

The Unlikely Prophet:

Percy Bysshe Shelley's Biblically Prophetic Tendencies

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Abstract

This dissertation posits the idea that Percy Bysshe Shelley fulfils the characteristics of a biblical prophet. While initially this appears to be a somewhat bizarre assertion it is in the paradoxical aspects of my argument that characteristics of biblical prophecy display themselves. It is Shelley's opposition to specifically institutional religion that is reminiscent of the biblically prophetic trait of opposing priests, clergymen, temples, and any other feature of religious institutions.

Despite Shelley's anti-Anglican sentiments, he still utilises the Bible as a means of communicating his own message, which is founded upon philosophy and morals. I explore ideas of counter-presents as being prophetic, to a certain extent as they imagine a present that is not present and therefore, they use change to look to the future. I then move on to discuss the role of temporality more broadly for Shelley and biblical prophecy, resultantly addressing Shelley's postulations on posterity. I argue that these postulations are indicative of an eternal element of words or messages contained within a work, which aligns Shelley with biblical prophecy.

I use Shelley's lesser-explored prose writings as a means to understand his reasonings and personal ethics, having established a basis through these essays I then apply the theories to select Shelley poems. In doing this I aim to highlight the parallels not only between biblical prophecy and Shelley's work but also Shelley's morals and politics as being biblically prophetic.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author.

This work has not previously been presented for a degree or other qualification at this University or elsewhere. All sources are acknowledged as references.

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Notes on The Texts

Shelley's Prose, edited by David Lee Clark compiles and renames Shelley's essays: *Speculations on Metaphysics* and *Speculations on Morals as A Treatise on Morals*.

Clark notes this editorial change: "I have arranged these fragments into one continuous whole under the title of *A Treatise on Morals*". For the purposes of my essay *A Speculation on Morals* is contained within pages 186-193, starting: 'The Science of Morals' and ending with "it is in the differences that it actually consists". Furthermore, Clark's dating of the fragments is widely discredited with B.C. Barker-Benfield dating them in the range of 1816-1821 in 'Shelleyan Writing Materials in the Bodleian Library: A Catalogue of Formats, Papers, and Watermarks', in *The Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts*, Volume XXIII (Routledge, 2002), pp. 34-5 ('A7'); pp. 49-50 ('A34'); pp. 75-6 ('C14', 'C15', 'C16'). Clark has had to be consulted due to the lack of academic publications of this piece of Shelley's prose and due to the analysis of the Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts being beyond the scope of this dissertation.

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Introduction

Percy Bysshe Shelley fulfils the characteristics of a biblical prophet through his prose works. I assert that in reading his prose and poetry in parallel with the work of biblical prophets such as, but not limited to: Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Matthew, the similarities demonstrate a common thread of the presence of an eternal message or moral philosophy. My analysis of Shelley's often-neglected prose will illustrate that it is the contradictions of Shelley's religious affiliations that are biblically prophetic. This differs from many critical approaches, such as Colin Jager's or Martin Priestman's, which allow the myth of his (ir)religiosity to distract from the deep-rooted Biblical features which permeate his works. In creating a distinct separation between the Bible and Christianity Shelley makes room for alternate approaches to the faith and its doctrine. The question, then, is not whether Shelley was religious or not; it is how he utilised that religion in his writing to present his personal philosophy to his readers. As in work by Ian Balfour or Michael O'Neill, Biblical prophecy is generally ignored in critical discussions in favour of the Grecian prophetic tradition of the Oracles such as . However, there is much to be found in Shelley's works which parallels the insights and structures of biblical prophecy. 'On Christianity' (1817), 'A Philosophical View of Reform' (1820), and 'A Defence of Poetry' (1821) all draw on the figure of Christ as a philosopher and poet. These essays illustrate Shelley's relationship to biblical prophecy as far more complex than simply opposition to Anglicanism. They show him to be aligning himself with the ultimate biblical prophet Christ.

I define biblical prophecy as a call originating from a divine source, whether the divinity is acknowledged by the recipient or not. It must also echo a biblical message

or share the moral and anti-corruptionist qualities of a biblical prophecy. For example, Isaiah 53:5 prophesies the suffering of the Messiah:

But he *was* wounded for our transgressions, *he was* bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace *was* upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.

For Christians this prophecy was fulfilled by Christ. However, the lack of clarity and specificity of the prophecy means that it is more widely applicable than current accepted Christian interpretation. For instance, the prophecy does not share any details of said suffering nor does it name the “Messiah” to which it refers and as a result it foretells the feeling of the events but does not disclose more pragmatic elements.

Shelley often heralds Greek prophecy as superior to biblical prophecy as a result his poetry often centres around the Greek, for instance *Prometheus Unbound* is a retelling of the Greek myth of Prometheus. The interesting thing is that his understanding of the two is shaped by the culturally Christian society he was educated in. Therefore to understand Shelley’s prophetic allusions one must look to ancient Greece. The Greek oracular tradition shares similarities to biblical prophecy as Richard Stoneman in his book *The Ancient Oracles: Making the Gods Speak* discusses. The key resemblance between biblical and Greek prophecies is that “the oracle itself may be open to interpretation” (7), speaking to the ambiguity of prophecy across cultures and religions. The lack of clarity shared across both Christian and Greek conceptions of prophecy grants insight into its variability, exposing its innately

non-specific nature. Stoneman differentiates between biblical Prophecy and Greek oracular tradition stating that the latter did contain “fortune-telling aspects” (8). An individual's ability to seek advice and call upon an oracle about issues pertaining to specific problems leads to “fortune-telling” and differentiates it from biblical prophecy. Additionally, he goes on to assert that “the literary handling of the oracle is at variance with its everyday practice” (91) and poses a question of the prophetic forms of ancient Greece as known to Shelley. Therefore, key differences include fate (Greek) versus freedom (biblical), along with individual (Greek) versus collective (biblical). Shelley’s understanding of Greek Oracles would have been coloured by a Christian lens and so the essence of both types of prophecy being a divine inspiration with an unknown message is very much encapsulated by those shared qualities, but their differences, as discussed above, are much more valuable to understanding how Shelley writes biblical prophecy.

Ian Balfour defines prophecy for the Romantic literary movement in his book *The Rhetoric of Romantic Prophecy* as: “a call and a claim much more than it is a prediction, a call oriented towards a present that is not present” (18). His definition transcends theological bounds, which is indicative of the shared qualities across prophetic tradition as demonstrated by my analysis of Stoneman’s work; although the differences between biblical and Greek prophecy are evident there is still a joint foundation establishing prophecy. The exclusion of a religious premise grants greater freedom of interpretation. The presence of a theology, for this dissertation Anglican Christianity, partially determines the context behind the “prediction [or] call” which defines prophecy. It is the addition of a religion that grants provenance, allowing for both personal and divine interpretation.

Shelley actively includes biblical prophecy in much of his prose. 'A Defence of Poetry' (1821) functions as a manifesto of his theological and philosophical ideas. Shelley's comment that "the poet [is] subjected [to] the ignorance of the philosophy" (684) reads as a temporal restriction, for Shelley "ignorance" is a contemporary issue, an issue that will be corrected with time. Said restriction is on both the poetic intention of a work and its interpretation. The result is that the provenance and meaning of a work is not a conscious decision or attempt by the poet but rather an external process. A text, therefore, cannot be fully comprehended by its author in its own time. It is this interplay between temporality, philosophy, and religion that fits a work within the biblically prophetic canon. Shelley addresses this by suggesting that the combination of poetry and philosophy makes them the source of religion. Similarly, Balfour observed the connection between these fields. He comments more generally on Romantic poetry stating that "If poetry, when juxtaposed first with philosophy, can be saved for the ends of virtue and truth, it is no wonder that it can later be paired with religion itself" (Balfour 57). The resultant effect of this observation is that Balfour bridges poetry and philosophy to demonstrate how poetry and prophecy are intrinsically linked, echoing Shelley's sentiments surrounding the prophetic nature of poetry in 'A Defence of Poetry'.

Earlier in 'A Defence' Shelley explores ideas of temporality and prophecy as intrinsically poetic. He states that: "Time [...] augments that [beauty, story and fact] of poetry, and forever develops new and wonderful applications of the eternal truth which it contains" (680) further confirming the vital relationship between literature and time in producing prophetic meaning. Shelley defines the concept of the 'poet' in

the above quotation as being superior due to their ability to see and speak with absolute truth irrespective of their temporal moment. Shelley's inclusion of time's augmentative power is suggestive that it is Christianity's antiquity that grants the Church political power. It is through this assertion that the suggestion of posterity and temporality as features of both poetry and prophecy is brought to the forefront. The temporal existence of "eternal truth" allows poetry to relate a message to the masses, much in the same manner as prophecy. Shelley's premise of "eternal truth" is suggestive of poetry being the basis of a religious message. The poetry of "eternal truth" echoes the power of literature as demonstrated in John 1:1 where God and language are made synonymous: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The repetition of "word" connotes a sense of communication highlighting the distinctly verbal nature of biblical prophecy. Prophecy is, then, the attempt at the verbal representation of a message from God, with God being the same as the "word". Shelley's verse and prose illustrates the challenge of conceptualising God's existence. However, biblical prophecy, for Shelley, is expressing, in his works, an "eternal truth" (680). So God's presence is in the words of a text when discussing morality and temporality, making Shelley's texts echo the structures of biblical prophecy.

Moreover, 'A Defence' differentiates between the literal interpretation of the Bible and Shelley's allegorical interpretation. For example, he states that: "it is unfortunate for those who cannot distinguish words from thoughts, that many of these anomalies have been incorporated into our popular religion" (698). His condescending approach here is indicative of his opposition to the "popular religion": Christianity. Meanwhile, the attack he launches in the above statement is actually against the

unchanging prescriptive teachings of the Church and misunderstandings of the word that I have discussed in the previous paragraph. For instance, the creation story in the book of Genesis is over ages rather than days; after all, “yom”, the Hebrew word in this passage can translate as both day and age, highlighting the entrenched Christian teachings, permeating standard biblical analysis. Bryan Shelley’s observes the idea that “Poetry becomes the ‘word of God’ in Shelley’s religion” (127) meaning that Shelley imbues his poetry with the same imagery as the Bible by paralleling its prophecies. “Shelley would eventually adapt biblical ideas in constructing a theological poetics” (31 Bryan Shelley). I go further than Bryan Shelley, drawing Shelley into the same light as biblical prophets.

The prophecy featured in Shelley’s poetry mirrors the imperceptible message of Biblical prophecy. In the ode ‘To A Skylark’ (1820), Shelley demonstrates the ambiguity of prophecy by allegorising the skylark as the source of his poetic inspiration. He does this while simultaneously using angelic imagery to illustrate the bird’s impact on the poetic voice. Hence, he is relating the source of the inspiration to Christian imagery. The metaphysical role of the bird is highly suggestive of a divine influence without an explicit pedagogical direction. Instead, the message of the prophecy will be released over time following Shelley’s above declaration of poetic eternal truth. Hence, biblical prophecy is entrenched in Shelley’s work. The below extract, of lines 16 to 20 of the poem, exemplifies a sense of hallucination associated with the sighting of the Skylark, evoking the spirit of a vision.

The pale purple even
Melts around thy flight;

Like a star of Heaven,
 In the broad day-light
 Thou art unseen, but yet I hear thy shrill delight, (486)

The “pale purple” of the first line alludes to the time of day being twilight when the light fades and shadows play tricks on a person's eyes. The second line highlights the bird's separation from the dimming light around it, a premise that is further emphasised by the simile of the next line. This centralises the divine aspect of the vision, which is in turn indicative of divine inspiration causing a prophetic vision. The reference to “Heaven” grants the skylark an otherworldly or even divine aura granting inspiration to the poem's persona (Shelley). The following image of a star in daylight is demonstrative of the bird's brightness and unusual nature, again solidifying the angelic qualities of this scene. The vision-like element of the stanza is confirmed through the use of the adjective “unseen” as it relates that only the persona can see the Skylark, a messenger from God, cementing the biblically prophetic nature of the stanza. The persona's lack of understanding of the message is symptomatic of the vital role temporality plays in exposing the message of a prophecy, meaning the prophet cannot necessarily comprehend in the present the prophecy they receive. Balfour states that “In the prophetic books as well as in the Psalter, God's face is present primarily in its absence” (67). In applying this premise to the above extract God's absence from the vision validates a biblically prophetic reading of the ode.

Shelley reuses the premise that God's absence is prophetic when arguing for the poetic as prophetic in ‘A Defence of Poetry’ (1821):

Not that I assert poets to be prophets in the gross sense of the word, or that they can foretell the form as surely as they foreknow the spirit of events: such is the pretence of superstition, which would make poetry an attribute of prophecy, rather than prophecy an attribute of poetry (677).

In essence, this quotation demonstrates of Shelley declares the innate entanglement of poetry and prophecy. Shelley removes the need for a definitive prophetic message, instead he blends the meaning of poetry with prophecy, which is addressed in the phrase the “gross sense of the word”. This echoes John 1:1 and enables a less inflammatory religious response to his interpretation of the prophetic than his claim of “the pretence of superstition”. This is then contrasted by the statement “pretence of superstition” which appears to be an attack on organised religion as it comments on the certainty of prophetic meaning as proclaimed by religious officials and institutions. Shelley is arguing for freedom to interpret Christian doctrines; while still being inflammatory he stops short of blasphemy. Additionally, in producing a distinction between Anglican prophecy and prophecy as interpretive, Shelley entangles biblical prophecy and literature. Micheal O’Neill eloquently foregrounds this premise when he states that “poetry, for the Shelley of ‘A Defence of Poetry’, does not usurp religion; it is what religion always was” (67), meaning that Shelley presents poetry as an expression of theology and therefore his poetic writings are his own form of religion that pulls from the history and culture that he was brought up in: Anglican Christianity. As a result, equating Shelley to the character of a biblical prophet seems fitting. For Shelley, if taking the above extract of ‘A Defence of Poetry’ as exemplary, poetry is distinctly prophetic in its ability to

“foreknow the spirit of events”. By sidestepping the certainty of prophecy Shelley moves towards a more imaginative form of prophecy based on feeling rather than study. The “spirit” that he mentions is synonymous with the feeling of the future in prophecy. Looking at this, along with the divine inspiration central to ‘To A Skylark’, I claim he is clearly exhibiting the biblically prophetic qualities.

In this dissertation I will explore Shelley’s relationship to biblical prophecy and how he fits the category of a biblical prophet. I will do this in three chapters each focusing on how different elements of Shelley’s prose merge into facets of biblical prophecy. Those facets are: Shelley’s opposition to the contemporary social and Anglo-Christian order, Shelley’s political affiliations and the counter-present he imagines, and then finally the posterity of a text as being pseudo-prophetic.

Chapter Two will mostly discuss Shelley’s complex and ever-changing relationship to the social aspects of Christianity, centring around the premise that it is Shelley’s opposition to the contemporary Anglican Church that aligns him with the biblical prophets. The corruption he notes in ‘On Christianity’ (1817) is a significant reason behind his antagonistic stance to Christianity, illustrating a separation between the Bible and the Church, for Shelley. I produce an entry point to Shelley’s biblical interpretations and theological theories, illustrating how his social commentaries revolve around his thoughts on organised religion. Shelley’s concept of theology as a form of poetry is in part an evolutionary consequence of changing approaches to the Bible during the long Eighteenth century. Ian Balfour asserts that during the eighteenth century time that “The bible [became] a text among others [...] and so in the era of Romanticism we can witness the emergence of a substantially new poetic

stance toward the Bible, exemplified, for one, in the work of Percy Shelley” (37). By questioning the Bible as any other text Shelley was able to interpret the text independently from the Church’s prescribed teachings and therefore externally to the Church as an institution of power. This meant that he was able to borrow and allude to aspects of the Bible that held a cultural significance while subverting the expected meanings of the text.

Chapter 3 explores Shelley’s outsider status as a consequence of opposing the accepted religious order. The publication of *The Necessity of Atheism* (1811) and the scandal surrounding it solidifies Shelley’s dissident element. Shelley’s political beliefs and status echo those of the biblical prophets who notoriously opposed their contemporary power structures. Paul Wickman highlights how: “*The Necessity of Atheism* (1811) [...] *apparently* advocated atheism [which] was enough to risk criminal charges” (1) per the laws on Blasphemy at that time. I argue that *The Necessity* is in fact an exploration of belief, with a large proportion dedicated to the freedom of choice to believe, hence, Wickman’s italicization of “*apparently*”. Shelley’s counter-cultural status is noted as prophetic by Balfour who postulates that: “The prophetic message often runs literally *para doxa* - that is, counter to the dominant belief” (2). Shelley was against the “dominant belief” in his contemporary society, fulfilling Balfour’s “*para doxa*” definition of prophecy. Shelley’s opposition to Anglican Christianity, established him as a religious and political dissident and now a biblical prophet.

This chapter will go on to address Shelley’s subversion of the engrained traditional interpretations of the Anglican Church and how it places him against his

contemporary society politically. The political nature of his work is reflective of biblical prophets through the ethical foundation he lays out in: 'A Treatise on Morals' and 'A Philosophical View of Reform'. The suggestions he offers for political improvements are reminiscent of Mark Canuel's postulations on progress during Romanticism. Canuel states that Romantic Progressivism "became a vision of political futures" (222) and so Shelley's writing on reform expressed ideas of progress. Emily Rohrbach's *Modernity's Mist* offers a cause for this apparent tendency towards the future in the quotation: "For British Romantic-period writers, rapidly changing political circumstances at home and abroad heightened the urgency, and thus the awareness of the difficulty, of comprehending historical dimensions" (15). By observing faults and postulating on improvements in the governing class Shelley produces a sense of temporal progression. The inequality and corruption Shelley notes echo the teachings of Christ and the biblical prophets. For example, Matthew 23:60 states: "The chief priests, and elders, and all the council, sought false witnesses against Jesus, to put him to death", demonstrating the institutional corruption that both Christ and Shelley oppose. In both instances, it is the interwoven nature of religion and law which produces corruption. So rather than clinging to antiquated structures and institutions, such as the Church, Shelley looked forward to an alternative approach to separate politics and religion.

I will also use 'The Mask of Anarchy' to illustrate the permeation of prophecy in Shelley's works, particularly in accordance with his politics which the chapter revolves around. In addition I will explore how 'The Mask of Anarchy' famously alludes to the Book of Revelation, cementing the premise that Percy Shelley's works borrow from biblical prophecy in order to advocate for the need for political change.

Through Shelley's allusions and parallels to the Bible in his poetry, while critiquing the Bible in his prose, he establishes this connection. The effect of this is that he imbues biblical prophecy into his work.

Chapter four looks past the temporal constrictions of Shelley's life towards the future of a text and prophecy's reliance on posterity. This chapter will provide an in-depth look at textual posterity as Shelley postulated in 'A Defence of Poetry' (1821) and 'Ode to the West Wind' (1819). Through these texts, Shelley envisions the life of a literary work, particularly poetry, externally to its writer. The timeless relevance and remembrance of prophecy is what distinguishes it from other forms of writing and therefore, the continuing presence of a text grants it a prophetic edge. The ability of a text and its reader to move through time is addressed by Christina Lupton. She posits "books as the time-turners as well as the time-tellers of their modern lives" (Lupton 3) which has the effect of illustrating the life of a text. It is the interpretation drawn out of a text that makes it prophetic and each interpretation is temporally bound. Morality has the power to align a text theologically, for Shelley this results in an alignment with Christianity.

Prophecy relies on staying in the public consciousness for long enough to come to fruition, hence it draws on posterity. Shelley's interest in thinking about literary futures. Andrew Bennett's observation of Shelley's spirit permeating his work is a variation of the lingering connection between poet and poetry. According to Bennett the transcendence of the "ghosts" (173) refers to a message from beyond the grave, a message which, while being present from the start, is exposed in a new time and

social context. Shelley produces a metaphor for the evolving message of a text through time in the below extract from 'A Defence of Poetry':

It is the faculty which contains within itself the seeds at once of its own and of social renovation. [...] They may have perceived the beauty of those immortal compositions, simply as fragments and isolated portions [...] may recognize them as episodes to that great poem, which all poets, like the co-operating thoughts of one great mind, have built up since the beginning of the world.
(687)

Shelley uses the connotations of "seed" to express collective growth based on external stimuli such as light, food, water, and nutrients, similarly to the constant movement of the wind in 'Ode to the West Wind'. It is this collective impact that parallels the collaborative aspect of the Bible's many authors and prophets.

Furthermore, the premise of "one great mind" is monotheistic in sentiment. Shelley's phrasing and imagery here are drawing on the posterity of the Bible due to the power of "one" which holds eternal connotations. Essentially, for Shelley, all poetry forms a complete body to express the message of a unified entity, similarly to the collective nature of the Bible. Shelley appears to be arguing that poetry is a form of prophecy that is yet to be declared prophetic. So despite his ardent argument against institutional religion he utilises its doctrinal origin: the Bible.

Each chapter investigates a different element of Shelley's relationship to biblical prophecy to demonstrate that despite his contradictory and constantly evolving religious affiliations from *The Necessity of Atheism* (1811) to 'A Defence of Poetry'

(1821), The Bible stands as a text of great influence to him and so the biblically prophetic nature of his poetry is prevalent in his numerous prose writings. The biblical element is evidently Christian, but, the texts are not tied up with the ecclesiastical teachings of Shelley's time. Instead the Bible stands as a work of philosophy for Shelley. Thus, Shelley's prose works align him with biblical prophets and their prophecy.

Chapter 2: A Refutation Of Biblical Prophecy

In this chapter I suggest that Shelley's prose, though it articulates apparent atheist views, shares important formal and rhetorical elements with biblical prophecy. Though it seems counter-intuitive, Shelley's counter-cultural religious beliefs have much in common with biblical prophecy. Shelley addresses both contemporary Christianity and the Bible in his works: 'On Christianity' (1817) and 'On the Doctrines of Christ' (1817) which highlight his interest in Anglican Christianity and theology. These essays provide unedited and relatively unrestrained opinions as they were published posthumously, Bryan Shelley confirms that they "did not reach the form of a final draft" (56). This means that when writing Shelley was less bound by the socio-political constraints of the publishing process allowing for a freedom to his claims. In these essays, Shelley analyses Christian theology and culture in detail, and articulates his own form of personal theology. The raw expression I take from these works aligns Shelley, in my opinion, with the biblical prophets. The prophets were opposed to the corruption of their respective institutions of faith, making evident the longstanding relationship between prophecy and religious opposition, similar to Shelley's tumultuous relationship to Christianity. Biblical prophecy is likewise oppositional and counter-cultural. In the Book of Ezekiel, Ezekiel opposes the dominant institutional faith, similarly to Shelley.

Then he [God] said unto me,[...] Is it a light thing to the house of Judah that they commit the abominations which they commit here? for they have filled the land with violence, and have returned to provoke me to anger (8:17)

Ezekiel depicts God leading the way to show him the hidden corruption of religious leaders and institutions. The question “is it a light thing” generates a sense of anger that God and Ezekiel feel towards the “abominations” they witness. Shelley’s prose echoes the seemingly paradoxical criticism of Christianity with his personal admiration for the Bible and biblical figures. This creates a contradictory negative approach to the contemporary Church, and in turn associates him with the characteristics of the biblical prophets.

Shelley’s views on Christianity and the Bible are best explored through his prose, which has on the whole been mostly neglected by critics, leaving a gap in scholarship study. Bryan Shelley is one of the few to discuss ‘On Christianity’, reading the essay through a lens of Shelley’s theological interpretation of scripture, which is the focus of his book: “Shelley would eventually adapt biblical ideas in constructing a theological poetics” (31). Bryan Shelley traces Shelley’s theological lineage to Spinoza highlighting his influence on Shelley’s biblical interpretations. I however am detaching Shelley’s study of Christian theology in favour of looking at how he used it in his writings. “Theological poetics” implies Shelley’s tendency to imbue his religious thoughts into his poetry and prose. It is a poetics, I argue, that manifests into the same prophecy it is informed by, meaning that by imbuing biblical prophecy into his work Shelley’s writing takes power from that same biblical prophecy. Shelley’s self-proclaimed atheism would appear to a modern readership as a belief that there is no God ; however, Colin Jager’s exploration of Shelley produces a differing definition of “Atheism.” Jager charts a path that suggests Shelley viewed atheism as a radical mantra rather than a statement of non-belief: “This slots Shelley’s atheism into the tradition of freethought” (613) as opposed to

opposition. In contrast, Ian Balfour does not discuss Shelley, but he does detail the use of biblical prophecy to other Romantic poets.

My argument in this chapter addresses Shelley's counter-cultural qualities as key to understanding him as Biblically prophetic. His personal and social philosophies shape his view of the world and so permeate his prose; in doing so his opposition to certain aspects of society makes his works appear as biblically prophetic.

Prophetic Antagonism

The modern and highly contentious debate around Shelley's religious views is significant as it is a common trait in biblical prophecy that the prophets' beliefs go against their contemporary society. The opposition to religion that Shelley presents in 'On Christianity' focuses on the hateful premises distributed by Christian officials in the name of God. He states "The advocates of literal interpretation have been the most efficacious enemies of those doctrines" (252), illustrating Shelley's view on the corruption of the biblical message by religious officials. I argue that this culture of hate, for Shelley, comes from misinterpretation that permeates Shelley's contemporary Anglican Church. The prevalence of misconduct in the Church is highlighted by Bryan Shelley when he asserts that "the Shelleyan message is that clerical corruption, like the Yahwistic tradition, is slipping into history" (45). The "slipping into history" of the "clerical corruption" Bryan Shelley establishes indicates that the tradition of corrupt Church officials will hopefully become an issue of the past. I use Bryan Shelley's observation on the longstanding history of corruption within institutionalised religion to suggest a parallel between Shelley's contemporary

Anglican Church and Christ's Hebrew one, illustrating the continuing issue of the entanglement of law, politics and religion.

Shelley's reasoning for opposing the Christian Church is the priestly corruption, which is made clear in 'On Christianity'. Shelley highlights the tradition of priests abusing power, referring to: "Mankind, transmitting from generation to generation this horrible legacy [Christianity] of accumulated vengeances, and pursuing with the feelings of duty the misery of their fellow beings" (258). The tone of anger Shelley employs to emphasise the sense of injustice and hatred preached by Church officials has the effect of placing the Church in opposition to the good that Christ teaches and Christianity is meant to be founded upon. It also highlights the idea of church officials abusing their power. Shelley highlights the history imbued into the Church in their teachings and beliefs when he states "generation to generation". By pulling on the idea of inheritance through this repetition Shelley establishes a tradition of grudges and judgement, which acts against the Church's cause for forgiveness. Christopher Stokes' claim that "all religion is priestcraft [...] placing an assumption of priestcraft at the heart of his [Shelley's] understanding of prayer" (187-188) establishes the innate human involvement, vital to inventing religions and selling them to the masses. In Shelley's essay he encouraged individual analysis to break away from the inheritance of the "horrible legacy" which is being perpetuated by the Church. This is aided by the language of aggression used to reassert Shelley's argument. The "mankind" that is responsible for transmitting holds both officials and individuals to account. Shelley describes this as "the conceptions of any nation or individuals" (258 Shelley), shortly after the above quotation from 'On Christianity'. In blaming the congregation as well as officials for the corruption Shelley deviates slightly from the

Bible where, for the most part but not exclusively God blames the officials, priests, rabbis, and pastors for corrupting everyone else. For example, in Jeremiah 23:2: "Therefore thus saith the LORD God of Israel against the pastors that feed my people; Ye have scattered my flock, and driven them away". The above passage comes as God is showing Jeremiah behind the closed doors of the Church. They witness backhanded deals and people turning their backs on the Church as a result. The corruption witnessed and the public response seen in Jeremiah 23 is indicative of the kind of clerical corruption prominent in religious institutions. Shelley observes earlier in the essay that "we live and move and think, but we are not the creators of our own origin and existence" (251). In commenting directly on the idea of God as a creator, Shelley hints at the irony of the authority granted to the Church as being a result of the Anglican God. I infer from this a sense of social and legal pressure exerted on individuals that comes from the authority of the Church, meaning that the prominence of the declarations of institutional priestly corruption and the need for individual responsibility in Shelley's essays becomes a foundation for biblical Prophecy, by blaming clerical corruption for doctrinal distortion.

Shelley's desire for the social improvement of his contemporary society illustrates the necessity he feels for individual responsibility to eradicate the Church's corruption. Ian Balfour states that: "prophecy tends not to be fulfilled in any definitive way, certainly not immediately, [...] [they] can be quoted, reworked, and reconfigured in virtually endless ways" (2) resulting in my conclusion that prophecy, if interpreted literally, is not accurate. However, the process of the "reconfiguration" of prophetic meaning places prophecy as a form of textual analysis, it is as though humanity is rewriting the same message as a way to see God in their contemporary world. This

idea relates back to my mention of John 1:1 in chapter 1, where I look at the doctrinal idea of the “word of God”. By taking this idea of reworking prophecy and paralleling it in the instance of both Shelley and Jeremiah, when looking at “transmitting [...] this horrible legacy” (258), I see the essence of prophecy reworked for Shelley’s contemporary society. Shelley, therefore, paradoxically aligns himself with the biblical prophets due to his observations on the corruption of Anglican officials in their teachings on Christianity.

Shelley’s scepticism regarding biblical prophecy can be explained by the misinterpretations of the Bible and ideas of false prophets. The quotation “all communication among human beings was vitiated and polluted in its sources” (247) exemplifies the religious tradition of misinterpreting prophecy and its provenance. The biblical prophets ciphered through doctrines to pull out the false prophets and criticised incorrect teachings. Matthew declares that you should “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.” (7:15). This verse comes from Christ’s ‘Sermon on the Mount’ and highlights the pretence involved in prophetic deception. The passage illustrates that it is the prophetic content or “inward” aspect that determines a prophecy’s truth rather than its form, meaning that one must use their own analysis to distinguish what prophetic truth is. These false prophets represent the perpetuation of unfounded principles within the Church, meaning that, for Shelley, the wrong interpretation of the Bible is being preached. He expresses that “the superstitions [Christianity’s teachings] accumulated authority [through the] ages [and were] made dear and venerable to them” (271). In foregrounding the historical lineage of misinformation in the Christian faith Shelley comments upon the extension of

corruption which is present even in the Bible, such as the above extract of Matthew, that while discussing false prophets also touches on the external view of the Church versus the hidden corruption. In essence, false prophecy stands, for Shelley, as a need for biblical analysis on an individual basis.

The Christian institution seems outdated to Shelley partly because of the history of corrupt officials in religious organisations. The remedy, for Shelley, is individual biblical analysis. He states in 'On the Doctrines of Christ' that "mankind is governed by precedents for actions which were never or are no longer useful" (272), meaning that Shelley thinks aspects of Christianity should be removed from the Church's teachings. His use of "precedents" suggests that it is the reasoning behind certain teachings that Shelley sees as antiquated and immoral. For the most part Shelley's argument is against officials picking and choosing the doctrine that suits them. Many aspects of Shelley's society choose to ignore the Christian Golden rule: "therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets." (Matthew 7:12) which preaches equality and fair treatment and instead institutions favour selfish passages. For instance, in applying Leviticus 25:44 to Shelley's contemporary society, there is a clear indication that the Anglican Church is picking and choosing which scripture to follow. The justification for slavery in Leviticus 25:44 unquestionably goes against Christ's teachings:

Both thy bondmen, and thy bondmaids, which thou shalt have, *shall be* of the heathen that are round about you; of them shall ye buy bondmen and bondmaids. (25:44)

Slavery was still very much a part of the global economy while Shelley was writing and was not outlawed globally until the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. In illustrating the traditions included in the Church's doctrine that are outdated, or immoral Shelley offers support for marginalised groups. In Shelley's statement that Christian precedents "are no longer useful" (272) he is not advocating for the dissolution of the Church nor the disregarding of the Bible, instead, Shelley is calling for a modernisation and rethinking of the institution and the role it plays in society. This exemplifies Stokes's assertion that "Shelley [is] turning the religious away from hierarchical institutions and towards political faith" (198). Stokes is observing Shelley's approach to Christianity, noting that to Shelley it is a historic institution that should evolve to fit the political sphere rather than vice versa. In 'On the Doctrines of Christ', Shelley highlights the idea of Christian teachings as outdated traditions:

No mistake is to be more deplored than the conception that a system of morals and religion should derive any portion of its authority either from the circumstance of its novelty or its antiquity (272)

Shelley's reference to "novelty" and "antiquity" here highlights his opposition to the "authority" of the Church being granted by its age. Here Shelley is pushing for change within the institution of Christianity. That change is a need to diminish the status and power afforded to the Church, which, for Shelley, can only be done through individual interpretation of the doctrine. Bryan Shelley similarly claims that "this interest in scripture does not mean that Shelley was becoming more sympathetic to Christianity. Neither does his rejection of the Church as an institution mean that the Bible was irrelevant to his spiritual impulses" (22); rather Shelley is

just reading a significant cultural text, illustrating the separation needed between the text and the Church. Similarly, Balfour insists on the Bible as a text rather than the word of God stating that “The Bible could be taken up, cited, learned from, and more without any particular doctrinal attachment to its content” (27). This chimes with my claim that Shelley is discussing the Bible in order to understand it, as well as demonstrating the need for personal perspectives of it to eradicate the Church’s corruption. Shelley is, consequently acting in a counter-cultural sense, enabling his work to be prophetic.

Shelley adamantly opposes the Christian faith and yet appears to be fascinated by the Bible and Christ. There is a critically contradictory stance to the Christian Bible in his work. I suggest the reason for this as being Shelley separating the Bible from Christianity as he states: “How far his [Jesus] doctrine or their interpretation may be true, it would scarcely have been worthwhile to enquire” (260). In using “true” Shelley sidesteps the supposed divinity of Christ landing instead on Christ’s moral philosophy. So, while Shelley analyses the text the religious significance is kept separate from it. The second half of the quotation: “scarcely have been worthwhile” speaks to Shelley’s religious scepticism, with his anger towards institutions of faith. I therefore note Shelley’s contempt for the contemporary issue of blasphemy. This anger aligns him with the biblically prophetic principle of witnessing the failings of the social order and declaring a need for change. Bryan Shelley notes “Shelley believes that the ‘prophetic’ poet does not actually predict coming events” (120), meaning that Shelley’s prophetic statements, much like those in the Bible, critique the status quo without necessarily predicting the future. Shelley’s view of the Bible as a text in combination with my reading of Bryan Shelley’s comments highlights Shelley’s

detachment from the Church as an institution of power. Shelley's study of the Bible and his scepticism are, in fact, fundamental in establishing his biblically prophetic tendencies.

In differentiating between the Bible as a form of literature and the Bible as a sacred text, Shelley grants himself liberty to interpret the Bible as he wishes. All prophecy, to attain posterity, has at some point been written down in one form or another. Biblical prophecy is, therefore, fundamentally a part of literary study as it has been compiled into a text. Throughout both Shelley's work and history allusions to the Bible are rife. This separation between Christianity and the Bible is exemplified in the Gospel of Matthew when Christ explains the difference between God and religion:

And whoso shall swear by the temple, sweareth by it, and by him that dwelleth therein.

And he that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon. (23: 21-22)

The distinction made by Christ exemplifies the biblically prophetic characteristic of separating God from the Church. In addition, this prophecy is spoken in the future tense as though the future can be seen as a variation of the present. I take this to present biblical prophecy not as fortune-telling but as seeing the changes needed in the present. This argument against determinism contrasts Bryan Shelley's postulation that "The poetic, providential way of seeing God in relation to history in prophecy gave way to determinism, plain fortune-telling, and the interpretation of

dreams” (149) which illustrates the manner in which definitions of prophecy have evolved as well as demonstrating Percy Shelley’s scepticism in regards to the authenticity of prophecy. I have briefly touched on this idea of a present that is not present and will discuss it further in chapter three. Balfour distils the Romantic distrust of biblical prophecy down to “the providential system of prophecy, in which the words of one prophet were quoted and complemented by another to provide internal coherence to the totality of the biblical message” (23). I assert that by taking the principle of requiring support from other prophets and applying it directly to Shelley’s writing centralises his tendency towards intertextuality for example ‘Adonais’ being in conversation with Keats’ ‘Endymion’ distorting the accuracy and leaving prophecy open to being flooded with false prophets as mentioned earlier. If one must be backed up and in turn back up other prophets then prophecy becomes intentional and easily forged. Hence, Shelley’s earlier statement ignoring the question of truth in the bible and instead focusing on prophetic meaning is demonstrative of his more objective analysis.

The declarations Shelley makes against the institution of Christianity is central to his writing, particularly in his essay ‘On the Doctrines of Christ’ as he fosters the role of the literary critic when analysing the bible and observes the conflicts between the text and the Church that are represented by it. This fuels Shelley’s antipathy to Christianity and ironically pulls him towards biblical prophecy. As Balfour claims “It is, of course, proverbial in the Bible for a prophet to be without honour in his own country” (51) meaning that Shelley’s opposition to the Anglican Church aligns him with biblically prophetic characteristics, especially during his self-exile in Italy which brought him new perspectives on English society: “these changes [moving to and

settling in Italy] brought him gradually into dispute with contemporary English taste” (46 Pite). Thus, Shelley’s negative view of Christianity paradoxically parallels him with biblical prophets. His discussion of social impact, corruption and tradition tie together to highlight an opposition to the Church while maintaining the sanctity of the Bible.

The Shelleyan God

God is a concept that holds Shelley’s fascination as he debates and analyses the biblical God as opposed to the Anglican depiction. This is partly why Shelley argues for the need for interpretive liberty regarding the Bible highlighting individual opinions over the dictated or taught meanings presented to the congregation at services or Sunday school. This argument places Shelley against the contemporary climate adding to his prophetic parallels. As I have said it is Shelley’s opposition to the religious order, and indeed to the socio-political landscape of his contemporary society (which will be discussed in Chapter 3) that places him in a pseudo-prophetic role. I established this as a key aspect of biblical prophecy in Chapter 1 when I quoted Balfour saying “The prophetic message often runs literally *para doxa* - that is, counter to the dominant belief” (2). It is through Shelley being “counter to the dominant belief” that he embodied Biblical Prophecy. One of the reasons Shelley gives in ‘On Christianity’ for the “*Para doxa*” is that God is a ubiquitous concept and resultantly: “God [...] was contemplated by Jesus Christ as every poet and every philosopher must have contemplated the mysterious principle” (251). In essence, Shelley’s whole essay revolves around the point that the existence of the concept of

God and the vital nature of it to society in both his present and historical context is more significant and interesting than whether God genuinely exists.

In 'On Christianity', Percy Bysshe Shelley separates his approach to God from the Anglican Christian one. His differing interpretation to what is taught by the Church shows him assessing the God of the Bible. I suggest that in doing so Shelley demonstrates his countercultural and therefore, prophetic nature. Through Shelley's theorising on God he grants individuals the ability to understand and practice the message of God's Bible independently, without the need for the Church to dictate the meaning. By focusing on the multiplicity of Godly envisionments that can resultantly be derived from the Bible Shelley pushes against the accepted contemporary Christian Church's teachings. This act of subverting expected biblical approaches to God highlights Shelley's prophetic nature as by objectively critiquing the Bible Shelley is able to draw out flaws and issues within his contemporary Anglican Church while still postulating God as an entity of fascination, in a similar way to the biblical prophets who criticised the Church for straying from God in their own times, which I have discussed in the previous section of this chapter for example.

Most commonly Shelley's biblical analysis focuses on envisioning and reenvisioning variations of Christian depictions of God. In 'On Christianity', he discusses the biblical God he reads against the God of Anglican Christianity:

The most awful and venerable of names [God], as a common term devised to express all of mystery or majesty or power which the invisible world contains. And not only has every sect distinct conceptions of the application of this

name, but scarcely two individuals of the same sect, who exercise in any degree the freedom of their judgement, or yield themselves with any candour of feeling to the influencings of the visible world find perfect coincidence of opinions to exist between them (249).

Shelley establishes the term “God” as an abstract depiction of the unexplainable elements of the world. Each aspect of the Holy trinity is echoed in the triadic structure: “mystery or majesty or power”. The “mystery” of the Holy Spirit, “majesty” of Christ and “power” of the Father, all combine to make God. This means the authority of the Christian Church is granted by an abstract concept that the Church created. Therefore, Shelley’s scrutiny of the “distinct conceptions” of God are dissecting the origin of his contemporary Christian Church in order to question the Anglican Church’s authority. Balfour’s view of “the Bible as simultaneously the word of God and the work of human hands” (107) highlights the problematic aspect of God because the depictions of God, biblically, have been used to promote the Christian faith by people through a specific interpretation. I draw together the divine and the human to highlight Shelley’s criticism as being explorative of the Bible, not against God, resulting in a clear indication of Shelley’s scholastic and interpretive interest in the Bible. Shelley’s biblically prophetic parallels are cemented through his exploration of “God” as a multifaceted construct.

Shelley’s depiction of God as “awful and venerable” in the passage above ties in with Old Testament depictions of God. In the Old Testament God is shown repeatedly to punish and seek vengeance and justice, whereas the New Testament God is centred around forgiveness and benevolence which Anglicanism leans towards. However,

when Shelley states that God is a “name [...used] to express all of the mystery ...”, he indicates a distinct awareness of the Church’s power, meaning Shelley is separating the wrongs done in the name of God (by the Church) and those done directly by God. The combination of these two elements of Christian fear helps to illustrate the religious climate Shelley was working in. Shelley’s allusion to the God of the Old Testament signifies his analysis of the Bible as a text rather than a tool for perpetuating the Church’s teachings as he acknowledges the different faces of God. This allusion is exemplified as biblically prophetic in the Book of Nahum:

God *is* jealous, and the LORD revengeth; the LORD revengeth, and *is* furious; the LORD will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserves *wrath* for his enemies. (1:2)

This passage really drills in the premise that God is vengeful but only against “his enemies” relating to my earlier observation on Shelley and Jeremiah’s perceptions about corrupt officials, and suggesting that the vengeance will be directed against the corrupt institution. Therefore, Shelley’s individual analysis of the Bible provides an alternate impression of God and encourages individual interpretation, responsibility and the inevitability of the fall of corrupt institutions.

Moreover, the Anglican Church's dictatorial interpretation of the Bible and transformation of God from the Old Testament to the New is, to Shelley, a source of intrigue. As the above section has shown Shelley prioritises individual analysis, which can be in opposition to the Church’s contemporaneous teachings on God as omni-benevolent. However, there are instances in both the Old and New Testaments

where God is shown to be good. In 'On Christianity', Shelley exemplifies his disagreement with the Church's teachings on God, illustrating the complexity of the concept of God and the prevalence of moral aspects:

Jesus Christ represented God as the principle of all good [...]. But the interpreters of his doctrine have confounded the good and the evil principle. They observed the emanations of these universal natures to be inextricably entangled in the world, and trembling before the power of the cause of all things addressed to it such flattery as is acceptable to the ministers of human tyranny (259).

Here Shelley evokes the Holy Trinity to illustrate Christ's goodness as God is "the principle of all good" which separates God from Satan who being the antithesis is evil. Shelley then goes on to observe that the Church have "confounded the good and evil principle" meaning that by mixing God with the world they become inexplicably entwined and so God is distorted into something to be feared. Shelley claims that the Church is unable to view God as only good because good and evil are "inextricably entangled in the world" and therefore, God as part of Christianity becomes distorted and so appears to contain evil, however that evil is a byproduct of the Christian institution not God. Shelley's accusation of "flattery" is directly related to the fear that he witnesses the Church officials imposing on the populace hence, Shelley calling Church officials "ministers of human tyranny". Through the passage, Shelley's feelings on the Church's teachings on God are highlighted demonstrating the complexity of his being, which Shelley believes is misrepresented to Christian

congregations. The beginning of the quotation alludes to the biblical prophets's assertions on God's ultimate goodness. Nahum States:

The LORD *is* good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him. (Nahum 1:7)

This passage is very straightforward in its language. There are an abundance of prophets who also speak about God and goodness being synonymous, including Amos, Isaiah, and Christ, making this principle a widely acknowledged Biblical tenet. In most instances, as with Nahum 1:7 God's goodness comes accompanied by a comment on a "day of trouble" which translates as an observation on religious corruption and as a result Shelley's parallel with this instance in the Bible highlights the biblically prophetic elements of his writing. I emphasise that Shelley consistently bears witness and calls out the Church's corruption, which is biblically prophetic. My assertion on Shelley's prophetic tendencies is suggestive of Balfour's more general statement that "in the end, all writing that matters may be prophetic" (18). Biblical prophecy is as a result a tool of social improvement. The issues Shelley observes are universal, affecting us all throughout time, in a prophetic manner.

Shelley's postulations on Christ represent the distinctly Christian approach he takes to God and the Bible, so while he may oppose Christianity in the form he experiences, the problem he has is not with Christ or religion but with people's distortions of texts. This shift in Shelley's approach to the Bible is a result of his interpretation of Christ as a moral philosopher. In 'On Christianity', Shelley exemplifies his admiration of Christ by stating:

It is the profound wisdom and the comprehensive morality of his doctrines which essentially distinguish him [Jesus Christ] from the crowd of martyrs and of patriots who have exalted to devote themselves for what they conceived would contribute to the benefit of their fellow men (247)

In this quotation Shelley argues that the prevention of autonomous individual engagement with the Bible produces corruption, in effect aligning it with a passage from Ezekiel. The book of Ezekiel highlights oppression and corruption and the impact that corruption has on the population who do not have power in that society: “The people of the land have used oppression, and exercised robbery, and have vexed the poor and needy: yea, they have oppressed the stranger wrongfully” (22:29). This verse signifies the dangers of the power of the Church as it highlights, in the context of the rest of the chapter, the manner in which the institution of the Church has been used to oppress and subjugate people in the same ways in biblical times as in Shelley’s time. God goes on to declare this corruption as unjust and against his word, meaning that Shelley’s interpretation of God’s word supports his opposition to the Church. Hence, people must take the initiative to understand and read God’s word for themselves so as to not have it used against them and to ensure that they follow it they must first know and read it, relating back to Shelley’s assertions on the importance of individual thought.

Shelley’s quotation echoes the above passage from Ezekiel in sentiment while using opposite language. Shelley focuses on the positive when addressing “the benefit of their fellow men,” (247) whereas Ezekiel frames it in the negative stating that they

“oppressed the stranger wrongfully” but both are attempting to bring about harmony and justice through God’s words. Stokes argues that: “Shelley evokes Christianity only to shift into a prophetic mode of glorifying poetic imagination” (192), suggesting that Shelley draws on the authority of prophecy to add weight to his ideas for change. Similarly Bryan Shelley focuses on Shelley's choice to align himself to Christ affirming that “*On Christianity*, where Jesus is presented as a poet, with a poet’s imagination” (132) is indicative of Shelley’s prophetic alignments. Bryan Shelley argues that Shelley is “The Jacobin Jesus” (56) suggesting that Shelley is attempting to replicate Christ. Bryan Shelley goes on in this chapter to state that “the Jesus Shelley reconstructs is to a large extent a projection of his own self-image as an apostle of enlightenment” (57) . I follow Bryan Shelley in his reading of Shelley’s Jesus, but I differ The reference to “enlightenment” produces the prophetic tone as it shifts the message into a positive and future-orientated light. In comparison and by intentionally utilising allusions of the Christian Bible in ‘On Christianity’ Shelley is deliberately aligning himself with the biblically prophetic tradition.

Dichotomies of Faith

The previous sections of this chapter have discussed Shelley’s critical approaches to the Church's societal role and its teachings. I will now move to address his prophetic practice, assessing how he applies the aforementioned criticism to his own beliefs.

The biblically prophetic elements of Shelley’s work are exemplified in ‘On Christianity’, where he both discusses biblical prophecy and creates it, meaning Shelley’s interpretation of biblical prophecy is applicable to his own work.

For Shelley Christianity is a social religion, meaning that rather than the faith being a belief system it is an expectation ingrained in the social fabric of nineteenth-century England. As such his analysis of the faith in 'On Christianity' is focused on the teachings of the Church, as he understands them. Shelley claims that society is more complex than Christianity leaves room for: "Good and evil subsist in so intimate an union that few situations of human affairs can be affirmed to contain either of these principles in an unconnected state" (248). The permeating concepts of "good and evil" in both the Church and the Bible function, for Shelley, as a way of highlighting the oversimplification of morality in Christianity. This is further illustrated with the use of "so intimate a union" which is demonstrative of the entanglement and overuse of these two concepts in a discussion on morality. In highlighting this issue of oversimplification Shelley touches on the restriction of only having these two options. He blurs the boundaries between the two and creates a grey area. In doing so his later comment on an "unconnected state" of human affairs expresses a separation of theory and practice. "Good and evil" disregard the myriad of moral grey areas that lay between those two points. Goodness is an unattainable aspect of Christianity to Shelley which distances his theology from the faith.

Bryan Shelley's description of critical approaches to Shelley's religiosity displays the complexity of belief, drawing a parallel between the restrictive choice between good and evil, and Christianity and atheism:

There are, ironically, two opposed misconceptions about Shelley's religious beliefs [...] one is that his diverse speculations on the idea of God can be

safely subsumed in the term 'atheism;' the other is that he is in some sense a Christian (17)

The assertion of the misconception of Shelley being either an Atheist or a Christian this quotation captures the complexity of Shelley's approach to Christianity. Jager in 'Shelley After Atheism' explores what atheism meant to Shelley and the reasons that Shelley used it as a descriptor for himself. Jager comes to the conclusion that "Atheism [is] an occupation" (623) meaning that to be an atheist was to be controversial and counter-cultural rather than it being, as we now understand it, the belief that there is no God. For the purposes of my argument, Shelley's religious affiliations are not that consequential as biblical prophets are not exclusively Christian and so viewing Shelley as having biblically prophetic qualities does not mean that he must be Christian. Shelley addresses the issue of only having the Bible as a source of information about Jesus Christ, stating that "he [Jesus Christ] has left no written record of himself" (260) unlike Shelley and the other prophets such as Isaiah or Ezekiel who have left reams of writing, solidifying Shelley's similarity to biblical Prophets, rather than solely Jesus.

Furthermore, Jager's claim that Atheism, "far from opposing Christianity, is a very Christian concept [...] it is brittle and shallow" (617- 618) highlights how the church kept people submissive. The "brittle and shallow" element he observes is atheism's dependence on theism and it is this dependence that indicates atheism as being against the accepted social order, resulting in a common enemy and trapping people through fear in the Church, as it becomes a group (Christianity) against individuals. Shelley's choice to label himself as an atheist is, consequently, a decision to stand in

opposition to his contemporary social order, rather than a declaration of no faith. Shelley's revelations on the topic of God are suggestive of this. For instance, in 'On Christianity': "The word God according to the acception of Jesus Christ [...] is the interfused and overruling spirit of all the energy and wisdom included within the circle of existing things" (250). The all-encompassing God Shelley describes is indicative of his envisionment of the biblical God. Shelley's decision to include the "acception of Jesus" illustrates that he is discussing God as an entirely Christian conception and in doing so even though it seems different to Anglican conceptions it is genuinely Christian, "overruling" can be seen to represent the principle of God as both transcendent and omnipotent, for instance. Shelley goes on to state that God exists circling everything, which appears to be a paraphrasing of God being omniscient and omnipotent. However, it also alludes to Isaiah who describes God in a comparable manner as circling the world:

It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in (40:22)

Isaiah's description, aside from being more poetic, also uses "earth" adding a specificity that Shelley later changes to accommodate the expansion of knowledge surrounding the solar system, thus his use of "existing things," allows space for future knowledge to fit into his prophecy. The all-encompassing depiction of God includes both the good and bad that is present. So Byron Shelley's postulation that "He [Shelley] comments on the society of which he is a part, addressing its moral ills while at the same time seeing the direction in which it is headed" (120) produces the

effect of Shelley's prophetic nature being down to observational power and its applicability to Christianity through context and affiliation. The observational power of Shelley's prophecy further illustrates the biblically prophetic quality of discussing the morality of the Church and the clergy's actions in his contemporary society.

Shelley's version of biblical Prophecy is a call for morality, more than it is a prediction. He remarks on the socio-political state of the Middle East at the birth of Christ suggesting that Christ's prophecies represent a new age of ethics, and the subsequent religion was formed because of a lack of philosophical teaching at the time. Furthermore, as Balfour states "The major difference between prophet and bard lies in the way history functions for each of them" (30). Therefore, the primary difference between biblical prophets and Shelley is the label that we now attach to them and posterity afforded to them, which is the focus of chapter four. In the quotation below, Shelley treats Christ not as a prophet but as a poet and philosopher, effectively relabelling Christ in the same way as I am relabelling Shelley.

The birth of Christ occurred at a period which may be considered as a crisis
[...] Accumulations of wealth and power were inordinately great. [...].
Refinement in arts and letters distorted from its natural tendency to promote
benevolence and truth, became subservient to lust and luxury. All
communication among human beings was vitiated and polluted in its sources.
(247)

By Shelley making note of the climate of Christ's world he aligns the turmoil with that of his own time, paralleling the corruption and inequality present in both Shelley's and Christ's worlds. This has the apparent effect of aligning the two figures. The reference to "arts and letters" acknowledges the creative nature of Christ and addresses Christ's words as the Bible recounts them. The Bible is a work of many authors accounting for God's interaction with humans and for a significant portion depicting Christ's life. It is, then, the part of the Bible about Christ's life specifically (not Old Testament prophecies pertaining to the Messiah) that Shelley is discussing when referring to the corruption and distortion of texts for monetary gain. As a result, Shelley is suggesting that it was Christ's ethical doctrine that appealed to and granted him posterity and prophetic status. Similarly, Bryan Shelley observes Shelley's "reinterpretation of Jesus as a benign moral teacher" (24). While I agree that Shelley imagines Jesus as a "moral teacher" I argue that Shelley does not see him as "benign" but rather the opposite. The urgency of the above quotation from 'On Christianity' highlights Shelley's perception of Christ as a radical thinker, transforming the social and political spheres of his and later times. These radical qualities are partly what Shelley attempts to emulate, paralleling the deeply ethical and political nature of Christ and the biblical prophets.

Through this Chapter I have argued that Shelley's thoughts surrounding biblical prophecy are exemplified and explored in 'On Christianity'. This unfinished essay lends insight into Shelley as both a literary critic and as a writer/poet. His words are indicative of biblical prophecy as by distancing himself from the corruption of institutions he draws himself into the company of prophets like Ezekiel, Nahum, Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Leviticus, demonstrating a proclivity for Christian morality and

doctrine. The prophets Shelley parallels are distinct in their observations on their contemporary societies much in the same way as Shelley. His allusions to the aforementioned prophets are demonstrative of the prophetic tradition of interwoven prophecy. Hence, Shelley's refutations of biblical prophecy ironically and paradoxically parallel those of the biblical prophets.

Chapter 3: The Political Prophet

Shelley takes issue with the intermingling of government, law and Christianity, as to him the codependency of power seems immoral. These institutions have historically lent each other support producing a breeding ground for power-based corruption. The criminal status of blasphemy was a direct consequence of the cumulative power of Church and State; for Shelley this is particularly pertinent due to accusations of blasphemy leading to his expulsion from Oxford. Shelley makes the case for the connection between Christianity and political corruption through his essays *The Necessity of Atheism* (1811), *Speculations on Morals* (1816 - 21) and 'A Philosophical View of Reform' (1820) and his poem 'The Mask of Anarchy' (1819) highlighting the perpetual issue of religion impacting law and politics. Furthermore, these works chart a route through Shelley's adulthood, cementing the vital role political corruption played in contributing to his lifelong political and religious concerns.

I claim that the pronouncements Shelley makes that were condemned as blasphemous actually have important parallels with the pronouncements of the biblical prophets. Take for instance the fact that Christ, the son of God and one of the most renowned biblical prophets, was crucified as a blasphemer. Christ is not the only instance of this, an additional couple of examples are:

Jeremiah, in Jeremiah 26:11

Then spake the priests and the prophets unto the princes and to all the people, saying, This man *is* worthy to die; for he hath prophesied against this city, as ye have heard with your ears.

Stephen, in Acts 6:11

Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and *against* God.

In each of these instances the prophets were put to death for the crime of blasphemy. So if we parallel Shelley in *The Necessity of Atheism* with these biblical examples there is a similarity in institutional opposition to critiques of religious premises. Shelley's awareness of the irony that a religion founded upon a blasphemer would punish blasphemy is, to him, demonstrative of the corrupting power of political influence and the dangers of entangling politics and religion. He communicated this through the separation created between the Bible and Christianity, demonstrating Blasphemy as biblically prophetic in nature, as it opposes institutions of faith rather than the respective faiths in themselves.

In this chapter I will discuss how Shelley's *Speculations on Morals* focuses on ethical practice and forming beliefs independently from institutional prescription, meaning the personal nature of both political and religious belief should allow space for debate without fear of retribution. As a result Shelley attempts to avoid opposing politics and religion, while still commenting upon them. Shelley then puts his beliefs into practice with the poem 'The Mask of Anarchy' which explores the political state of England, the Peterloo Massacre, and Shelley's hopes for the country in the future. In essence, 'The Mask of Anarchy' functions similarly to biblical prophecy. Shelley presents the issue of corruption proposing future outcomes and solutions.

Shelley's future-orientated politics draws parallels with my definition of the prophetic leading me on to the premise of counter presents. Counter-presents are an alternative present. A present that is not present, so to speak. Therefore, they are dependent on politics' changeability to instill both a contemporary relevance and a temporal direction for change. Seeing the present in a different way, for example witnessing corruption and taking steps to prevent and eradicate it, makes the premise of counter presents highly prophetic. Shelley demonstrates the political desire for progress in 'A Philosophical View of Reform' and through his focus on "reform" I read that text with a focus on it as a revised version of the present, rather than an idealistic future. In doing so I argue Shelley fits into the characteristics of biblical prophecy as defined in Chapters One and Two. The permeation of Shelley's political stance into his body of work mirrors the traditions of biblical prophets.

The Politics of Prophecy

Shelley's position on the crime of blasphemy is political, religious and, most importantly, biblically prophetic. There is a prophetic tendency to critique the corruption of their contemporary social order. In the case of Shelley this manifests as the entanglement of politics and religion . Shelley embodies this propensity in *The Necessity of Atheism* (1811), a vital text addressing the premise of belief and non-belief, along with being a key foundation for the trajectory of Shelley's career. I will also use *Speculations on Morals* (1816 - 21) to illustrate Shelley's focus on ethics, as the thoughts the essay contains shape Shelley's political and religious affiliations instantiating his prophetic tendencies. In both of these texts Shelley attempts to dismantle the systemic corruption of the entanglement of Church and State,

paralleling the same trait in biblical prophecy. Thus I will show that Shelley's observations on the influence of religion on the continuance of political corruption is biblically prophetic.

The Necessity of Atheism (1811) is the earliest text I am using because it plays a significant role in understanding the relationship between religion and politics for Shelley. The scandal, which surrounds the text, originates from its reception, with university officials declaring it blasphemous. It is this perceived blasphemy which resulted in Shelley's expulsion from Oxford and, to a certain extent, establishes his atheistic and counter-cultural status. Paul Whickman begins his book on Blasphemy and politics by addressing the context of *The Necessity of Atheism* scandal: "On 25 March 1811, the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley and his future biographer, Thomas Hogg, were expelled from University College, Oxford" (Whickman 1). In doing this Whickman highlights the significance of the event in understanding Shelley's writing, particularly as Shelley's expulsion from university became an example of his dissident standing in the social order. Shelley's outcast perspective on society as a result of this social exclusion is reminiscent of the outcast characteristic of the biblical prophets, particularly as it is the outcast status that allows for the external observations of society and politics that are present in both the Shelleyan canon and the biblical prophecies.

The Necessity of Atheism's central argument is the right of an individual to determine their experience of belief. Shelley argues that "No degree of criminality can be attached to disbelief" (5) meaning that belief is not something that can be regulated or controlled in any real sense and therefore the act of non-belief cannot be

criminalised as it cannot be evidenced. The irony of the charge of blasphemy against Shelley is emphasised by this quotation as the pamphlet foreshadows his later postulations on individual thought and interpretation, especially in regards to politics and religion. For James Chandler, Shelley's atheistic standing is "less about intellectual light than about pragmatic application" (117) indicating that Chandler reads Shelley's work as an attempt to rationalise the human experience not discredit an ethereal realm, whether that be Heaven or Mount Olympus or Valhalla. The "pragmatic application" that Chandler refers to is further exemplified when Shelley posits that "Testimony is insufficient to prove the being of a God" (5). Here Shelley is continuing the narrative of individual belief signifying the necessity of questioning belief. Proving belief is paradoxical, as once proof is found belief changes from faith to fact. Shelley's use of "testimony" is indicative of faith in other people rather than in God. The word is also reflective of the Bible as it is a human testimony of divine experience. The issue that Shelley raises about belief is in fact addressed in the Bible, encapsulating the ubiquity of doubt within faith. In John 20:29 Jesus says:

Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed *are* they that have not seen, and *yet* have believed.

This passage illustrates the importance of belief to faith, as faith by definition cannot be proven. Shelley's similar approach in *The Necessity of Atheism* to the individual experience of belief relates to the above passage as representative of one person and their experience and their "testimony". The second part of the passage places virtue on the "blessing" of blind faith, validating the experience of doubt. As a result of the connection between this passage and *The Necessity of Atheism* I claim that

Shelley's atheism and oppositional religious stances in no way discredits an alignment with biblical prophecy and in fact the questioning of faith is a prevalent feature of the biblical prophecies.

Atheism, or non-belief, was a way for Shelley to oppose the political order. The socially and politically disruptive nature of the term "atheism" means it is a symbol of resistance. Whickman's observation, in regards to the title of Shelley's pamphlet, supports this assertion, as he states "*The Necessity of Atheism* (1811), was far less provocative than its title suggested; to have *apparently* advocated atheism, however, was enough to risk criminal charges" (1). The conclusion I draw from this is that the title was chosen to shock and provoke instilling a far more radical ideology than the actual contents do. Whickman's quotation is also suggestive of the title being the main cause for the "criminal charges" of blasphemy. Despite this, the blasphemous label placed on Shelley lasted throughout his life as he continued to theorise on Christianity and atheism but, for the most part, he did so in a less obviously abrasive way. Mark Canuel, in his concluding discussion of Romantic progressivism when reflecting on the writers he uses in the main body of his book, cements the premise that for Romantic writers "dissenting religious culture permeated political theorizing" (211) which echoes my assertion that Shelley's atheism was a political statement. Moreover, Canuel argue that the prevalence of the entanglement of Christianity in political circumstances. This is exemplified by Whickman who notes that "blasphemy is both political and religious for Shelley" (14) and so as I have argued Shelley is a religious and political outsider and social, political and religious critic, tying his work to that of the biblical prophets and granting his work a prophetic voice.

Shelley's essay *Speculations on Morals* analyses "Morals, which, under the name of religion, have in various ages and countries prevailed among mankind" (190). In this instance, Shelley is arguing that morality was the foundation of religion and therefore the political impact of religion should in turn be one of morality. However, Whickman argues that people who believe in a religious depiction of God or "theists risk bestowing infallibility as well as authoritarian attributes on to human political systems" (99) and in doing so the morality that politics and religion should be based on is forgotten in order to protect an institution of power. For Shelley it is as a result of the distortion of moral value that the Church and State feed each other's corruption. Shelley's writing on the immorality of combining the Church and State is addressed by Whickman who highlights "political power as reliant on abstracted religious notions" (110). The choice of "abstracted" indicates a distortion and manipulation of "religious notions" suggesting that the intangibility of religious proof that Shelley presents when discussing issues of belief is continually prevalent in both *The Necessity of Atheism* and *Speculations on Morals*. This is the basis of Shelley's personal philosophy on the immorality of religion dictating law, as illustrated in his analogy of a bound man in *Speculations on Morals*.

No person can be BOUND or OBLIGED, without some power preceding to bind and oblige. If I observe a man bound hand and foot, I know that someone bound him. But if I observe him returning self-satisfied from the performance of some action, by which he has been the willing author of extensive benefit, I do not infer that the anticipation of hellish agonies, or the hope of heavenly reward, has constrained him to such an act (188)

In this passage Shelley is exploring active and passive roles in force and consent, leading him to apply this premise to religious oppression. The principle of a “power preceding” an act of oppression is how the passage moves from a literal application of force to a figurative one. The “power” could be a literal force such as a person or the law, or it could be a mental one. Shelley’s argument suggests that religious force, which can be physical and observed, is greater or even causes the unobservable mental force (God) due to the power of belief but also a herd mentality. Hence, when the man who did the binding appears his motives are unclear and so represent an unseen force, known only to the man who has done the binding. Shelley’s suggestion is that this force is a Christian one; to Shelley the man he observes is equally obligated, but his bindings are invisible.

To apply this to blasphemy I assert that for Shelley the law is the physical power tying up the man and faith is the mental force leading to the binding. Shelley’s argument highlights the absurdity of this by producing a visual and visceral representation of the oppression. To add to the absurdity a biblical parallel is Christ’s crucifixion for apparent blasphemy and yet the religion for which he is the eponym continues punishing that same crime.

Likewise also the chief priests mocking *him*, with the scribes and elders, said,
He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him.

He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God. (Matthew 27:41-43)

Matthew not only communicates Christ's crucifixion but also shows senior religious officials casting aspersions on Christ while he died. The quotation also describes Christ being physically bound and those people who bound him feeling it is their duty to do so as a result of their faith. Matthew also demonstrates the relationship between crimes like blasphemy and institutional corruption as there was no need for the "chief priests mocking". Shelley echoes the external perspective pointing out the absurdity of essentially rubbing salt in the wound. It is perhaps as a result of this observation that, as Chandler states, for Shelley "Christ himself - is distinct from Christianity" (112) creating a separation between the institutional corruption and the victims of it, in both Matthew and the "BOUND man" analogy. This means that despite Christ's eponymous standing Christianity is a religion build on more than being purely Christ's works. Thus the role of biblical prophecy, including Christ's own prophecy comes to the foreground as almost a contextualisation or allegory of moral premises much like Shelley's *Speculations on Morals*, solidifying my argument that Shelley's advocacy for the separation of Church and State is a biblically prophetic stance. In addition it demonstrates Shelley's antithetical religious and political stance in his contemporary society, furthering his alignment with the biblical prophets.

Speculations on Morals highlights the idea that Shelley's political writings are built upon his sense of morality as it demonstrates the formation of ethical and moral premises. In the essay Shelley asserts that:

We look on all that in ourselves with which we can discover a resemblance in others; and consider those resemblances as the materials of moral knowledge. It is in the differences that it actually consists. (193)

Here Shelley is observing the power of difference in creating both morality and progress. The use of “consider” in opposition to “consists” illustrates the conflict between theory and certainty. I argue that the quotation is asserting the idea that difference is the source of moral improvement to Shelley and so his preoccupation with his own otherness functions as a demonstration of his progressive nature. The emphasis Shelley places on the self is, therefore, indicative of his counter cultural status due to the “difference” he creates between himself and others. In essence, the essay encourages the individual to think and act for themselves, which is a continuation of his arguments for opposing the norm in *The Necessity of Atheism*, published four years prior. Canuel’s assessment of the Romantic characteristic of progress builds on the principle of “difference” that Shelley is discussing. Canuel alleges that “Romantic writers seize on internal division and take it less as an occasion for anxiety, exclusion, or erasure, and more as impetus to rethink the groundwork of progress itself” (7), which is exactly what I observe Shelley to be doing through *Speculations on Morals*. The consequential effect of Canuel’s envisionment of progress, when applied to Shelley, is that progress becomes synonymous with change, more specifically a moral change, resulting in an alignment between Shelley and the biblical prophets as both prophecy and politics are based upon change. Gerard Cohen-Vrignaud’s claim that in ‘The Mask of Anarchy’ “Shelley’s sociological sense of hope as the recourse of the disenfranchised” (162) comes from the culmination of morality and politics for Shelley, since his hopes and desires for the future are established through his moral postulations and so his self-imposed social exile relates him to the “disenfranchised” encouraging him to make political change, which is the “hope” Cohen-Vrignaud witnesses. As a result Shelley’s moral and political affiliations become prophetic through his own difference.

The future orientation of Shelley's moral and political thinking pushes his work further into the Biblically prophetic mode. Rohrbach states that "anticipatory poetics gives fullness to the present and invites critical discussion about how that temporal mode relates to Romantic modes of the prophetic" (23). I argue that, in combination with Shelley's difference to his contemporary social order, his desire for change is expressed using a temporal mode indicating towards the prophetic. The "anticipatory" element Rohrbach mentions furthers the prophetic tone of critical exploration of temporality. The "anticipatory" element is the foundation of Shelley's prophetic mode, exemplified in *Speculations on Morals* as Shelley declares:

Imagination or mind employed in prophetically imagining forth its objects, is that faculty of human nature on which every gradation of its progress, nay every, the minutest, change, depends. (189)

Shelley directly alludes to the idea that the change afforded by imagining progress in the present is prophetic. In a sense Shelley determines society's future direction by observing problems and directing his ideas for change into an abstract future. However, Shelley's focus takes on "imagination" in this quotation is indicative of the creativity and thought required to see the world as it is in the present and to design change to attempt to improve it. It is the idea of improvement that I draw on to connect Shelley's moral postulations with his political ones, leading me to the conclusion that the prophetic nature of his work is multi-faceted and far more than a tendency towards thinking in relation to the future. Cohen-Vrignaud's argument that "Shelley's biography and poetry manifests in what many critics have recognised as

his future orientation” (160) reconfirms Shelley’s propensity for future thinking; however I go further arguing that the future thinking “critics have recognised” is in fact prophetic. That future orientation in combination with Shelley’s postulations on moral improvement is a signifier of biblical prophecy as taught in the Christian faith. For instance in Exodus 20 where God, speaking through Moses, gives the Ten Commandments to the Israelites:

And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments. (20:6)

The Ten Commandments are ten rules that all Abrahamic religions are morally based on. These rules set the precedent that prophecy while being forward thinking, should also have moral implications. By relating this moral grounding to Shelley’s work I argue that for Shelley the political implications of morality, particularly when positioned in relation to the future, are deeply biblically prophetic.

For Shelley, moral theory becomes politics when put into practice, meaning that if there is a fault in the moral theory the political application will be wrong. Shelley often claims institutional Christianity created a country that was governed by misinterpretations of religious premises, particularly Biblical content. In *Speculations on Morals* Shelley expresses the need for resolution to that misrepresentation for morality to triumph stating that: “Virtue is thus entirely a refinement of civilised life; a creation of the human mind; or rather, [...] the relations established between man and man” (189). The “relations between man and man” highlights the need for social interaction and debate in order to accomplish political change. Through this I contend that if “virtue”, as Shelley states, is a social construct then it is required to

develop through social systems such as religion and politics. Furthermore, it is in the “refinement” that Shelley observes that suggests social and political progress are dependent on moral change. Over time moral principles bring forth political progress and so Shelley’s future orientated view means his alternative morals counter his contemporary world, making him appear prophetic in retrospect.

Rohrbach’s assertions that “History can teach the politician or the moral philosopher to predict behaviour in a certain possible situation and thereby enable him to manipulate” (42) adds another dimension to the relationship between politics and ethics. She leans to the negative to discuss the political tendency towards “manipulation”, but the ability to manipulate is not intrinsically immoral, in fact Shelley continually uses “history” to envision the future and as Rohrbach argues earlier in her book there is a “Romantic propensity to imagine the present in its relation to futurity” (9). By this logic the ability to manipulate the present is prophetic in its vision of the future as an altered present. In continuation of the role of history in envision both the present and the future Canuel remarks on “Religious Dissenting culture [...] interpreting history as a pattern in the past that could extend predictability into the future” (31) conveying the blurring of temporal bounds to political and moral structures for the writers he discusses, such as Shelley. Canuel is also alluding to history repeating itself and so the events of the future echo the events of the past. Shelley’s *Speculations on Morals* gives two reasons for the future’s echoing of the past.

Firstly: “The stability of human society seems to be maintained sufficiently by the uniformity of the conduct of its members” (191), which is evocative of tradition preventing change and in the context of this essay that tradition is Anglican

Christianity. In addition, the “uniformity” Shelley notes strips away the individual and therefore mankind is bound to continue the same mistakes as long as they follow the same patterns, which emphasises the need for individual thought to create any change. Hence, morality, religion and politics are drawn together as extensions of one another. The “uniformity” of religion is according to Shelley the aspect affords both religious and political “stability”. Hence without that same “uniformity” and “stability” Shelley is observing future possibilities of individual moral and political practice. Canuel continues this by indicating that, in the case of William Wordsworth, “the personal translates into the political” (9). However, this is equally applicable to Shelley as Canuel is implying that the political system is dependent upon the individual and the difference which produces arguments for change.

Secondly: “The basis of all political mistakes [... is] the prolific cause and effect of religious error” (190). This is encapsulated by Shelley’s opposing the political and legal structures being based on religion. This issue can be represented by the use and legality of capital punishment. An instance of such a religious error is in the ten commandments Exodus 20:13 “Thou shalt not kill.” Despite this Christian nations killed people and still do for any number of reasons that they dictate. Similarly, Matthew 7:12 (the Golden Rule) says “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.”. The Bible, in both the New and Old Testament affirms the fundamental pillar of Christianity is do not harm other people. Shelley’s declaration of “religious error” is arguably a highly accurate representation of the perverted by Christian moral teachings and the way they have been applied to political institutions.

In both of the above instances Shelley is demonstrating the manipulation of religion and its distorted political applications. In turn this confirms the ability to witness such examples and bring them to light as biblically prophetic, due to Shelley's culturally critical thinking and his propensity to future orientated thinking. In *The Necessity of Atheism* and *Speculations on Morals* Shelley demonstrates his own moral philosophy and suggests its political ramifications. I expand this to argue that prophecy is vitally political and politics is in its most basic form a branch of moral philosophy. Through these works I have highlighted the ways Shelley uses ethics and politics to allude to and mirror the biblical prophets and as a result he draws parallels between his life and theirs. Thus, Shelley's unmistakable moral political thought places his work amongst the biblical prophets.

Shelley's Modern Prophecy

Shelley's prophetic nature as outlined by his prose also permeates his poetry. Up until this point I have exclusively discussed Shelley's prose writings, as they shed more light on his postulations of the elements of biblical prophecy. Shelley's poem 'The Mask of Anarchy' (1819) exemplifies the political nature of biblical prophecy and so it presents an alternate entry point to my argument that Shelley's political nature and religiously outcast status are characteristically biblically prophetic. Lilla Crisafulli presents "*The Mask of Anarchy*, [as] a counter-space of the contemporary political scene" (132) and from that position I will explore the poem from that position. The two lenses I am going to apply are firstly: one of institutional corruption and the ramifications of leaving that corruption unchecked; secondly, the change Shelley incites religiously, socially and politically as being prophetic in a biblical

manner. These two elements of the poem that I will analyse represent key factors of my argument that thus far, Shelley fulfills the characteristics of the biblical prophets.

Shelley's 'The Mask of Anarchy' is a deeply political poem, which was written in response to the Peterloo Massacre in 1819. Throughout the poem a refrain appears that echoes the triadic nature of the holy trinity: "Thou art God, and Law, and King" (In 61, 324). In separating faith and religion Shelley's allusions take on political meaning due to his continual argument against institutional corruption. I argue that religion is a defined belief system as opposed to faith being a personal sense of something bigger. Hence religion and faith are not mutually exclusive. Therefore, Shelley's separation of faith and religion goes against the contemporary political situation of Anglican Christianity being the overriding national religion, while other denominations of Christianity are actively politically discriminated against. The declaration in line 61 alludes to the roles religion, government and monarchy played in the devastation at Peterloo. In echoing those institutions in this way Shelley places blame on the corruption of those bodies of power. Furthermore the reference to the Christian trinity highlights how the Church, for Shelley, props up government and monarchy and so by repeating this line throughout the poem Shelley is stating and restating the institutional cause. Canuel mentions this "hostility to monarchs, hierarchies, and state religions" (117) which emphasises the presence of the "hostility" throughout Shelley's work. Canuel's mention of "hierarchies" draws on both social and institutional bodies, while "state religion" indicates Shelley directing responsibility for the massacre to the combined Church and State. In addition, Shelley's combination of those three social principles, which are echoed by Canuel, is stated by Rohrbach who asserts that "Shelley's poetics aspire to a comprehensive

social picture” (68). In saying this Rohrbach is demonstrating how Shelley’s contemporary awareness permeates his work. The “social picture” he draws on is almost a manifesto for change and so he is envisioning a counter present or a variation of his contemporary world but one without the issues he raises. The “comprehensive” nature of this is representative of the depth of thought and the interconnection of corruption that Shelley sees. ‘The Mask of Anarchy’, exemplifies, the political element of revolutionary ideas in biblical prophecy because of Shelley addressing the contemporary relevance of the Peterloo massacre.

In ‘The Mask of Anarchy’ Shelley directly associates the poetic verse with biblical prophecy. The final two stanzas, which are a refrain throughout the poem, are a call to arms with Shelley attempting to inspire a change amongst the people. Cohen-Vrignaud similarly asserts that “*The Mask of Anarchy* prompts a speech that would proliferate in print as a rallying cry for nineteenth century reformers and beyond” (168) and in doing so he demonstrates the future-orientated nature of Shelley’s “rallying cry” for change through the era specific “nineteenth century” and “beyond”, having the effect of highlighting how Shelley’s prophetic ending will resonate through generations similarly to biblical prophecy. Fairclough argues that “Shelley [...] engaged closely with the physical and moral authority of mass meetings” (12). Ironically the power Shelley sees in “mass meetings” is harnessed by Anglican Christianity to spread their dogma. The passage below borrows from biblical prophecy to lend gravitas and intertextual authority to the poem. Shelley harnesses the power of organised religion through almost every line of these central two stanzas containing a biblical allusion.

Men of England, heirs of Glory,
 Heroes of unwritten story,
 Nurslings of one mighty Mother,
 Hopes of her, and one another;

(In 147-150, 329)

The first line's "heirs of glory" references Romans 8:17

And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with *him*, that we may be also glorified together.

The "mighty mother" who Shelley emphasises through alliteration over the course of lines 149 and 150 is the Virgin Mary, Line 150 is suggestive of Luke:

And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, *thou that art* highly favoured, the Lord *is* with thee: blessed *art* thou among women. (1:28)

This biblical quotation has become a prayer said in Mary's honour that originates from the same part of scripture as the Annunciation. Shelley's line acknowledges her role in the bearing of Christ and respects her pseudo-divine status as a result.

The Second stanza (repeated at the conclusion of the poem) is more obscure in its allusions:

Rise like Lions after slumber
 In unvanquishable number,
 Shake your chains to earth like dew

Which in sleep had fallen on you –
 Ye are many – they are few.

(In 151-155, 329)

The final two lines of the stanza echo 1 Thessalonians 5:6:

Therefore let us not sleep, as *do* others; but let us watch and be sober. (1
 Thessalonians 5:6)

The opposition of awake and asleep that Shelley utilises in lines 154 and 155 is figurative for a mental awareness of events. Equally the quote from 1 Thessalonians is also addressing the virtue of being aware and open to seeing the world in an acutely critical way.

The simile in line 151 connotes a multitude of things. It represents bravery and England as a nation but it also works as being reminiscent of Amos 3:8.

The lion hath roared, who will not fear? the Lord GOD hath spoken, who can
 but prophesy?

This quotation underscores the relationship between Shelley's poem and biblical prophecy, especially when the previous two lines of the biblical passage are taken into consideration.

Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid? shall there
 be evil in a city, and the LORD hath not done *it*?

Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his
 servants the prophets.

(Amos 3:6-7)

Looking at the passage from Amos as a whole and comparing it to the final stanzas of 'The Mask of Anarchy' pinpoints the political implications of the Peterloo massacre. I contextualise Shelley's prophecy with those from Amos and 1 Thessalonians to highlight Shelley embodying the role of "the prophets" through his observations on the "evil in a city", paralleling Biblical prophetic content. He observes and then speaks to the people as a voice for change. Crisafulli observes Shelley's acute social awareness, stating that "Shelley shows the British people what strategies they should put into action" (130). In essence, Shelley is stepping into the role of a biblical prophet in a very obvious way in this poem by establishing a cause for change. Canuel discusses "Shelley's proposals for concrete political reforms - to admit a fracturing and localising of how good was to be defined" (32 Canuel), suggesting Shelley's general works to be concerned by external interpretation of his words as a sign of morality. Canuel and Crisafulli are both commenting on Shelley as a political figure; I use them to demonstrate the prophesying elements of 'The Mask of Anarchy' through Shelley's political thought. I argue that this is because Shelley is making a case for social, political and religious improvement rather than attempting to predict a future. Cohen-Vrignaud states that "unpredictable futures do not stop Shelley from prophesying, as he does in the final moments of *The Mask*"; (171) however, prophecy is more abstract than prediction. So it is by instilling a sense of political difference in a future orientation that Shelley becomes prophetic. Essentially, he envisions a counter present. As a result these critics stop short of realising that the biblically prophetic content of Shelley's work is in fact the future application of his ideas, while the biblically prophetic elements lie in Shelley's social role and his allusions to biblical content.

Prophecy's innate future orientated viewpoint results in the prediction of the end of days, also known as the apocalypse, for which Ezekiel 7:6 is an example "An end is come, the end is come". For Shelley the apocalypse is deeply linked to the political state of affairs. He views the apocalypse as a continuation and exponential growth of the corruption he sees in his contemporary world, as opposed to the counter present, which is suggestive of improvement. Shelley uses content and intertext to allude to the prophetic, often relating his work directly to the Bible. For Morton Paley 'The Mask of Anarchy' is a "rewriting of the book of Revelation in terms of the politics of England in 1819" (92) highlighting Shelley's use of biblical allusion to add authority to his poetry. Furthermore, "Percy Shelley's thoughts and verse, so often future orientated, tend toward the prophetic in linguistic register" (Rohrbach 67) such as in lines 151 to 155 above, and so the combination of prophetic content and register corroborates my argument that Shelley fulfils the characteristics of biblical prophecy. However, the prophetic nature of Shelley's work draws on more than just his "future orientated" tone. For example in 'The Mask of Anarchy' Shelley draws on the image of Death as one of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse:

Last came Anarchy: he rode
 On a white horse, splashed with blood;
 He was pale even to the lips,
 Like Death in the Apocalypse.
 (In. 30-33, 321-322)

The simile in line 33 parallels ideas of “anarchy”, a lack of social order, with “Death in the apocalypse”. The image of a “white horse” amongst the chaos and it being splashed with blood highlights the use of mounted cavalry in dispersing the protest, resulting in the Peterloo massacre. Therefore the “white horse” represents the oppressing class and is suggestive of the relationship between anarchy and oligarchy. Morton Paley explores the visual and grotesque elements of the stanza by pulling out the direct linguistic parallels to the Peterloo massacre. He fixates not only on the facts of the event but also on parallels to art such as the “influence of Benjamin West's painting *Death on the Pale Horse*” (239), illustrating Shelley's multidisciplinary approach to poetics. In essence, this stanza highlights how ideas of biblical apocalypse are applicable to Shelley's contemporary events. He stands witness to the political, social and religious corruption that permeated his society. Morton Paley draws cultural allusion into the picture depicted by Shelley in the poem. This stanza directly refers to the book of Revelation:

And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth. (6:8)

In being so obviously related to this biblical passage Shelley adds to the wider social picture of the Peterloo massacre. The protest that began the massacre was against the price of bread and hunger that was sweeping the nation and in favour of political representation for the masses. Robert Poole in his book *Peterloo : The English Uprising* states that “the Yeomanry [were] waving their swords”, illustrating that the military were armed. Furthermore, it is evident that Shelley changes the colour of the

horse from “pale” to “white” to not only to create a more visceral image but to allude to the pretence of innocence by the politicians and King when their role makes them far from innocent. Canuel claims that “Shelley exploits a religious genre in order to shift its priorities from unification to dispersal” (129) indicating the power of the biblical parallel that Shelley includes in lines 30 to 33 of ‘The Mask of Anarchy’ as the inclusion of the allusion draws in the Church as an institution and places blame partially on them, while still using the connotations of fear surrounding the apocalypse to present the horror and devastation of the massacre. I also infer from Canuel’s claim that typically Shelley’s references to religion in his body of works is political and as a result Shelley is combining the political and the religious in a biblically prophetic manner .

‘The Mask of Anarchy’ exemplifies the sophistication with which Shelley utilises Biblical passages and prophecy as a way to expand the authority of his works. These allusions are indicative of the dysfunctional relationship between the Church and State, highlighting Shelley’s political affiliations and instantiating the corruption he so often discusses in both his poetry and prose. It is through the political elements of ‘The Mask of Anarchy’ that I foreground the function of the biblical prophet for Shelley.

Counter Presents

Politics, progress and posterity coincide for Shelley at the point of envisioning the future. Some critics, such as Canuel and Rohrbach now consider envisioning a different configuration of the present to be equally future orientated.. He manifests social and political progress through imagining variations of the present in ‘A

Philosophical View of Reform' (1820), which notably explores political progress as a version of reform. The progression of political and philosophical ideas between his 1816 fragments *Speculations on Morals* (as previously discussed) and 'A Philosophical View of Reform' (1820) highlights the temporal relevance of reform to prophecy. The continued relevance of both Shelley's poetry and prose exhibit my theory that counter presents are prophetic as they are dependent on posterity and social relevance. While Shelley's approach evolves from 1811 to 1820 the emphasis he places on morality, institutional corruption and politics is consistent. The biblically prophetic status I assert Shelley holds is only strengthened by his displays of counter present visions.

Political reform and progress are key features of Shelley's biblical prophecy as they depict a counter present rather than predicting the future. Shelley's counter presents derive from his political theories, which are built upon biblical prophecy. He deemed that "The broad principle of political reform is the natural equality of men" (253). In stating the principle that all men are equal Shelley draws in another example of biblical moral teachings. Galatians 3 repeatedly advocates for the equality of mankind irrespective of religion, gender, or race: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." (28). This principle is not applied in Shelley's contemporary society as Catholics and any Non-Christians are discriminated against, the Slave trade is still ongoing despite the 1807 slave trade act, Women are without rights as are the majority of men. Wollstonecraft (Shelley's deceased mother-in-law) was an early advocate of human rights, Emily Dumler Winckler highlights this arguing that "Wollstonecraft's [...] arguments are still highly relevant for [...] debates about rights

and gender equality” (182) which demonstrates the need for discourse surrounding these issues both before and after Shelley was writing on them. In essence, Shelley’s calls for equality were contemporarily radical. These legal, political and social inequalities are representative of the corruption of political and religious leaders. They also make evident the role of the Church in dictating law. Rohrbach observes that “For British Romantic-period writers, rapidly changing political circumstances at home and abroad heightened the urgency, and thus the awareness of the difficulty, of comprehending the historical dimensions” (15). Her observation is reflective of the changing political landscape of the early nineteenth century, including the abolitionist movement (as I have previously mentioned in chapter two), worker’s rights movements such as the Luddites, and the legacy of the French Revolution. The social reform movements I mention were founded upon the principle of equality between men. I, therefore, assert that in applying Rohrbach’s principle of the unstable present to my analysis of Shelley, the unstable present becomes representative of his moral and political approach to reform in ‘A Philosophical View of Reform’. Rather than predicting the social changes to come he reflects on the correction that must be made to improve the present. His standpoint of equality results in Shelley’s counter present visions.

As I discuss above, Shelley’s opposition to Anglican Christianity is partially as a result of the inequality he witnesses within the Church, particularly the influence the Church holds over governing structures. In ‘A Philosophical View of Reform’ Shelley expresses his dissatisfaction with the Church as a representation of Christ’s message:

Names borrowed from the life and opinions of Jesus Christ were employed as symbols of domination and imposition; and a system of liberty and equality - for such was the system planted by that great Reformer - was perverted to support oppression. (230)

In this quotation Shelley establishes the socio-political entanglement of religion and politics through the juxtaposition of "liberty and equality" and "domination and imposition". . Shelley's observation of this element of his contemporary society places him in opposition to it as throughout his literary career he argues for the separation of Church and State. Interestingly, Shelley's choice of "Reformer" to describe Christ aligns the pair as it reflects the title of the essay. I, therefore, draw the conclusion that Shelley was intentionally creating this parallel as an attempt to demonstrate the similarities between his political leanings and Christ's, which effectively positions Shelley in a biblically prophetic role. The quotation also discusses the corruption involved in maintaining the political power of the Church through the final clause: "perverted to support oppression" denoting the co-dependency of the Monarchy and the Church as non-democratic institutions that lend each other power, as we saw in 'The Mask of Anarchy'. Shelley's proclivity for including mentions of said corruption is foregrounded by Whickman: "Shelley's key issue with organised religion, specifically Christianity is in its emphasis on enforcing and maintaining political power structures rather than the ideals of its founder Jesus Christ" (182). Here Wickham similarly observes Shelley's complex relationship to biblical doctrine. However I further this arguing that Shelley is paralleling the biblical prophets' political views and through his explicit opposition to Anglican Christianity Shelley is paradoxically biblically prophetic.

The Bible contains many instances of Prophets opposing their contemporary Church in the same ways as Shelley, as a result of the corrupting influence of the power of governance. For example in Hosea the destruction of Israel is as a direct consequence of a rejection of God's knowledge:

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children. (Hosea 4:6)

This passage reflects on the corruption of the priests and is highlighting the consequential "lack of knowledge" those priests spread to their congregation and so like an intergenerational game of Chinese whispers the biblical message becomes distorted. Shelley's above sentiments echo Hosea illustrating not only the continuing prevalence of religious corruption, but also aligning his prose with that of the biblical prophets. Furthermore Whickman's argument that "Christianity for Shelley has become the very institutional religion that Jesus came to reform" (155) emphasises the significance of Shelley paralleling the Bible. In Hosea 4:6 the corruption of the Church and the prophetic disposition to eradicate said corruption is a vital signifier of a biblical prophet as their aim is to serve God not the contemporary configuration of the Church.

My argument that for Shelley there is a Biblically prophetic need for religious reform is demonstrated in the quotation:

The New Testament is in everyone's hand, and the few who ever read it with the simple sincerity of an unbiased judgement may perceive how distinct from the opinions of any of those professing themselves establishers were the doctrines and actions of Jesus Christ. (639)

He claims here that the corruption of the Church has led to the blind obedience of the people and, to an extent, the apathy of the population. Similarly to the "lack of Knowledge" of the people in Hosea 4:6. Shelley also calls for "unbiased judgement" of the text centralising the idea of individual interpretation of the Bible as vital in understanding Shelley's perception of Christian teachings. The individual interpretation Shelley encourages disregards the Church's contemporary teachings. He uses the "New Testament" as an example; it is, therefore, pertinent for me to also give an example from that text such as:

Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know *these things* before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. (2 Peter 3:17)

The presentation of the distortion and corruption of the Church and the Church's teachings in the above quotation are central to understanding biblical prophecy. Peter is reflecting on the "unlearned" sacred texts and indicating that the distortion and misrepresentation of scripture needs to be corrected. Shelley uses similar methods of persuasion in 'A Philosophical View of Reform'. Peter also remarks on the question of intent behind the distortion with the phrase "led away" which is indicative of a deliberate misrepresentation, rather than it being accidental. I relate

back to Shelley's above claim that the faith has become "perverted" as a way to serve the elite and continue oppression. The abundance of parallels to the bible in Shelley's writings on politics, ethics and religion throughout his career cements my thesis that Shelley's writings are biblically prophetic in nature, as I have demonstrated Shelley continually parallels biblical passages and inadvertently biblical prophets.

There is a disconnect between Christianity and the Bible for Shelley illustrated by acts and attitudes of members of the Church. In 'A Philosophical View of Reform' Shelley highlights the superiority people believe they hold for being religious. He claims that: "The person who [may] think it virtuous to believe, will think a less degree of virtue attaches to good actions than if he had considered it as indifferent." (673). The view of virtue Shelley establishes in this quotation illustrates the complexity of choice and assigning value based on reason. Shelley is suggesting that virtue comes from being good because it is morally right, not because you are told that it is good, as opposed to a religion, in this case Christianity, dictating what constitutes moral behaviour. Consequently, he leaves the decision of what constitutes goodness to the individual. The inclusion of "a less degree" does not discredit the person who does good because they are told to, but instead equates the acts, merely stating that goodness is goodness. The negative implication of doing good, Shelley shows is, however, irrefutably present in Matthew 6:

Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them:
otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.

Therefore when thou doest *thine* alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth:

That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly. (6:1-4)

This passage depicts the same moral quandary that Shelley discusses, extending the clear biblical parallels Shelley is prone to. However, the biblical passage goes further as it includes a reference to “the hypocrites in the synagogues” (6:2) which relates back to other sections of ‘A Philosophical View of Reform’ and my previous discussion on the corruption of the Church. Those “hypocrites” are the members of the clergy who preach doctrine but do not follow it, for Shelley they are the priests as opposed to the Rabbis in Matthew. The hypocrisy appears to be almost as a consequence of their position of power as despite Christ reforming the biblical hypocrites they appear very much present in Shelley’s contemporary society. In echoing this passage Shelley justifies his life and works as being representative of what he believes to be right. In correspondence with this Shelley’s politics is founded upon his historicism, particularly as his moral grounding has a basis in Christ’s teachings.

Canuel uses the premise of historicism as a way of viewing progress when he shares that “narratives of historical progress are nonetheless progressive in that they mark out alternative futures” (12). These “alternative futures” are synonymous with

the idea of counter presents as they both are ways of envisioning morality and by extension political change. The effect of this is demonstrative of Rohrbach's assertion of "the mist of anticipation opening the present up to multiple possibilities" (11). The lack of definition separating past, present and future makes space for Rohrbach to observe a shift through that temporal spectrum. It is the "anticipation" Rohrbach notices that I suggest is the same driving force of Shelley's political ideologies. This leads to the deeply prophetic element of his work and his entanglement with the Bible but not Christianity.

Prophecy's transcendence of temporal constraints, especially in regards to the theory of the counter presents, comes from being morally and universally applicable to different temporal planes. Canuel cements this when he says "Instances of Romantic progressivism that embrace *political* advancements are simultaneously unburdened by the norms of cultural or scientific progress" (148). In essence, Canuel lays out prophetic terms through the political implications of a counter present. The "unburdened" element he picks up is as a result of differing "cultural" environments, which are afforded by the passing of time. The counter present being envisioned is, as a result, more applicable in the future than in the writer's present, thereby rendering a counter present as a prophetic tool. In addition, Rohrbach notes the "surprising force of a not yet conceptualised present that disrupts the formally predominant ways of knowing" (61) which emphasises the necessity of change for the existence of the present/future and by inciting that change the envisionment or cause becomes prophetic. This idea too echoes countless instances making it Biblically relevant. The idea of rebirth and the old becoming new again is a key example, for instance: "Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old

things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” (2 Corinthians 5:17). I have argued that Shelley conforms to the role of a Biblical prophet, despite his aggression towards the Anglican Church and to an extent because of it. Hence, this biblical quotation highlights the cyclical nature of rebirth as pseudo-prophetic. I also assert that Shelley is representative of it because of his declarations for social, political and moral change.

Temporality’s preservative impact on literature and as a result a text’s posterity produces a prophetic aura to said texts. If a text like Shelley’s ‘A Philosophical View of Reform’ does envision a counter present, then it has the power to inspire change through its application to the reader’s present. For instance Chandler states that: “[The *View* was] Shelley’s way of engaging directly with the political crisis of the moment” (117) and by engaging “directly” his ideas for improvements and changes lean towards the future through the counter present. In the essay Shelley acknowledges literature’s political influence by stating:

The literature of England, an energetic development of which has ever followed or preceded a great and free development of the national will, has arisen, as it were, from a new birth. (673)

Shelley’s awareness of the symbiotic relationship between literary movements and social/political change emphasises my premise that works are biblically prophetic. The theory he posits in the quotation can be applied, when looking at the past, to the Bible itself; the Bible is a body of literature which has over centuries and generations brought about social and political changes. The political elements drawn out by

“national will” highlight the power of unity for change, illustrating a sense of progress over time. Shelley’s theory, repeated in *A Defence of Poetry* (700) almost word for word, can also be applied to his own works as is illustrated by Canuel’s overarching conclusion to his book which combines his analysis of various romantic poets, stating; “Romantic progressivism [...] became a vision of political futures” (222). Canuel’s focus on “Romantic Progressivism” emphasises the future orientation and innate political elements of Romantic poetry and, as I claim in Shelley’s work this appears as a prophetic tone. Rohrbach counters Canuel’s declarations of the Romantic propensity for progress stating that the “Romantic anticipations emphatically depart from the notion of progress” (18) and instead it is the indefinable nature of modernity that propels the Romantic movement. I suggest that both critics are observing a Romantic stylistic tendency towards the binding of politics to a temporal moment I counter that Shelley’s politics are tied up with his sense of morality and so despite his political message, his works transcend his specific political context producing a seemingly prophetic relevance. Take for instance the Biblical passage of the Sermon on the Mount: “Blessed *are* they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.” (Matthew 5:6). The repetition in Matthew 5, of which this quote is an example, of the past participle verb “blessed” suggests a perpetual continuation of the blessing. Christ is not saying that only in his time are these people “blessed”, he is saying that forever both before and after him each category he states is blessed. Hence, the continual relevance of the passage, which supports both the concept of Rohrbach's indistinguishable present time and Canuel’s insistence on progress. The metaphorical “hunger and thirst” of Matthew 5:6 is symbolic of moral and ethical need, hence the use of “righteousness”. The premise that these people who need this moral fulfilment are blessed and that their

“hunger” will be satiated highlights the prophetic nature of politics through morality, as well as the indiscriminate temporal movement which brings the “righteousness” and fulfillment to fruition. Applying this to Shelley means that his works on morality and by extension politics will eventually be realised as prophecy. The “new birth” (239) Shelley imagines in the quotation on the previous page suggests a form of textual rebirth in each temporal moment, especially when taking into account the use of “followed or proceeded” (239) which highlights the temporal separation of writers and their texts. The separation of a text and its temporal moment is illustrated by Canuel’s claims that “Shelley’s articulations of poetry’s relationship to its current moment are even more ambiguous in *A Philosophical View of Reform*” (121). Shelley’s “ambiguity” reasserts his idea of literature and I add that temporality’s complementary role amounts to political change and as a result the counter present. Shelley creates prophetic visions based on specific political moments which translate across time in a similar way to biblical prophets including Christ.

Shelley’s perception of corruption in his contemporary world, especially politically and religiously speaking, colours his envisionment of the future. He notes awareness of the imperceptible passage of time, which drives towards a future: “Modern European society is thus an engine assumed to be for useful purposes [...] but which, instead [...] is perpetually wearing away or breaking to pieces the wheels of which it is composed.” (641). The negativity with which Shelley appears to view this progression of time is a consequence of his negative view of “modern society” leading to his conclusion that society will “wear away” and “break to pieces” as time goes on. By describing the crumbling of society in the future, he creates a sense of society as we know it to be breaking down, to the point of eventual collapse some

would say the apocalypse. This echoes the sentiments of the book of Revelation and its focus on the end of days. For instance:

And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath. (16:19)

The depiction of the fall of Jerusalem in this passage highlights the cause of the city's demise as being the corruption of the Church and governance of the city. Similarly, Shelley equates the societal failings he witnesses as being the ultimate cause for the eventual social downfall. Chandler glosses Shelley's meaning stating that "Shelley here [in the *View*] depicts the ills of the society" (120). The use of the term "ills" is demonstrative of the morality and ethics linked to society's faults. As I have previously argued, Shelley's moral philosophy inspires his political sensibilities creating a deeply entwined relationship between a social environment and the morality of those in that situation. In essence the situation determines the moral response. My claim is again supported by Shelley's work as he states: "Morals and politics can only be considered as portions of the same science, with relation to such absolute perfection as Christ and Plato and Rousseau and other reasoners have asserted [...] with irresistible eloquence, systemized and developed." (664) meaning that the two principles are representative of contemporary society. Shelley, here, exhibits the same ideology as the prophecy in Revelation 16. It is the corruption and societal failings which result in societies' downfall. Immorality's continual presence in politics is a common thread of biblical prophecy exemplifying my argument that

Shelley's political observation of the corrupt present and the hopeful future parallels the lives and works of the biblical prophets.

Shelley's political and ethical postulations as demonstrated in *The Necessity of Atheism*, *Speculations on Morals* and 'A Philosophical View of Reform' make him biblically prophetic. Over the nine years these works cover Shelley continually utilises the Bible as a tool to attempt to redirect the social and political spheres in order to create change. The effect is that he produces counter presents, a concept which I have argued is reflective of the prophetic. Through the combination of these two aspects I assert that Shelley's political stance means he is characteristically biblically prophetic. I used 'The Mask of Anarchy' to emphasise this by drawing in the biblically prophetic allusions and echoes which permeate sections of it and indicate the way in which those allusions function to illustrate the moral grounding of Shelley's prose works.

Chapter 4: Uncertain Prophetic Futures

Shelley's work functions in multiple temporal zones. So far I have focused on how Shelley's interactions with the present builds his relationship to biblical prophecy. Shelley argues in 'A Defence of Poetry' (1821) that posterity and the life it affords a text are determining factors in continual temporal relevance. I must as a result discuss the future and past of Shelley's texts. The temporal transcendence of Biblical prophecy allows for its meaning to be exposed and for prophecy to come to fruition. Take for instance Isaiah's prophecies, in the Old Testament about the Messiah; for Christians the messiah is Christ and, therefore, the prophecies have been fulfilled. However, in Judaism, where Old Testament texts make up the Torah, Yeshayahu's (the Hebrew variant of Isaiah) messianic prophecies (Nev'im: Yeshayahu) have not been fulfilled. I say this to illustrate the abstract nature of prophecy for it is over time that prophetic knowledge can be decoded. Hence, a text's posterity and its ability to be unburdened by temporal constraints results in Shelley's continued social relevance.

This chapter analyses 'A Defence of Poetry' and 'Ode to the West Wind' (1819). The first explores the role of futurity and posterity in biblical prophecy and the second looks to the past as a method of understanding, while acknowledging nonlinear temporal planes. The pieces of literature that survive through time, for Shelley, do so because they have resurrections of public interest due to a social and political relevance that transcends time. That is not to say that the posterity of a text is predetermined by a great celestial being, only to credit the role of posterity in producing prophecy. To explore the future and past of a text I am utilising 'A Defence of Poetry', which contains many of Shelley's ideas surrounding posterity and

temporality, and 'Ode to the West Wind', which details the temporal elements of posterity and the intangible nature of prophetic meaning and provenance. By looking at 'A Defence of Poetry' and 'Ode to the West Wind' together, I show that the elements of posterity, as Shelley presents them, are central to his poetic ideology that "poets [are] the prophets" (691). I pinpoint the biblically prophetic element of posterity and highlight Shelley's relationship to it.

The relevance of posterity to literature is keenly observed by Andrew Bennett in *Romantic Poets and the Culture of Posterity*, particularly by means of detailing the separation of a poet and their works. He argues that: "posthumous life [is] a form of textual continuation of personal identity" (13), which conveys the way that posterity is an accomplishment achieved on behalf of a deceased poet by their work, resulting in a non-linear envisionment of temporality. I expand on this by suggesting that the intangibility of the present means that posterity is either looking back from a future vantage point as Shelley did to Ancient Greek philosophers, such as Plato, or posterity is looking forward to a time of remembrance. This relates back to chapter three where I discuss counter presents. In contrast to Bennett Christina Lupton's *Reading and the Making of Time in the Eighteenth Century* focuses on the experience of temporal transitions in relation to the present. Lupton does this for the exact reason Bennett does not, that being that reading is a unique temporal certainty as it is always in the present.

A text's existence, as a result of posterity, is paradoxically outside any single person's conceptualization of time. Therefore, the only way to bring a text into the present is by reading. In doing so a text achieves posterity, creating a specific

meaning dictated by its temporal location. This results in my claim that a text's future and past become intertwined with posterity and in doing so the intermingling of temporalities becomes prophetic.

The Resurrection of Meaning

I argue that a text's evolution of meaning and interpretation is dependent on its temporal situation. The social positioning of a text helps to shape its meaning so the more objectively one can look at one's own social and political context the more relevant its interpretation seems to be as a result. I assert that as time passes interpretations continue to stay relevant and prophetic. Shelley's preoccupation with the doctrines of Christ and other Biblical prophets emphasises the Biblical nature of Shelley's prophecy. Shelley separates the teaching from the doctrine by centralising individual interpretation as I discussed in chapter 2. However this idea is also instantiated in 'A Defence of Poetry', so he uses the same technique to discredit and distance himself from Anglican Christianity while still fulfilling characteristics of biblical prophecy at the end of his career and nearer the beginning (*On Christianity*, 1817). This separation of Christ and Christianity is highlighted by O'Neill's essay as he foregrounds "Shelley's paradoxical view of religion in *A Defence of Poetry*" (64). The extraction of doctrine from religion appears "paradoxical", however I argue that by advocating for individual study Shelley removes the Church as an institution from the faith, similarly to the biblical prophets as I have shown in chapter 3. Hence, to Shelley the Bible is not a sacred text with one taught meaning. This allows him to interpret Christ's philosophy rather than the Church's teachings.

Shelley has a tendency to explore the philosophical and moral aspects of his writings on prophecy. He does this by addressing the role Christian morality plays in his contemporary literary culture. For instance, in 'A Defence of Poetry' he explains that "the immorality of poetry rests upon the misconception of the manner in which poetry acts to produce the moral improvement of man" (681). I apply this to biblical prophets, indicating that Shelley argued for individual thought over accepted biblical doctrines. It is in the institutional interpretation of those doctrines that Shelley claims prevents "the moral improvement of man". Hence, Shelley's opposition to the Church intersects with the tradition of biblical prophets opposing institutions of faith for their dogmatic rulings. Lupton posits a similar argument to Shelley's focus on individual thought stating that dates "show where books happened, not where they got stuck in the process of communication" (15). The instance of getting "stuck in the process of communication" illustrates my premise that, for Shelley, there is a continual need for reinterpretation; he argues that the Anglican Church is "stuck" and needs reinventing. In applying Lupton's theory to the Bible, as with any other text, it would suggest a perpetual reading and evolution of the relevance of it to new temporal environments. She goes on in her book to explain the importance of returning to texts, stating that doing so "situates books in time by seeing them as objects open to revisitation" (79). It is in that "revisitation" that books grow and develop new meaning; this is a belief shared by Shelley in 'A Defence'.

Shelley's work explores interpretation through intertextuality. He plays around with meaning and comprehension, layering allusions, intertexts and inspiration. His approach is demonstrated in 'A Defence' when insisting that "great poets walk through eternity enveloped and disguised." (691), implying that previous texts

become embedded in contemporary literature carrying the essence forward through posterity. In this case, posterity is afforded to the poem rather than the poet, but the resultant authorial fame alludes to the prophetic. The biblical intertexts that Shelley uses hold a universal truth that cannot necessarily be understood. He “enveloped” previous writers' ideas, reworking them in new ways for a new time. Joel Faflak highlights “Shelley’s vision of poetry as the evolution of unanticipated mutations” (264), using “unanticipated” to indicate the unpredictability of the future, while “evolution” demonstrates an ongoing chain of work. My proposition is that the interweaving of texts over time reinvents the words and form but maintains the meaning, which is illustrated by the parallel between “disguised” (Shelley) and “mutated” (Faflak) as they both connote a distorted image that carries the same message.

The interplay of Shelley’s texts and the Bible exemplifies a literary lineage as he draws on a rich body of texts to expand his authority and meaning. More generally, Lupton considers that “Books [...] connect us to each other, they connect books to other books, they connect distant times to recent ones, and they show objects connecting to subjects.” (16). The connection of books produces a unity of message. Lupton emphasises the temporal transcendence of a literary message, relating back to Shelley’s above quotation, as the “disguise” (691) comes from the connection Lupton observes and the evolution Faflak pulls on. Whatever message is contained in a text is reworked over time, illuminating the essentiality of the temporal movement of books for their comprehension.

The thread of literature's temporal interactions is described by Shelley's as though texts are "the co-operating thoughts of one great mind, [that] have built up since the beginning of the world." (687). Here Shelley provides a sense of the provenance of a text being almost divinely inherited, it is the "one great mind" that Shelley refers to that produces a remarkable resemblance to Christian ideations of God, who is often referred to as the "one". For example in Ephesians:

One Lord, one faith, one baptism,

One God and Father of all, who *is* above all, and through all, and in you all. (4: 5-6)

Shelley alludes to this passage and as a result, to God's message. Moreover, Shelley is crediting this "One great mind" (687) with the essence that runs through all poetry. This stands as a reminder that Shelley associates himself with Jesus, and parallels Shelley's work with biblical prophecy as it claims divine providence as inspiration. Hence, Dallin Lewis's statement that "Shelley embodied the type of prophet-poet he idealized" (576) highlights Shelley's intention to fulfill his own claims. Shelley utilises biblical content to align himself with the prophets, assuring his own posterity through reinterpreting God's message.

The eternal message contained within poetry that Shelley establishes becomes synonymous with God as a result of his postulations on posterity. The dictatorial teachings of the Christian Church appear restrictive to Shelley; for him they corrupt and limit freedom of interpretation. Shelley approaches the doctrines from atypical vantage points allowing for debate and contrasting opinions with his own ideas. In a

dedicated portion of 'A Defence', he declares the morality of Christ and the biblical prophets. In doing so he justifies their morals and philosophies, despite his apparent opposition to the faith derived from them.

It is probable that the poetry of Moses, Job, David, Solomon, and Isaiah had produced a great effect upon the mind of Jesus and his disciples. The scattered fragments preserved to us by the biographers of this extraordinary person are all instinct with the most vivid poetry. But his doctrines seem to have been quickly distorted. At a certain period after the prevalence of a system of opinions founded upon those promulgated by him, the three forms into which Plato had distributed the faculties of mind underwent a sort of apotheosis, and became the object of the worship of the civilised world. (688-689)

In acknowledging the biblical prophets as poets Shelley establishes a literary lineage through the biblical prophets mentioned: "Moses, Job, David, Solomon, and Isaiah." This lineage is a way for him to position himself, in parallel with biblically divine inspiration. Despite Shelley discrediting Christianity the later part of the extract shows he states the cause of "distortion" was the Church's interpretive interference. The role the institution of the Church played in Shelley's education illustrates the taught interpretation of biblical passages. In straying from the explicit teachings Shelley positions himself in opposition to the Church. Hence, Shelley's observation that "his [Christ's] doctrines seem to have been quickly distorted" means that Shelley does not blame Christ and instead blames human corruption, in doing so he echoes the biblical prophets. The sentiment I draw out of this section of 'A Defence' is paralleled by Martin Priestman's view that there is a: "stronghold on learning by

religious ideologies” (226). The restriction Priestman notes on education is exactly what Shelley opposes. He favours the Platonic approach, as alluded to in the extract above. Plato’s system of learning is explained by Julia Annas as being that: “Plato cannot know anything for you; you have to do your own work to achieve understanding of what is going on” (31). Therefore, Shelley’s choice to draw on Plato becomes a way for him to uphold those philosophical principles. Throughout ‘A Defence’ and the other prose works I have discussed in the previous chapters Shelley has displayed that Platonic quality. Both Shelley and Plato have their audiences think for themselves and interpret based on their individual experiences. This sentiment is similarly observed by Lupton who touches upon the entanglement of education and religion referring to “the temporal logic of religion to the project of education”; (49), the inference of this is that there is an uneven approach when interpreting texts, hinting at the irony of the dedicated temporal space granted to the study of religion (Sundays) while education remains an individual pursuit during, Shelley’s life. Temporality and study transform a text's meaning, but religious texts seem exempt from the same level of scrutiny, echoing back to Shelley’s declaration in the above extract about the creation of “a system of opinions” that has been formulated into a religion due to posterity.

Shelley’s writings on the Bible and Anglican Christianity evolved over his career as a result of his own reinterpretation. This moved him from ardent opposition to respect for Christ and biblical doctrine, leading Shelley to separate the origin from the institution. Hence, Shelley's comment in ‘A Defence’ that “it belongs to a philosophical critic to distinguish rather than confound.” (700) Shelley is regarding himself as the “philosophical critic” while simultaneously discrediting the critics who

have avoided him due to his status as a political and religious dissident and blasphemer (as discussed in chapter three). As a result Shelley appears to be citing the necessity of study and thought to produce understanding. Bennett's statement that "Shelley's career involves a constantly shifting view of the relationship between poetry and religion" (64) highlights both the evolution of Shelley's self proclaimed philosophy and his reactionary approach to writing as discussed in chapter three.

For Shelley judgement comes from beyond his contemporaries, as the "philosophical critic" is beyond his time. He argues against his contemporary critics in the preface of 'Adonais' his reference to: "My known repugnance to the narrow principles of taste" (649) exemplifies his known dislike of criticism. One of the most prevalent passages of the Bible in our modern era: John 8 illustrates a similar thought of rising above contemporary ideals of what is morally right. In John 8 Jesus responds to a crowd about to stone a woman, stating: "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." (John 8:7). This phrase has been quoted and paraphrased across the ages and is taken to mean that as humans we do not have the right to punish each other or view ourselves as superior. Shelley is applying this sentiment to contemporary criticism, in the case of 'Adonais' the criticism of John Keats.

Judgement, to Shelley, comes from beyond his contemporaries and for Keats from beyond the grave. Similarly, Shelley's contemporary critics cannot outlive his work. For him posterity offers a chance for those critics to be disproved. Bennett alludes to judgement through posterity in his assessment of posterity: "posthumous judgement as the final and accurate arbiter of genius" (54). In deferring judgement until an unknown future Bennett suggests that Shelley is hoping his work will be accepted in the future. However as Tilottama Rajan says "Shelley insists on the imagination as

dynamic and vital but thereby unable to fix meaning” (292), which, contrary to Bennett’s claims, indicates an indefinite evolution of meaning, resulting in continual relevance to its readers. I would argue, then, that Shelley envisions his afterlife as a part of his texts. It is through Shelley’s constantly evolving relationship to the Bible that he hopes future readers will have the same approach to his texts, thereby achieving both Bennett and Rajan’s versions of posterity.

Shelley’s ever-changing approach to the Bible is best explored in ‘A Defence’ where the content of Biblical prophecy is viewed as metaphorical, keeping the text open to reevaluation and reinterpretation. Shelley asserts that the poets “language is vitally metaphorical; that is [that] it marks the before unapprehended relations of things and perpetuates their apprehension, until the words which represent them, become, through time, signs for portions or classes of thoughts” (676). Shelley combines the literary lineage of biblical prophets with a freedom to interpret their prophecy, indicating a cause for the higher status of some texts, a status that through temporality turns into philosophy or religion. I argue that temporality’s role enables a text to be defined as biblical prophecy in a future time. Bennett’s postulation that “posterity is never less than a site of conflict and subversion” (4) lends credence to my postulation on the future’s ability to see differently to the past, in many instances creating tension between previously accepted ways of being, which is what Shelley does through his Atheistic stance.

Further to the metaphorical approach to analysis Shelley takes to the Bible he also views “all original religions [as] allegorical, or susceptible to allegory, and, like Janus, [they] have a double face of false and true” (677). This radical assertion that religions

are figurative rather than literal is demonstrative of Shelley's constant revisitation of biblical doctrine as a way to interpret the allegories. By invoking "Janus" Shelley highlights duplicity in meaning indicating a truth to his interpretations and a lie to many of the established interpretations. Janus is also said to look forwards and back, as the namesake to January he often represents the new year and is entangled with temporality in Roman mythology. It is as a result of the use of Janus as representative of duality that the antonyms of life and death transform posterity. Bennett posits: "The culture of posterity in Shelley's writing is a kind of ghostly spirit set to haunt or inhabit the minds of readers. This is most powerfully suggested in *A Defence of Poetry*" (175). His premise is dependent on poets haunting the future through their work. Resultantly, Bennett indicates the metaphysical as the arbitrator of posterity. In response, I suggest that it is not ghosts that grant a text posterity, rather it is posterity that causes biblical prophecy and so rather than haunting, as Bennett suggests it is divine provenance that creates the effect of posterity and prophecy.

Shelley stitches together the essence of other texts in his work which can be visualised in the metaphor: "the future is contained within the present as the plant within the seed" (675). The image of the seed represents the temporal conditions needed for a text or "seed" to flourish. Consequently, the layering of intertextuality, would in this metaphor be the layering of mulch and soil, containing the minerals and nutrients needed for growth consequentially from past texts come new ones. These new texts rely on the old and so the similarities that run through them appear to suggest a universal provenance. The new texts will inevitably return to that soil and aid another seed, meaning the cyclical nature of the reworking of the carbon cycle:

which Shelley utilises plants the idea that he returns to throughout his literary career. The thesis of the collective nature of writing to produce future texts in 'A Defence', essentially, alludes to the premise that all poetry includes that same spark of inspiration. This domino effect of poetic truth, originates from the "one great mind" (687) that I have established as God. The importance of the seed metaphor to this overarching premise, cannot be understated, in fact Shelley reuses the idea in 'Ode to the West Wind', lines 7 to 9:

The winged seeds, where they lie cold and low,
Each like a corpse within its grave, until
Thine azure sister of the Spring shall blow (357)

In this version of the "Seed" metaphor Shelley combines the growth of the "seed" with the death of the plants around it. The addition of "winged" grants a sense of supernatural flight and an increased ability to spread the message stored within the seed. The following line suggests a graveyard of dead works that will, according to the third line, rise again in a new age and as a result old works return to the soil and become part of new ones.

In addition, this extract, on the whole, represents Shelley's perception that his contemporary society is unfeeling, asleep to injustice, and in need of a more egalitarian future; it also parallels Matthew's depiction of the final days and resurrection of the dead, only for Shelley the dead are old texts:

And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept
arose,

And came out of the graves after his resurrection (Matthew 27:52-53)

The resurrection of the dead is represented in 'Ode to the West Wind' as "Spring", a time of rebirth characterised culturally in Christian nations by Christ's death and resurrection, commonly referred to as Easter. Thus the allusion to the Anglican premise of final judgement can be conflated with Shelley's interpretation of posterity, particularly when posterity is considered the afterlife of a text. O'Neill in his article 'Shelley's Defences of Poetry' establishes that "this sense of poetry as working on the reader's imagination is the spring of Shelley's poetic practice" (21). In essence, the rebirth that I argue Shelley is alluding to in lines 7 to 9 further highlights how that reinvention occurs.

The "reader's imagination" that O'Neill describes articulates a form of posterity achieved through the future appreciation of a text. Bennett explores this form of posterity in his reading of 'Ode to the West Wind' by applying his theory of posterity. The significance of death to posterity in the Ode that I have stated is central to Bennett's reading. He says "*Ode to the West Wind* presents a figuration of posthumous writing, the dissemination of dead thoughts. But the posthumous writing also involves the death of the reader" (177). Here, Bennett illustrates the necessary absence of the poet from their work for posterity. He carries on to insinuate that poetry will outlive mankind in a way that is unquestionably eternal. It is through this eternal nature of poetics that providence and posterity intersect at the point of biblical prophecy. Shelley describes this relationship between Biblical prophecy and posterity in 'A Defence of Poetry':

The first part of these remarks has related to poetry in its elements and principles; and it has been shown, as well as the narrow limits assigned them would permit, that what is called poetry, in a restricted sense, has a common source with all other forms of order and of beauty, according to which the materials of human life are susceptible of being arranged, and which is poetry in a universal sense. (700)

Shelley establishes the sense of meaning as ever expanding, by contradicting the “narrow limits” attributed to them, hence, the “universal sense” of poetry. This “universal sense” has “a common source with all other forms of [...] beauty”. The connotations of this are highly suggestive of the “one great mind” (687) argument I established earlier in this chapter, meaning that divine provenance, whether named God or not, is central to Shelley’s approach to both his poetry and his prose. The above passage (700) ties this provenance closely with posterity. Jennifer Wagner asserts that “Shelley hoped for an imaginative enlightenment that would lead to a universal political and ethical enlightenment” (126) and so in accordance with the above extract I see Shelley imagining the future through his works in an almost utopian sense. The hopeful tone in combination with ideas of posterity appears as prophetic, especially in light of Wagner’s idea of universal enlightenment. Shelley’s remarks maintain that the posterity of a text is determined by those future audiences.

Therefore, temporality relies on the revelation of meaning a concept Lupton describes as “books [...] flare[ing] to life under special temporal conditions” (36). Lupton demonstrates that it takes the right moment for the meaning of a text to be revealed. Lupton’s keen eye for the temporal significance of the physical text reflects

the religious tradition of beautiful manuscripts of sacred texts and so draws on religious worlds. These physical manifestations of poetry as sacred that Shelley envisioned allows posterity to become tangible and it is this tangibility that holds futurity. I suggest that a text secures its place in future generations due to its physicality as this means it can be held and passed down. Hence it is tangible in the future. Accordingly, Bennett remarks that “fame is given a quasi-theological status as an absolute and transcendent virtue, underwritten by God” (57). Fame is essentially, for both Bennett and I, the precursor and result of posterity and as fame progresses along temporal planes it becomes almost synonymous with religion, eventually ending up with God. Following Bennett’s assertion that Christ is the epitome of fame, for Shelley, it is the deliberate parallel Shelley makes to Christ that is an attempt to afford himself fame. In accordance with this I have argued that Shelley’s works are biblically prophetic in the way that he calls out institutional and religious corruption while utilising biblical allusion. His works are afforded posterity as they echo biblical prophecy’s continual relevance socially, politically and morally irrespective of temporal locations.

Temporal uncertainty and humanity's propensity to look in a future-facing direction mean that the biblical prophecies that are yet to be enacted, for Christians, are for the most part concerning the apocalypse and so there is a human collective consciousness that is distinctly aware of death. As a result death becomes the ultimate future and posterity the trumpet of prophecy to get us there. Hence, Shelley’s writing, which so often pre-empts death, holds space for interweaving biblical prophecy through posterity.

A Poetic Pastlife

Posterity is equally about looking to the past as it is looking to the future. Shelley specifically focuses on poetic tradition as being the source of knowledge and forethought. In 'A Defence' he claims that "every great poet must inevitably innovate upon the example of his predecessors" (679) meaning that his poetry expands the timeless content of canonical texts. However, the choice of "example" centralises the idea of expanding that content through interpretation. I infer from this that Shelley is issuing a poetic responsibility to pull together his present and the past in order to produce innovative work that transcends linear conceptions of time. Lupton describes a similar principle when she considers "Time as an ongoing axis of struggle and possibility; one along which our relationships to each other, to the world, and to objects and our labour are arranged and spaced out and joined up, often with elasticity and creativity" (Lupton 2). The "elasticity and creativity" Lupton identifies as part of this process produces a visual representation of the give and take of poetic creation as Shelley is describing it in 'A Defence'. Take, for instance a string of elastic; it can be tied and pulled and crossed and looped, joining points together with flexibility. It has no certain length and can be distorted based on need and imagination; like a string of elastic time is not always linear nor does it have a fixed duration. Hence, the variation between the feeling of time and its measured reality. The power of Posterity exists in feeling not numerical value. Similarly, Mary Fairclough's assertion that "For Shelley the creative power of poetry overcomes spatial and temporal distance" (238) illustrates the transmigration of poetry across time. This untethered, almost nomadic, aspect of poetry is due to posterity, and it is this element that produces a strong alignment with prophecy, as it is the importance of prophecy that has afforded it posterity. Therefore, the history of a text exposes both its provenance and posterity as prophecy.

Posterity and biblical prophecy are inextricably linked. It is the posterity of prophecy that keeps it relevant to a contemporary audience. In fact, for Shelley, time and posterity add distinct meaning to works making them appear prophetic. In 'A Defence' Shelley highlights the expansion of understanding, claiming that "Time [...] augments that of poetry, and forever develops new and wonderful applications of the eternal truth which it contains." (680). The "eternal truth" to which Shelley refers stands for the message contained within the poem, and it also imitates biblical language surrounding the word of God. In 2 Corinthians this premise is explicitly written: "for the things which are seen *are* temporal; but the things which are not seen *are* eternal" (4:18). The separation of the "eternal" and "temporal" is illustrative of time as a human conception, whereas the "eternal" is the meaning and interpretation of the words. I place Shelley in direct conversation with 2 Corinthians to highlight the distinction between "eternal" and "temporal". Shelley is writing from the human perspective, rather than the divine and consequently views the "eternal truth" (680) through a temporal lens, signifying that the divine or biblical message is communicated through poetry. O'Neill observes the connection between the human and the divine when he asserts that "he [Shelley] brings humanity and God into alignment" (73). The combination of human and divine that O'Neill alludes to compares to the symbiosis of poetry and prophecy I have been arguing for, making evident the divine inspiration these entities are contingent upon.

For Shelley in his 'A Defence' this divine entity grants the ability to envision the future through a study of the past, as he removes himself from the present. Shelley's awareness of the convergence of posterity and history illustrates a text's temporal

migration to new audiences. He credits readers with the responsibility of posterity stating them to be: “impanelled by Time from the selectest of the wise many generations” (680). The significance of temporality is something Shelley is acutely aware of, hence by capitalising “Time” he establishes that “Time” is a living concept rather than an inanimate premise. Moreover, the inclusion of people in communicating literature through generations is reflective of the fact that literature has to be read to be remembered. Therefore, the religious nature of a text is irrespective of its future remembrance. Biblical prophecy, then, can be partially defined as a text that has relied on posterity, despite being contrary to the popular opinion of its own and later times.

While posterity is the survival of a text in the public imagination, I argue that the prophetic is the hidden meaning buried within the text. The intermingling of time is evidenced by Christina Lupton’s claim that “past, present and future all exist at once” (129) and so rather than a linearly progressing time there is actually an intermingling of temporal planes leaving room for borrowing from non-present temporalities such as the past. Furthermore, Bennett insists on the ghostly presence of the writer leads to the, assertion that “the Romantic culture of posterity emphasises the importance of the poet’s *transcendence* of his own time” (70). Here Bennett illustrates the premise of existing in multiple temporalities. His choice to italicise “*transcendence*” produces a sense of separation that is required for posterity but it also suggests that the poet does not belong in their present. I have so far discussed the role of the future but, for Shelley the past is of equal significance. Seldom does the history of a text come into discussion of its posterity; however, Shelley does touch on this idea in ‘A Defence’. The foreknowledge that comes from past texts introduces questions of

provenance that rely on intertextuality as echoes of the past develop into prophecy.

Shelley harnesses this idea stating:

They are the episodes of that cyclic poem written by Time upon the memories of men. The Past, like an inspired rhapsodist, fills the theatre of everlasting generations with their harmony. (688)

In relating his thoughts in such a visual way in this extract, he utilises the other senses, more specifically sound. The simile “like an inspired rhapsodist” instils the sense of a complex polytonal piece that, due to being “inspired”, is fundamentally virtuosic. Shelley then takes this Bach-like song further, mentioning the build-up of “harmony” which is evocative of functional and beautiful difference, rather than the same ideas being recapitulated in the same way. Therefore, instead of thinking of temporality as linear Shelley focuses on the poetic importance of the past and the layering of history. This resembles Lupton’s argument that it is “A world of multiple temporalities that resembles the art of reading much more than a chronologically arranged text” (62) and so by drawing on the past and pulling it to the present, while envisioning the future Shelley is stretching the fabric of time as we understand it. Faflak engages with Shelley’s reliance on the past, when he explains that “Shelley’s *Defence* speaks to a historical continuity” (266). In discussing the “historical continuity” Faflak is evoking the socio-political context of Shelley’s life. “Continuity” is vital in remembering the unstoppable nature and inevitability of temporal movement, while it is clear that Faflak is looking back; he gives no indication as to whether that is back to Ancient Greece or to 1819 with the Peterloo Massacre, which was discussed in chapter three. In doing this Faflak avoids Shelley’s penchant for looking ahead, while extracting the importance of posterity, through the posterity of Shelley’s

influences. Shelley posits in 'A Defence' that "by prolonging in its [] voice and motions the duration of the effect [], to prolong also a consciousness of the cause." (675), which relates to a desire for continuation, as Faflak also states above. Shelley pulls that historical continuation into the future, favouring an extended narrative of history, in the knowledge that he will be a part of that history as a result of posterity.

The role of temporality in the above extract places the responsibility of poetic creation on the past, but the inclusion of "cyclical" is indicative of the conjoined nature of time, a theme equally present in 'Ode to the West Wind'. These "cyclical" "episodes" stand for a return to the past as though each literary movement is a loop building upon previous premises expressed in the literary canon. Shelley emphasises this "cyclical" and expansive nature of literary time through the intertextual allusion of "theatre of everlasting generations", which perpetuates the idea that posterity is continuous by comparing it to the "theatre". Shelley's allusion here to Shakespeare's *As You Like It*'s most famous speech: "All the world's a stage, [...] And one man in his time plays many parts" (act 2, scene 7) grants permission to the audience, or future generations, to perceive historical figures, such as poets as though they are characters. In Shakespeare's play one of the characters, Rosalind, dresses as a boy; a fact that the audience knows yet the other characters do not: "*Enter Rosalind dressed as Ganymede*" (act 4, scene 3). In borrowing the sentiments of dramatic irony and applying them to historical reality Shelley explores the idea that future generations are the audience and so look back on the past and perceive characters differently to how those figures would have envisioned themselves. This illustrates external temporal observations as part of

posterity. Likewise, looking back on Shelley I have observed his similarities to the biblical prophets as symptomatic of his work, positioning him alongside them.

The future relevance of a text is indicative of a text's ability to move through time. This is expressed by Shelley in 'Ode to the West Wind', where he envisages the passages of texts either as a whole work or broken up into fragments. The below extract cements the idea that the wind is carrying not only change but also texts and prophecies.

Scatter, as from an unextinguish'd hearth
Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!
Be through my lips to unawaken'd earth

The trumpet of a prophecy! O Wind,
If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind? (ln. 66-70) (363)

The "scattering" of material connotes a sense of letting go of a text, allowing it to take on new meanings. By starting the stanza in this way Shelley is almost commanding the deliberate spreading of his works through time. Moreover, the imagery surrounding the "hearth" creates a complex metaphor for ideas embedded in texts. The ideas that need scattering, for Shelley, are the "Ashes and sparks" which are symbolic of shedding the waste (the ash) and extracting the meaning and hope (sparks). Shelley confirms this in the following clause stating that the contents of the hearth are "my words". He goes on to repeat "my" claiming ownership of his work, as though he feels bound to be responsible for bringing about the "spring". There is a sense of delay between the speaking or publication of these words and the time

when they will be acknowledged and understood, as illustrated by the change of seasons in the final line which is evocative of posterity. The “unawaken’d earth” is suggestive of sleeping, but the choice of “unawaken’d” seems to imply that it is not a restorative sleep but in fact a daze that the earth is subjected to. Therefore, it is the fire of Shelley’s words that is meant to reignite a passion in society, similar to his call to arms in ‘The Mask of Anarchy’ which I address in chapter three. For Luke Donahue, this passage reads as a theory of posterity: “The wind that threatens to extinguish the “unextinguished hearth” is the very force that spreads the dead remainder of his thought throughout the “unawakened Earth”” (2). There are, as a result, multiple temporal and prophetic readings of this passage. Donahue illustrates the “wind” moving Shelley’s words as a form of literary afterlife. He highlights how a threat (the wind) can become a strength as that wind is the agent of posterity. The hope that permeates the trio is then echoed in the couplet that follows, which describes looking forward to a transition between seasons. For Donahue this hope is Shelley willing posterity for himself. Poetically the “winter” is a time of death and dark. In contrast “spring” is the time of rebirth and light. The cycle of the year (as mentioned previously on page 15 in reference to ‘A Defence’) creates the impression that Shelley’s work or “words” are going to produce this change from dark to light. This change adds a highly prophetic tone to the poem, as he goes on to declare “the trumpet of prophecy”, an exclamation announcing to the world the arrival of this prophecy of hope. This prophetic declaration echoes the biblical prophecy of the coming of the end of times, as detailed in the book of Revelation: “And the seven angels which had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound.” (8:6). The intertext introduced here by Shelley produces a parallel with biblical doctrine and is exemplary of the innate connection between poetry and prophecy.

Shelley's signification of the interwoven nature of poetry and prophecy through posterity is further solidified in 'Ode to the West Wind'. He does this through the unpredictable feeling of the Wind, which Donahue mentions in relation to lines 66-70. I expand this imagining that the wind is echoing erratically much like the unpredictable nature of the passage of time.

Wild Spirit, which art moving everywhere;

Destroyer and preserver; hear, oh hear! (ln. 13-14 358)

The "Wild Spirit" of the couplet animates the essence of the wind producing the experience of an unpredictable force. Rather paradoxically it is within this unpredictability that the prophetic lies, as the uncertainty symbolises the unknown future. However, it also is "moving everywhere" suggesting it darts between the past and the future through the present; the effect then is of a divine messenger depositing inspiration at will wherever in time it finds itself. Furthermore, the divine reference seen in the line "destroyer and preserver" is reminiscent of the Old Testament God, for example in Job: "the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken" (1:21). Despite there being an evangelising aspect in Shelley there is also the suggestion of temporality being exclusively human. Bennett's thesis that "posterity validates the poet, but does so in the future perfect tense" (2) makes evident the necessity of posterity to both prophecy and poetry by expressing the authority a poet receives in the future as a result of posterity. However it neglects the importance of the past. This in turn offers confirmation to my proposal that the posterity of a poem

aligns it with the biblically prophetic, particularly for Shelley as to him poetry contains the “eternal truth”.

In ‘A Defence’ Shelley alludes to a conflict between literature’s posterity and its place in different temporal societies referring to: “the mediator and redeemer, Time” (699) which is suggestive of a meaning being exposed over time, especially due to the use of “redeemer”. “Redeemer” is indicative of a reconciliation between society and a text, meaning that through posterity there will come a time, for Shelley, when his writing will reflect the moral implications of the time. The word “redeemer” also echoes biblical and cultural language surrounding Christian teachings on redemption, such as the ‘Cristo Redentor’ (‘Christ the Redeemer’ statue in Rio de Janeiro); another example is John 3:16 “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life”. The combination of forgiveness and eternal life parallels my claim that posterity is a form of poetic afterlife. Shelley’s postulations centralise biblical prophecy’s dependence on posterity.

The metaphysical connotations of divine provenance in poetic content align with Shelley’s claim that “poetry cannot be made subservient” (680). The use of “subservient” in this quotation is reminiscent of Shelley’s distaste for organised religion as an oppressive and dominant force. Thus “subservience” stands as a reminder that poetry and prophecy cannot be distorted; it is the teachings that are inaccurate in Christianity not the doctrine. Moreover, the “eternal truth” (680) of poetry, that is mentioned above, is divine and so cannot be repressed or manipulated, instead the ever-shifting meaning of poetry is a constant revelation that

over time solidifies a work's divine provenance. Shelley makes time vital to this process as it is temporality that provides the revelations. Lupton touches upon this necessity when she addresses the need all texts have for time: "Fiction and religion are the modes in which the intertwining of objects and people is most fully acknowledged as needing duration" (22). Lupton parallels "fiction and religion" and in doing so echoes my above sentiments that the alignment of poetry and prophecy allow each to be disguised as the other. Shelley's continual reassessment of literature and religion suggests his fears for death. He overcomes this fear through his theorising on posterity, as posterity is a way for his life to continue despite the inevitability of death. Bennett observes this expressing that "Shelley's writing delineates a future determined by the radical absence of the poet: poetry is future-orientated and prospective because of its necessary engagement with a reception which can only occur in a time beyond the poet's own death" (160). It is this forward projection of thought that for Bennett illustrates a situation that bypasses the poet's death and envisions the life of poetry separate to the poet. Bennett instills this "future-orientated" element into his analysis of Shelley's work. The comfort Shelley takes in posterity appears to me to come from his fascination with the past's relevance to his present.

Despite Shelley's poetic fear of death his awareness of the future absence of the poet is inevitable. He acknowledged the transcendence of literature from human constraints of temporality merging the future, present and past of a text. Posterity is dependent upon traversing multitudinal temporal planes. However, defining the history of a text is complicated because to people texts exist when they're read and when they're written. Texts, therefore, outlive the humans that draw them into the

present hence texts inhabit the present, future and past simultaneously. In essence, the extended life span of a text is what distorts our perception of its past. Shelley's differentiation in describing the existence of a text illustrates the posterity associated with it, as he declares in his 'A Defence' when he states that "he [the poet] beholds the future in the present" (677) meaning that it is the imperceptible transition between future and present that suggests the prophetic nature of poetry. The difference of the future and present for the poet is unequivocally their absence, which is inevitable and so the author's death is to a certain degree a part of the posterity of a text.

The afterlife is a place where your experience is determined by how you have lived your life on earth and so is an imaginative variation of poetic absence. In Anglican Christianity that takes the form of Heaven and Hell. Christian teachings dictate that Hell is the absence of God as stated in 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9:

In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.

The dichotomy in Christian eschatological teachings of Heaven and Hell speaks to a theological tendency for distilling uncertainty into definitive terms. Heaven and hell in Shelley's essay are a social construct designed for Christianity to control the masses through fear, preventing them from opposing the Church. Shelley observes this use of fear in socio-political institutions and like many of his predecessors, for example Dante in *The Divine Comedy* and Milton in *Paradise Lost*. Shelley uses literature to

blur the bounds between the polar opposites of Heaven and Hell. It is within this no-man's-land of an afterlife that literary posterity forms. Literature, ungoverned by the same divine and temporal constraints as humans, floats in the grey area as a divine spirit. Bennett argues that it is not literature haunting the world, it is instead the writer haunting the world through their text. He asserts that "reading is haunted by the unreadable, the unspeakable, or the immemorial, in short the ghostly" (176), a premise that shares much with the sentiments of 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9. In both quotations it is the absence of the creator (God or poet) that drives the knowledge and message of a text, which is similarly true of Shelley as I have demonstrated through this chapter.

The conjunction between God and poet is reminiscent of Shelley's argument in 'A Defence' that "poets [are] the prophets" (691). The future is, therefore, vitally linked to death, however, for Shelley it is also tied up with ideas of posterity and so posterity becomes almost a life after death for a writer. This poetic afterlife is exemplified by the Biblical poets and Christ, as their work is still alive today despite them not being so. In essence, this form of posterity is indicative of biblical prophecy as it is the life of a text that allows it to be relevant to different temporal landscapes.

Conclusion

The Bible plays a vital role in understanding the Shelleyan canon as it forms a basis for his social, political and literary aspirations. His personal philosophies are founded upon an understanding of history and literature which stems from the Anglican culture he was educated in. Shelley's future orientation and biblical allusions are fundamental to my argument that he fulfills the characteristics of the Biblical prophets. Throughout his works, from *The Necessity of Atheism* (1811) to 'A Defence of Poetry' (1821), Shelley returns to Jesus and the Biblical prophets for theological and philosophical answers, maintaining a separation between the Anglican Church and the doctrines it was founded upon. He credits the Church with establishing the institutions of much of the Western world, placing the responsibility of corruption on the Church's doorstep. However, Shelley makes clear that Christian doctrine is not corrupt, he instead claims that man's misinterpretation is corrupting. Shelley honours Christ's work and hopes in return his work will be honoured in the same way, entangling the Shelleyan canon with biblical prophecy.

Writing a text for a future audience is an act which is prophetic in and of itself but Shelley's almost constant allusion to the Bible and morality makes him distinctive. Hence, representations of prophecy are rife in the Shelleyan canon. What makes it Biblically prophetic is Shelley's continual use of the Bible to support his moral ideas, showing himself as looking to the future. By taking inspiration from the past Shelley envisions the future in a visionary way, seeking to improve society. In 'A Defence' Shelley declares that "chivalry was the law, and poets the prophets." (691) which presents a medieval sense of ethics or a code of conduct. In essence, the quotation presents the principle that to be a good person one must be able to choose to be good or bad; expanding from this a morally good society has to choose to be good.

In looking back at Shelley he is using history as a way to envision a different present, or counter present (as explored in chapter three). He is therefore, writing for the inhabitants of this different time and in doing so borrows from the past to envision a future. Shelley's envisionments of future social improvements are noted in Fairclough's essay where she articulates that "Shelley's work does not merely represent but aims to reform the world creatively" (245). I argue that the creativity she observes in Shelley formulating his visions of the future defines his prophecy. Moreover Lupton's supposition that texts are "Orientated in time toward a future in which they already participate" (144) highlights how in writing for the future Shelley places his texts amongst the inhabitants of that envisioned future. This illustrates my premise that writing for the future and to an extent writing between temporalities is prophetic in nature.

Shelley plays with temporal transitions as he reflects on the past to contemplate the future. He uses the images he creates to produce visions of the future, making clear the need for balance between temporal planes. In 'A Defence' he illustrates this premise stating:

But let us not be betrayed from a defence into a critical history of poetry and its influence on society. Be it enough to have pointed out the effects of poets, in the large and true sense of the word, upon their own and all succeeding times. (693)

This extract parallels the equal cultural significance of the literary canon and Christianity to Shelley. Despite Shelley's estranged relationship to Christianity he still acknowledges the positive effect that it has and will have on people due to the

doctrine. In ignoring the negative attributes of institutional religions that he typically associates with Christianity he separates the Bible and the figures contained within it treating the text as a form of philosophy. The optimism of this extract is captured by O'Neill as he explores Shelley's complex religiosity: "Shelley's poetry at its most compelling holds open a fine-spun hope that it seems right to call poetic and religious" (76). It is the combination of "poetic and religious" that O'Neill pulls out of Shelley's work that I claim as prophetic, as well as expanding O'Neill's claim to include Shelley's prose. This is due to Shelley's assertions that poets are prophets (691) whose works have been transformed into sacred texts. Bennett's claim parallels this idea that posterity affords literature an almost religious status as poetry appears to become faith or myth over the centuries. He states that "the judgement of true aesthetic value is the same in all ages, unvarying and unchangeable, it transcends temporality and the contingency of historical circumstance" (60) which signifies posterity as a defining feature of prophecy, particularly due to the standardisation of judgement that Bennett is describing which parallels the temporal relevance of religious texts. A text's ability to transmigrate through temporal constraints is only achievable through posterity, meaning that a text's future relevance is determined unknowingly by its poet and essentially prophetic.

The ultimate aim of Biblical prophecy given its eternal posterity is to lay out the path to the apocalypse as it is so irrevocably entangled with futurity. To look at this through a Biblical lens would be to highlight the continual relevance of the Bible to millions of people, as was prophesied in Matthew: "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come." (24:14). This is highly future-orientated and draws on the idea of

universal accessibility to literature throughout time. The paradox of the significance and insignificance of temporality to the “gospel” is indicative of the relevance of posterity. By this I mean the level posterity of the “Gospel” is in receipt of allows it to transcend temporal bounds hence in this instance temporality is both significant (as it has afforded posterity) and insignificance (the level of posterity has made the text appear timeless). Shelley’s works are likewise future-orientated and so Shelley parallels aspects of the Biblical, especially when he posits that “The popular division into prose and verse is inadmissible in accurate philosophy” (678). This results in the conclusion that literature transcends form and so by transcending both form and temporality a text becomes prophetic. Therefore, the truth that is contained in a text is key in attaining that dual transcendence, hence poems, novels, songs and any other form of writing can become prophetic if they contains an eternal truth.

In ‘Ode To The West Wind’ Shelley uses distinctly Christian and prophetic imagery to fabricate a poetic world separate from mundane reality. In chapters two and three I discussed the social and political elements of Shelley’s present and it is that present that he tries to escape from. This escapist approach also relates to Shelley’s fear of his own death and so he focuses upon the idea of a better future.

The comrade of thy wanderings over Heaven,
As then, when to outstrip thy skiey speed
Scarce seem'd a vision; I would ne'er have striven (ln. 49-51) (361)

Shelley indicates the challenge of differentiating between a prophetic vision and reality. This is made abundantly clear in the final line as Shelley states that it “Scarce

seem'd a vision"; intriguingly he goes on to declare a complete acceptance of this vision forced upon him, as the word "striven" points towards a futility to the opposition of this experience. Furthermore the opening line indicates the vision's source as being "over Heaven" and while that can be taken to mean the West Wind is a powerful transcendent force bringing out that vision, it also implies that the wind has come from God, or an overseer of Heaven. The connotations of the divine in this stanza are observed by O'Neill who states that "Shelley in *Ode to the West Wind* negotiates with belief systems" (72). The "belief systems" he refers to are personal aspects of religious institutions, drawing on the proposition that Shelley's obsession with Christian doctrine shapes his personal "belief system" which shares elements of Christianity but rejects the corruption that institutionalised religion represented. Lupton uses the dedication required to study scripture as a parallel to show the importance of applying the same study to reading a book. She asserts that "the justification for religion's need for time strengthens [...] the case for book use, not as an alternative to worship, but as one that would require kindred techniques of timetabling" (49). She pulls together temporality, study and religion to determine the irrefutable significance of analysing a text through a uniquely personal lens. In essence, both Lupton and O'Neill instill the importance of individual study to a text in order to understand it fully and by applying this to Shelley his religious affiliations and Biblical study are explained. The combination of belief and prophecy are understood when they are exposed in a new and future context. The meaning of the 'West Wind's' message is only made clear in a future moment.

It is evident, then, that Shelley's awareness of the concept of posterity and temporality places him in a prophetic stance. He lends credit to the premise in 'A Defence' claiming that "posterity has done ample justice to the great names now

referred to" (699). These great names include Christ and many other biblical prophets. The heralding that these "great names" receive is what Shelley hopes for. I have argued that certain meanings embedded into a text and unknown to Shelley or his contemporary audience will come to light as his texts reach new ages. My claim centres around the posterity of a text resulting in prophetic readings of it. In the case of that Shelley this manifests through his notably biblical content coupled with a hope for a better future. It is through the combination of content and posterity that Shelley's works fulfil the seemingly contradictory premise of Shelley being biblically prophetic. However it is precisely because of this contradiction that the term is so fitting. I have explained how Shelley's vocal opposition to the Church echoes the biblical prophets. I have, over the course of this dissertation, explored the ways Shelley takes on the role of a biblical prophet arguing that his relationship to the Bible, to his contemporary society and to the future prove it to be true. It is only from a future vantage point that one can look back and understand a text as biblical prophecy.

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