 35.2 (2004), p. 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Stevenson, *Romanticism and the Androgynous Sublime*, p. 114. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Bonca, *Shelley’s Mirrors of Love*, p. 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Quoted in James A. Kelhoffer, *Miracle and Mission: The Authentication of Missionaries and Their Message in the Longer Ending of Mark* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), p. 354. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Tracy Hargreaves, *Androgyny in Modern Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Stella Sandford, *Plato and Sex* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), p. 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Angela Hobbs, ‘Female Imagery in Plato’, in *Plato’s Symposium: Issues in Interpretation and Reception* ed. by J. H. Lesher, Debra Nails, and Fisbee C. C. Sheffield (Washington D. C.: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2006), 252-271 (p. 270). [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. See Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley*, p. 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Quoted from B. C. Barker-Benfield, ‘A spoof letter to William Godwin’, *Bodleian Library Record*, 21.1 (for April 2008, publ. 2009), pp. 112-115. <http://163.1.35.99/anonymous-letter-from-shelley-to-godwin?item=579#Transcript> [accessed 20 August 2018]. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. I am indebted to Michael Rossington for sharing this finding in his lecture, ‘Shelley’s Textual History’, Wordsworth Summer Conference, Rydal Hall, 7 August 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. See Stephen C. Behrendt’s analysis of Shelley’s epistolary valedictions, and in particular his uses of ‘friend’ and ‘friendship’, in *Shelley and His Audiences* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), pp. 9-11. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Sudarsky, ‘*The Banquet*, Gender, and “Original Composition”’, p. 163. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. ‘Shelley…brings home Wordsworths Excursion of which we read a part—much disappointed—He is a slave’, Mary Shelley, *The Journals of Mary Shelley*, ed. by Paula K. Feldman and Diana Scott-Kilvert, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), I, p. 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Bonca offers a sustained study of ‘the narcissistic Shelley’ in *Shelley’s Mirrors of Love*, p. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. See O’Neill, ‘“The Whole Mechanism of the Drama”: Shelley’s Translation of Plato’s *Symposium*’, p. 54. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Mary Shelley, ‘Note on *The Witch of Atlas*’ in *The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. by Mary Shelley, 4 vols (London: Edward Moxon, 1839), IV, pp. 51-52. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Mary Shelley, *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, ed. by Betty T. Bennett, 3 vols (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980-1988), I, p. 223. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Michael Rossington, ‘Creative Translation’ in *The Oxford Handbook of British Romanticism*, ed. by David Duff (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 547-561 (p. 548). [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Stuart Curran, *Shelley’s Annus Mirabilis: The Maturing of an Epic Vision* (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1975), p. 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Quoted from *The Poems of Shelley*, ed. by Jack Donovan, Cian Duffy, Kelvin Everest, and Michael Rossington, 5 vols (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2014; first published Pearson Longman, 2011), III, p. 127. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. On Shelley and sorority, see Bonca, *Shelley’s Mirrors of Love*. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Quoted in F. W. Bateson, ‘Exhumations V. Shelley on Wordsworth: Two Unpublished Stanzas from *Peter Bell the Third*’, *Essays in Criticism*, 17.2 (1967), 125-129 (p. 127). [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Michael O’Neill, ‘Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*’ in *A Companion to Romanticism*, ed. by Duncan Wu (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 259-268 (p. 261). On Shelley’s use of pronouns, see Michael O’Neill, ‘Shelley’s Pronouns’ in *The Oxford Handbook of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. by Michael O’Neill and Anthony Howe with the assistance of Madeleine Callaghan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013; repr. 2107), pp. 391-407. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Leigh Hunt, Review of *Rosalind and Helen, a Modern Eclogue; with other Poems*, *Examiner*, 9 May 1819, p. 302. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. See Harold Bloom: ‘Shelley wrote nothing so hopeful again. The ruin and desolation that shadow the heart’s affections in *Prometheus Unbound* haunt all of his later poetry’, *The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1971), p. 323. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. ‘In both *The Examiner* and *The Quarterly Review* the issue is hope and reform—whether poetry should encourage its readers to place their hopes in this world or in the next’, Steven E. Jones, *Shelley’s Satire* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1994), p. 55. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Madeleine Callaghan, *Shelley’s Living Artistry: Letters, Poems, Plays* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017), p. 76. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. On Wordsworthian murmurs, see Michele Speitz, ‘The Wordsworthian Acoustic Imagination, Sonic Recursions, and “that dying murmur”’, *SEL*, 55.3 (2015), 621-646. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Quoted from *The Complete Poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. by Donald H. Reiman, Neil Fraistat, and Nora Crook, 3 vols to date (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000-), III. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. *BSM XIII: Drafts for ‘Laon and Cythna’, Facsimiles of Bod. MSS. Shelley adds. e. 14 and adds. e. 19*, ed. by Tatsuo Tokoo (New York, NY: Garland, 1992). [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. See Ross Greig Woodman, ‘The Androgyne in *Prometheus Unbound*’, *Studies in Romanticism*, 20.2 (1981), 225-247 (p. 235). [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Harold Bloom, *Shelley’s Mythmaking* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1959), p. 146. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Ross Greig Woodman, *The Apocalyptic Vision in the Poetry of Shelley* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964), p. xiv. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Michael O’Neill, *Shelleyan Reimaginings and Influence*, p. 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Behrendt, *Shelley and His Audiences*, p. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Leigh Hunt, ‘Thieves, Ancient and Modern’, *Indicator*, 22 December 1819, p. 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. *Concordance*, pp. 52-53. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Bonca, *Shelley’s Mirrors of Love*, p. 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. See Bonca, *Shelley’s Mirrors of Love*, pp. 107-120. For Bonca, imaginative transsexualism ‘signifies a crossing over from one distinctly defined gender to the other’, p. 260n. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. Wilson, *Shelley and the Apprehension of Life*, p. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. Timothy Webb, *The Violet in the Crucible: Shelley and Translation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Michael O’Neill, ‘“The Whole Mechanism of the Drama”: Shelley’s Translation of Plato’s *Symposium*’, p. 54. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. See *The Poems of Shelley*, III, pp. 223-226 for an excellent summary of the lyric’s critical reception and publication history. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. Curran, *Shelley’s Annus Mirabilis*, p. 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. C. E. Pulos, *The Deep Truth: A Study of Shelley’s Scepticism* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1962), p. 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. Thomas Love Peacock, *The Works of Thomas Love Peacock*, ed. by H. F. B. Brett-Smith and C. E. Jones, 10 vols (New York, NY and London: 1924) X: Dramatic Criticisms and Translations & Other Essays, p. 212. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. Michael O’Neill, ed., *Percy Bysshe Shelley, Volume VIII: Fair-Copy Manuscripts of Shelley’s Poems in European and American Libraries*, ed. by Donald H. Reiman and Michael O’Neill (*New York, NY: Garland, 1997)*, p. 278. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. See Nancy Moore Goslee’s *Shelley’s Visual Imagination* for a sustained study of the visual elements of Shelley’s compositions, and Ann Wroe’s *Being Shelley: The Poet’s Search for Himself* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 2007) for the biographical implications of Shelley’s intracompositional sketches. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Quoted from W. B. Yeats, *The Major Works*, ed. by Edward Larrissy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. Callaghan, *Shelley’s Living Artistry*, p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Table Talk*, ed. by Carl Woodring, gen. ed. Kathleen Coburn, assoc. ed. Bart Winer, 2 vols (Princeton, NJ and London: Princeton University Press, 1990), II, pp. 190-191. James Vigus notes that ‘the *Symposium* was probably a source for Coleridge’s frequent assertion of the androgyny of the poet’s mind’, *Platonic Coleridge* (London: Legenda, 2009), pp. 15-16. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. ‘Plato and Calderon have been my gods’, *PBS Letters*, II, p. 245. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. *The Poems of Shelley*, III, p. 485. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. *BSM V: The Witch of Atlas Notebook* [adds. e. 6], ed. by Carlene Adamson (New York, NY: Garland, 1997), p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. *Oxford English Dictionary* online, Oxford University Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* ed. by Roland Greene et al., (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 4th ed., pp. 408-409. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. Bonca and Gelpi both offer sustained considerations of the vitalism debate between John Abernethy and William Lawrence and its effect upon Shelley’s conception of sympathy in *Shelley’s Mirrors of Love* and *Shelley’s Goddess*. For a more recent analysis of Shelley and vitalism, see Sharon Ruston, *Shelley and Vitality* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. Madeleine Callaghan, ‘Shelley and the Ambivalence of Idealism’, *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 64 (2015), 92-104, pp. 93 and 95. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. Peacock ‘had the type of mind that is incapable of holding a position without perceiving the force of the contrary position’, J. J. Mayoux, *Un Epicurien Anglais*, p. 606 cited in Thomas Love Peacock, *Nightmare Abbey and Crotchet Castle*, ed. by Raymond Wright (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969; repr. 1974), p. 16. See also Donald H. Reiman’s acknowledgement that ‘Peacock’s influence on Shelley is sometimes difficult to separate from Shelley’s on Peacock’, *Intervals of Inspiration: The Skeptical Tradition and the Psychology of Romanticism* (Greenwood, FL: The Penkevill Publishing Company, 1988), p. 215. Marilyn Butler’s *Peacock Displayed: A Satirist in his Context* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979) remains the preeminent study of Shelley and Peacock’s shared influence, but see also Suzanne L. Barnett’s *Romantic Paganism: The Politics of Ecstasy in the Shelley Circle* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017) for the shared influence of the Marlow circle. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. Susan Fischman’s ‘“Like the Sound of His Own Voice”: Gender, Audition, and Echo in *Alastor*’, *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 43 (1994), 141-169 remains the most in-depth analysis of *Alastor*’s indebtedness to Ovid’s myth of Echo and Narcissus. Stuart Peterfreund discerns an echo of the myth in the Narrator’s cry, ‘He overleaps the bounds. Alas! alas!’ (207), where the lament ‘AI AI’ cried by Narcissus and repeated by Echo is conflated with Milton’s Satan, in *Shelley among Others: The Play of the Intertext and the Idea of Language* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), pp. 242-243. Io and Prometheus also cry ‘ai ai’ in Aeschylus’ *Prometheus Bound*, and Shelley transfers this lamentation to Jupiter in his *Prometheus Unbound* (3.1.79 and 83). Wordsworth’s presence in *Alastor* has been well-documented by critics and will be considered in more depth throughout this chapter. Coleridge’s presence has been considered most extensively by Timothy Webb in ‘Coleridge and Shelley’s *Alastor*: A Reply’, *The Review of English Studies*, 18.72 (1967), 402-411 and by Sally West in *Coleridge and Shelley: Textual Engagement* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007). For a recent and comprehensive study of the reader’s role in Plato’s dialogues, see A. K. Cotton, *Platonic Dialogue and the Education of the Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. In July 1812, Shelley pugnaciously responds to William Godwin’s suggestion that he study the Classics by writing that ‘the evils of acquiring Greek & Latin considerably overbalance the benefits’; however, after first meeting Thomas Love Peacock in October or November of that year, Shelley in December 1812 orders ‘Greek classics’ from Thomas Hookham (*PBS Letters*, I, pp. 316 and 341). I employ the terms ‘actual’, or real, and ‘ideal’ reader to follow Stephen Behrendt’s borrowing of Gerald Prince’s terminology, wherein ‘any work of fiction (which I shall broaden here to include any written work) has three varieties of reader: (1) the *actual* reader, a real person who holds and reads the text; (2) the *virtual* reader, upon whom the author deliberately “bestows certain qualities, faculties, and inclinations according to his opinion of men in general (or in particular) and according to the obligations he feels should be respected”; and (3) the *ideal* reader, who “would understand perfectly and would approve entirely the least of his words, the most subtle of his intentions.”  This latter reader suggests “the more select classes of poetical readers” Shelley addresses in *Prometheus Unbound*, and it is instructive to recall that Shelley professed to believe that few readers would fully appreciate that work.  In an ideal world, all “actual” readers would also be “ideal” readers’, Stephen C. Behrendt, *Shelley and His Audiences* (Lincoln, NE and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), p. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi, ‘The Politics of Androgyny’, *Women’s Studies*, 2 (1974), 151-160 (p. 151). [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, ed. by Robert Squillace, trans. by Frank Justus Miller (New York, NY: Barnes & Noble Books, 2005; original translation 1916), p. 73. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. I borrow the term ‘psychic unity’ from Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi, ‘The Politics of Androgyny’, p. 151. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. William A. Ulmer, *Shelleyan Eros: The Rhetoric of Romantic Love* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 48. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. My use of the term ‘interanimation’ is indebted to Ross Wilson’s analysis of the ‘dramatisation’ of ‘interanimation’ in *Prometheus Unbound*, in which ‘the poem only lives in the reader’s reading, but that, at the same time, the reader is brought more fully to life by the poem’, Ross Wilson, *Shelley and the Apprehension of Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. Frederick Kirchhoff, ‘Shelley’s *Alastor*: The Poet Who Refuses to Write Language’, *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 32 (1983), 108-122 (p. 109). [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. Elise M. Gold, ‘Touring the Inventions: Shelley’s Prefatory Writing’, *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 36 (1987), 63-87 (p. 68). [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. Neil Fraistat, ‘Poetic Quests and Questioning in Shelley’s *Alastor* Collection’, *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 33 (1984), 161-181 (p. 181). Fraistat reads the *Alastor* Preface as a preface to the collection as a whole and not solely to the eponymous poem, writing that the ‘*Alastor* collection is itself an elaborate balancing act, counterpoising the first six poems against the final six’. Stephen Behrendt makes a similar observation: ‘The preface to *Alastor* is, it turns out, the preface to all the poems, and its position at the beginning of the volume ensures its applicability not just to the title poem to which it explicitly refers but also to all the poems that follow’, Behrendt, *Shelley and His Audiences*, p. 100. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. Diane Long Hoeveler, *Romantic Androgyny: The Women Within* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1979), p. 59. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. Carlos Baker, *Shelley’s Major Poetry*: The Fabric of a Vision (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1948), p. 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. Such pure Platonism reaches its epitome while translating the *Symposium* from Greek into the English of *The Banquet* and its accompanying fragmentary essays ‘On Love’ and ‘A Discourse on the Manners of the Antient Greeks Relative to the Subject of Love’. [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. David Newsome, *Two Classes of Men: Platonism and English Romantic Thought* (London: John Murray, 1974), p. 71. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. Carlos Baker, *Shelley’s Major Poetry: The Fabric of a Vision* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1948), p. 48 and Mary Shelley, ‘Note on *Alastor*’ in Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 4 vols (London: Edward Moxon, 1839) I, pp. 141-142.. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. Newsome, *Two Classes of Men: Platonism and English Romantic Thought*, p. 71. [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. Timothy Webb, *English Romantic Hellenism 1700-1824* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982), p. 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. Thomas Love Peacock, *Memoirs of Shelley, with Shelley’s Letters to Peacock*, ed. H. F. B. Brett-Smith (London: Henry Frowde, 1909), p. 336. [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. Thomas Love Peacock, *Works*, VIII, p. 99 and Plato, *The Dialogues of Plato*, trans. by Benjamin Jowett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1892), 3rd edition, <<http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/769>> [accessed 30/05/2017] [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. In March 1815, Mary records in her journal: ‘In the evening Peacock comes. Talk about types, editions, and Greek letters all the evening’, *The Journals of Mary Shelley*, ed. by Paula K. Feldman and Diana Scott-Kilvert, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), I, p. 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. Mary Shelley, ed., Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments*, 2 vols. (London: Edward Moxon, 1852), I, p. viii. [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. James A. Notopoulos, ‘Shelley and Thomas Taylor’, *PMLA*, 51.2 (1936), 502-517 (p. 506) and *The Platonism of Shelley*, p. 189. [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. See Stephanie Nelson, ‘Shelley and Plato’s *Symposium*: The Poet’s Revenge’, *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, 14.1/2 (2007), 100-129 for a detailed analysis of Shelley’s translations from the Greek and Ficino’s Latin. [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. Percy Bysshe Shelley, *BSM XI: The Geneva Notebook of Percy Bysshe Shelley: Bodleian MS. Shelley adds. e. 16 and MS. Shelley adds. c. 4, folios 63, 65, 71, and 72*, ed. by Michael Erkelenz (New York, NY: Garland, 1992), 1 and 10, p. 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. William Wordsworth, from *The Cambridge Companion to William Wordsworth*, ed. by Stephen Gill, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. xvi. [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. *BSM* *XI*, 13-15, p. 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. C. E. Pulos, *The Deep Truth: A Study of Shelley’s Scepticism* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1954), p. 81. [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. Jerrold E. Hogle, ‘Romantic Contexts’ in *The Cambridge Companion to* Frankenstein, ed. by Andrew Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 41-55 (p. 45). [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. ‘In particular he was impressed with the *Phaedo*, the *Republic*, and the *Symposium*, and a survey of his Platonism shows that these dialogues exercised the greatest influence on his work. Shelley read them in translation at Oxford, and then reread them in the original in the interval of 1817-20. The knowledge and influence of these dialogues on Shelley’s compositions from 1810 to 1817’, James A. Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley*, p. 38. Thomas Jefferson Hogg, *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 4 vols (London: Edward Moxon, 1858), I, p. 73. [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. Mary Shelley, Preface to *Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments*, p. viii. [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. Pulos, *The Deep Truth: A Study of Shelley’s Scepticism*, p. 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. Thomas Miller, ‘Socrates’ Warning Against Misology (Plato, *Phaedo* 88c-91c)’, *Phronesis* 60.2 (2015), pp. 172 and 147. [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. For Aristophanes, love can ‘heal the divided nature of man’, *The Banquet*, p. 431. [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. Madeleine Callaghan, *Shelley’s Living Artistry: Letters, Poems, Plays* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017), p. 58. [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. Peterfreund makes the connection between Shelley’s ‘Alas! alas!’ and Ovid’s ‘AI AI’ in *Shelley among Others*, pp. 242-243. [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
152. Lucy Newlyn, *Reading, Writing, and Romanticism: The Anxiety of Reception* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), p. 126. [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
153. Notopoulos, p. 167. [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
154. For Shelley’s ‘natural Platonism’ see Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley*, pp. 14-28. [↑](#footnote-ref-154)
155. Wordsworth, *The Major Works*, p. 694n. [↑](#footnote-ref-155)
156. Plato, *Phaedo* in *The Cratylus, Phaedo, Parmenides and Timaeus of Plato*, trans. by Thomas Taylor (London: Benjamin and John White, 1793), p. 196. All quotations from the *Phaedo* in this chapter are from this translation unless specified otherwise. p. 188. [↑](#footnote-ref-156)
157. Wordsworth’s works are quoted from *The Major Works*, ed. by Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984; repr. 2000 and 2008). [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
158. Michael O’Neill, *The Human Mind’s Imaginings: Conflict and Achievement in Shelley’s Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-158)
159. Tilottama Rajan, *Romantic Narrative: Shelley, Hays, Godwin, Wollstonecraft* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), p. 29. Jerrold E. Hogle also writes of this similarity in *Shelley’s Process: Radical Transference and the Development of His Major Works* (New York, NY and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-159)
160. Butler, *Peacock Displayed*, p. 301. [↑](#footnote-ref-160)
161. John C. Bean, ‘The Poet Borne Darkly: The Dream-Voyage Allegory in Shelley’s *Alastor*’, *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 23 (1974), p. 70. [↑](#footnote-ref-161)
162. Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley*, p. 165. [↑](#footnote-ref-162)
163. Eric Lindstrom, ‘“To Wordsworth” and the “White Obi”: Slavery, Determination, and Contingency in Shelley’s “Peter Bell the Third”’, *Studies in Romanticism*, 47.4 (2008), 549-580 (p. 572). [↑](#footnote-ref-163)
164. William Keach, *Shelley’s Style* (New York, NY and London: Methuen), pp. 167 and 168. [↑](#footnote-ref-164)
165. Butler, *Peacock Displayed*, p. 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-165)
166. Percy Bysshe Shelley, ‘*Rhododaphne, or the Thessalian Spell*: a Poem—Hookhams’ in *The Works of Thomas Love Peacock*, ed. by H. F. B. Brett-Smith and C. E. Jones, 10 vols. (London: Constable & Co Ltd, 1931), vii, p. 441. [↑](#footnote-ref-166)
167. There is a striking similarity between Peacock’s description of Plato and Coleridge’s assertion in 1795 that Plato ‘is dark with excess of Brightness’, quoted in James Vigus, *Platonic Coleridge* (London: Legenda, 2009), p. 20. Vigus notes that Coleridge’s description alludes to Milton’s ‘Dark with excessive bright’, evidencing Coleridge’s ‘longstanding personal association of Plato with Milton’, p. 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-167)
168. Thomas Love Peacock, ‘Müller and Donaldson’s *The History of Greek Literature*’, in *The Works of Thomas Love Peacock*, ed. by H. F. B. Brett-Smith and C. E. Jones, 10 vols (London: Constable & Co Ltd, 1931), X, p. 212. [↑](#footnote-ref-168)
169. Milton Wilson, *Shelley’s Later Poetry: A Study of His Prophetic Imagination* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1957; repr. 1961), p. 164 and O’Neill, *The Human Mind’s Imaginings*, p. 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-169)
170. Plato, *Phaedo*, p. 196. [↑](#footnote-ref-170)
171. Stuart M. Sperry, *Shelley’s Major Verse: The Narrative and Dramatic Poetry (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988),* p. 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-171)
172. Rajan, *Romantic Narrative*, p. 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-172)
173. Bo Earle, ‘The Prophetic Strain: Shelley on Erotic Failure and World Legislation’, *Studies in Romanticism*, 44.4 (2005), 605-631 (p. 625). [↑](#footnote-ref-173)
174. Plato, *Symposium*, trans. by Percy Bysshe Shelley as *The Banquet* in Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley*, p. 450. All quotations from the *Symposium* will be from Shelley’s *The Banquet* unless specified otherwise. [↑](#footnote-ref-174)
175. *The Banquet*, p. 435. [↑](#footnote-ref-175)
176. *The Banquet*, p. 460. [↑](#footnote-ref-176)
177. Earle, ‘The Prophetic Strain: Shelley on Erotic Failure and World Legislation’, p. 622. [↑](#footnote-ref-177)
178. *Phaedo*, p. 243. [↑](#footnote-ref-178)
179. Hoeveler, *Romantic Androgyny*, pp. 250-251. [↑](#footnote-ref-179)
180. Plotinus, *The Enneads*, trans. by Stephen MacKenna, intr. by John Dillon (London: Penguin Books, 1991), pp. 42 and 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-180)
181. M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York, NY and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1971; repr. 2010), p. 143. [↑](#footnote-ref-181)
182. Bean, ‘The Poet Borne Darkly: The Dream-Voyage Allegory in Shelley’s *Alastor*’, p. 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-182)
183. Susan Fischman, ‘“Like the Sound of His Own Voice”: Gender, Audition, and Echo in *Alastor*’, p. 145. [↑](#footnote-ref-183)
184. *The Banquet,* p. 450. [↑](#footnote-ref-184)
185. David Towsey, ‘Eros and Deconstructive Love’, *Studies in Romanticism*, 40.4 (2001), 511-530 (p. 514), Gerald E. Enscoe, *Eros and the Romantics: Sexual Love as a Theme in Coleridge, Shelley and Keats* (The Hague, Paris: Mouton, 1967), p. 73, and Raymond D. Havens, ‘Shelley’s *Alastor*’, *PMLA*, 45.4 (1930), 1098-1115 (p. 1102). [↑](#footnote-ref-185)
186. Keach, ‘Obstinate Questionings: *The Immortality Ode* and *Alastor*’, *The Wordsworth Circle*, 12.1 (1981), 36-44 (p. 40). [↑](#footnote-ref-186)
187. Ulmer, *Shelleyan Eros*, p. 48. [↑](#footnote-ref-187)
188. O’Neill, *The Human Mind’s Imaginings*, p. 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-188)
189. James A. Notopoulos, ‘The Symbolism of the Sun and Light in the *Republic* of Plato. II’, *Classical Philology*, 39.4 (1944), 223-240 (p. 224). [↑](#footnote-ref-189)
190. For Shelley’s Orphic Platonism, see Ross G. Woodman, ‘Shelley’s Changing Attitude to Plato’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 21.4 (1960), 497-510. Woodman traces Shelley’s Platonism to John Frank Newton’s influence, describing Shelley’s poetry as ‘the imaginative recovery of Plato’s Orphic vision’, p. 506. Newton’s impact upon Shelley’s mystical thought is undeniable, but I contend that it is through Thomas Love Peacock’s Classical knowledge and conception of Plato as a sceptic that Shelley’s Platonic engagement develops most rapidly. [↑](#footnote-ref-190)
191. Keach, ‘Obstinate Questionings’, p. 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-191)
192. See, for instance, Enscoe who claims that ‘[t]he entire scene is an obvious image of an erotic dream; the seduction is a physical one, and the rapture of the poet’s response to the vision is obviously orgasmic’, *Eros and the Romantics*, p. 76, and Nathaniel Brown’s suggestion that the ‘famous passage in *Alastor* described a wet dream’, *Sexuality and Feminism in Shelley*, p. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-192)
193. Benjamin Sudarsky, ‘*The Banquet*, Gender, and “Original Composition”’, *The Keats-Shelley Journal*, 67 (2017), 160-165 (pp. 164 and 165). [↑](#footnote-ref-193)
194. Angela Hobbs, ‘Female Imagery in Plato’ in *Plato’s* Symposium*: Issues in Interpretation and Reception*, ed. by James Lesher, Debra Nails, and Fisbee Sheffield (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 252-271 (pp. 264 and 271). [↑](#footnote-ref-194)
195. Suzanne Barnett, ‘“The great God Pan is alive again”: Thomas Love Peacock and Percy Shelley in Marlow’, *Essays in Romanticism*, 21.1 (2014), 65-87 (p. 71). [↑](#footnote-ref-195)
196. Mary Shelley, Preface to *Prince Athanase* in *The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. by Thomas Hutchinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1912), p. 156n. [↑](#footnote-ref-196)
197. Newsome, *Two Classes of Men*, p. 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-197)
198. Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley*, p. 87. [↑](#footnote-ref-198)
199. Plotinus, quoted in Newsome, *Two Classes of Men*, p. 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-199)
200. Thomas Taylor, *Mystical Initiations; or, Hymns of Orpheus* (London: 1787), p. 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-200)
201. Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley*, p. 89. [↑](#footnote-ref-201)
202. This term is Mary Shelley’s; see her Preface to *Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments*, 2 vols. (London: Edward Moxon, 1852), I, p. viii. [↑](#footnote-ref-202)
203. See Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley*, p. 179. [↑](#footnote-ref-203)
204. *Phaedo*, p. 183. [↑](#footnote-ref-204)
205. Paul Henry, ‘The Place of Plotinus in the History of Thought’, in Plotinus, *The Enneads*, trans. by Stephen MacKenna and intr. by John Dillon (London: Penguin Books, 1991), p. xlii. [↑](#footnote-ref-205)
206. Marilyn Butler, *Peacock Displayed: A Satirist in his Context* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), p. 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-206)
207. Butler, *Peacock Displayed*, p. 58. [↑](#footnote-ref-207)
208. See Kenneth Neill Cameron, ‘Shelley and *Ahrimanes*’, *Modern Language Quarterly*, 3.2 (1942), 287-295. [↑](#footnote-ref-208)
209. In his *Memoirs of Shelley*, Peacock explains that Shelley ‘was at a loss for a title, and I proposed that which he adopted: *Alastor; or, the Spirit of Solitude*. The Greek word Ἀλάστωρ is an evil genius, κακοδαίμων, though the sense of the two words is somewhat different, as in the φανεὶς ἀλάστωρ ἢ κακὸς δαίμων ποθέν of Aeschylus. The poem treated the spirit of solitude as a spirit of evil. I mention the true meaning of the word because many have supposed *Alastor* to be the name of the hero of the poem’, *Thomas Love Peacock, Memoirs of Shelley and other Essays and Reviews*, ed. by Howard Mills (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1970), p. 60. [↑](#footnote-ref-209)
210. Kenneth Neil Cameron, ed., *Shelley and His Circle*, 10 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), III, pp. 237 and 101. [↑](#footnote-ref-210)
211. Cited in *Shelley and His Circle*, p. 211. [↑](#footnote-ref-211)
212. See H. F. B. Brett-Smith, ‘“Ahrimanes,” by Thomas Love Peacock’, *The Modern Language Review*, 4.4 (1909), 521-524 (p. 523) and Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley*, p. 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-212)
213. See Cameron, ed., *Shelley and His Circle*, III, p. 238. [↑](#footnote-ref-213)
214. Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus*, trans. by Gilbert Murray (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1948), p. 93, 1223-1226. [↑](#footnote-ref-214)
215. See *Shelley and His Circle*, III, p. 238n. [↑](#footnote-ref-215)
216. Compare *Ahrimanes*, ‘The bark glides swiftly on: new scenes expand, / In day’s full splendour now distinctly seen. / The light acacia blooms along the strand’ (2.13) with the found ‘shallop’ (299) that transports the Poet past ‘The ash and acacia’ (437) in *Alastor*. *The Works of Thomas Love Peacock*, ed. by H. F. B. Brett-Smith & C. E. Jones, 10 vols (London: Constable & Co and New York, NY: Gabriel Wells, 1931), VII, p. 282. [↑](#footnote-ref-216)
217. Plato, *Republic*, trans. by Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993; repr. 1994 and 1998), p. 245. [↑](#footnote-ref-217)
218. See James Vigus, *Platonic Coleridge* (London: Legenda, 2009), p. 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-218)
219. See *Thomas Love Peacock Letters to Edward Hookham and Percy B. Shelley with Fragments of Unpublished MSS.*, ed. by Richard Garnett (Cambridge, MA: The University Press, 1910), p. 101. [↑](#footnote-ref-219)
220. Hoeveler, *Romantic Androgyny*, p. 61. [↑](#footnote-ref-220)
221. Plato, *Phaedo*, trans. by David Gallop (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-221)
222. *Phaedo*, pp. 189 and 188. [↑](#footnote-ref-222)
223. O’Neill, *The Human Mind’s Imaginings*, p. 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-223)
224. Leader and O’Neill, eds., *The Major Works*, p. 718n. See also Kelvin Everest and Geoffrey Matthews, eds., *The Poems of Shelley*, I, p. 482n and Neil Fraistat and Nora Crook, eds., *The Complete Poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, III, p. 419 for similar assertions that this scene recalls the veiled maid. [↑](#footnote-ref-224)
225. Henry, ‘The Place of Plotinus in the History of Thought’, p. lxi and Plotinus, *The Enneads*, p. 53. [↑](#footnote-ref-225)
226. Laura Quinney, ‘Romanticism, Gnosticism, and Neoplatonism’ in *A Companion to Romantic Poetry*, ed. by Charles Mahoney (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 412-424 (p. 417). [↑](#footnote-ref-226)
227. Geoffrey Matthews and Kelvin Everest, eds., *The Poems of Shelley*, I, p. 481n. [↑](#footnote-ref-227)
228. Plotinus, *The Enneads*, p. 372. [↑](#footnote-ref-228)
229. Plotinus, *The Enneads*, p. 373. [↑](#footnote-ref-229)
230. P. H. Butter, ed., Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Alastor and Other Poems, Prometheus Unbound with Other Poems, Adonais* (London and Glasgow: Collins Publishers, 1970), p. 243. [↑](#footnote-ref-230)
231. Gelpi describes ivy as ‘a highly charged erotic symbol but also an ambiguous, bisexual one’ in *Shelley’s Goddess*, p. 162. [↑](#footnote-ref-231)
232. Havens, ‘Shelley’s *Alastor*’, p. 1109. [↑](#footnote-ref-232)
233. O’Neill, *The Human Mind’s Imaginings*, p. 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-233)
234. William Crisman, ‘Psychological Realism and Narrative Manner in Shelley’s *Alastor* and *The Witch of Atlas*’, *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 35 (1986), 126-148 (p. 141). [↑](#footnote-ref-234)
235. Plotinus, *The Enneads*, p. 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-235)
236. Leader and O’Neill, eds., *The Major Works*, p. 718n and Vincent Newey, *Centring the Self: Subjectivity, Society and Reading from Thomas Gray to Thomas Hardy* (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1995), p. 136. [↑](#footnote-ref-236)
237. W. B. Yeats, *Essays and Introductions* (New York, NY: The Macmillan Company, 1961), pp. 81-82 and 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-237)
238. Henry, ‘The Place of Plotinus in the History of Thought’, p. xlvi. [↑](#footnote-ref-238)
239. Plotinus, *The Enneads* (VI.9.9) quoted in M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, p. 148. [↑](#footnote-ref-239)
240. Sperry makes the identification between Shelley’s ‘yellow flowers’ and ‘narcissus’ in *Shelley’s Major Verse*, p. 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-240)
241. Fischman, ‘“Like the Sound of His Own Voice”: Gender, Audition, and Echo in *Alastor*’, p. 143. [↑](#footnote-ref-241)
242. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, p. 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-242)
243. Bonca, *Shelley’s Mirrors of Love*, p. 146n. [↑](#footnote-ref-243)
244. Mary Shelley, *The Journals of Mary Shelley*, I, p. 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-244)
245. Jennifer Wallace, ‘“Copying Shelley’s Letters”: Mary Shelley and the Uncanny Erotics of Greek’, *Women’s Studies*, 40.4 (2011), 404-428 (p. 410). [↑](#footnote-ref-245)
246. Wallace, ‘“Copying Shelley’s Letters”: Mary Shelley and the Uncanny Erotics of Greek’, p. 410. [↑](#footnote-ref-246)
247. Keach, ‘Obstinate Questionings’, pp. 40-41 and Madeleine Callaghan, *Shelley’s Living Artistry*, p. 60. [↑](#footnote-ref-247)
248. Plotinus, *The Enneads*, p. 67. See also Plato, *Phaedo*, trans. by David Gallop, p. 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-248)
249. Lucy Newlyn, *Reading, Writing, and Romanticism: The Anxiety of Reception* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. xii. [↑](#footnote-ref-249)
250. All references to *Laon and Cythna* are from *The Complete Poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. by Donald H. Reiman, Neil Fraistat, and Nora Crook, 3 vols to date (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000-), III, unless stated otherwise. All of Shelley’s other works are quoted from *The Major Works*, ed. by Zachary Leader and Michael O’Neill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003; repr. 2009) unless stated otherwise. [↑](#footnote-ref-250)
251. Newlyn, *Reading, Writing, and Romanticism: The Anxiety of Reception*, p. 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-251)
252. Ross Wilson, *Shelley and the Apprehension of Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-252)
253. Madeleine Callaghan, *The Poet-Hero in the Work of Byron and Shelley* (London: Anthem Press, 2019), p. 201. Dawson Era ebook. [↑](#footnote-ref-253)
254. Newlyn, *Reading, Writing, and Romanticism*, p. 73. [↑](#footnote-ref-254)
255. Shelley describes *Laon and Cythna* as ‘in the style and for the same object as “Queen Mab”’, *PBS Letters*, I, p. 557. [↑](#footnote-ref-255)
256. See the editors’ note that Shelley ‘was severely castigated in the *Quarterly* for April 1819 which insinuates that in the poem he is indirectly defending his own sexual conduct’ in *The Poems of Shelley*, III, p. 128. [↑](#footnote-ref-256)
257. ‘Shelley’s *Revolt of Islam*’, *Quarterly Review*, April 1819, p. 467 quoted in *The Romantics Reviewed: Contemporary Reviews of British Romantic Writers*, Part C, 2 vols, ed. by Donald H. Reiman (New York, NY: Garland, 1972), II, p. 774. [↑](#footnote-ref-257)
258. ‘A Satire upon Satire’ and *Peter Bell the Third* are quoted from *The Poems of Shelley*, III, pp. 274 and 127. [↑](#footnote-ref-258)
259. All of Shelley’s translations from Plato, including accompanying prose, are cited from James A. Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley: A Study of Platonism and the Poetic Mind* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1949), unless stated otherwise. [↑](#footnote-ref-259)
260. See Madeleine Callaghan, *Shelley’s Living Artistry: Letters, Poems, Plays* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017), p. 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-260)
261. Plato, *Ion* in *Classical Literary Criticism*, trans. by Penelope Murray and T. S. Dorsch (London: Penguin Books, 1965; repr. 2000), p. 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-261)
262. *The Poems of Shelley*, III, p. 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-262)
263. Kenneth Neill Cameron, ‘Shelley and *Ahrimanes*’, *Modern Language Quarterly*, 3.2 (1942), 287-295 (p. 287). [↑](#footnote-ref-263)
264. See James A. Notopoulos, ‘Shelley and the *Symposium* of Plato’, *The Classical Weekly*, 42.7 (1949), 98-102 (p. 99). [↑](#footnote-ref-264)
265. Thomas Medwin recalls Shelley reading the *Symposium* with Dr Lind at Eton in Thomas Medwin, *Revised Life of Shelley*, ed. by H. B. Forman (London: Oxford University Press, 1913), p. 33; for doubts on this, see Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley*, p. 381.

     The compositional period of *Athanase* generally ranges from 1817 to 1819. *The Poems of Shelley* editors note that ‘the Platonic interests of lines 185ff., particularly in the *Symposium*, which S. translated at Bagni di Lucca in the summer of 1818, plausibly constitutes a continuation and new inflection of the Hellenism cultivated in the Shelley-Peacock circle at Marlow in the summer of 1817, which itself probably gave an initial impetus to many features of the original poem’, *The Poems of Shelley*, ed. by Kelvin Everest and G. M. Matthews (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2014; first published Pearson Education 2000), II, p. 312. [↑](#footnote-ref-265)
266. Quoted in *The Poems of Shelley*, II, p. 322. [↑](#footnote-ref-266)
267. These associations can be traced to Freud’s assertion that ‘one uses masculine and feminine…in the sense of activity and passivity’, and also to ancient Greek and Roman conceptions: ‘Both in Greece and in Rome, what marked the difference between a man and a woman was active and passive behavior in society in general and in sexual relations in particular’. Sigmund Freud, *Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex*, trans. by A. A. Brill (New York, NY, 1916), p. 79n and Luc Brisson, *Sexual Ambivalence: Androgyny and Hermaphroditism in Graeco-Roman Antiquity*, trans. by Janet Lloyd (Berkley and Los Angeles, CA and London: University of California Press, 2002), p. 60. [↑](#footnote-ref-267)
268. Nancy Moore Goslee, *Shelley’s Visual Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-268)
269. Quoted from Percy Bysshe Shelley, ‘On “Rhododaphne or The Thessalian Spell”, a Poem’ in *The Prose Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. by E. B. Murray (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), pp. 285-288. [↑](#footnote-ref-269)
270. Marlon B. Ross, *The Contours of Masculine Desire: Romanticism and the Rise of Women’s Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-270)
271. Diane Long Hoeveler, *Romantic Androgyny: The Women Within* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990), p. 97. See A. J. L. Bust who traces nineteenth-century images of the androgyne to ‘the androgynous Adam of the occult and mystical philosophies associated with the Judaeo-Christian tradition, such as for example the Kabbala, gnosticism, freemasonry, Rosicrucianism and the philosophy of Boehme’ and ‘brother-sister incest in Greek and Roman mythology, in primitive societies, and in alchemy’, ‘The Image of the Androgyne in the Nineteenth Century’ in *Romantic Mythologies*, ed. by Ian Fletcher (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967), 1-95 (pp. 4 and 53). [↑](#footnote-ref-271)
272. Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley*, pp. 142 and 141. [↑](#footnote-ref-272)
273. Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley*, p. 393. [↑](#footnote-ref-273)
274. Hoeveler, *Romantic Androgyny*, p. 104. [↑](#footnote-ref-274)
275. Jerrold E. Hogle, *Shelley’s Process: Radical Transference and the Development of His Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 94. [↑](#footnote-ref-275)
276. June Singer, *Androgyny: Towards a New Theory of Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1977), p. 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-276)
277. William Blake, *Complete Writings*, ed. by Geoffrey Keynes (New York, NY and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966; repr. 1969, 1971, 1972), p. 216. [↑](#footnote-ref-277)
278. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. by H. M. Parshley (London: Vintage Books, 1997), p. 735. [↑](#footnote-ref-278)
279. De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, pp. 735 and 741. [↑](#footnote-ref-279)
280. Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015), pp. 45-46. [↑](#footnote-ref-280)
281. Carlos Baker, *Shelley’s Major Poetry: The Fabric of a Vision* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1948), p. 71 and John Donovan, ‘Incest in *Laon and Cythna*: Nature, Custom, Desire’, *The Keats-Shelley Review*, 2.1 (1987), 49-90, (p. 84). See also Carl Grabo who writes that ‘the Lady and the Serpent are transformed, the throne is occupied, seemingly by a dual spirit, male and female, which had been Serpent and Lady and are now one. Then the male aspect of the divinity steps forth and tells the tale of his experiences on earth when, as a divided spirit, as Laon and Cythna, he—or they—took on human form’, *The Magic Plant: The Growth of Shelley’s Thought* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1936), p. 210 and James Ruff who writes that Laon and Cythna’s relationship ‘obviously duplicates that of the Woman and Serpent of Canto I, who fused together into an androgynous figure’, *Shelley’s* The Revolt of Islam (Salzburg: Studies in English Literature, 1972), p. 60. [↑](#footnote-ref-281)
282. Cited from Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. by Thomas P. Roche, Jr. with the assistance of C. Patrick O’Donnell, Jr. (London: Penguin Books, 1978; repr. 1987). The similarity between the Form and Spenser’s Venus is noted by the editors in *The Poems of Shelley*, II, p. 91n. [↑](#footnote-ref-282)
283. For this compositional evidence, see Donald H. Reiman, ed., *Shelley and His Circle*, V, p. 150. [↑](#footnote-ref-283)
284. Stuart M. Sperry, ‘The Sexual Theme in Shelley’s *The Revolt of Islam’*, *The Journal of English and German Philology*, 82 (1983), pp. 32-49 (p. 33). [↑](#footnote-ref-284)
285. Baker, *Shelley’s Major Poetry*, p. 78. [↑](#footnote-ref-285)
286. Callaghan, *Shelley’s Living Artistry*, p. 70. [↑](#footnote-ref-286)
287. Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi, ‘The Politics of Androgyny’, *Women’s Studies*, 2 (1974), pp. 151-160 (p. 151). For additional analyses of androgyny in Shelley’s poetry, see Warren Stevenson, *Romanticism and the Androgynous Sublime*, (London: Associated University Presses, 1996) and Diane Long Hoeveler, *Romantic Androgyny: The Women Within*, (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990). While I depart from Hoeveler’s concept of the androgynous as an ultimately masculine creation which ‘cannibalizes’ the feminine, my definition of androgyny in Shelley’s works bears similarity to her notion of the androgynous being defined as: ‘The myth of the one unified self composed of two entities, masculine and feminine’. *Romantic Androgyny*, p. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-287)
288. To Shelley, ‘The abolition of personal slavery is the basis of the highest political hope that it can enter into the mind of man to conceive’, and ‘The freedom of women’ is of utmost importance. *A Defence of Poetry*, p. 690. [↑](#footnote-ref-288)
289. David Duff, *Romance and Revolution: Shelley and the Politics of a Genre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 193. [↑](#footnote-ref-289)
290. Hoeveler, *Romantic Androgyny*, p. 139; Percy Bysshe Shelley, ‘On the *Symposium*, or Preface to the Banquet of Plato’ in Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley*, p. 402. [↑](#footnote-ref-290)
291. Notopoulos concedes that ‘[t]he Neoplatonic influences which reached Shelley through Thomas Taylor and other authors affected by Neoplatonism were more sympathetic to Shelley’s temperament than was logical Platonism’, p. 89, and David Newsome agrees that ‘[m]uch, then, of what one meets in Romantic Platonism is nearer to Plotinus than to Plato’, *Two Classes of Men: Platonism and English Romantic Thought* (London: John Murray Ltd., 1974), p. 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-291)
292. All of Shelley’s translations from Plato, including accompanying essays, are cited from James A. Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley*, unless stated otherwise. [↑](#footnote-ref-292)
293. Donald Reiman and Tatsuo Tokoo agree that Canto I was not entirely written ‘until Canto XII (the last canto) was nearly complete’, continuing to assert that ‘the second half of Canto I (which describes the voyage to the Temple of the Spirit by the Poet, the woman, and the serpent) and the last ten stanzas of Canto XII (which depict the identical voyage by the souls of Laon and Cythna) were composed almost simultaneously and perform parallel functions, giving a cosmic and historical dimension to the main narrative.’ Percy Bysshe Shelley, *BSM XIII: Drafts for ‘Laon and Cythna’, Facsimiles of Bod. MSS. Shelley adds. e. 14 and adds. e. 19*, ed. by Tatsuo Tokoo (New York, NY: Garland, 1992), pp. xii-xiii. [↑](#footnote-ref-293)
294. Thomas Jefferson Hogg recalls that he and Shelley studied Dacier and Ficino’s translations of Plato’s works, including passages from the *Symposium*, while at Oxford in 1810; see Thomas Jefferson Hogg, *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (London: George Routledge & Sons Limited, 1906), p. 72, and Thomas Medwin recalls Shelley reading the *Symposium* with Dr Lind at Eton, Thomas Medwin, *Revised Life of Shelley*, ed. by H. B. Forman (London: Oxford University Press, 1913), p. 33; for doubts on this, see James A. Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley*, p. 381. [↑](#footnote-ref-294)
295. See the entry on ‘Empathy and Sympathy’ in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* wherein the distinction between empathy and sympathy is that ‘sympathy runs parallel, while empathy unites’; however, empathy is also equated ‘with the sympathy of Hume and Smith’, *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* ed. by Roland Greene et al., (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 4th ed., pp. 408-09. Empathy, entered into the *Oxford English Dictionary* in 1895, is synonymous with Hume and Smith’s earlier conceptions of sympathy, a term originating in English the 16th-century but owing to translations and descriptions of ‘fellow-feeling’ in Plato and Pliny. *Oxford English Dictionary* online, Oxford University Press. See also Timothy Clark, *Embodying Revolution: The Figure of the Poet in Shelley* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) wherein Shelley’s ‘sympathetic imagination…was a reciprocal one’, p. 87. [↑](#footnote-ref-295)
296. See Stephen C. Behrendt, *Shelley and His Audiences* (Lincoln, NE and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1989). [↑](#footnote-ref-296)
297. Behrendt, *Shelley and His Audiences*, p. 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-297)
298. See Michael Henry Scrivener, *Radical Shelley: The Philosophical Anarchism and Utopian Thought of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982), p. 122. [↑](#footnote-ref-298)
299. William Wordsworth, Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* in *The Major Works*, ed. by Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984; repr. 2000 and 2008), p. 600. [↑](#footnote-ref-299)
300. William Wordsworth, from *The Cambridge Companion to William Wordsworth*, ed. by Stephen Gill, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. xvi. [↑](#footnote-ref-300)
301. Madeleine Callaghan, *Shelley’s Living Artistry*, p. 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-301)
302. Peter Finch, ‘Shelley’s *Laon and Cythna*: The Bride Stripped Bare … Almost’, *The Keats-Shelley Review*, 3.1 (1988), 23-46 (p. 30). [↑](#footnote-ref-302)
303. Stuart Curran, *Shelley’s Annus Mirabilis: The Maturing of an Epic Vision* (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1975), p. 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-303)
304. Mary’s journal entry for 13 August 1817 reads: ‘Shelley writes—reads Plato’s Convivium’. *The Journals of Mary Shelley: 1814-1844*. 2 vols., ed. by Paula R. Feldman and Diana Scott Kilvert (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), I, p. 178. ‘On 10-13 August, 1817, he returned to page 37 of adds. e. 16 to make notes on his reading of Plato’s *Symposium*’, *BSM XI: The Geneva Notebook of Percy Bysshe Shelley: Bodleian MS. Shelley adds. e. 16 and MS. Shelley adds. c. 4, folios 63, 65, 71, and 72*, ed. by Michael Erkelenz (New York, NY: Garland, 1992), pp. xxvii-xxviii. [↑](#footnote-ref-304)
305. Marsilio Ficino, *Commentary on Plato’s* *Symposium On Love*, trans. by Sears Jayne (Woodstock, CT: Spring Publications, 1985; rep. 1999), p. 73. [↑](#footnote-ref-305)
306. Tracy Hargreaves, *Androgyny in Modern Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-306)
307. See, for instance, Carlos Baker’s claim that Cythna, ‘even when she is not present, [is] a positive dynamic force, a kind of matrix of revolution’ while ‘Laon is a mere shadow…more acted upon than acting’, *Shelley’s Major Poetry*, p. 81. In contrast, William A. Ulmer asserts that Cythna is ‘excessively pliant’ and is granted ‘an initiative activism only in Laon’s absence’, *Shelleyan Eros: The Rhetoric of Romantic Love* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. 62 and 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-307)
308. See Luc Brisson, *Sexual Ambivalence*, where ‘Both in Greece and in Rome, what marked the difference between a man and a woman was active and passive behavior in society in general and in sexual relations in particular’, p. 60. [↑](#footnote-ref-308)
309. Newlyn, *Reading, Writing, and Romanticism: The Anxiety of Reception*, p. 317. [↑](#footnote-ref-309)
310. Catherine Malabou, *Changing Difference: The Feminine and the Question of Philosophy*, trans. by Carolyn Shread (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), p. 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-310)
311. Malabou, *Changing Difference*, pp. 27-28. [↑](#footnote-ref-311)
312. John Donovan traces the image’s potential origin to a range of literary sources ranging from the ‘*Iliad* xii 200-7, where it serves as a divine warning to the Trojan army, and in *Aeneid* xi 751-6 and *Metamorphoses* iv 714-17 where it typifies the implacable enmity of two adversaries - as it does also in the aerial contest between a griffin and a dragon of *Faerie Queene* I v 8’, ‘Incest in *Laon and Cythna*: Nature, Custom, Desire’, p. 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-312)
313. For Shelley’s reversal of gender in this sequence see Susan Wolfson, ‘Gendering the Soul’ in Paula R. Feldman and Theresa M. Kelly, eds., *Romantic Women Writers: Voices and Countervoices* (Hanover, NH and London: University Press of New England, 1995) 33-68 (p. 48). [↑](#footnote-ref-313)
314. Teddi Chichester Bonca includes multiple references to Shelley’s kinship with the snake in *Shelley’s Mirrors of Love*, particularly in stating that: ‘This reptilian image becomes even more complex, and self-revelatory, when we recognize that snake as one of Shelley’s familiars. Since spellbinding his young sisters with tales of the Great Old Snake…Shelley felt a special affinity with this most maligned of creatures’, *Shelley’s Mirrors of Love: Narcissism, Sacrifice, and Sorority* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998), p. 79. [↑](#footnote-ref-314)
315. Jerrold E. Hogle, *Shelley’s Process*, p. vii. [↑](#footnote-ref-315)
316. Curran, *Shelley’s Annus Mirabilis*, pp. 28 and 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-316)
317. Curran, *Shelley’s Annus Mirabilis*, p. 82. [↑](#footnote-ref-317)
318. Kenneth Neill Cameron, ‘Shelley and *Ahrimanes*’, p. 295. [↑](#footnote-ref-318)
319. Donna Richardson, ‘“The Dark Idolatry of Self”: The Dialectic of Imagination in Shelley’s *Revolt of Islam*’, *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 40 (1991), p. 74. [↑](#footnote-ref-319)
320. This is noted by the editors, who also identify a similarity to Peacock’s *Ahrimanes*, *The Poems of Shelley*, II, p. 63n. [↑](#footnote-ref-320)
321. Quoted in *The Major Works*, ed. by H. J. Jackson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985; repr. 2000 and 2008), p. 53. [↑](#footnote-ref-321)
322. Geoffrey Hartman, ‘The Psycho-Aesthetics of Romantic Moonshine: Wordsworth’s Profane Illumination’, *The Wordsworth Circle*, 37.1 (2006), 8-14 (p. 9). [↑](#footnote-ref-322)
323. Stuart Sperry, *Shelley’s Major Verse: The Narrative and Dramatic Poetry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 45 and 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-323)
324. Gelpi, ‘The Politics of Androgyny’, p. 151 and Hoeveler, *Romantic Androgyny*, pp. 250-251. [↑](#footnote-ref-324)
325. Hoeveler, *Romantic Androgyny*, p. 251. [↑](#footnote-ref-325)
326. See Nancy Moore Goslee, *Shelley’s Visual Imagination*, pp. 140-158. [↑](#footnote-ref-326)
327. Goslee, *Shelley’s Visual Imagination*, pp. 70 and 79. [↑](#footnote-ref-327)
328. *BSM XVII: Drafts for ‘Laon and Cythna’, Cantos V-XII: Bod. MS. Shelley adds. e. 10*, ed. by Steven E. Jones (New York, NY: Garland, 1994), p. 125, 25-28 and p. 127, 1-2 and 14-15. [↑](#footnote-ref-328)
329. *The Poems of Shelley*, III, p. 205n. [↑](#footnote-ref-329)
330. Stuart Peterfreund, *Shelley among Others: The Play of the Intertext and the Idea of Language* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), p. 136. [↑](#footnote-ref-330)
331. Curran, *Shelley’s Annus Mirabilis*, p. 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-331)
332. De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 738. [↑](#footnote-ref-332)
333. Michael O’Neill, ‘Emulating Plato: Shelley as Translator and Prose Poet’ in *The Unfamiliar Shelley*, ed. by Timothy Webb and Alan M. Weinberg (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 239-255 (p. 242). [↑](#footnote-ref-333)
334. O’Neill, ‘Emulating Plato: Shelley as Translator and Prose Poet’, p. 242. [↑](#footnote-ref-334)
335. De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 735. [↑](#footnote-ref-335)
336. Hoeveler, *Romantic Androgyny*, p. 100. [↑](#footnote-ref-336)
337. Timothy Webb, ‘Shelley and the Ambivalence of Laughter’ in *Percy Bysshe Shelley: Bicentenary Essays*, ed. by Kelvin Everest (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1992), 43-62 (pp. 52-53). [↑](#footnote-ref-337)
338. The Serpent ‘Relax[es] his suffocating grasp’ in a moment that should not be interpreted as weakness or submission, but rather as sympathetic passivity (1.13.111). For contradicting opinions on this, see Carlos Baker’s claim that after ‘minutes of fierce combat the snake falls vanquished into the sea’, *Shelley’s Major Poetry*, p. 70, and Peter A. Schock’s claim that ‘the eagle drops the serpent into the sea and wings away’, *Romantic Satanism: Myth and the Historical Moment in Blake, Shelley, and Byron* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), p. 121. [↑](#footnote-ref-338)
339. Curran, *Shelley’s Annus Mirabilis*, p. 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-339)
340. Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. by Alan Sheridan (London: The Hogarth Press, 1977), p. 101. [↑](#footnote-ref-340)
341. Donovan, ‘Incest in *Laon and Cythna*: Nature, Custom, Desire’, p. 84. [↑](#footnote-ref-341)
342. Hoeveler, *Romantic Androgyny*, p. 107. [↑](#footnote-ref-342)
343. Donovan, ‘Incest in *Laon and Cythna*: Nature, Custom, Desire’, p. 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-343)
344. Finch, ‘Shelley’s *Laon and Cythna*: The Bride Stripped Bare … Almost’, p. 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-344)
345. Brisson, *Sexual Ambivalence*, p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-345)
346. Donovan, ‘Incest in *Laon and Cythna*: Nature, Custom, Desire’, p. 78. [↑](#footnote-ref-346)
347. John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. by Stephen Orgel and Jonathan Goldberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 257. [↑](#footnote-ref-347)
348. E. M. W. Tillyard, ‘The Causeway from Hell to the World in the Tenth Book of *Paradise Lost*’, *Studies in Philology*, 38.2 (1941), 266-270 (p. 269). [↑](#footnote-ref-348)
349. Quoted in James A. Kelhoffer, *Miracle and Mission: The Authentication of Missionaries and Their Message in the Longer Ending of Mark* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), p. 354. [↑](#footnote-ref-349)
350. Teddi Lynn Chichester, ‘Shelley’s Imaginative Transsexualism in *Laon and Cythna*’, *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 45 (1996), 77-101 (p. 77). [↑](#footnote-ref-350)
351. Finch, ‘Shelley’s *Laon and Cythna*: The Bride Stripped Bare … Almost’, pp. 27-28. [↑](#footnote-ref-351)
352. Leigh Hunt, *The Examiner* (1 February 1818), pp. 75-76 (p. 75) quoted in *The Romantics Reviewed: Contemporary Reviews of British Romantic Writers*, ed. by Donald H. Reiman, Part C, 2 vols (New York, NY and London: Garland, 1972), I, p. 433. [↑](#footnote-ref-352)
353. Sperry, ‘The Sexual Theme in Shelley’s *The Revolt of Islam*’, pp. 36-37. [↑](#footnote-ref-353)
354. Baker, *Shelley’s Major Poetry*, p. 219. [↑](#footnote-ref-354)
355. ‘And thro’ thine eyes, even in thy soul I see’, Dedication ‘To Mary’, 98. [↑](#footnote-ref-355)
356. Gelpi, *Shelley’s Goddess*, p. 128; Bonca, *Shelley’s Mirrors of Love*, p. 175. [↑](#footnote-ref-356)
357. Shelley exclaims in a letter to Mary while the two were living separately that ‘Your thoughts alone can waken mine to energy’, confirming her perceived power (*PBS Letters*, I, p. 414). [↑](#footnote-ref-357)
358. Gerald McNiece, *Shelley and the Revolutionary Idea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), p. 133. [↑](#footnote-ref-358)
359. Baker, *Shelley’s Major Poetry*, p. 55. [↑](#footnote-ref-359)
360. Baker, *Shelley’s Major Poetry*, p. 53. [↑](#footnote-ref-360)
361. Hogle, *Shelley’s Process*, p. 342. [↑](#footnote-ref-361)
362. Gelpi, *Shelley’s Goddess*, p. ix. [↑](#footnote-ref-362)
363. Baker, *Shelley’s Major Poetry*, p. 81. [↑](#footnote-ref-363)
364. Baker is one of the few critics who has asserted that Cythna’s is the active power, as most discussions of the siblings’ roles seem to agree that Cythna is but an echo of the more dominant Laon. For instance, William Ulmer and Gerald McNiece similarly posit that, ‘Cythna’s heroism can temporarily make her appear Laon’s equal’; however, ‘her equality nonetheless suffers from Laon’s return’, and ‘Laon’s was the active, creative power’ while Cythna ‘was the profoundly receptive auditor able to sing and live those harmonies’ (Ulmer, *Shelleyan Eros*, p. 70; McNiece, *Shelley and the Revolutionary Idea*, p. 203). [↑](#footnote-ref-364)
365. William Keach raises a number of issues around Shelley’s decision to enclose Cythna’s speech in quotation marks, one of which, in response to Hogle’s suggestion that ‘the idealized mutual self-constitution [Shelley] celebrates cannot be sustained’, is that ‘[t]he rhetorical locating and marking off of Cythna’s voice may be read…as a sign of difference even within levels of specular projection, as a denial of any claim of unmediated access to the feminine even in a text in which the feminine is so evidently a projection of the male writer’s desire’, p. 13. Also, on Cythna as a potential production in response to Southey’s *Joan of Arc*, Keach notes that Shelley ‘would have [been] fascinated’ by the idea of Joan as an ‘“Ideal Androgyne”’, ‘Cythna’s Subtler Language’, *Studies in Romanticism*, 37.1 (1998), 7-16 (p. 10). [↑](#footnote-ref-365)
366. Ulmer, *Shelleyan Eros*, p. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-366)
367. Curran, *Shelley’s Annus Mirabilis*, p. 115. [↑](#footnote-ref-367)
368. McNiece, *Shelley and the Revolutionary Idea*, pp. 133-134. [↑](#footnote-ref-368)
369. Sperry, ‘The Sexual Theme in *The Revolt of Islam*’, p. 41. See also Chichester, ‘Shelley’s Imaginative Transsexualism in *Laon and Cythna*’, pp. 90-92. [↑](#footnote-ref-369)
370. To ‘quell the insolence’ of the androgynous humans, Jupiter decides to ‘cut [the] human beings in half’. Shelley, *The Banquet*, p. 430. Robin Waterfield’s new translation of the *Symposium* offers a more gruesome depiction of the event, when Zeus ‘told Apollo to twist every divided person’s face and half-neck round towards the gash, the idea being that the sight of their own wounds would make people behave more moderately in the future’. Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Robin Waterfield, 1994 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-370)
371. ‘His eyes beheld / Their own wan light through the reflected lines / Of his thin hair’, (*Alastor*, 469-471). [↑](#footnote-ref-371)
372. Baker, *Shelley’s Major Poetry*, p. 81. [↑](#footnote-ref-372)
373. Hoeveler, p. 104. [↑](#footnote-ref-373)
374. Teddi Chichester Bonca, ‘Shelley’s Imaginative Transsexualism in *Laon and Cythna*’, pp. 86 and 95. [↑](#footnote-ref-374)
375. For detailed accounts, see Brisson, *Sexual Ambivalence*. [↑](#footnote-ref-375)
376. See Brisson, *Sexual Ambivalence*, p. 62. [↑](#footnote-ref-376)
377. Gelpi elaborates upon Shelley’s choice of ivy in particular by remarking that ‘the plant merges and unifies dual sexual characteristics, since it is bisexual.  That in plants is not unusual, but the ivy's duality-in-unity is particularly striking’, *Shelley’s Goddess*, p. 161. [↑](#footnote-ref-377)
378. Sperry, ‘The Sexual Theme in Shelley’s *The Revolt of Islam*’, p. 49; Bonca, *Shelley’s Mirrors of Love*, p. 69. [↑](#footnote-ref-378)
379. Finch, ‘Shelley’s *Laon and Cythna*: The Bride Stripped Bare … Almost’, p. 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-379)
380. Baker, *Shelley’s Major Poetry*, p. 81. [↑](#footnote-ref-380)
381. Levine, *Forms*, p. 106. [↑](#footnote-ref-381)
382. Michael J. Neth, ed., *The Complete Poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, III, p. 647. [↑](#footnote-ref-382)
383. Plato, *Phaedo*, trans. by David Gallop (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993; repr. 1999 and 2009), p. 31 (80b). [↑](#footnote-ref-383)
384. Ross, *The Contours of Masculine Desire*, p. 135. [↑](#footnote-ref-384)
385. Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi, ‘The Politics of Androgyny’, *Women’s Studies*, 2 (1974), 151-160 (p. 151). [↑](#footnote-ref-385)
386. All references to Shelley’s works are from *Percy Bysshe Shelley: The Major Works*, ed. by Zachary Leader and Michael O’Neill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003; repr. 2009) unless stated otherwise. [↑](#footnote-ref-386)
387. Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993), p. 191. [↑](#footnote-ref-387)
388. Ross Wilson, *Shelley and the Apprehension of Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-388)
389. On the compact between reader and poet, Stephen C. Behrendt writes that ‘[Walter J.] Ong’s claim that author and reader form a compact in which the reader is required to play the role assigned by the author comes remarkably close to Shelley’s view.  Shelley attempts to regulate both the terms and the manner of discourse, recognizing that controlling the ground rules affords him the greatest power and flexibility while limiting his audiences’ options for any but positive, cooperative responses.  He requires that his readers be willing to participate actively in an intellectual dialogue of which he will supply both the principle ingredients and the rhetorical and intellectual framework.  The dialogic form of this intellectual program is explicitly represented in Plato’s dialogues’, *Shelley and His Audiences* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), p. 5. Teddi Lynn Chichester also asserts that in *Prometheus Unbound* ‘Shelley most powerfully implicates his reader’; she goes on to state that, ‘[g]enre, as well as style and rhetoric, provided the poet with powerful tools for attracting and then guiding particular audiences’, ‘Entering the Stream of Sound: The Reader and the Masque in Shelley’s *Prometheus Unbound*’, *Colby Quarterly*, 30.2 (1994), 85-97 (p. 85). Similarly, Tilottama Rajan posits that Asia and Panthea alternate between embodying the roles of the ‘implied author’ and the ‘implied reader’: ‘the reader desired by the author and one who “produces” the meaning of the text by intuitively grasping [the poet’s] intention’, Tilottama Rajan, ‘Deconstruction or Reconstruction: Reading Shelley’s *Prometheus Unbound*’, *Studies in Romanticism*, 23.3 (1984), 317-338 (p. 323). [↑](#footnote-ref-389)
390. Behrendt, *Shelley and His Audiences*, p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-390)
391. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Friend*, I, p. 25, quoted in Lucy Newlyn, *Reading, Writing, and Romanticism: The Anxiety of Reception* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 80. [↑](#footnote-ref-391)
392. Ross Woodman, ‘The Androgyne in *Prometheus Unbound*’, *Studies in Romanticism*, 20.2 (1981), 225-247 (p. 225). [↑](#footnote-ref-392)
393. Benjamin Sudarsky, ‘*The Banquet*, Gender, and “Original Composition”’, *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 66 (2017), 160-165 (p. 165). [↑](#footnote-ref-393)
394. See Angela Hobbs, ‘Female Imagery in Plato’ in *Plato’s Symposium: Issues in Interpretation and Reception* ed. by J. H. Lesher, Debra Nails, and Fisbee C. C. Sheffield (Washington D. C.: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2006). [↑](#footnote-ref-394)
395. ‘*Prometheus Unbound* was written to “familiarize” (the choice of verbs is telling) a “select” group of readers with an “ideal” vision that ought to—and someday will—be familiar to everyone’, William Keach, ‘The Political Poet’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Shelley*, ed. by Timothy Morton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006; repr. 2008), 123-142 (p. 131). [↑](#footnote-ref-395)
396. Gelpi, ‘The Politics of Androgyny’, p. 151. [↑](#footnote-ref-396)
397. All of Shelley’s translations from Plato, including accompanying prose, are cited from James A. Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley: A Study of Platonism and the Poetic Mind* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1949), unless stated otherwise. [↑](#footnote-ref-397)
398. Marlon B. Ross, ‘Shelley’s Wayward Dream-Poem: The Apprehending Reader in *Prometheus Unbound*’, *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 36 (1987), 110-133 (p. 116). [↑](#footnote-ref-398)
399. Wilson, *Shelley and the Apprehension of Life*, p. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-399)
400. Teddi Lynn Chichester, ‘Love, Sexuality, Gender’ in *The Oxford Handbook of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. by Michael O’Neill and Anthony Howe with Madeleine Callaghan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 132-147 (p. 146). [↑](#footnote-ref-400)
401. *Laon and Cythna* is quoted from *The Complete Poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. by Donald H. Reiman, Neil Fraistat, and Nora Crook, 3 vols to date (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), III, unless stated otherwise. [↑](#footnote-ref-401)
402. Earl R. Wasserman, ‘Myth-Making in *Prometheus Unbound*’, *Modern Language Notes*, 70.3 (1955), 182-184 (p. 182). [↑](#footnote-ref-402)
403. Ellen Brown Herson, ‘Oxymoron and Dante’s Gates of Hell in Shelley’s *Prometheus Unbound*’, *Studies in Romanticism*, 29.3 (1990), 371-393 (pp. 373 and 377). [↑](#footnote-ref-403)
404. Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. by Frederick L. Jones, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), I, p. 414. [↑](#footnote-ref-404)
405. Mary Shelley, ‘Note on *Prometheus Unbound*’, *The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. by Mary Shelley, 4 vols (London: Edward Moxon, 1839)), II, p. 135. [↑](#footnote-ref-405)
406. Behrendt, *Shelley and His Audiences*, p. 247. [↑](#footnote-ref-406)
407. Tilottama Rajan, ‘Deconstruction or Reconstruction: Reading Shelley’s *Prometheus Unbound*’, p. 318 and Woodman, ‘The Androgyne in *Prometheus Unbound*’, p. 235. [↑](#footnote-ref-407)
408. Marlon B. Ross, *The Contours of Masculine Desire: Romanticism and the Rise of Women’s Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 95. [↑](#footnote-ref-408)
409. Woodman, ‘The Androgyne in *Prometheus Unbound*’, p. 227. [↑](#footnote-ref-409)
410. Woodman, ‘The Androgyne in *Prometheus Unbound*’, p. 237. [↑](#footnote-ref-410)
411. Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015; repr. 2017), p. 94. [↑](#footnote-ref-411)
412. Gerald McNeice, *Shelley and the Revolutionary Idea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), p. 75. [↑](#footnote-ref-412)
413. Milton Wilson, *Shelley’s Later Poetry: A Study of His Prophetic Imagination* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1957; repr. 1961), p. 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-413)
414. William A. Ulmer, *Shelleyan Eros: The Rhetoric of Romantic Love* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 92. [↑](#footnote-ref-414)
415. Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi, *Shelley’s Goddess: Maternity, Language, Subjectivity* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 204. Stuart Curran makes a similar assertion in stating that, ‘the center of *Prometheus Unbound* occurs in Demogorgon’s chthonic realm where Asia confronts the ultimate force of the drama’s universe’, *Shelley’s Annus Mirabilis: The Maturing of an Epic Vision* (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1975), p. 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-415)
416. Simon Jarvis, ‘Why Rhyme Pleases’, *Thinking Verse*, 1 (2011), 17-43 (p. 36). [↑](#footnote-ref-416)
417. Laura Wells Betz, ‘“At once mild and animating”: *Prometheus Unbound* and Shelley’s Spell of Style’, *European Romantic Review*, 21.2 (2010), 161-181 (p. 161). [↑](#footnote-ref-417)
418. Betz writes: ‘Generally, the power of tyrannical rule to affect its subjects psychologically is compared to the possessing power of a spell when the Chorus of Spirits suggests that Jupiter’s tyranny causes young people to be “sense-enchanted” and “implanted” with such feelings as self-contempt, misery, and fear (1.510–12, 516), as well as inclined toward submissiveness and paralysis in the face of authoritarianism’, ‘“At once mild and animating”: *Prometheus Unbound* and Shelley’s Spell of Style’, p. 165. In actuality, these lines are spoken by the Chorus of Furies. [↑](#footnote-ref-418)
419. Marlon B. Ross, in *The Contours of Masculine Desire*, claims that: ‘Absorption itself is a complex process that is not simply the reception by a passive medium of an active agent.  The “softness” of the medium disposes it to receive a harder intrusive agent; however, the capacity to absorb can itself become a kind of power.  As the “active” agent asserts its power by permeating the “passive” medium, it also gives itself to that medium and becomes possessed by it.  As the medium is infiltrated by the agent, the medium establishes its own form of power.  Furthermore, *ad*sorption necessarily accompanies *ab*sorption.  They are different conceptions of the same process’, p. 95. [↑](#footnote-ref-419)
420. Mary Shelley, ‘Note on *Prometheus Unbound*’, *The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*,II,p.135. [↑](#footnote-ref-420)
421. Gelpi, *Shelley’s Goddess*, p. 162. [↑](#footnote-ref-421)
422. Stuart M. Sperry paraphrases ‘the first critic of Shelley’s poem, Leigh Hunt’, ‘The Sexual Theme in Shelley’s *The Revolt of Islam’*, *The Journal of English and German Philology*, 82 (1983), 32-49 (p. 36). [↑](#footnote-ref-422)
423. Zachary Leader and Michael O’Neill, eds., *Percy Bysshe Shelley: The Major Works*, p. 747n; Curran, *Shelley’s Annus Mirabilis*, p. 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-423)
424. Diane Long Hoeveler, *Romantic Androgyny: The Women Within* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990), p. 139. Leader and O’Neill, *The Major Works*, p. 747n. [↑](#footnote-ref-424)
425. Timothy Webb, *Shelley: A Voice Not Understood* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977), p. 117. [↑](#footnote-ref-425)
426. The lyric is defined as ‘poetry that expresses personal feeling’ in a ‘harmoniously arranged form…and that is indirectly addressed to the private reader’, *The* *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. by Roland Greene, 4th edn (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 826. [↑](#footnote-ref-426)
427. David Taylor, ‘“A Vacant Space, An Empty Stage”: *Prometheus Unbound*, *The Last Man*, and the Problem of Dramatic (Re)form’, *The Keats-Shelley Review*, 20.1 (2006), p. 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-427)
428. Ross, ‘Shelley’s Wayward Dream-Poem’, p. 120. [↑](#footnote-ref-428)
429. Michael O’Neill, ‘Shelley’s Pronouns’, *The Oxford Handbook of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. by Michael O’Neill and Anthony Howe with the assistance of Madeleine Callaghan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 391-407 (p. 394). [↑](#footnote-ref-429)
430. Behrendt, *Shelley and His Audiences*, p. 139. [↑](#footnote-ref-430)
431. Ross Woodman provides a reading of the reunited Prometheus and Asia as the archetypal ‘androgyne’ and ‘One Mind’ in ‘The Androgyne in *Prometheus Unbound*’, p. 225. [↑](#footnote-ref-431)
432. Plato, *Republic*, Book 3 402d, trans. by Benjamin Jowett with notes by Elizabeth Watson Scharffenberger (New York, NY: Barnes & Noble Books, 2004), p. 96. [↑](#footnote-ref-432)
433. Plato, *Republic*, Book 3 401e, p. 95. [↑](#footnote-ref-433)
434. Ross, ‘Shelley’s Wayward Dream-Poem’, p. 114. [↑](#footnote-ref-434)
435. Earl R. Wasserman, *Shelley: A Critical Reading* (Baltimore, MA: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971), p. 211. [↑](#footnote-ref-435)
436. O’Neill points up ‘Demogorgon’s genderless state’ in his essay, ‘Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*’ in *A Companion to Romanticism*, ed. by Duncan Wu (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 1998; repr. 1999), 259-268 (p. 261). Similarly, Jerrold E. Hogle’s analysis of *Prometheus Unbound* refers to Demogorgon as ‘he (or it)’, elucidating upon the ambiguity of its gender, *Shelley’s Process: Radical Transference and the Development of His Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 186. [↑](#footnote-ref-436)
437. Leader and O’Neill, *Major Works*, p. 749n. [↑](#footnote-ref-437)
438. Curran, *Shelley’s Annus Mirabilis*, p. 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-438)
439. Wasserman, *Shelley: A Critical Reading*, p. 291. [↑](#footnote-ref-439)
440. Wasserman, *Shelley: A Critical Reading,* p. 289. [↑](#footnote-ref-440)
441. Quoted in Wasserman, *Shelley: A Critical Reading,* p. 289. [↑](#footnote-ref-441)
442. *Major Works*, p. 748n. [↑](#footnote-ref-442)
443. *Major Works*, p. 748n. [↑](#footnote-ref-443)
444. ‘Demogorgon’s cave—where man’s life is an unending union with his own feminine nature that ultimately, like Milton’s angels who assume either sex at will, is free of all restraints’, Woodman, ‘The Androgyne in *Prometheus Unbound*’, pp. 237 and 243. [↑](#footnote-ref-444)
445. John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Oxford World’s Classics, ed. by Stephen Orgel and Jonathan Goldberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-445)
446. W. B. Yeats, ‘*Prometheus Unbound*’ in *Essays and Introductions* (New York, NY: The MacMillan Company, 1961), p. 420. [↑](#footnote-ref-446)
447. Woodman, ‘The Androgyne in *Prometheus Unbound*’, p. 244. [↑](#footnote-ref-447)
448. Lucy Newlyn, *Paradise Lost and the Romantic Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. ix. [↑](#footnote-ref-448)
449. Wasserman, *Shelley: A Critical Reading*, p. 275. [↑](#footnote-ref-449)
450. Wasserman, *Shelley: A Critical Reading*, p. 272. [↑](#footnote-ref-450)
451. Curran, *Shelley’s Annus Mirabilis*, p. 110. [↑](#footnote-ref-451)
452. Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. by David Wills (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-452)
453. M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1971), p. 304. [↑](#footnote-ref-453)
454. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, p. 302. [↑](#footnote-ref-454)
455. Ulmer, *Shelleyan Eros*, p. 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-455)
456. Keach, ‘The political poet’, *The Cambridge Companion to Shelley*, p. 134. [↑](#footnote-ref-456)
457. Curran, *Shelley’s Annus Mirabilis*, pp. 46 and 60. [↑](#footnote-ref-457)
458. Rajan, ‘Deconstruction or Reconstruction’, p. 325. [↑](#footnote-ref-458)
459. Rajan, ‘Deconstruction or Reconstruction’, p. 328. [↑](#footnote-ref-459)
460. Curran, *Shelley’s Annus Mirabilis*, pp. 51-52. [↑](#footnote-ref-460)
461. When Jupiter first perceives Demogorgon’s presence in Heaven, he exclaims: ‘Awful shape, what art thou? Speak!’, to which Demogorgon replies: ‘Eternity. Demand no direr name’, (3.1.51-52). [↑](#footnote-ref-461)
462. Curran points up the essential passivity of Shelley’s poetic philosophy in *Shelley’s Annus Mirabilis*, p. 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-462)
463. Stuart Curran, *Poetic Form and British Romanticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 202. [↑](#footnote-ref-463)
464. ‘The first of these is in the exchange of Ocean and Apollo, ancient Titan and young god, not in this resolutely humanist work to be construed as deities but rather as primal elements, water and fire, no longer in contention.’ Curran, *Poetic Form and British Romanticism*, p. 201. [↑](#footnote-ref-464)
465. Keach, ‘The political poet’, p. 138. [↑](#footnote-ref-465)
466. Mary Shelley, ‘Note on *Prometheus Unbound*’, *The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, II, p. 135. [↑](#footnote-ref-466)
467. Wasserman, *Shelley: A Critical Reading*, p. 371. [↑](#footnote-ref-467)
468. Ross Greig Woodman, *The Apocalyptic Vision in the Poetry of Shelley* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964), p. ix. [↑](#footnote-ref-468)
469. Curran, *Shelley’s Annus Mirabilis*, p. 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-469)
470. For a summary of the usage and contrast between time and eternity in *Prometheus Unbound*, see Earl R. Wasserman’s chapter, ‘The Far Goal of Time’, in *Shelley: A Critical Reading*. [↑](#footnote-ref-470)
471. Yeats, ‘The Philosophy of Shelley’s Poetry’ in *Essays and Introductions*, p. 90. [↑](#footnote-ref-471)
472. Stuart Curran, equating Apollo with Lucifer and Asia with Venus, states that: ‘Now that Lucifer has regained his rightful seat in the day star, he becomes indistinguishable from the great goddess who is the evening star, Venus, even as at last Prometheus and Asia are joined in eternal love’, *Shelley’s Annus Mirabilis*, p. 60. Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi reconciles both the morning and evening star in the image of Venus; she states: ‘In Sumerian, Greek, and Roman mythologies, Venus [acts] as both morning and evening star…Her power manifests itself in the star’s dual gender: the Babylonians described the morning star as the “male Venus” and the evening star as the “female Venus”; or both morning and evening stars might be given masculine names—Lucifer, Phosphorus, Hesperus—yet be associated with Venus’, *Shelley’s Goddess*, p. 176. [↑](#footnote-ref-472)
473. Jarvis, ‘Why Rhyme Pleases’, p. 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-473)
474. Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, p. 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-474)
475. Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, p. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-475)
476. Wasserman, *Shelley: A Critical Reading*, p. 371. [↑](#footnote-ref-476)
477. For an additional reading on the role of the reader in *Prometheus Unbound*, see Andrew Franta, who asserts that: ‘the transformation Shelley imagines in *Prometheus Unbound* is, in an important sense, left to the reader to realize’ in *Romanticism and the Rise of the Mass Public* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 160. [↑](#footnote-ref-477)
478. See Shelley’s ‘Essay on the Literature, the Arts, and the Manners of the Athenians’ wherein he discusses society’s improvement as contingent on ‘the abolition of slavery’, where slavery includes ‘the inferiority of women’. Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments*, ed. by Mary Shelley, 2 vols(London: Edward Moxon, 1852), I, p. 56. Additionally, see Nathaniel Brown’s *Sexuality and Feminism in Shelley*, wherein he posits that: ‘The liberation of women occupies a central position in all three of [Shelley’s] major verse forecasts of futurity’. These major works are: *Queen Mab*, *Prometheus Unbound*, and the *Revolt of Islam* (*Laon and Cythna*). (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 180. [↑](#footnote-ref-478)
479. Stuart Curran, ‘The Political Prometheus’, *Studies in Romanticism*, 25.3 (1986), 429-455 (p. 455). [↑](#footnote-ref-479)
480. In this assertion I both concur with and depart from Jean Hall’s claim that the Witch ‘is the protagonist of her poem. The others are the visions of the poems’ heroes, men who briefly glimpse the ideal and are drawn into a passionate, poetic search for it’, ‘Poetic Autonomy’ in *The New Shelley: Later Twentieth-Century Views*, ed. by G. Kim Blank (London: Macmillan, 1991), 204-219 (p. 209). [↑](#footnote-ref-480)
481. *The Witch of Atlas* is quoted from *The Poems of Shelley*, ed. by Jack Donovan, Cian Duffy, Kelvin Everest, and Michael Rossington with the assistance of Laura Barlow, 5 vols to date (New York: NY and London: Routledge, 1989-), III, 552-618. [↑](#footnote-ref-481)
482. Michael O’Neill, ‘“And all things seem only one”: the Shelleyan Lyric’ in *Percy Bysshe Shelley: Bicentenary Essays and Studies 1992*, ed. by Kelvin Everest for the English Association (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1992), 115-131 (p. 118). [↑](#footnote-ref-482)
483. Critics often posit that the Witch is representative of the poet, the poem, or poetry more broadly, or an ambiguous alternation between the poet and the poem or poetry. For example, Hugh Roberts notes that the Witch ‘seems to represent poetry’ in general, and Richard Cronin states that the Witch ‘represent[s] the visionary rhyme’ itself. Alternatively, David Rubin claims that: ‘If the Witch may be called the poet, then the Hermaphroditus is the poem,’ and Diane Long Hoeveler views ‘[t]he Witch as muse, like Shelley the poet’. More recently, Madeleine Callaghan has asserted that the Witch is a ‘figure representing poetry or its effects, [and] is complicated by appearing as a kind of poet in parts of the poem’. Hugh Roberts, *Shelley and the Chaos of History: A New Politics of Poetry* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), p. 328; Richard Cronin, *Shelley’s Poetic Thoughts* (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, 1981), p. 74; David Rubin, ‘A Study of Antinomies in Shelley’s *The Witch of Atlas*’, *Studies in Romanticism*, 8.4 (1969), 216-228 (p. 227); Diane Long Hoeveler, *Romantic Androgyny: The Women Within* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1979), p. 251; Madeleine Callaghan*, Shelley’s Living Artistry: Letters, Poems, Plays* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017), p. 181. [↑](#footnote-ref-483)
484. Hoeveler, *Romantic Androgyny*, pp. 22-23. [↑](#footnote-ref-484)
485. Mary Shelley, ‘Note on *The Witch of Atlas*’ in *The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. by Mary Shelley, 4 vols (London: Edward Moxon, 1839), IV, pp. 51-52. [↑](#footnote-ref-485)
486. Hoeveler, *Romantic Androgyny*, p. 255; Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. by Frederick L. Jones, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964). [↑](#footnote-ref-486)
487. Michael O’Neill also observes a correlation between the Witch and the Fourth Spirit; see ‘Fictions, Visionary Rhyme and Human Interest: A Reading of Shelley’s *The Witch of Atlas*’, *The Keats-Shelley Review*, 2.1 (1987), 105-133 (p. 123). [↑](#footnote-ref-487)
488. Harold Bloom, *The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1971), p. 323. [↑](#footnote-ref-488)
489. I adopt the term ‘interanimation’ from Ross Wilson, who uses it to describe how ‘the poem only lives in the reader’s reading, but that, at the same time, the reader is brought more fully to life by the poem’. Ross Wilson, *Shelley and the Apprehension of Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-489)
490. While the editors gloss ‘satellite’ as being ‘[u]sed in its Latin sense of “attendant or guard”’, the luminosity afforded by ‘light’ seems to me to also be metaphorically imaging the nymphs as satellites in the astronomical sense. This reading would foreshadow the immortal Witch’s approximation to ‘the surviving Sun’ in stanza 24, *The Poems of Shelley*, III, p. 591n. [↑](#footnote-ref-490)
491. O’Neill, ‘Fictions, Visionary Rhyme’, p. 127. [↑](#footnote-ref-491)
492. Harold Bloom, *Shelley’s Mythmaking* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1959), p. 165. [↑](#footnote-ref-492)
493. Jack Donovan, ‘The Storyteller’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Shelley*, ed. by Timothy Morton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006; repr. 2008), 85-103 (p. 85). [↑](#footnote-ref-493)
494. Michael O’Neill, ‘Shelley’s Defences of Poetry’, *The Wordsworth Circle*, 43.1 (2012), 20-25 (p. 20). [↑](#footnote-ref-494)
495. O’Neill, ‘Shelley’s Defences of Poetry’, p. 20 [↑](#footnote-ref-495)
496. Laura Claridge, ‘The Bifurcated Female Space of Desire: Shelley’s Confrontation with Language and Silence’ in *Out of Bounds: Male Writers and Gender(ed) Criticism*, ed. by Laura Claridge and Elizabeth Langland (Amherst, MA: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1990), 92-109 (p. 105). [↑](#footnote-ref-496)
497. Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi, ‘The Politics of Androgyny’, *Women’s Studies*, 2 (1974), 151-160 (p. 151) and Diane Long Hoeveler, *Romantic Androgyny: The Women Within* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1979), pp. 250-251. [↑](#footnote-ref-497)
498. Ross Woodman, ‘The Androgyne in *Prometheus Unbound*’, *Studies in Romanticism*, 20.2 (1981), 225-247 (pp. 234-36 and p. 239). [↑](#footnote-ref-498)
499. William Crisman, ‘Psychological Realism and Narrative Manner in Shelley’s *Alastor* and *The Witch of Atlas*’, *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 35 (1986), 126-148 (p. 132). [↑](#footnote-ref-499)
500. Crisman, ‘Psychological Realism and Narrative Manner in Shelley’s *Alastor* and *The Witch of Atlas*’, pp. 131-132. [↑](#footnote-ref-500)
501. Jerrold E. Hogle, ‘Metaphor and Metamorphosis in Shelley’s *The Witch of Atlas*’, *Studies in Romanticism*, 19.3 (1980), 327-353 (p. 329). [↑](#footnote-ref-501)
502. Rubin, ‘A Study of Antinomies in Shelley’s *The Witch of Atlas*’, p. 220. [↑](#footnote-ref-502)
503. Stuart Curran, *Shelley’s Annus Mirabilis*: *The Maturing of an Epic Vision* (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1975), p. 60. [↑](#footnote-ref-503)
504. William Keach, ‘Reflexive Imagery in Shelley’, *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 24 (1975), 49-69 (p. 58). [↑](#footnote-ref-504)
505. Rubin, ‘A Study of Antinomies in Shelley’s *The Witch of Atlas*’, p. 220. [↑](#footnote-ref-505)
506. Callaghan, *Shelley’s Living Artistry*, p. 175. [↑](#footnote-ref-506)
507. Crisman, ‘Psychological Realism and Narrative Manner in Shelley’s *Alastor* and *The Witch of Atlas*’, p. 132. [↑](#footnote-ref-507)
508. Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi, *Shelley’s Goddess: Maternity, Language, Subjectivity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 218. [↑](#footnote-ref-508)
509. Stuart Sperry, *Shelley’s Major Verse: The Narrative and Dramatic Poetry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 100. [↑](#footnote-ref-509)
510. Rubin, ‘A Study of Antinomies in Shelley’s *The Witch of Atlas*’, p. 219. [↑](#footnote-ref-510)
511. Crisman, ‘Psychological Realism and Narrative Manner in Shelley’s *Alastor* and *The Witch of Atlas*’, p. 147. [↑](#footnote-ref-511)
512. Claridge, ‘The Bifurcated Female Space of Desire: Shelley’s Confrontation with Language and Silence’, p. 105. [↑](#footnote-ref-512)
513. Rubin, ‘A Study of Antinomies in Shelley’s *The Witch of Atlas*’, p. 222. [↑](#footnote-ref-513)
514. Milton Wilson, *Shelley’s Later Poetry: A Study of His Prophetic Imagination* (New York: Columbia UP, 1957; repr. 1961), pp. 265-266. [↑](#footnote-ref-514)
515. See Leigh Hunt’s statement that ‘*The Witch of Atlas* will be liked by none but poets, or very poetical readers’. Leigh Hunt, *Lord Byron and Some of his Contemporaries* (London: Henry Colburn, 1828), p. 212. [↑](#footnote-ref-515)
516. O’Neill, ‘Fictions, Visionary Rhyme and Human Interest’, p. 110. [↑](#footnote-ref-516)
517. William Hazlitt, ‘Shelley’s *Posthumous Poems*’, *Edinburgh Review*, July 1824, p. 502 in *The Romantics Reviewed: Contemporary Reviews of British Romantic Writers*, ed. by Donald H. Reiman, Part C, 2 vols (New York, NY: Garland, 1972), I, p. 403. [↑](#footnote-ref-517)
518. *The Poems of Shelley*, III, pp. 561-562. [↑](#footnote-ref-518)
519. Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi, ‘The Politics of Androgyny’, p. 151. [↑](#footnote-ref-519)
520. Simon Jarvis, ‘Why Rhyme Pleases’, *Thinking Verse*, 1 (2011), 17-43 (p. 18). [↑](#footnote-ref-520)
521. Claridge, ‘The Bifurcated Female Space of Desire: Shelley’s Confrontation with Language and Silence’, p. 105. [↑](#footnote-ref-521)
522. Jarvis, ‘Why Rhyme Pleases’, p. 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-522)
523. Bloom, *Shelley’s Mythmaking*, p. 167. [↑](#footnote-ref-523)
524. O’Neill, ‘Shelley has come a long and increasingly solitary way since *The Revolt of Islam*, the far more polemical “winged Vision” alluded to in line 17…also preceded by introductory stanzas to Mary—stanzas, though, which represent the poet and his wife as comrades in ideological arms’, ‘Fictions, Visionary Rhyme and Human Interest: A Reading of Shelley’s *The Witch of Atlas*’, p. 118. [↑](#footnote-ref-524)
525. Rubin, ‘A Study of Antinomies in Shelley’s *The Witch of Atlas*’, p. 219. [↑](#footnote-ref-525)
526. Ross, ‘Shelley’s Wayward Dream-Poem: The Apprehending Reader in *Prometheus Unbound*’, p. 122. [↑](#footnote-ref-526)
527. Glenn O’Malley, ‘Shelley’s “Air-Prism”: The Synesthetic Scheme of *Alastor*’, *Modern Philology*, 55.3 (1958), p. 179. Also, for a discussion of fire and water in *The Witch of Atlas*, see Rubin, ‘A Study of Antimonies in Shelley’s *Witch of Atlas*’. [↑](#footnote-ref-527)
528. Hugh Roberts, *Shelley and the Chaos of History* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), p. 337. [↑](#footnote-ref-528)
529. See Luc Brisson for the androgynous implications of the phoenix, ‘the bird of fable that repeatedly gave itself life, since it was at once its own father and its own mother’, *Sexual Ambivalence: Androgyny and Hermaphroditism in Graeco-Roman Antiquity*, trans. by Janet Lloyd (Berkley and Los Angeles, CA and London: University of California Press, 2002), p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-529)
530. Paul Valéry, ‘Poetry and Abstract Thought’, *The American Poetry Review*, 36.2 (2007), 61-66 (p. 64). [↑](#footnote-ref-530)
531. O’Neill, ‘Fictions, Visionary Rhyme and Human Interest: A Reading of Shelley’s *The Witch of Atlas*’, p. 110. [↑](#footnote-ref-531)
532. Roberts, *Shelley and the Chaos of History*, pp. 341-342. [↑](#footnote-ref-532)
533. Stuart Curran, *Shelley’s Annus Mirabilis*, p. 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-533)
534. Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 1964, repr. 1973), pp. 59-60. [↑](#footnote-ref-534)
535. Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi, ‘The Nursery Cave: Shelley and the Maternal’, in *The New Shelley: Later Twentieth-Century Views*, ed. by G. Kim Blank (London: Macmillan, 1991), 42-63 (p. 58). [↑](#footnote-ref-535)
536. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Reverie: Childhood, Language, and the Cosmos*, trans. by Daniel Russell (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 58. [↑](#footnote-ref-536)
537. Bachelard, *The Poetics of Reverie*, p. 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-537)
538. Carlos Baker, *Shelley’s Major Poetry: The Fabric of a Vision* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1948), p. 207. [↑](#footnote-ref-538)
539. Samuel Lyndon Gladden, ‘Mary Shelley’s Editions of *The Collected Poems of Percy Bysshe Shelley*: The Editor as Subject’, *Studies in Romanticism*, 44.2 (2005), p. 195. [↑](#footnote-ref-539)
540. Mary Shelley, ‘Note on *The Witch of Atlas*’, p. 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-540)
541. O’Neill, ‘Fictions, Visionary Rhyme and Human Interest: A Reading of Shelley’s *The Witch of Atlas*’, p. 117. [↑](#footnote-ref-541)
542. Mary Shelley, ‘Note on *The Witch of Atlas*’, p. 53. [↑](#footnote-ref-542)
543. Lucy Newlyn, *Paradise Lost and the Romantic Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. ix. [↑](#footnote-ref-543)
544. Stephen C. Behrendt, *Shelley and His Audiences* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), pp. 233-234. [↑](#footnote-ref-544)
545. Bloom, *The Visionary Company*, p. 323. [↑](#footnote-ref-545)
546. Kelvin Everest, ‘Shelley and His Contemporaries’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. by Michael O’Neill and Anthony Howe with the assistance of Madeleine Callaghan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 513-529 (p. 528). [↑](#footnote-ref-546)
547. Timothy Webb, ‘Shelley and the Ambivalence of Laughter’, in *Percy Bysshe Shelley: Bicentenary Essays*, ed. by Kelvin Everest (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1992), 43-62 (p. 62). [↑](#footnote-ref-547)
548. Hazlitt, ‘Shelley’s *Posthumous Poems*’, p. 502. [↑](#footnote-ref-548)
549. O’Neill, ‘Fictions, Visionary Rhyme and Human Interest’, p. 109. [↑](#footnote-ref-549)
550. Jerrold E. Hogle, ‘Shelley’s Poetics: The Power as Metaphor’, *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 31 (1982), 159-197 (p. 170). [↑](#footnote-ref-550)
551. Bachelard, *The Poetics of Reverie*, p. 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-551)
552. Bachelard, *The Poetics of Reverie*, p. 60. [↑](#footnote-ref-552)
553. Bloom, *The Visionary Company*, p. 335. [↑](#footnote-ref-553)
554. Callaghan, *Shelley’s Living Artistry*, p. 175. [↑](#footnote-ref-554)
555. Bachelard, *The Poetics of Reverie*, p. 91. [↑](#footnote-ref-555)
556. Hoeveler, *Romantic Androgyny*, pp. 250-251. [↑](#footnote-ref-556)
557. Matthew Ward, ‘Laughter as Sympathy in Percy Shelley’s Poetics’, *The Cambridge Quarterly*, 44.2 (2015), 146-165 (pp. 152-153). [↑](#footnote-ref-557)
558. Christine Gallant, *Shelley’s Ambivalence*, (Hong Kong and London: MacMillan Press, Ltd, 1989), pp. 139-140. [↑](#footnote-ref-558)
559. Callaghan, *Shelley’s Living Artistry*, p. 181. [↑](#footnote-ref-559)
560. Bachelard, *The Poetics of Reverie*, pp. 20 and 99. [↑](#footnote-ref-560)
561. Bachelard, *The Poetics of Reverie*, p. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-561)
562. A. J. L. Busst, ‘The Image of the Androgyne in the Nineteenth Century’, in *Romantic Mythologies*, ed. by Ian Fletcher (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967), p. 1 and Nathaniel Brown, *Sexuality and Feminism in Shelley* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-562)
563. Gelpi, ‘The Politics of Androgyny’, p. 151. [↑](#footnote-ref-563)
564. Richard Cronin, ‘Shelley’s *Witch of Atlas*’, *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 26 (1977), 88-100 (p. 97). [↑](#footnote-ref-564)
565. Jean Watson Rosenbaum, ‘Shelley’s Witch: The Naked Conception’, *Concerning Poetry*, 10 (1977), 33-43 (pp. 41 and 40). [↑](#footnote-ref-565)
566. Harold Bloom, ‘The Unpastured Sea: An Introduction to Shelley’, in *Romanticism and Consciousness: Essays in Criticism*, ed. by Harold Bloom, (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 1970), 374-401 (p. 393). [↑](#footnote-ref-566)
567. Harold Bloom, ‘The Unpastured Sea: An Introduction to Shelley’, p. 393. [↑](#footnote-ref-567)
568. Andelys Wood, ‘Shelley’s Ironic Vision: *The Witch of Atlas*’, *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 29 (1980), 67-82 (p. 78). [↑](#footnote-ref-568)
569. Hoeveler, *Romantic Androgyny*, pp. 256 and 250. [↑](#footnote-ref-569)
570. ‘From at least 1819 Shelley is fascinated by how the ludic might proffer a way towards the cognitive transformation he pursued for his readers’, Ward, ‘Laughter as Sympathy in Percy Shelley’s Poetics’, p. 152. [↑](#footnote-ref-570)
571. Bachelard, *The Poetics of Reverie*, p. 150. [↑](#footnote-ref-571)
572. Cronin, ‘Shelley’s *Witch of Atlas*’, p. 94. [↑](#footnote-ref-572)
573. ‘[T]he pleasure resulting from the manner in which [poets] express the influence of society or nature upon their own minds, communicates itself to others, and gathers a sort of reduplication from that community’, (*A Defence of Poetry*, p. 676). [↑](#footnote-ref-573)
574. Wood, ‘Shelley’s Ironic Vision: *The Witch of Atlas*’, p. 71. [↑](#footnote-ref-574)
575. Susan J. Wolfson, *Formal Charges: The Shaping of Poetry in British Romanticism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 195. [↑](#footnote-ref-575)
576. Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. by Frederick L. Jones, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964). [↑](#footnote-ref-576)
577. Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi, ‘The Politics of Androgyny’, *Women’s Studies*, 2 (1974), 151-160 (p. 151). [↑](#footnote-ref-577)
578. All of which Shelley translated. See James A. Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley: A Study of Platonism and the Poetic Mind* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1949), on Shelley’s readings and translations from Plato. [↑](#footnote-ref-578)
579. I will hereafter refer to Plato’s *Symposium* as *The Banquet* excepting circumstances where I am not discussing Shelley’s translation. *The Banquet* and all accompanying compositions are quoted from James A. Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley: A Study of Platonism and the Poetic Mind* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1949) unless stated otherwise. [↑](#footnote-ref-579)
580. My use of the term ‘transference’ is indebted to Jerrold E. Hogle’s pioneering term, ‘radical transference’, which ‘emphasize[s] the inversions and radical reorientations that occur when one Shelleyan image or phrase is transformed by an adjacent figuration’, Jerrold E. Hogle, *Shelley’s Process: Radical Transference and the Development of His Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-580)
581. I follow Stuart Curran’s bold assertion that there is ‘no basis for reading the poem within the biographical strait-jacket that scholarly diligence has devised for it. Indeed, as the poem was published anonymously, most readers would have had no familiarity with the poet at all’, ‘*Epipsychidion*, Dante, and the Renewable Life’ in *Dante and Italy in British Romanticism*, ed. by Frederick Burwick and Paul Douglass (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 99. [↑](#footnote-ref-581)
582. Diane Long Hoeveler, *Romantic Androgyny: The Women Within* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1979), pp. 22-23. [↑](#footnote-ref-582)
583. Hoeveler, *Romantic Androgyny*, p. 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-583)
584. Kari Weil, *Androgyny and the Denial of Difference* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1992), p. 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-584)
585. Hoeveler, *Romantic Androgyny*, p. 139. [↑](#footnote-ref-585)
586. Madeleine Callaghan, ‘Shelley in Eternity’, *Essays in Criticism*, 68.3 (2018), 308-326 (p. 318). [↑](#footnote-ref-586)
587. Mary Shelley, *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, ed. by Betty T. Bennett, 3 vols (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980-1988), I, p. 223. [↑](#footnote-ref-587)
588. *BSM XVIII: The ‘Homeric Hymns’ and ‘Prometheus’ Drafts Notebook*, ed. by Nancy Moore Goslee (New York, NY: Garland, 1996), p. xxxiv. [↑](#footnote-ref-588)
589. Newell Ford, ‘The Wit in Shelley’s Poetry’, *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 1.4 (1961), 1-22 (pp. 1, 6, and 5). [↑](#footnote-ref-589)
590. Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley*, p. 278. [↑](#footnote-ref-590)
591. ‘[T]he serpent with its tail in its mouth…is one of the earliest of the androgynous symbols…it represents eternity, being circular, but because it contains in itself the male and female members, it is also androgynous’, Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 1964, repr. 1973), p. 59. [↑](#footnote-ref-591)
592. D. J. Hughes, ‘Coherence and Collapse in Shelley, with Particular Reference to *Epipsychidion*’, *ELH* (28.3), 1961, 260-283 (p. 262). [↑](#footnote-ref-592)
593. Heilbrun, *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny*, p. 60. [↑](#footnote-ref-593)
594. ‘[T]he amphisbaena’s first appearance in literature, as a terrestrial counterpart…when the Aeschylean Cassandra seeks a suitable *comparandum* for Clytemnestra’, Stephanie West, ‘The Amphisbaena’s Antecedents’, *The Classical Quarterly* (56.1), 2006, 290-291 (p. 291). [↑](#footnote-ref-594)
595. Angela Leighton, ‘Love, Writing and Scepticism in *Epipsychidion*’ in *The New Shelley: Later Twentieth-Century Views*, ed. by G. Kim Blank (London: Macmillan, 1991), 220-241 (p. 239). [↑](#footnote-ref-595)
596. Stephen Behrendt, *Shelley and His Audiences* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), p. 230. [↑](#footnote-ref-596)
597. David Rubin posits the Witch as poet and the Hermaphrodite as poem, while Madeleine Callaghan considers that ‘[t]he Witch, though a figure representing poetry or its effects, is complicated by appearing as a kind of poet in parts of the poem’. David Rubin, ‘A Study of Antinomies in Shelley’s *The Witch of Atlas*’, *Studies in Romanticism*, 8.4 (1969), 216-228 (p. 227) and Madeleine Callaghan*, Shelley’s Living Artistry: Letters, Poems, Plays* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017), p. 181. Leighton, ‘Love, Writing and Scepticism in *Epipsychidion*’, p. 225. [↑](#footnote-ref-597)
598. Michael O’Neill, ‘Emulating Plato: Shelley as a Translator and Prose Poet’ in *The Unfamiliar Shelley*, ed. by Alan M. Weinberg and Timothy Webb (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2008), 239-255 (p. 241). [↑](#footnote-ref-598)
599. S. T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. by James Engell and W. Jackson Bate. 2 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), II, Ch. 14, pp. 13-14, quoted in O’Neill, ‘Emulating Plato: Shelley as a Translator and Prose Poet’, p. 240. [↑](#footnote-ref-599)
600. ‘We read forward, we rhyme backwards’, Gillian Beer, ‘Rhyming as Comedy: Body, Ghost, and Banquet’ in *English Comedy*, ed. by Michael Cordner, Peter Holland, and John Kerrigan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 180-196 (p. 181). [↑](#footnote-ref-600)
601. *BSM XVIII: The ‘Homeric Hymns’ and ‘Prometheus’ Drafts Notebook*, ed. by Nancy Moore Goslee (New York, NY: Garland, 1996), p. xlv. [↑](#footnote-ref-601)
602. Nancy Moore Goslee, *Shelley’s Visual Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 147. [↑](#footnote-ref-602)
603. *BSM XVIII: The ‘Homeric Hymns’ and ‘Prometheus’ Drafts Notebook*, ed. by Nancy Moore Goslee (New York, NY: Garland, 1996), 4-7a, p. 67. [↑](#footnote-ref-603)
604. Alan M. Weinberg writes that Mary and Claire first ‘visit[ed] St Anna [the convent where Emilia was confined] on 29 November 1820. Soon after, Shelley himself made the first of many visits’, *Shelley’s Italian Experience* (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, 1991), p. 135. [↑](#footnote-ref-604)
605. Goslee, *Shelley’s Visual Imagination*, p. 146. [↑](#footnote-ref-605)
606. See, for instance, *PBS Letters*, II, p. 447. [↑](#footnote-ref-606)
607. In 1821, Shelley writes to Thomas Jefferson Hogg: ‘I knew a very interesting Italian lady last winter, but she is now married; which, to quote our friend Peacock, is you know, the same as being dead’, *PBS Letters*, II, p. 360. [↑](#footnote-ref-607)
608. Hoeveler, *Romantic Androgyny*, p. 251. [↑](#footnote-ref-608)
609. Hoeveler, *Romantic Androgyny*, p. 251. [↑](#footnote-ref-609)
610. In a comparative study of the Greek text and Shelley’s English translation, Stephanie Nelson reveals how Shelley embellishes and gives eloquence to Agathon’s speech. Nelson writes: ‘Agathon, for Shelley, as not for Plato, was deeply serious’, Stephanie Nelson, ‘Shelley and Plato’s *Symposium*: The Poet’s Revenge’, *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, 14.1-2 (2007), 100-129 (p. 118). [↑](#footnote-ref-610)
611. Rodolphe Gasché, ‘Reading Chiasms: An Introduction’ in Andrzej Warminski, *Readings in Interpretation: Hölderlin, Hegel, Heidegger* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. xvii. [↑](#footnote-ref-611)
612. Gasché, ‘Reading Chiasms: An Introduction’, p. xvii. [↑](#footnote-ref-612)
613. Gasché, ‘Reading Chiasms: An Introduction’, pp. xviii-xix and xxii. [↑](#footnote-ref-613)
614. Kenneth Neil Cameron, ‘The Planet-Tempest Passage in *Epipsychidion*’, *PMLA*, 63.3 (1948), 950-972 (pp. 950-972). [↑](#footnote-ref-614)
615. Callaghan, ‘Shelley in Eternity’, p. 316. [↑](#footnote-ref-615)
616. K. D. Verma’s Jungian reading of *Epipsychidion* allows for ‘the annihilation of ego, the non-self’ and ‘the recovery of the anima’ where ‘Emily as poem, art and Idea converges into the unity of mind and spirit’. I do not agree with Verma’s point that the poem results in resolved unity; however, Verma’s assertion that ‘the total structure of the poem contains three main units’ that ‘are not linear but concentric and simultaneous progressions’ offers a compelling alternative to a linear narrative. K. D. Verma, *The Vision of “love’s rare universe”: A Study of Shelley’s* Epipsychidion (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1995), pp. 6, 2, and 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-616)
617. Geoffrey Ward rejects an entirely linear and autobiographical reading but notes that the second section ‘returns to narratives of the past’, where it is framed on either side by ‘tendentious failure’. For Ward, the first section finds movement through a multiplicity of metaphorical transferences while the final section, rather than beckoning to the future, ‘simply ceases to proceed’. Geoffrey Ward, ‘Transforming Presence: Poetic Idealism in *Prometheus Unbound* and *Epipsychidion*’ in *Essays on Shelley*, ed. by Miriam Allott (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1982), 191-212 (pp. 209, 206, and 211). [↑](#footnote-ref-617)
618. Bernard Beatty, ‘The Transformation of Discourse: *Epipsychidion*, *Adonais*, and Some Lyrics’ in *Essays on Shelley*, ed. by Miriam Allott (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1982), 213-238 (p. 219). [↑](#footnote-ref-618)
619. Callaghan, *Shelley’s Living Artistry*, p. 210. [↑](#footnote-ref-619)
620. David K. O’Connor, ‘Platonic Selves in Shelley and Stevens’ in *Plato’s Symposium: Issues in Interpretation and Reception*, ed. by J. H. Lesher, Debra Nails, and Fisbee C. C. Sheffield (Washington D. C.: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2006), 360-375 (pp. 367 and 370). [↑](#footnote-ref-620)
621. Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi notes that, in *Prometheus Unbound*, ‘[ivy] merges and unifies dual sexual characteristics, since it is bisexual. That in plants is not unusual, but the ivy’s duality-in-unity is particularly striking. As Shelley knew (see “Adonais,” l. 292), the ivy is sacred to Dionysus’, *Shelley’s Goddess: Maternity, Language, Subjectivity* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 161, and Weil identifies ‘[t]he sign of Aphrodite in the violets of [Alcibiades’] crown’, *Androgyny and the Denial of Difference*, p. 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-621)
622. Judith Butler and Catherine Malabou, ‘You Be My Body for Me: Body, Shape, and Plasticity in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*’ in *A Companion to Hegel*, ed. by Stephen Houlgate and Michael Baur (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), ‘Must the self remain attached to itself to shape itself? Must the self detach from itself to shape itself, and how are we to understand the resulting “plasticity” (Malabou’s term) as a figure for absolute knowledge, but also, clearly, in relation to the body: to be this being here and to be that being elsewhere, partially both and fully neither, as the essential condition of becoming?’, p. 611. [↑](#footnote-ref-622)
623. Malabou, ‘You Be My Body for Me: Body, Shape, and Plasticity in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*’, p. 613. [↑](#footnote-ref-623)
624. Teddi Lynn Chichester, ‘Love, Sexuality, Gender’ in *The Oxford Handbook of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. by Michael O’Neill and Anthony Howe with Madeleine Callaghan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 132-147 (p. 146). [↑](#footnote-ref-624)
625. See Nora Crook and Derek Guiton, *Shelley’s Venomed Melody* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), who assert that ‘critics such as Cameron, Holmes, and Brown have stressed the essentially sexual nature of the love celebrated in the poem, a view with which we are in agreement’, p. 146. Also, see James Bieri, *Percy Bysshe Shelley: A Biography: Exile of Unfulfilled Reknown, 1816-1822* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2005), who claims that ‘[Shelley’s] description of sexual intercourse with [Emilia] in *Epipsychidion* is the most vivid erotic encounter in his poetry’, p. 221. [↑](#footnote-ref-625)
626. On the ‘“She” of line 72’, D. J. Hughes writes: ‘This figure cannot be identified with Emilia, though by the end of this third apostrophe the identification will be made. It is best, I think, to regard this figure as the familiar presence of Intellectual Beauty’, ‘Coherence and Collapse in Shelley, with Particular Reference to *Epipsychidion*’, p. 267. Michael O’Neill claims that ‘we have, in reading, to give up the notion that we can identify Emily by seeing her as a solely a person or merely an idea (such as an incarnation of Intellectual Beauty;]’, ‘Shelley’s Defences of Poetry’, *The Wordsworth Circle*, 43.1 (2012), 20-25 (p. 23). [↑](#footnote-ref-626)
627. Curran, ‘*Epipsychidion*, Dante, and the Renewable Life’, p. 102. [↑](#footnote-ref-627)
628. For more details on the repurposing of fragments in *Epipsychidion*, see Tatsuo Tokoo, ‘The Composition of *Epipsychidion*: Some Manuscript Evidence’, *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 42 (1993), 97-103. [↑](#footnote-ref-628)
629. Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley*, p. 393. [↑](#footnote-ref-629)
630. Shelley, ‘Preface to the Banquet of Plato’, p. 402. [↑](#footnote-ref-630)
631. Michael O’Neill and Zachary Leader date *A Defence of Poetry*’s composition as from February to March 1821, noting that *Epipsychidion* was ‘[f]inished by 16 February 1821’, *The Major Works*, pp. 828n and 795n. [↑](#footnote-ref-631)
632. Shelley, ‘Preface to the Banquet of Plato’, p. 402. See also *A Defence of Poetry* where Shelley claims that ‘Plato was essentially a poet’, p. 679. Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley*, p. 394. [↑](#footnote-ref-632)
633. See Nelson, ‘Shelley and Plato’s *Symposium*: The Poet’s Revenge’, 100-129, David K. O’Connor, ed., Plato, *The Symposium of Plato: The Shelley Translation*, trans. by Percy Bysshe Shelley (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 2002), and Michael O’Neill, ‘“The Whole Mechanism of the Drama”: Shelley’s Translation of Plato’s *Symposium*’, *Keats-Shelley Review*, 18.1 (2004), 51-67. [↑](#footnote-ref-633)
634. O’Neill, ‘“The Whole Mechanism of the Drama”: Shelley’s Translation of Plato’s *Symposium*’, p. 242. [↑](#footnote-ref-634)
635. Percy Bysshe Shelley, Bodleian MS. Shelley adds. e. 8, 11-12a, p. 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-635)
636. Bodleian MS. Shelley adds. e. 8, 14a-15, p. 48. [↑](#footnote-ref-636)
637. See Kelvin Everest, ‘*Athanase*’, *The Keats-Shelley Review*, 7.1 (1992), 62-84. [↑](#footnote-ref-637)
638. Thomas Hutchinson, ed., *The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1912), p. 156. For issues of the poem’s title and dating its period of composition see *Shelley and His Circle*, ed. by Donald H. Reiman, 10 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), VII, pp. 110-160. [↑](#footnote-ref-638)
639. Mary’s journal entry for 13 August 1817 reads: ‘Shelley writes—reads Plato’s Convivium’. *The Journals of Mary Shelley: 1814-1844*. 2 vols., ed. by Paula R. Feldman and Diana Scott Kilvert (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), I, p. 178. Thomas Jefferson Hogg recalls that he and Shelley studied Dacier and Ficino’s translations of Plato’s works, including passages from the *Symposium*, while at Oxford in 1810; see Thomas Jefferson Hogg, *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (London: George Routledge & Sons Limited, 1906), p. 72, and Thomas Medwin recalls Shelley reading the *Symposium* with Dr Lind at Eton, Thomas Medwin, *Revised Life of Shelley*, ed. by H. B. Forman (London: Oxford University Press, 1913), p. 33; for doubts on this, see Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley*, p. 381. [↑](#footnote-ref-639)
640. Everest, ‘*Athanase*’, p. 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-640)
641. Mary Shelley, ‘Note on Fragments of *Prince Athanase*’ in *The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. by Mary Shelley, 4 vols (London: Edward Moxon, 1839), III, p. 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-641)
642. O’Connor, *The Symposium of Plato: The Shelley Translation*, pp. xvii and xviii. [↑](#footnote-ref-642)
643. Shelley, ‘Preface to The Banquet of Plato’ in Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley*, p. 402. [↑](#footnote-ref-643)
644. Hutchinson, *The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, p. 156. [↑](#footnote-ref-644)
645. Goslee borrows and builds upon this phrase and methodology from D. J. Hughes’ proposition of ‘a method of reading Shelley, and particularly *Epipsychidion*, which sees calculated coherence and calculated collapse, the whole to mirror in its progress the process of mind as it creates the poem’, D. J. Hughes, ‘Coherence and Collapse in Shelley, with Particular Reference to *Epipsychidion*’, *ELH*, 28 (1961), 260-283 (p. 261), quoted in Goslee, *Shelley’s Visual Imagination*, p. 140. Goslee, *Shelley’s Visual Imagination*, p. 79. [↑](#footnote-ref-645)
646. Callaghan, *Shelley’s Living Artistry*, p. 217. [↑](#footnote-ref-646)
647. Timothy Webb, *The Violet in the Crucible: Shelley and Translation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-647)
648. Mary Shelley, ed., Preface to *Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments*, 2 vols (London: Edward Moxon, 1852), I, p. viii. [↑](#footnote-ref-648)
649. Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-649)
650. ‘[T]he formal organization of *Epipsychidion* enacts a temporal progression—since the three main sections of *Epipsychidion* are devoted respectively to present, past, and future’, William Ulmer, *Shelleyan Eros: The Rhetoric of Romantic Love* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 140. [↑](#footnote-ref-650)
651. Leighton, ‘Love, Writing and Scepticism in *Epipsychidion*’, p. 225. [↑](#footnote-ref-651)
652. Suzanne L. Barnett, ‘*Epipsychidion* as Posthumous Fragment’, *Keats-Shelley Journal* (65), 2016, 89-99 (p. 96). [↑](#footnote-ref-652)
653. Harold Bloom, *The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1971), p. 336; Ulmer, *Shelleyan Eros*, p. 133. [↑](#footnote-ref-653)
654. Leader and O’Neill, eds., *The Major Works*, p. 821n. [↑](#footnote-ref-654)
655. Leighton, ‘Love, Writing and Scepticism in *Epipsychidion*’, p. 225. [↑](#footnote-ref-655)
656. Barnett, ‘Shelley diverges from Dante by placing *Vita Nuova*’s optimism about posthumous reunion (represented in the *Paradiso*) with an “annihilation” (line 587) of the (fictive) poet’s life and of his dreams of posthumous love’ and ‘undermines Dantean professions of Christian belief by stressing instead a religious skeptic’s uneasiness with death’, ‘*Epipsychidion* as Posthumous Fragment’, p. 92. [↑](#footnote-ref-656)
657. See the chapter, ‘Dispersoning Emily: Drafting as plot in *Epipsychidion*’ in Nancy Moore Goslee, *Shelley’s Visual Imagination*, pp. 140-158. [↑](#footnote-ref-657)
658. Goslee, *Shelley’s Visual Imagination*, p. 155. [↑](#footnote-ref-658)
659. ‘Fragments Connected with *Epipsychidion*’ quoted from *The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. by Thomas Hutchinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1912), pp. 419-424. [↑](#footnote-ref-659)
660. Goslee, *Shelley’s Visual Imagination*, p. 148. [↑](#footnote-ref-660)
661. Verma, *The Vision of “love’s rare universe”: A Study of Shelley’s* Epipsychidion, p. 16n. [↑](#footnote-ref-661)
662. Goslee, *Shelley’s Visual Imagination*, p. 149. [↑](#footnote-ref-662)
663. Butler and Malabou, ‘You Be My Body for Me: Body, Shape, and Plasticity in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*’, p. 611. [↑](#footnote-ref-663)
664. Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, p. 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-664)
665. Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, p. 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-665)
666. Bodleian MS. Shelley adds. e. 8, 1-1a and 4, p. 61. [↑](#footnote-ref-666)
667. *BSM VI: Shelley’s Pisan Winter Notebook (1820-21), A Facsimile of Bodleian MS. Shelley adds. e. 8*, ed. by Carlene Adamson (New York, NY: Garland, 1992), p. 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-667)
668. Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, p. 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-668)
669. Timothy Webb refers to *Epipsychidion* as ‘a self-conscious and highly wrought piece of art’. *Shelley: A Voice Not Understood* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977), p. 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-669)
670. Ward, ‘Transforming Presence: Poetic Idealism in *Prometheus Unbound* and *Epipsychidion*’, p. 203. [↑](#footnote-ref-670)
671. *Epipsychidion*’s reworking of themes and imagery from *Alastor* is well-documented, but I depart from readings that posit *Epipsychidion* as correcting *Alastor*, such as Ghislaine McDayter’s assertion that ‘*Epipsychidion* is a poem whose imagery and phantasmatic vision seem to strive for a corrective to the failure of poetic creativity in his previous work, *Alastor*, but which only succeeds in repeating the doomed poet’s fate’, ‘O’er Leaping the Bounds: The Sexing of the Creative Soul in Shelley’s *Epipsychidion*’, *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 52 (2003), 21-49 (p. 28). [↑](#footnote-ref-671)
672. Leader and O’Neill supply an English translation to these lines in *The Major Works*: ‘The loving soul launches itself outside creation, and creates for itself in the infinite a world all its own, very different from this dark and frightening abyss’, p. 796n. [↑](#footnote-ref-672)
673. *The Poems of Shelley*, ed. by Michael Rossington, Jack Donovan, and Kelvin Everest with the assistance of Andrew Lacey and Laura Barlow, 5 vols to date (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 1989-), IV, p. 129. [↑](#footnote-ref-673)
674. *The Poems of Shelley*, IV, p. 125. [↑](#footnote-ref-674)
675. Stopford A. Brooke, *Epipsychidion: A Type Fac-simile*, pp. xlv-xlvi, quoted in *The Poems of Shelley*, IV, p. 125. [↑](#footnote-ref-675)
676. Ward, ‘Transforming Presence: Poetic Idealism in *Prometheus Unbound* and *Epipsychidion*’, p. 204. [↑](#footnote-ref-676)
677. Webb, *The Violet in the Crucible*, p. 309. Webb lists the works Shelley translated into Italian for Emilia: ‘The song of the Voice in the Air from *Prometheus Unbound*, II. v. 48 ff: ‘Life of Life! thy lips enknindle…’, Asia’s continuing lyric, II. v. 59 ff.: ‘My soul is an enchanted boat…’, Lines 1-90 of *Prometheus Unbound*, Act IV., Stanzas 1-13 of the ‘Ode to Liberty’, Stanzas 1-3 and part of stanza 4 of *Laon and Cythna*, Canto II.’, pp. 307-308. [↑](#footnote-ref-677)
678. Michael Rossington, ‘Creative Translation’ in *The Oxford Handbook of British Romanticism*, ed. by David Duff (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 547-561 (p. 548). [↑](#footnote-ref-678)
679. O’Connor, ‘Platonic Selves in Shelley and Stevens’, p. 365. [↑](#footnote-ref-679)
680. Weil, *Androgyny and the Denial of Difference*, p. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-680)
681. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, ed. by Robert Squillace, trans. by Frank Justus Miller (New York, NY: Barnes & Noble Books, 2005; original translation 1916), p. 73. [↑](#footnote-ref-681)
682. Callaghan, *Shelley’s Living Artistry*, p. 216. [↑](#footnote-ref-682)
683. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. by A. S. Kline (Ann Arbor, MI: Borders Classics, 2004), p. 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-683)
684. Weil, *Androgyny and the Denial of Difference*, p. 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-684)
685. See *PBS Letters*, I, p. 353 and *MWS Journal*, I, pp. 73-78; 178; 317. [↑](#footnote-ref-685)
686. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. by Frank Justus Miller, p. 72. [↑](#footnote-ref-686)
687. Callaghan, ‘Shelley in Eternity’, p. 319. [↑](#footnote-ref-687)
688. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. by Anthony S. Kline, p. 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-688)
689. Goslee, *Shelley’s Visual Imagination*, p. 147. [↑](#footnote-ref-689)
690. *MWS Letters*, I, p. 223. [↑](#footnote-ref-690)
691. Tatsuo Tokoo, ‘The Composition of *Epipsychidion*: Some Manuscript Evidence’, pp. 102 and 103. [↑](#footnote-ref-691)
692. Goslee, *Shelley’s Visual Imagination*, p. 149. [↑](#footnote-ref-692)
693. *BSM VI*, adds. e. 8, 8e-16, p. 62. [↑](#footnote-ref-693)
694. Adamson, *BSM* *VI*, p. 211. [↑](#footnote-ref-694)
695. See Adamson’s detailed analysis of the variety of ink colours, flow, and pen-cuts present on this page. *BSM* *VI*, p. 211. [↑](#footnote-ref-695)
696. Edward T. Duffy, *The Constitution of Shelley’s Poetry: The Argument of Language in* Prometheus Unbound (London: Anthem Press, 2011), p. 225. [↑](#footnote-ref-696)
697. Goslee, *Shelley’s Visual Imagination*, p. 149. [↑](#footnote-ref-697)
698. Bodleian MS. Shelley, adds. e. 8, 7b-8, p. 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-698)
699. John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. by Stephen Orgel and Jonathan Goldberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991; repr. 2004), X, 249-250, p. 247. [↑](#footnote-ref-699)
700. Adamson, ed., *BSM* *VI*, p. 12; Weinberg, ‘Shelley’s Italian Verse Fragments: Exploring the Notebook Drafts’ in *The Neglected Shelley*, ed. by Timothy Webb and Alan Weinberg (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015; repub. New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2016), p. 295. [↑](#footnote-ref-700)
701. Goslee, *Shelley’s Visual Imagination*, p. 148. [↑](#footnote-ref-701)
702. Curran, ‘*Epipsychidion*, Dante, and the Renewable Life’, p. 100. [↑](#footnote-ref-702)
703. Robert N. Essick, ‘“A shadow of some golden dream”: Shelley’s Language in *Epipsychidion*’, *PPL*, 22.2 (1986), 165-175 (p. 167). [↑](#footnote-ref-703)
704. Curran, ‘*Epipsychidion*, Dante, and the Renewable Life’, p. 103. [↑](#footnote-ref-704)
705. Weil, *Androgyny and the Denial of Difference*, p. 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-705)
706. Angela Hobbs, ‘Female Imagery in Plato’ in *Plato’s Symposium: Issues in Interpretation and Reception* ed. by J. H. Lesher, Debra Nails, and Fisbee C. C. Sheffield (Washington D. C.: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2006), 252-271 (p. 269). [↑](#footnote-ref-706)
707. Thomas Pfau, ‘Tropes of Desire: Figuring the “Insufficient Void” of Self-Consciousness in Shelley’s *Epipsychidion*’, *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 40 (1991), 99-126 (p. 112). [↑](#footnote-ref-707)
708. O’Neill, ‘Emulating Plato: Shelley as a Translator and Prose Poet’, pp. 241 and 242. [↑](#footnote-ref-708)
709. Barbara Charlesworth Gelpi, ‘The Politics of Androgyny’, *Women’s Studies*, 2 (1974), 151-160 (p. 151). [↑](#footnote-ref-709)
710. Ross Wilson, *Shelley and the Apprehension of Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-710)
711. Excepting Michael O’Neill who points up ‘Demogorgon’s genderless state’ in his essay, ‘Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*’ in *A Companion to Romanticism*, ed. by Duncan Wu (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 1998; repr. 1999), 259-268 (p. 261) and Jerrold E. Hogle refers to Demogorgon as ‘he (or it)’, *Shelley’s Process: Radical Transference and the Development of His Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 186. [↑](#footnote-ref-711)
712. Angela Hobbs, ‘Female Imagery in Plato’, in *Plato’s Symposium: Issues in Interpretation and Reception* ed. by J. H. Lesher, Debra Nails, and Fisbee C. C. Sheffield (Washington D. C.: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2006), 252-271 (p. 270). [↑](#footnote-ref-712)
713. I borrow the term ‘subject-rhyme from Michael O’Neill, ‘“The Whole Mechanism of the Drama”: Shelley’s Translation of Plato’s *Symposium*’, *Keats-Shelley Review*, 18.1 (2004), 51-68 (p. 54). [↑](#footnote-ref-713)
714. Hobbs, ‘Female Imagery in Plato’, pp. 268 and 266. [↑](#footnote-ref-714)
715. Mary’s description of ‘the subtle dialectics and grandeur of aim of Socrates’ chimes with Shelley’s own subtle didacticism and idealism in Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments*, ed. by Mary Shelley, 2 vols (London: Edward Moxon, 1852), I, p. viii. [↑](#footnote-ref-715)
716. For the ‘neglect of Plato in England during the seventeenth, eighteenth, and the early part of the nineteenth centuries’ see James A. Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley*, p. 31. Also, see Frank B. Evans, III, ‘Platonic Scholarship in Eighteenth-Century England’, *Modern Philology*, 41.2 (1943), 103-110 and M. L. Clarke, *Greek Studies in England 1700-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1945). [↑](#footnote-ref-716)
717. Michael O’Neill, ‘“Trying to make it as good as I can”: Mary Shelley’s Editing of P. B. Shelley’s Poetry and Prose’ in *Mary Shelley in Her Times*, ed. by Betty T. Bennett and Stuart Curran (Baltimore, MD and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 185-197 (p. 194). [↑](#footnote-ref-717)
718. *MWS Letters*, I, p. 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-718)
719. Mary Shelley, Preface to *Essays, Letters from Abroad*, p. viii. For Agathon as a source of laughter in Plato’s *Symposium*, see Stephanie Nelson, ‘Shelley and Plato’s *Symposium*: The Poet’s Revenge’, *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, 14.1-2 (2007), 100-129. [↑](#footnote-ref-719)
720. See *The Mary Shelley Reader*, ed. by Betty T. Bennett and Charles E. Robinson (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 365-371. [↑](#footnote-ref-720)
721. ‘Byron and Shelley on the Character of Hamlet’, *New Monthly Magazine*, 29.2 (1830), 327-336 (pp. 339-340). Charles E. Robinson suggests that Mary ‘authored and published the dialogue’ in *Shelley and Byron: The Snake and the Eagle Wreathed in Flight* (Baltimore, MD and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 270 n30. Alternatively, Earl R. Wasserman suggests that Shelley wrote the dialogue himself in ‘Shelley’s Last Poetics: A Reconsideration’ in *From Sensibility to Romanticism: Essays Presented to Frederick A. Pottle*, ed. by Frederick W. Hilles and Harold Bloom (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 487-511 (pp. 505-511). The ambiguities surrounding the dialogue’s authorship emphasise Mary and Shelley’s unity of mind, as does its inclusion of the Delphic maxim shared by the pair in Shelley’s letter of 1814. In the dialogue, ‘*γνωθι* *σεαυτον*’ (know thyself) appears on p. 346. See Shelley’s letter to Mary in *PBS Letters*, I, p. 414 where the maxim’s inclusion follows Shelley’s description of the pair as ‘constituting but one being’.  [↑](#footnote-ref-721)
722. Mary concedes in her preface to the *Posthumous Poems* that she has included fragmentary compositions for ‘fear lest any monument of his genius should escape me than the wish of presenting nothing but what was complete to the fastidious reader’, Mary Shelley, Preface to *Posthumous Poems (1824)* in *The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1912), p. xvi. [↑](#footnote-ref-722)
723. Mary does this within her editions of Shelley’s work, according to Samuel Lyndon Gladden, by ‘innovat[ing] textual strategies…enabl[ing] her to establish her subjective position as creator/writer, even as she deliberately situate[s] herself in the margins’. Samuel Lyndon Gladden, ‘Mary Shelley’s Editions of “The Collected Poems of Percy Bysshe Shelley”: The Editor as Subject’, *Studies in Romanticism*, 44.2 (2005), 181-205 (p. 183). Mary Shelley, Preface to *Posthumous Poems (1824)* in *The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, p. xvi. [↑](#footnote-ref-723)
724. O’Neill, ‘“Trying to make it as good as I can”: Mary Shelley’s Editing of P. B. Shelley’s Poetry and Prose’, p. 189. [↑](#footnote-ref-724)
725. O’Neill, ‘“Trying to make it as good as I can”: Mary Shelley’s Editing of P. B. Shelley’s Poetry and Prose’, pp. 194 and 189. [↑](#footnote-ref-725)
726. Jennifer Wallace, ‘“Copying Shelley’s Letters”: Mary Shelley and the Uncanny Erotics of Greek’, *Women’s Studies*, 40.4 (2011), 404-428, (p. 406). [↑](#footnote-ref-726)
727. Wallace, ‘“Copying Shelley’s Letters”: Mary Shelley and the Uncanny Erotics of Greek’, p. 410. [↑](#footnote-ref-727)
728. O’Neill, “Trying to make it as good as I can”: Mary Shelley’s Editing of P. B. Shelley’s Poetry and Prose’, p. 186. [↑](#footnote-ref-728)
729. Madeleine Callaghan, *Shelley’s Living Artistry: Letters, Poems, Plays* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017), p. 233. [↑](#footnote-ref-729)
730. William Keach, *Shelley’s Style* (Methuen: New York, NY and London, 1984), p. 203. [↑](#footnote-ref-730)
731. Robert Kimbrough, ‘Androgyny Seen Through Shakespeare’s Disguise’, *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 33.1 (1982), 17-33 (pp. 18 and 19). [↑](#footnote-ref-731)
732. Spoken by Shelley in ‘Byron and Shelley on the Character of Hamlet’, p. 338. [↑](#footnote-ref-732)
733. Richard Cronin, *Shelley’s Poetic Thoughts* (New York, NY: St Martin’s Press, 1981), p. 243. [↑](#footnote-ref-733)
734. Susan Wolfson, *Formal Charges: The Shaping of Poetry in British Romanticism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 207. [↑](#footnote-ref-734)
735. Cronin, *Shelley’s Poetic Thoughts*, p. 246. [↑](#footnote-ref-735)
736. Frosch, ‘“More than Ever Can Be Spoken”: Unconscious Fantasy in Shelley’s Jane Williams Poems’, *Studies in Philology*, 102.3 (2005), 378-413 (p. 398). [↑](#footnote-ref-736)
737. See J. B. Kennedy, *The Musical Structure of Plato’s Dialogues* (London: Routledge, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-737)
738. Kennedy, *The Musical Structure of Plato’s Dialogues*, p. 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-738)
739. Callaghan, *Shelley’s Living Artistry*, p. 231 and Paul Weller, ‘Shakespeare, Shelley and the Binding of the Lyric’, *MLN*, 93.5 (1978), 912-937 (p. 925). [↑](#footnote-ref-739)
740. Frosch, “More than Ever Can Be Spoken”: Unconscious Fantasy in Shelley’s Jane Williams Poems’, p. 401. [↑](#footnote-ref-740)
741. *BSM XVIII: The ‘Homeric Hymns’ and ‘Prometheus’ Drafts Notebook*, ed. by Nancy Moore Goslee (New York, NY: Garland, 1996), p. xlv. [↑](#footnote-ref-741)
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743. Wolfson, *Formal Charges*, p. 216. [↑](#footnote-ref-743)
744. Wolfson, *Formal Charges*, p. 215. [↑](#footnote-ref-744)
745. Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Banquet* in James A. Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley: A Study of Platonism and the Poetic Mind* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1949), p. 430 and W. B. Yeats, ‘The Philosophy of Shelley’s Poetry’ in *Essays and Introductions* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1961), pp. 93-94. [↑](#footnote-ref-745)
746. Callaghan, *Shelley’s Living Artistry*, p. 232. [↑](#footnote-ref-746)
747. Paul Vatalaro, ‘The Semiotic Echoes in Percy Shelley’s Poems to Jane Williams’, *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 48 (1999), 69-89 (p. 83). [↑](#footnote-ref-747)
748. Keach, *Shelley’s Style*, p. 212. [↑](#footnote-ref-748)
749. Wolfson, *Formal Charges*, p. 226. [↑](#footnote-ref-749)
750. Judith Chernaik, *The Lyrics of Shelley* (Cleveland, OH: Case Western Reserve University Press, 1972), p. 173. Callaghan, *Shelley’s Living Artistry*, p. 232. See also Weller, ‘Shakespeare, Shelley and the Binding of the Lyric’, p. 926. [↑](#footnote-ref-750)
751. See Kennedy, *The Musical Structure of Plato’s Dialogues*, pp. 176-177. [↑](#footnote-ref-751)
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753. Frisbee Sheffield, *Plato’s Symposium: The Ethics of Desire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 173. [↑](#footnote-ref-753)
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759. *BSM* *XI*, 13-15, p. 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-759)