Dis/Locating the Derridean Ghost in Shelley

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Summary

The protean Percy Bysshe Shelley communicates the knowledge of instability in the stable course of life. At times, Shelley's fragile hopes and dreams are decimated upon the eerie encounter with reality. On other occasions, universe heightens his ethical sensibility by investing it with a generative vision to ameliorate his shattered convictions, and as such the messianic faith gives a new scope to his worldview. The oscillation between desire and despair, between reconstruction and destruction, parallels the Derridean exorcism of Western metaphysics. My point throughout the article is that Shelleyan philosophy visualises a transcendental wisdom – not hampered by the neutralising boundaries of tradition – which wards off totality in his Promethean fashion. I suggest that Shelley anticipates a simulacrum of the kind imagined and inscribed in Derridean discourse as a "ghost".

Opsomming

Die proteaan Percy Bysshe Shelley dra die kennis van onbestendigheid in die bestendige verloop van die lewe oor. By tye word Shelley se brose verwagtinge en drome uitgedun tydens die onheilspellende kennismaking met die werklikheid. By ander geleenthede verhoog die heelal sy etiese verstandigheid deur dit met ŉ generatiewe visie te beklee om sy verpletterde oortuigings te verbeter, en as sodanig verleen die Messiaanse geloof ŉ nuwe omvang aan sy wêreldbeskouing. Die skommeling tussen begeerte en wanhoop; tussen heropbouing en vernietiging ewenaar die Derride-aanse uitdrywing van Westerse metafisika. Die punt wat ek regdeur die artikel maak, is dat Shelley se filosofie ŉ transendentale wysheid visualiseer – onbelemmer deur die neutraliserende beperkings van tradisie – wat die geheel afweer op sy Prometeaanse manier. Ek gee te kenne dat Shelley ŉ nabootsing wat in Derriaanse diskoers as ŉ "spook" voorgestel en ingeskryf word, antisipeer.

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The future can only be for ghosts.
(Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*)

1 Introduction

If messianism, as conceived by Derrida, has a private structure, messianicity depends upon a universal structure. In *Specters of Marx* (1994) Derrida draws a distinction between messianicity as a generally non-dogmatic structure and the religious messianisms which provoke the expectation for a concrete saviour who will arrive in the long run. Messianism presents the most vivid and perfect illustration of the fundamental point of history that, to the extreme extent, holds on to the incommensurability of the singular with the general. The messianic promise, however, amounts to an irreducible axiom of history which, as a groundless ground, affirms that the anticipated is always an indeterminate ghost, an outsider which is never going to appear. In conjuring the spectre of Derrida, David Appelbaum calls attention to the "ghostly/ghastly future of messianicity" (Appelbaum 2009: 48) and eloquently directs past to future in a Derridean manner: "Only a limited view would locate the specter in the past. More precisely, its roots lie in the future, the to-come" (p. 3). The transcendental critique does not leave intact the religious dogmatisms which resist the appeal to an event of irreducible alterity, and consequently "Derrida's rhetoric would lead us to believe that we can once and for all make a total break or rupture with the metaphysical tradition" (Bernstein 1998: 182). This disjuncture becomes the source of a promise, "the very possibility of the other" (Derrida [1994]2006: 26). The mission of the messianic is then, in Derrida's terms, "[to] leave an empty place, always, in memory of the hope" (p. 82).

In his essay "Signature Event Context" (1972) Derrida declares that for a writing to remain a writing, it must retain its readability even when the author does not or cannot answer for his text. He develops the argument in order to bring into a position of prominence the linguistic and ontological inexorability of repetition. Meaning and the possibility of communication rest upon the occurrence of repetition, because no segment of language could possess meaning if it does not hold the possibility of reoccurrence. In a similar vein, discussion of objects would necessitate their repetition over time, as no single object could maintain its identity if it is not endowed with the vision of repeatability. Language and ontology are therefore perceived by Derrida as intertwined. The possibility of readability or repetition is known by Derrida as iteration and iterability. Shedding more light on Derrida's argument, Hobson aptly comments: "For Derrida, all discourse is marked by 'iterability' in that, however deeply embedded in the context or processes of its circumstances of production, it is repeatable in other circumstances applicable elsewhere" (Hobson 2001: 97). In the logic of

iterability repetition necessarily precedes affirmation. In order for something to achieve acceptance, it must have the capacity of repeatability in different contexts. Iterability incorporates both difference and sameness, because within every repetition something different is created but that something is still the same. Simply put, as soon as the singular proliferates, structure is created.

On the strength of Shelley's affinity with deconstruction, I argue that Shelley separates his philosophy from the traditional modes of representation. Love, hope, and other generalisations are transformed into singular spectacles in his poetry. Shelley's consideration of these blind spots is indeed noteworthy. Accordingly, this article begins with exploring Shelley's deconstruction of binary clichés that circulate around him. In addition, his opaque view of futurity is considered. The article identifies Shelley's paradoxical estimation of futurity, stressing that while he conspicuously loosens his grip on the flag of messianisms, he both hesitates and aspires to embrace the Derridean notion of messianicity. In the end, it addresses Shelley's associations with Derrida's concept of iterability.

2 Polarities Turned Upside Down

Whether they study language, myth, or literature, structuralists privilege langue over parole. They contend that nothing could be understood in isolation – it has to be viewed in the context of the larger structures it is derived from. In his essay on the structure of narrative Barthes argues: "No one can produce a narrative without referring himself to an implicit system of units and rules" (Barthes 1975: 238). Jonathan Culler offers the same definition in more explicit terms: "*Parole* is made possible by *la langue*, and if one attempts to identify any utterance or text as a moment of origin one finds that they depend upon prior codes" (Culler [1981]2005: 113). Seen this way, individual works of art lose their validity as autonomous creations of creative minds. They function as mechanistic artefacts conforming to larger units of meaning which exist prior to and independently of their particular presentations. Acts of interpretation in a structuralist framework thus pinpoint the conventions and operations that inform a piece of literature.

In contrast, deconstruction views a text's meaning as something undecidable. In this way, meaning is no longer a part of the langue, since construction of meaning becomes the privilege of the text and the reader, given their distinctive singularities. The methodological principle in this mode of criticism challenges (or let us say expands) the former protocols of reading through the discovery of a text's hauntedness by evasive significations which ultimately seal its self-deconstruction. J. Hillis Miller points out that the text itself performs self-deconstruction, and that a deconstructive reading is not the attribution of some significance beyond the

capabilities of a text: "Any literary text, with more or less explicitness or clarity, already reads or misreads itself" (Miller 1991: 120). In the process of undoing the taken-for-granted grounds and dissolving itself into incoherent meanings, a text involves itself in a misspeaking condition. It becomes undecidable. Miller deftly sums up undecidability's central point: "The notion of undecidability names the presence in a text of two or more incompatible or contradictory meanings that imply one another or are intertwined with one another" (Miller 1998: 97). This instability would thereby lead the text away from assuming the face of a systematic construction, and each individual text (parole) would relate to a unique system which in turn might have nothing to do with the local or, possibly, the universal langue.

The indisputable polarities Western metaphysics has defined ascribe coherence and logic to meaning. It is Derrida's aim to temporarily invert these seemingly irrevocable counter-discourses in order to show the indeterminacy of meaning, or, put in different terms, the instability of patterns. Deconstruction, in Culler's shrewd formulation, "involves the demonstration that a hierarchal opposition, in which one term is said to be dependent upon another conceived as prior, is in fact a rhetorical or metaphysical imposition and that the hierarchy could well be reversed" (Culler 2005: 204). In order to demystify the stability of dichotomies, deconstruction seeks to lend the received orders a revisionist bent. This means that deconstruction does not seek to destroy them but to assign them paraconsistent and many-valued logics. "To deconstruct an opposition," Culler explains, "is to show that it is not natural and inevitable but a construction, produced by discourses that rely on it, and to show that it is a construction" (Culler [1997]2011: 140). The outcome of these restructurings is what Derrida calls "supplementarity". In Supplementarity the two sides of the binary operation are reversed so that the unprivileged may be given the platform to express its suppressed being, to add and to replace at the same time. However, by this reversal, the denominator will not become the stable authority, as the reversal is only meant to bring to light the fragile basis for the construction of these polarities, and thus to leave them in what Derrida dubs "undecidability". Supplementarity itself engenders another corollary. When no side of the dual operation is bestowed the upper hand, every relationship operates according to *différance*. Relationships become referential; that is to mean, we know something solely because it is different from its counterpart, not because there is a transcendental signified to which it must be compared. Furthermore, we part ways with closure, because there no longer exists any transcendental signified and, consequently, no predetermined interpretation.

"To deconstruct the opposition, first of all," declares Derrida "is to overturn the hierarchy at a given moment" (Derrida 1981: 41). Derrida finds it non-pertinent to tangle with conceptual oppositions when *différance* sets in. It is of the utmost significance to him to undo the need of esteeming

predetermined equations to give scope to the notion that any of such considerations might fail. Although the entanglements appear quite knotted and the decorum of all codes is governed by the binary logic, normalization, to borrow from Foucault, could be disrupted in the sites of intervention. For Derrida, resistance to the seemingly contradictory arguments would inevitably usher in lack of cohesion and undecidability. Derrida believes this undecidability is characterised by incalculability, because it "render[s] all totalization, fulfillment, plentitude impossible" (Derrida 1988: 116). The orientation toward the Other consequently reduces the authoritarian right of exclusive conceptualisations in favour of expanding the possibility of alterity. By applying Derrida's methodology to critical discourse, one is apt to forgo the centrality and totality of oppositions in what would mark the twist of terms.

At the end of "Ode to the West Wind" Shelley does not settle his critique of the wintry circumstances; in fact, spring might always lag behind. Nevertheless, he wishes to breathe life unto the paralysing anomalies to elevate them to a new stance. He becomes the herald of rebirth by encouraging his readers to faithfully keep their hold on the Derridean "to-come" or the futurity which challenges the image of the present annihilation. The spectre of messianicity promises a step beyond the imperatives of the possible, and Shelley has no doubt that the hope must be preserved. Such insistence on the redeeming power of the poet is indeed a characteristic of the Romantics. Blake's optimism derived from his prophetic vision is tangible enough in his "Introduction" to *Songs of Experience*. Wordsworth too assumes the persona of a poet-prophet or 'the chosen Son' in *The Prelude*. He benefits from the hyperbolic language in his Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, *The Recluse*, and *The Prelude* to put forth the thesis of the existential divinity of himself and his incomparable accomplishments. In the same manner, Shelley seeks to act as the voice of an era torn between contradictions of hope and despair, freedom and restraint, future and past. It is in accordance with the same presupposition that Shelleyan idealism allows, rather than obstructs, the presence of its opposite, scepticism, to defiantly challenge the virginity of bright speculations and leave them overwrought. Shelley covets to present both arguments so that a synthesis might emerge out of them, and in some bright episodes of his poetry the reader is compelled to struggle as to which conclusion he may arrive at. This open-endedness forms a considerable part of his poetry insofar as all theses remain unscathed in the eternal battle of opposites.

One might contend that the discovery of the spirit of rebellion in Shelley's neglected poetry is taking on a similar quest for appreciating his traditionally acclaimed poetry. Since, as generalising as the claim may seem, Shelley's corpus is devotedly a representation of Prometheus in that it breaks away from a docile glorification of gods by expostulating against the sites of conventionality. Stafford captures this spirit of rebellion in Shelley: "For

Shelley, slavery was the universal condition of mankind, as long as human beings remained in thrall to what he regarded as outmoded systems of belief and conventional thinking" (Stafford 2012: 76). Thus, on Shelley's account, the prototypal writer of his era – "the Romantic poet" – is seen as some kind of modern Prometheus, a standout for anarchism. Shelley does not bow to the inherited epistemology and is involved, in the Althusserian sense, in an epistemological break. Indeed, Shelley's poetry is a space for practicing a highly innovative thinking for giving rise to rereadings of Western metaphysics and providing counter-narratives against the logocentric frames of intelligibility.

Shelley situates his anti-authoritarian aesthetic upon questioning the unchallengeable assertiveness of Augustan poets like Dryden and Pope to foreground the presence of the reader as well. In his brilliant deconstructive approach to Shelley's *The Triumph of Life*, Paul de Man (1979) lauds the poem for its fragmentary nature that calls upon the reader to reconstruct and complete the spaces of reading. Moreover, he points out how Shelley at times achieves innovation by a static progression – when his poetry threatens to grind to a halt. Shelley leaves his arguments open-ended, argues De Man, by amassing a series of unattended questions: "The answer to the question is another question, asking what and why one asked, and thus receding even further from the original query" (De Man 1979: 44). By leaving the riddles undecided, Shelley distorts the normal linguistic communication and approves of the disparity between articulation and meaning. According to De Man, this indetermination, though properly serving Shelley's unsettled spirit, "haunt[s]" (p. 45) the reader. Shelley the deconstructionist does not stand limitations in form and content, nor does his outrageous desire ever stop desiring.

Scholarship on Shelley has tended to marginalise the bulk of his poetry by lavishing criticism on a limited range of his works (see, as examples, Franta 2001; Miller 2010; Haekel 2011). However, his shorter poetry seems to possess a unique quality that could lend itself to different and trailblazing readings. Among such works, "Pan, Echo, and the Satyr" is one of Shelley's attempts to destabilise a violent hierarchy: love/hate. In this poem, each character seeks the love of another one who does not reciprocate his or her feelings and who longs for the love of another person who in turn does not share the same affections. They are all involved in an endless quest that takes the form of unswerving pathos. Throughout the entire lyric, love is not able to perform its task against its ironically love-consuming energy. Unexpectedly, the all-pervading separation of lovers finally poses a threat to them to take refuge in an eloquent silence or to totally do away with the thought of love and resort to hate. Love does not now, as formerly, qualify as the upper hand due to its destructive impulse. We are implicitly shown that love is not necessarily the defining element in the binary operation, and it is stripped of its authority so that hate could gain power. Love is not

necessarily or inherently good, for it might – or actually does – invoke hate. On the other hand, hate is not inferior to love, but accompanies and defines it:

> As Pan loved Echo, Echo loved the Satyr, –
> The Satyr, Lyda; and so love consumed them. –
> And thus to each – which was a woful matter –
> To bear what they inflicted Justice doomed them;
> For, inasmuch as each might hate the lover,
> Each, loving, so was hated. – Ye that love not
> Be warned – in thought turn this example over,
> That when ye love, the like return ye prove not.
>
> (Shelley 2012, Vol. 3: 59)

It is a characteristically Shelleyan quality to question the unquestioned. "To-morrow" with its lamenting tone does not give the impression that with the coming tomorrow joy and rejuvenation will inevitably spring forth. "Where art thou, beloved To-morrow?" (Shelley 2012, Vol. 2: 204) starts the poem and is reminiscent of a strong but unfulfilled yearning for the blissful future, taking its impetus from the sphere of sensation. Shelley elaborates on the natural tendency that encourages man to seek a helpless refuge under the shelter of future, which, startlingly, turns out to be an unavailing step. In other words, Shelley is attempting to decentre the traditional notion of future's superiority to the present. Not only does future play a key role in giving an excessive optimism that it ineluctably disappoints, it obscures one's vision from treasuring the blessings the present has to offer. Since, it is after finding oneself on a fruitless pursuit of happiness that "We find the thing we fled – To-day" (p. 204). Shelley reverses the binary system by empowering the present and questioning future. Far from being a vacuous affirmation, this concern for logical uncertainties overrides the triumph of recurrent dichotomisations. Shelley here acts in unison with the dictates of his inward sentiments. For Shelley, the messianic vitality enfeebles the intellect; it sanctions the self-evident attraction of the accessible for the benefit of futurity. (Later on, I will point out how Shelley conflates the now-time's nightmarish visions with the frenzied promises of time without offering a synthesis.)

These fresh classifications of terms prove that Shelley is conscious of the play of differences within language and, like Saussure and Derrida elsewhere, acknowledges that language depends on difference. Nevertheless, he does not widely associate himself with structuralism's premise that such binaries are irreversible and thereby brings himself closer to deconstruction.

What manifests itself in Shelley's oeuvre is his fascination with melancholy. "Our sweetest songs", as he points out reflexively in "To a Skylark", "are those that tell of saddest thought" (Shelley Vol. 2: 130). What gives power to an imaginative reappraisal of dejection is its juxtaposition

with its opposite, hope. Michael O'Neill calls attention to this idea in the poem: ""saddest thought" discovers its nature most profoundly and finds "sweetest" expression when contemplating its opposite" (O'Neill 2011: 10). Shelley is mournful to an extent that he admits escape from suffering is not feasible. He tends steadily, despite momentary springs of vitality and rapture, toward despair. Hence, bleakly and not wholeheartedly, he sets out to merge melancholy with joy in an effort to view life as it is with its accompanying complexities. Not without direct relation to his own plagued life, his sensibility is wounded to a pitch of susceptibility that renders his worldviews divergent from one in possession of healthy sensations. The cynical attitude reverberates recurrently through his lamentations over the stark sense of loss and deprivation. He takes note in the concluding lines of the poem that "Our sincerest laughter / With some pain is fraught" (Shelley Vol. 2: 130). Interestingly, the play between binary pairs is spelled out to the extent of fostering faith in an organic development of life, one unhampered by the incessant pursuit of what Shelley deems impossible: reacting against the force of life itself.

The battle of opposites is portrayed in its loftiest measure in "Oh, wretched mortal, hard thy fate!". Here, as in *The Triumph of Life*, Shelley's poignancy demonstrates itself in the form of unattended questions. At the outset, Shelley sets sorrow in opposition to happiness and privileges the earlier over the latter: "Ah say, what is adversity / If sorrow be prosperity" (Shelley 2000, Vol. 1: 138). In deconstruction's habitual vocabulary, the poem is embroiled in a series of aporias that it finally leaves unresolved. At the point of these aporias, the reader's logic reaches a point of exhaustion or is pressed to the extreme. In the lines above, the poet invites the reader to not only doubt the grandeur universally attributed to happiness but to hold faith in sorrow as something that engenders happiness. The second aporia of the poem is set forth in the dichotomous relationship of renown and infamy. The logical tension forcing its way out of this duality is the subordination of fame to notoriety: "What can glory be, / If high renown be infamy?" (p. 138). The opacity is quite clear when the formerly condemned term rises to a position of popularity. Yet, at the same time, it is not made known why the subordinate sides of the argument should be given space for expression. Do the newly-promoted claims have their unshakable meanings for Shelley? Or do we unavoidably navigate a direction amidst the vortex of complexities? Our certainties are repeatedly questioned. In compliance with deconstruction's fundamental postulation, Shelley avoids absolutism in his consideration of polarities. And, by this lack of endorsement, naturally either/or mentality gives way to a "both/and kind of logic" (Hutcheon 2006: 116). The poem retains its idiosyncratic stature with another polarity: "Who can be free if liberty / Be aye the basest slavery?" (Shelley Vol. 1: 138) Shelley lashes out at freedom equating it with slavery. Similar to above, the fluidity and indeterminacy of these two lines' interpretation enable a free

play of discourses, such that either side of the pole supplements and does not invalidate the other one. The next binary operation to be given little or no strength by Shelley is the heaven/hell conflict. At this point, he tears down the foundation of Western metaphysics through this inversion: "What mind conceive if heaven be hell?" (p. 138) The last conceptual opposition records the inevitability of pessimism in what would make Shelley's despair-inducing tendency a myriad of doubtful indications. It detaches the reader from his Elysian dreams, since, to his utmost dismay, Shelley advises him to be "Sure, wretched mortal! hard thy fate – / Keen misery is thy happiest state" (p. 138). This echoes the undertone found in "To a Skylark", in which Shelley muses over the disheartening combination of happiness and sorrow. The unavoidable and undecidable aporias that inhabit the poem testify to Shelley's manipulation of language, and, while they enlarge the reader's expectations for a peaceful settlement, the rhetorical promise of resolution is simply forgotten.

Shelley's poem allows more than one coherent but entirely incompatible reading, and none could lead us to make a valid decision as to which of them can be given priority over the other. We cannot claim with certitude that the poem resolves the question of the superiority of the traditionally suppressed term over the customarily authorised one, nor do we know what exact connotations are borne by the reversals to make the intent of the poem transparent. In this way, meaning of the poem cannot be reduced to total closure, as a single literal meaning proves the text to be an incoherent entity on the verge of self-annihilation. Rather, it is engaged in a condition of polysemics or what Derrida calls "dissemination" which makes it possible for the poet "to let meanings proliferate, to keep open as many possibilities as it is possible to keep open at once" (Lucy 2004: 29). This is evident in the two concluding lines of the poem which attempt a summing up of the argument carried forth in the preceding lines. However, the extent to which they successfully complete the mission is a matter of doubt. This chiefly boils down to the idea that the questions raised throughout the poem are not accompanied with, at least, detectable clues. Thus, the poem compels its self-deconstruction: "The sentence hear which wisdom gave: / 'The lover is the vilest slave'" (Shelley Vol. 1: 138). Why is the lover "the vilest slave" in Shelley's eyes? We cannot know. What we can know is that the device of dissemination, wielded by Shelley for the art of the impossible, is a passage to deconstruction's indeterminacy and undecidability.

3 Dialectic of Messianism and Messianicity

Walter Benjamin declares in "Theses on the Philosophy of History" that the synthesis of past and present is inevitable, that "there is a secret agreement between past generations and the present time" (Benjamin 2003: 389). Every

generation is the heir of the preceding ones by inheriting the unfulfilled dreams and the memories of past sufferings, because it is obliged to redeem the oppressed past. To do justice to the notion of historical materialism, Benjamin goes on to assert: "Our coming was expected on earth. Like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a weak messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim" (p. 389). In this way, the ongoing developments (revolutions) – of course if there are any – are the messiahs the former people were waiting for. In contrast, the Derridean motif breaks away from a simple remembrance of the spirit preceding the present one, emphasising that an assimilation of its alterity in relation to the present is not brought to pass. Whereas Benjamin's gaze is locked over the past, Derrida acknowledges our debt to the past and anticipates the never-to-come future. Messianic time loosens the bond with future's promise of salvation and guides its energy to dusting a past that is accessible immanently. However, a trust in the other, in the abstract sense of emancipation and justice that cannot in principle come about, constitutes Derrida's future-oriented observation. He tends toward a transcendent future – not an omnipotent tradition – and underlines the radical futurity of the messianic promise that is not inspired by a particular figure. "In order to account for the heterogeneity of the messianic," Ware remarks, "Derrida recasts time as out-of-joint, thereby viewing the future not as a future-present, but as a heterogeneous other" (Ware 2004: 100). It is the absolutely indeterminate structure of future liberated from the concrete messianisms of objective time that precludes its closure within the realm of finitude.

Owing to Shelley's social sympathies, the appraisal of his close associations with the messianic is not only a distinct possibility but a crucial necessity. The Fairy Queen cries in *Queen Mab*: "The Present and the Past thou hast beheld: / It was a desolate sight. Now, Spirit, learn / The secrets of the Future" (Shelley Vol. 3: 143). The ironic disjuncture between the past and the present helps to settle the state of life for Shelley: futurity, as an absent referent, is to be held in high esteem. Shelley upholds that the now-time is not usually a space for ecstasy, and that it is afflicted with the pressures of reality which assume no responsibility toward the individual's wide horizon of expectations. Life precipitates the individual into an illusion of buoyancy, and it is in response to this illusive tendency that in his preface to *The Revolt of Islam* he calls his own age "an age of despair" (Shelley 2012, Vol. 1: 59). It is no secret that this declaration has something to do with his frustration at the turn of events during the French Revolution. He feels revulsion at the defect of correlation between the knowledge which supposedly guarantees liberation and the actualisation of the dream which seems at any rate to be doomed to failure. Whether the accentuation of the polarity yields any totalised conception may not befit Shelleyan spirit, and, not without justice to his inclination toward the messianic promise, both drought and life mushroom in his orchard.

It is ranging from transience to permanence that, at least in part, provokes a stiffening ambiguity in Shelley. Laurence S. Lockridge explains that Shelley has “a passion for reforming the world” and “addresses the issue with some sophistication.” He concludes the outcome is that “the paradox of freedom and necessity generates some of his finest verse” (Lockridge 2004: 311). Nevertheless, Shelleyan libertinism yells the dawning of a new age, and the intervention of revolutionary freedom invites, beyond temporal and spatial boundaries, repudiation of the all-encompassing political tyrannies which reconcile the distance between acquiescence and felicity. In “War” Shelley anticipates a day when man is not torn by the antagonism of the avaricious rulers. Through immersion in the idea of political justice, the war-plagued individual of the poem comes to terms with futurity. The new-sprung hope of the final, though lengthened, liberation warms the chilling impression engendered when he is caught by the “anguished groan” (Shelley Vol. 3: 247). His refusal to commit himself to the disdainful gesture of the omnipresent sorrow only signifies that the time-to-come offers something worthy of commanding his attention. He develops a position of resistance to the sufferings that have overwhelmed him:

> Ah! when will come the sacred fated time,
> When man unsullied by his leaders’ crime,
> Despising wealth, ambition, pomp, and pride,
> Will stretch him fearless by his foe-men’s side?
> Ah! when will come the time, when o’er the plain
> No more shall death and desolation reign?
> When will the sun smile on the bloodless field,
> And the stern warrior’s arm the sickle wield?
>
> (pp. 247-248)

The illustration of the unrepresentable, the constitution of the unforeseeable, and the promise of the impossible are the provocations of messianicity. The followers of this line are for Derrida in constant need of prophets to guide them on the straight even if they cannot know but only believe. Whether it is the biblical Messiah or the universal messiah, the faith in this pact is not to be quenched, because the promise must always be a breach of the present, stemming from an irresistible passion for the possibility of the impossibility. Upon overthrowing the regime of the possible, messianicity sets about to invent the other and therefore is “a future sheltered by an absolute secret and absolved from whatever is presentable, programmable, or foreseeable” (Caputo 1997: 73). The very suspense of the upcoming event shrouded in cryptic articulations bestows a legitimate import upon incalculable preparations. It is only the unaccomplishment, the non-arrival of the messianic idea which keeps the wheels of history on the move.

Benjamin’s weak messianism conservatively refrains from appreciating future altogether because, in Ware’s terms, “it commits us to a false notion

of progress – that the present is moving toward a determined future – which in turn commits us to the model of objective, linear time" (Ware 2004: 113). If the attempt for reconciling the present to the future is, within the Benjaminian frame, a passion-driven quest, the radical heterogeneity of the future is for Derrida the demystification of the concrete event. Derrida does not propose a foregraspable and identifiable other so as to keep the vision of alterity in balance. The arriving event must be "unknown, not merely factually unknown but structurally unknowable, which is what Derrida calls the 'secret' or the 'absolute secret'" (Caputo 1997: 101).

Viewed thus, the indignation of Shelley's character corresponds to the messianic vision of absolute hospitality, or the "yes" to the inconceivable. The melancholy individual oscillates between despair and optimism, because he is aware "o'er the palsied earth stalks giant Fear, / With War, and Woe, and Terror, in his train" (Shelley Vol. 3: 248), but is concurrently ready to admit "That Heaven, indignant at the work of Hell, / Will soon the cause, the hated cause remove, / Which tears from earth peace, innocence, and love" (p. 248). All the anticipated foreshadowings – inferred from the now-time's urgency for the messianic – push him forward, and, although his zest is obscured to a great degree, it is neither manacled nor is it effaced in the end. The logic of messianicity informs Shelley's critical account of the abdicated throne of futurity which is now trodden down by custom and usage. To take arms against the Hydra-like despotism would necessitate that the messianic associations hold their positions so that victory, though not at hand, could finally be made possible. Shelleyan idealism affirms the messianic scope, something accomplished not by dusting history, rather by exposing the abstract sense of the open-ended structure. Over this long-anticipated future no dogma holds exclusive rights, and the basic promise of salvation provides a simple paradigm unencumbered by concrete messianisms.

How Shelley steers clear of the now-time we could gauge from the fact that he mostly seeks protection in futurity. If Keatsian fancy is protected within the Lethean realm, Shelleyan intellect is under the siege of the Stygian impulse. However, the unequal contest between happiness and reality gives him insight to ask for a futuristic cognitive turn. In "Song" he apostrophises the spirit of Delight with gusto. The argument over the necessity of the spirit is initiated upon the fateful confrontation of Shelley's vitality and Delight's despair: "Rarely, rarely, comest thou, / Spirit of Delight! / Wherefore hast thou left me now / Many a day and night?" (Shelley Vol. 2: 178) Shelley time and again falls back to this intensity when, against his own will, he is plunged into spiritual stalemate. In such occasions, he concedes that he is startled out of his reverie and inflicted by nostalgic impressions. His epiphany thus results in the re-envisagement of history's progression. The bloom is now withered, never to blossom again. In short, after acquiring awareness, the poet carries his down-to-earth

intention into effect by accepting this loss: "Even the sighs of grief / Reproach thee, that thou art not near, / And reproach thou wilt not hear" (pp. 178-179). Ostensibly, then, Shelley has given in to the exertions of inertia. However, we are acutely made aware that, despite being detached from the normal course of life, the poet regains his ardour when he is assured through his own pondering that he still loves all that the spirit of Delight "Lovest". He simply resuscitates the ghost of the absent; he ventriloquises the messianic Otherness conventionally encrypted within the unknown structure of futurity. Andrew Bennett puts emphasis upon Shelley's ghosted poetry which "is particularly and peculiarly concerned with the absent presence of the ghostly" (Bennett 2004: 174). In other words, the prominence of the absolute experience becomes comprehensible in Shelley's poetry as soon as the value and the validity of the aspiration is fully recognised. The tribute paid to the time-to-come, however in vain, at least impels Shelley to express his disenchantment in terms of helpless oscillation between the visionary and the real.

The conflict found between the vexing truth of Delight's rigidity and Shelley's optimism as to its undoubted attainability brings to the fore the aporia of the poem. In the fourth stanza we are told Delight "wilt never come for pity," and "wilt come for pleasure" (Shelley Vol. 2: 179) which, if taken for granted, induces one to concur with Shelley that the spirit of Delight is always a ghost to be chased – it is something we cannot catch up with in the time of need. Yet, in the last stanza our recent knowledge is called into question when the poet pleads to Delight: "Oh, come, / Make once more my heart thy home" (p. 179). While the paradox of the poem is left unscathed, the last two lines adequately characterise the idealist Shelley. This Shelley overtly rejects the passivity of Nature for its lack of life-giving warmth. Instead, he endears the adventitious when, in spite of all his calculations and diametrically opposed to the corrosive effect of ceaseless anticipation, the messianic promise fulfils its oath. Be that as it may, Shelley undauntedly refuses to suggest that his consolations will soothe the melancholy temperament and deliberately undermines the sureties characteristic of the prophetic tone.

4 Enmeshed in Continuity: The Ghost of Iterability

Building on the idea that the obscurity of life takes its roots from a universal structure, Shelley articulates a poetics which embarks upon a formulation of the larger, more impersonal aspects of the universe. Shelley is at pains to dissolve the subjectivity of his own reading and insist upon an objective wisdom wrested directly from an interaction with experience itself. What his poetry advances is a documentary realism; as in *Adonais*, he suggests the human inability to obtain objects of desire when "fear and grief / Convulse

us and consume us day by day, / And cold hopes swarm like worms within our living clay" (Shelley 2012, Vol. 1: 512). Shelley fuses the principle with the event in order that a system may be constructed which constitutes both the rule and the individual experience as related to that rule. His poetry resonates with moments of repetition when after finding himself captivated by the governing principles of the universe he searches for his own individuality. He posits that one's partial acts do not outstrip the general experience, and that they are immersion in experience itself. They contribute both to self-empowerment or self-realisation and to the cosmic order. We come across his eloquent utterance of the finite idea achieving infinite experience in "Mutability": "We feel, conceive or reason, laugh or weep; / Embrace fond woe, or cast our cares away: / It is the same!" (Shelley Vol. 2: 16) Nevertheless, he simultaneously proclaims, "Man's yesterday may ne'er be like his morrow; / Nought may endure but Mutability" (p. 16). Because everything is "the same", the concept of repetition is applicable to Shelley's line of thought. Yet, we confront Shelley's misspeaking when we are assured that yesterday is never going to be repeated. Hence although these lines confirm the repetition of our human experiences, on another level they conclude each encounter with the world bears within itself the seed of singularity.

Exploring the world with meticulous care, Shelley at times wishes to impart his meaning through logical generalisations. In "Love's Philosophy" he benefits from visual imageries for ascertaining his path toward his beloved. He mobilises his knowledge against the passivity of the lady which conspires to suppress his emotions. The poet is hopeful that this commodity may serve his purpose in proportion to the ardency of his pursuit. At the outset of the poem, we are provided with a series of arguments that, as the last line of the first stanza explicates, are intended to prevail upon the lady to accept the proposal of the lover. To accomplish the aim, Shelley relies upon the union of all natural forces in order to conclude how a unique repetition flows in the course of life:

> The fountains mingle with the river
> And the rivers with the Ocean,
> The winds of Heaven mix for ever
> With a sweet emotion;
> Nothing in the world is single;
> All things by a law divine
> In one spirit meet and mingle.
> Why not I with thine?
>
> (Shelley Vol. 2: 102)

It is the structure of nature, its comprehensibility, its iterability, which puts forward the notion of its lawfulness for Shelley. He does not hesitate to make befitting bridges to the realm of the universe, and by so doing to argue

that the occasion of his union with the beloved, regardless of its singularity, is connected to the thread of nature. Shelley's distinctive aim is to prepare his beloved for the issue of justice – which is for Shelley, I allow myself to add, the inviolable condition of being. By the end of the poem, Shelley comes close to the Emersonian tone of encouragement and gives a subtle conclusion to the foregoing lines, being certain of the charm of his persuasions: "What is all this sweet work worth / If thou kiss not me?" (p. 102)

Needless to say, to Derrida this rule-bound condition of repeatability is irrepressible and cannot be contained or decisively regulated. Principles are slowly forged from below, and, whether out of willingness or aversion, we are bound to stand our ground as the torrents of iterability wash over us. Derrida expands the possibility of iterability in "Afterword: Toward an Ethic of Discussion": "'iterability' does not signify simply ... repeatability of the same, but rather alterability of this same idealized in the singularity of the event" (Derrida 1988: 119). It is Shelley's unflagging hankering to allow his imagination to move on until it is blocked, and never is blocked. The lover of "Love's Philosophy" does not give in to the thought of failure, and his passion is not paralysed by the despair-fraught gaze of Medusan pessimism, the force barricading the entrance of new voices. The singularity that precedes – and concurrently accompanies – the principle in the poem inscribes in the vast receptacle of experience a different repetition. Although the experience is a commonplace, it is an expansion of the *a priori*.

It may not have been coincidental for Shelley to ponder over death as a liberating force. Constantly bound with physical pain, he developed a melancholy interest in the territory of the dead. It is the complexity of the universe that even in his most notable poems remains untouched, and after a life of introspection he still did not come across any clue in *The Triumph of Life*: "Then, what is life?" (Shelley 2012, Vol. 1: 602) Ill-health kindled his keenest sensibility in a way that "his literary corpus stems in part from the debility of his physical body" (Davies 2011: 269). Early in his career, he had already found peace and redemption in death. "A Dialogue" is a dialogue between Death and Mortal. To the weary Mortal, the argument of Death regarding his liberation from the clutches of dust is convincing enough: "Not a groan of regret, not a sigh, not a breath, / Dares dispute with grim Silence the empire of Death" (Shelley Vol. 3: 214). The Mortal is more than assured that "Mine eyelids are heavy; my soul seeks repose" (p. 214) and longs for a separation from the physical world. Therefore, the end of the dialogue is concerned with the Mortal's resolution for accepting Death's promise: "O Death! O my friend! snatch this form to thy shrine, / And I fear, dear destroyer, I shall not repine" (p. 215). The necessity of metamorphosis – an appreciation of otherworldliness – indicates that it is a part of the irrevocable cycle of life, and the Mortal is not brought low by his submission to Death. Shelley finds in the Mortal an expression of his own inward needs when at

odds with the realities of human life. Shelley believes that the uninterrupted continuity of man's struggle with misfortunes is, like his longing for redemption, beyond the choices of a wandering free will. The Mortal's entrapment in the excruciating ordeal of life is thus inextricably bound up with his self-definition. This is what in Derridean deconstruction we know as "iterability" which means "nothing can exist entirely unto itself, in a state of perpetual 'once only-ness', never to be repeated" (Lucy 2004: 59-60). It is of the utmost significance for Shelley to acknowledge the poignant repetition of daily trials in principle and formulate the singularity of each death-like confrontation. By virtue of the difference which comes about as the result of temporal and spatial uniqueness, it stands to reason to conceive that the Mortal is set apart from others by his "singularity", but the paradox of iterability is that this singularity is itself a repetition.

5 Conclusion

Shelley's poetry transforms a loss of authority into a source of freedom to explore the various possibilities offered by language. The newfound status of ambiguity in the poetic discourse gives Shelley a chance to allow a free play of significations, a quality that Derrida readily admits in "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" to be a deviation from Western tradition which "limit[s] … the play of the structure" (Derrida [1967]2002: 352). This innovation poses a challenge to the reader of Shelley who cannot treat his binary oppositions with certainty; it frustrates his tendency to do justice to Shelley's lofty messianicity in its entirety; and it becomes a continual reminder that repetition is itself a departure. Derrida was right after all. A ghost could be conjured from the future as well as the past.

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