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About this Hypertext

This volume of *Romantic Circles Praxis Series* includes an editor's introduction by Michael Scrivener, essays by Samuel Gladden, Robert Kaufman, and Mark Kipperman, with responses by Steven E. Jones.

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A note on the cover: The images in the cover montage are derived from other Websites. The calvary officer with raised sword, poised above a member of the crowd at St. Peter's Field on the day of the infamous Peterloo Massacre, is extracted from a larger rendering of the massacre available at the Chadderton Historical Society Website on their excellent Peterloo Massacre page. The images underneath the former consist of three renderings of Caroline of Brunswick, reputedly by Issac Cruikshank, previously available at a site devoted to the promotion of the Brighton and Hove regions of England. Finally, in the bottom right quadrant of the background is an image of a reform banner, by George Cruikshank, taken from Romantic Circles's own electronic edition of William Hone's *The Political House that Jack Built*, edited by Kyle Grimes.

For other images and information associated with the trial of Queen Caroline and the Peterloo Massacre, see this volume's listing of links of interest, available from a link on the [table of contents](#) page.

About the Romantic Circles Praxis Series

The **Romantic Circles Praxis Series** is devoted to using computer technologies for the contemporary critical investigation of the languages, cultures, histories, and theories of Romanticism. Tracking the circulation of Romanticism within these interrelated domains of knowledge, **RCPS** recognizes as its conceptual terrain a world where Romanticism has, on the one hand, dissolved as a period and an idea into a plurality of discourses and, on the other, retained a vigorous, recognizable hold on the intellectual and theoretical discussions of today. **RCPS** is committed to mapping out this terrain with the best and most exciting critical writing of contemporary Romanticist scholarship. The **Romantic Circles Praxis Series** was formerly known as **Romantic Praxis: Theory and Criticism**. The name was changed in November 1999.

About the Contributors

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Reading Shelley's Interventionist Poetry, 1819-1820

Introduction

Michael Scrivener, Wayne State University

1. After deconstruction, New Historicism, and a socially aware formalism, how are we to read those works by Shelley that seem to be interventionist, *The Mask of Anarchy*, *Swellfoot the Tyrant*, the lyrics and ballads that were to be published as *Popular Songs*? Thus the origin of the 1999 MLA panel on reading Shelley's interventionist poetry of 1819-20. The first of several historical ironies is that none of the interventionist poetry did much intervening at the time it was written, as only *Swellfoot* was published in Shelley's lifetime, and *Swellfoot* perished soon after its discovery by the Society for the Suppression of Vice that consigned every copy to the fire. From the unextinguished hearth of Shelley's writing, however, sparks intervened not just in 1832, with Leigh Hunt's *Masque of Anarchy*, but, as we learn from Rob Kaufman's paper, in the 1930s and 40s in translations and appropriations by the German left, Brecht, Benjamin, and Wolfenstein. The "loving anachronism"—Steven Jones's happy phrase—of reading Shelley with and against historical moments and political crises that are irreducibly unique and particular, "incommensurable" (Jones again), confirms those lines in *Adonais* (stanza 46) about the "fire" outliving the "parent spark."¹ Shelley's satires survive not as *objets d'art* in a museum of cultural monuments but as provocations, dialectical interventions, pretexts for speculation. *Swellfoot* comes to life as the transgressive body of Iona/"Queen Caroline" in Samuel Gladden's paper, while the *Mask of Anarchy* occasions a new meditation on committed art—or rather, provokes readings by Mark Kipperman and Rob Kaufman that are an *Aufhebung* of the older discussions of politics and art.
2. The very word and category, "interventionist," is still vexed by the older discussion of engaged art. The binary opposition of escapist and interventionist, idealist and materialist, resurrects a debate in which Adorno seems to have had the last word, but one has to emphasize "seems." Kipperman's observation that Adorno's critique does not really work with early nineteenth-century political satire rooted in popular iconography is just one of the many qualifications one must make of Adorno's strictures against committed art. In Tom Stoppard's recently revived *The Real Thing* a character who is a playwright, Henry, provides trenchant criticism of writing whose only virtue is its political commitment. Henry's speeches repeat a version of Adorno's ideas that art, to be authentic, must explore the intrinsic qualities of its own materials and must develop immanently from its own form according to its own self-creating teleology.² Rob Kaufman has aptly identified the Kantian "constructivist" argument that lies behind Adorno.
3. How can art be both autonomous and interventionist? The four papers offer similar but different answers. Gladden's *Swellfoot* places before us the queen's "body"—textual and physical—that challenges patriarchal power and its various "erections" with sexually transgressive symbolism. The urgent political crisis of hunger and scarcity becomes aesthetically shaped in mock heroic style that exploits the contemporary political symbolism of the "swinish multitude." Rather than idealize Queen Caroline as many of the queen's supporters did at the time, Shelley's satire ratchets up sexual excess a few more notches by making sexuality an omnipresent image and theme. The poem, then, intervenes on the side of the queen, but in such a way that the very terms of the political controversy are made problematic. "Pigs," for example, are both police and pressmen; the play's conclusion depicts a scene of revenge that is troubling, not celebratory; Queen Iona's lusty presence in the public sphere destabilizes rather than validates the phallogocentric logic of the Queen Caroline Affair's political discourse.
4. Rob Kaufman's paper offers two answers, a carefully documented and richly textured historical

reconstruction of the German left's engagement with Shelley at several levels (formal and ideological), and a briefer statement on the Kantian constructivist assumptions behind Adorno's aesthetics. The bullying pronouncements on art's political role characteristic of literary Stalinism are nowhere to be found in Kaufman's account of the German Marxists' appropriation and translation of Shelley. The Stalinists defined support for a political action or "line" as the only way someone could be politically committed; alternatives were either irrelevant—utopian—or "objectively" fascist. In Kaufman's narrative Shelley plays an emancipatory role even in a context dominated by the Communist Party. At the levels of language, form, and genre the intervention of the English Shelley unsettled older assumptions and stimulated new ways of using language. Shelley's effect on Brecht was more formal—stimulating a rethinking of the modern lyric and satire—than ideological.

5. Mark Kipperman's paper approaches the question of commitment through the ethical, starting with the "scandal" of Shelley's aristocratic exile but hardly ending with it, as the actual social origins of writing are not ultimately decisive anyway. Shelley's political thinking through the form of the poem, *The Mask of Anarchy*, tests and challenges the readily available conceptualizations about politics and explores new possibilities. The poem itself is a "scandal to literary form and decorum." Shelley is our contemporary—although our ages are also incommensurate—because of the poem's development of the problem of forgiveness within a revolutionary culture. Hardly an ideological evasion of political conflict, forgiveness is a difficult labor of deconstructing oppression without also reproducing it.
6. Steven Jones's responses to the three papers offer yet another way out of the antinomy of commitment and autonomy. As dialectical satires, Shelley's poems are on a continuum with Marx's own satirical writing, Brecht's satires, and Benjamin's commentary on satires. The satirical genre itself—its capacity for self-reflection and turning against itself, its ability to appropriate omnivorously any kind of discourse, its materialistic position always already within the *Lebenswelt* of social actors—in effect dissolves the antinomy, as any and every maneuver within satire is also a social action. Within satire the political has to have aesthetic form, and there cannot be satirical form without also political meaning.
7. As we have given up the older Historicist task of recovering the past as it really was (*wie es war*), we must content ourselves with alternative and lesser objectivities—intersubjectivities?—provided by Freud, Marx, Derrida, Adorno, Benjamin, Kant and others. As we look at these "interventionist" poems—were there a more conceptually adequate label for these works!—one cannot help but notice the intransigent *literariness* of these texts, subverting any easy transitions from poem to political action³: *Swellfoot*'s classical puns and allusions, the *Mask*'s generic complexities (including, as Morton Paley has delineated, its affiliations with the apocalyptic), and the *Popular Songs*' irony. An ideological complexity is gender, a prominent category in Gladden's analysis of the transgressive body of the "queen," and present as well in *The Mask of Anarchy*, particularly the last third of the poem spoken "as if" by a female "Earth." According to Anne Janowitz, the poem's maniac maid and maternal earth are voices that counter the male-centered individualism that marks one line of Romanticism.⁴ *The Mask*, in Kipperman's account, by blocking retaliation makes possible a form of development that is dialogic and ethical, and that deconstructs masculine violence. The *Bruderschaft* in Kaufman's account of the German left's Shelley runs strongly counter to individualism and suggests a universalism, not just homosocial bonding: not just *mein Bruder* Shelley, but *unser Bruder* Shelley. Whether directly, as in Iona, the maniac maid, and maternal earth, or indirectly, through nonviolent forgiveness and revolutionary brotherhood, Shelley's poems reconfigure gender categories.
8. There is a word that has powerful resonance in the context of these four papers: *translation*. *Swellfoot* exploits parallels and differences with classical Greek, as its English is shadowed and shaped by the classical allusions. In Kaufman's paper translation from English to German and back to English is at

the center of his narrative. As Benjamin writes in his wonderful essay, translation entails a dialogue between two languages, two separate traditions; translation is not the substitution of one word for another. It is obvious that one has to translate from English to German but it is an act of translation also—loving anachronism—that brings Shelley and his world to us now in 2001. A "voice from over the Sea": the words of Shelley always have to travel a long distance; their strangeness never wholly disappears, but as we read, we notice the "before unapprehended relations of things."

9. These papers force us to make connections between real and symbolic bodies. In Gladden's paper the actual queen's body and her various symbolic incarnations parallel the similitude between the politically insurgent people and the poetic swine. Real bodies also disturb Kaufman's paper, notably Haenisch, executed by Stalin for his alleged political crimes, and Benjamin, buried at the border of Spain and France. Shelley's physical presence in Italy is the "scandal" with which Kipperman's paper begins, and it ends with the problem of retaliation and revenge, the problem of political violence. As we have learned from the work of Steven Jones, the problem of violence is at the very heart of satire. How do we know whether symbolic constructions—by Shelley and us—merely repeat—*wiederholen*—or work through—*durcharbeiten*—concentrations of already inscribed meaning? When is allegoresis just an instance of bad transference unchecked by self-critical awareness?⁵ The four papers, without explicitly engaging in the Freudian project, maintain a conceptual clarity about real bodies and their symbolic contingencies that enhances rather than mystifies our understanding of Shelley and history.

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Notes

- ¹ All quotations from Shelley's writing are taken from Reiman and Powers, ed., *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*.

[2](#) The play has been revived on Broadway to rave reviews and several Tony Award nominations.

[3](#) Susan J. Wolfson's reading of the *Mask*—discussed by Mark Kipperman—finds that the poem's literariness subverts its political intentions sufficiently enough to render the poem an ineffective example of political poetry. Her close reading raises problems and issues that require the kind of serious attention Kipperman gives to it (195-206).

[4](#) A version of Anne Janowitz's essay also appears in her book, *Lyric and Labour in the Romantic Tradition*, in chapter 3, "The Sun and the Tree: Lyrics of Liberty."

[5](#) Dominick LaCapra has used the Freudian paradigm of traumatic repetition, acting-out, and working-through to approach historical understanding.

Reading Shelley's Interventionist Poetry, 1819-1820

Shelley's Agenda Writ Large: Reconsidering *Oedipus Tyrannus; or, Swellfoot the Tyrant*

Samuel Gladden, University of Northern Iowa

Love is . . . the sole law which should govern the moral world.

-Percy Bysshe Shelley, Preface to *Laon and Cythna*;

Or, The Revolution of the Golden City *

1. Percy Shelley's satire of the Queen Caroline affair, *Oedipus Tyrannus; or, Swellfoot the Tyrant. A Tragedy*, remains largely overlooked in Shelley scholarship, but the play stands as a key moment in the development of Shelley's thought and work, for it demonstrates the poet's thoroughgoing understanding of the political power of erotic transgression.¹ Significantly, Shelley's satire arises out of a historical moment in which the political ramifications of such transgressions were operating quite visibly in the world around him: *Swellfoot the Tyrant* describes the doomed scheme by which Tyrant Swellfoot attempts to quell public support for the return of Queen Iona to her rightful seat of power—a close parallel to the real-life George IV's desperate attempts to bar his wife, Caroline of Brunswick, from her spousal privilege incumbent upon his own accession to the throne. The deep connections between Shelley's satire and contemporary political events cannot be overlooked, for both Caroline of Brunswick and the play's heroine, Iona Taurina, function as highly visible emblems of the mother-whore, that revolutionary icon of the woman-in-public whose very presence threatens to feminize the public sphere and thus to hasten the collapse—the detumescence, to borrow an image central to Shelley's play—of masculine, patriarchal order.
2. The Shelleys were certainly not immune to the Queen Caroline controversy. Newman Ivey White notes that Mary was a strong proponent of the Queen but that Shelley himself only "technically" supported her, dismissing her as "a vulgar cook-maid" and finding the fact that her enemies were so despicable to be Caroline's only redeeming quality (225). Indeed, Shelley regarded the Queen Caroline Affair with some antipathy, as his 20 July 1820 letter to Thomas Medwin indicates: "I wonder what in the world the Queen has done [. . .]. What silly stuff is this to employ a great nation about. I wish the King and the Queen, like Punch and his wife, would fight out their disputes in person [. . .]." (*Letters* 2:220).² Eight days earlier, Shelley wrote at some length about the controversial Queen to Thomas Love Peacock, articulating with greater clarity his appreciation for the complexity of the Queen Caroline Affair. Although he finds it ridiculous, Shelley recognizes the tremendous cultural and political significance of the very public power-struggles that beset the royal couple:

Response

In another letter (II, 207), Shelley again refers to the King and Queen as "Punch and his wife," adding, "Let the nation stand aside, and suffer them to beat till, like most combatants that are left to themselves, they would kiss and be friends." His references to Punch inevitably associate the Affair with the carnivalesque popular culture of slapstick violence, a milieu that his play will deliberately tap into for its own complex satiric purposes.

Nothing, I think, shows the generous gullibility of the English nation more than their having adopted her Sacred Majesty as the heroine of the day, in spite of all their prejudices and bigotry. I, for my part, of course wish no harm to happen to her, even if she has, as I firmly believe, amused herself in a manner rather indecorous with any courtier or baron.

But I cannot help adverting to it as one of the absurdities of royalty, that a vulgar woman, with all those low tastes which prejudice considers as vices, and a person whose habits and manners every one would shun in private life, without any redeeming virtues, should be turned into a heroine because she is a queen, or, as a collateral reason, because her husband is a king; and he, no less than his ministers, are so odious that everything, however disgusting, which is opposed to them, is admirable. (*Letters* 2:576)

In his letter, Shelley acknowledges that Queen Caroline not only occupies a central role in the English imagination, but, more importantly, that her very public opposition to King George and his "odious" ministers causes her to figure politically. Queen Caroline emerges as an important political force because of her elevation to the iconic status of oppositional leader through the subversive mechanisms of gossip and the tabloid press, two forces that celebrate the Queen as a dissenting monarch who not only opposes the King but who does so publicly and unapologetically; Queen Caroline thus functions as a transgressor both in the political and erotic senses, for she interrupts the sovereign's claims to power even as she violates—transgresses—contemporary social mores. Queen Caroline's two bodies—her real, physical self, and her textual body which is anatomized, pathologized, and pornographized throughout countless arms of the radical press—coalesce in the image of the symbolic revolutionary whose politicized physicality compromises the constitutional power of King George and his court. In its physical and textual manifestations, the Queen's oppositional body functions as oppositional narrative, so that in both person and reputation, Queen Caroline interrupts the processes of monarchical order. Throughout the scandal, it is the feminine voice—the voice of the Queen, and the voice of revolt in general ³—that disrupts an entire household, thereby charging the Queen's physical and textual bodies as catalysts for the radical instability of her husband's political regime and her nation's established order. In Queen Caroline, Shelley recognizes the political implications of sexual transgression, for in her status as an oppositional icon she demonstrates the power of the perverse erotic body to intrude upon the political process by exposing the problematic nature of an entrenched, oppressive regime.⁴

Response

Her husband's own two bodies, one royal and the other dandyfied and eroticized—even Rabelaisian--were already part of public discourse, so Queen Caroline's two bodies in this sense serve as a kind of radical chiasmus, a double counter-sign.

3. Mary Shelley's note to her husband's play points to the elaborate nests of contexts out of which her husband's satire arises, from the textual interpolation of Aristophanes's *Frogs* to the proximate sounds of pigs that accompanied the poet's performance of his "Ode to Liberty" at San Giuliano. But it is the grunting of those pigs, I argue, that must be regarded far more seriously than Mary Shelley suggests, for two reasons: first, one of the most popular anti-monarchical pamphlets of 1820, *A Speech From the Throne*, described the cries for reform as arising from a "swinish multitude,"⁵ a phrase originally coined by Edmund Burke as a description for the masses that had become radical *lingua franca* by the 1790s (Scrivener 262)⁶; second, the *OED* indicates that as late as 1857, the term "pig" functioned as slang for both "a police officer" and "a pressman in a printing office."⁷ In Shelley's day, these entities were not as incongruous as they may seem to a late twentieth-century reader: police and pressman regularly engaged in contests for authority as the proliferation of publicity regarding the Queen Caroline Affair exceeded the power of the police to control it. Thus, printers effectively usurped authority from the police, so that just as in Shelley's play, one set of "pigs" displaced another as the keepers of hegemonic order. The swinish multitudes of *Swellfoot the Tyrant*, I believe, are those radical

Response

It is fitting that pigs should have inspired Shelley's satire. Pigs were popularly associated with fairs and carnivals in general, English as well as Italian. See Wordsworth's famous lines on Bartholomew Fair (see lines 650 and following).

pressman who reconstructed Queen Caroline's transgressions as symbolic acts of revolution, those artists and scribes who assembled the stories about her Continental improprieties into a metanarrative of the struggle for freedom.⁸ Along the way, those "pigs" transformed the sexually transgressive monarch into a revolutionary icon by portraying Caroline as both the victim of tyranny and the hope for liberation. In *Queen Caroline*, we find Revolution hypostatized in an eroticized female body, an ideological and iconographic outgrowth of French Revolution-era propaganda.

4. In this brief essay, I want to turn my attention to two themes central to the play's ideological development: first, the function of the body as a political register and as an instrument for social change; second, the role of sexual transgression in Shelley's metatextual agenda of what I call "liberty-through-love"—that is, the ways in which Shelley situates the erotic body as a model for social and political revolution.

The Body

5. The bodies of Tyrant Swellfoot and his subjects schematize the play's oppositions between empowerment and disempowerment, or possession and lack, and the play's registration of political relationships at the site of the body—a recurring trope throughout Shelley's works—finds form in the oppositional pair of erection/emaciation. Time and again, Shelley draws on the symbology of erection as a means for representing the tyrant's swollenness of power; similarly, emaciation emerges as a corporeal signifier for the disempowerment or oppression of the pigs. The condition of oppression is written upon the very bodies of Swellfoot's subjects, bodies so drained of potential that they tend toward anti-productivity and cannibalism, exemplified most dramatically in the Second Sow's marked anti-maternalism which invokes the diametric opposite to maternal nurturing—cannibalism: the mother eats her children rather than nourishing them with milk from her breasts. The Semichorus of Swine locate the evil of tyranny at a particular site on the King's body—his bosom (1.1.61)—and, significantly, they describe that evil as an alien force from which the body may be purified. Swellfoot, too, demonstrates his understanding of the body as a site for the mediation of politics when he recalls the attempts he has made to maintain political order:

Moral restraint I see has no effect,
Nor prostitution, nor our own example,
Starvation, typhus-fever, nor prison—
(1.1.76-78)

Here and throughout the play, we see a constant turn to the body and its physical and psychological needs—for food, for sex, for freedom—as a site where politics may be mediated in the purchasing of allegiance through the satisfaction of basic corporeal cravings.

6. The denial of bodily needs, however, contributes to a much more complicated model of political control, for it participates not in the purchasing of allegiance but in the generation of a state of chaos from which allegiance vanishes completely as starved individuals turn against others who share in their miserable condition: put simply, hunger, as the Second Sow's anti-maternalism demonstrates, starves compassion, exiling one from any sense of loyalty to a larger community. Hunger—the denial of a physical need, the bodily manifestation of oppression—overtakes the spirit of generosity, which Shelley situates as pivotal to his ongoing campaign of liberty-through-love; and selfishness, the psychic manifestation of hunger, leads only to a redoubling of oppression, to a multiplication of the effects of tyrannical gorging. On the other hand, extreme hunger can be pressed into the service of

Response

The obscene jokes of *Swellfoot* are more characteristically Shelleyan than many realize, once we take into account the young, satiric, "vulgar" Shelley, which we might rename for this occasion, and with a nod to Burke, the "swinish" Shelley.

liberty, as those held in real or imaginary prisons ultimately starve to such extremes that their emaciated bodies slip between the bars that hold them, thus freeing them from their places of containment. Such is the case of Purganax's rat, who is "So thin with want, . . . [that it] can crawl in and out / Of any narrow chink and filthy hole" (1.1.181-182). The denial of bodily need serves primarily in the maintenance of tyranny, but when it reaches a sort of vanishing point in the completely emaciated body, the trajectory of hunger is reversed as that body is thrust into oppositional engagements which enable it to "break out" of (the symbolic prison of) oppression. Throughout Shelley's play, oppression and freedom are thus consistently linked to the denial of bodily needs and to the physical condition of the oppressed, most clearly with regard to nourishment: tyrants gorge, and subjects starve.

7. Finally, the body functions throughout *Swellfoot the Tyrant* as a register of political instability. When Swellfoot realizes his rule is in danger of being usurped, he laments his sudden loss of appetite, saying,

. . . After the trial,
And these fastidious pigs are gone, perhaps
I may recover my lost appetite.
(2.2.28-30)

Swellfoot's loss of appetite *is* his loss of power, so that just as his empowerment has been metonymized in swollenness, in the "erections" of his corpulent body, his impending disempowerment now finds form in hunger's antithesis, the complete evacuation of his appetite. As the inevitability of Swellfoot's fall becomes clear, Mammon turns to another symbolic body, that of the Goddess Famine, and reads her corporeal instability as metonymic for the state of Swellfoot's regime:

I hear a crackling of the giant bones
Of the dread image, and in the black pits
Which once were eyes, I see two livid flames.
These prodigies are oracular, and show
The presence of the unseen Deity.
Mighty events are hastening to their doom!
(2.2.61-66)

Mammon recognizes in this collapse of the Goddess of Famine the new narrative of the play, the reversals of power that will be figured on the very bodies of Shelley's *Dramatis Personæ*. Throughout the play, Shelley thus poses the body as a register for politics according to a binary model of excess and lack: the swollen (or erect) body metonymizes power; the collapsed (or emaciated) body, oppression.

Sexual Transgression

8. As the putative hero of *Swellfoot the Tyrant*, Iona Taurina figures significantly throughout the text from the epigraph right through to the end, where she is the last major character to exit the stage. Iona's power to reconfigure the political landscape of the play draws directly from the phallic privilege she enjoys as an effect of her royal station. Thus, we see that even before she "castrates" her husband in the play's final moments, that act is prefigured in the rumors about her that succeed in embarrassing the throne. Upon hearing of his wife's return to Thebes, Swellfoot exclaims that "Swellfoot is wived! . . .", and he commands his guards to be "Off with her head!" (1.1.291). Clearly, Swellfoot recognizes the reversals of power that his wife's return to public visibility forebode, and he articulates those reversals in terms of gendered maneuvers: the *OED* defines the verb "wive" as "to act as a wife"; thus, the King's exclamation that "Swellfoot is wived!" codes Iona's return as his own symbolic castration. Fearing this reversal of power, he calls for the only action he believes able to trump that reversal—the displaced castration of the Queen by way of her beheading. Swellfoot's desire for Iona to be taken into custody

and brought to him, dismembered, underscores his anxious need to reassert his phallic authority over her, to take comfort in the sight of his own phallic power as it is manifested at the site of her "castrated" body.

9. Throughout the play, each time the swine laud Iona as their hero, they adopt the very strategies of corporeal opposition that Iona has modeled: in posing her transgressive body against the authority of her husband, Iona has taught the swine how to negotiate power at the site, or location (as well as through the sight, or spectacle) of the body itself. The pigs thus appropriate Swellfoot's regard for them as commodities and turn that position of powerlessness around, so that they become "commodities among themselves,"⁹ dispossessed beings whose refusal of the system that exploits them improvises a new market in which they are empowered as brokers—a complete reversal of their positions as mere commodities. Pawning their safety for the Queen's, the pigs graft their political convictions onto their own persons, reminding us again of the play's consistent imbrications of politics and the body. Where traditional monarchy conceives a King's two bodies as earthly and spiritual, in the liberated market, the Queen's two bodies are both decidedly fleshy—her own body and the collective body of her (egalitarian) subjects.
10. The swine's cries for victory over Swellfoot's tyrannical regime give voice to the political function they accord Iona's presence: "Hail! Iona the divine," they shout, "We will be no longer swine, / But bulls with horns and dewlaps" (1.1.277-279). Just as Iona's potential to disrupt Swellfoot's regime arms her with phallic power, so, too, do the swine anticipate the specifically gendered transformations their "divine" hero will bring them: freed from Swellfoot's tyranny by Iona, the swine will be transformed into bulls, their newly grown horns the outgrowth of the phallic transaction Iona has brokered. When Iona seizes Swellfoot's phallus to claim it as her own, she promises to distribute the power of that phallus equally among the commodities-among-themselves, the freed pigs-*cum*-bulls.
11. As the play suggests time and again, it is Iona's transgressive status that threatens the stability of Swellfoot's reign: through the figure of Iona, Shelley poses sexual transgression as a means for political subversion. In the logic of the play, Iona is cast as a politically dangerous figure because of her perverse erotic engagements, although Shelley wisely never particularizes the full range of Iona's so-called perversity; and the ultimate crime that all of Iona's transgressions metaphorize—Swellfoot's "castration"—is punished even before it is committed, since Swellfoot calls for the beheading of the Queen before she confronts him directly with her own demands for political power.
12. The political significance of sexual transgression is suggested in the maneuvers of the Gadfly who, sent out to torment the returning Queen, accomplishes his overtly political mission in the particularly symbolic space of the Queen's boudoir. In a speech that reinforces the connections Shelley draws between politics and the erotic body, the Gadfly reminds us of Iona's reputed lasciviousness by locating her activities in a bedroom and characterizing them as sinful—they should, he remarks, embarrass even the bedlamps. Next, he appropriates the more general space of pleasure, the inn, as a metaphor for Iona's lusty body itself, so that its "inn-doors and windows / . . . open to me" suggest the ready availability of her body to any who would purchase "entrance" into it (1.1.233-234). Finally, the Gadfly eroticizes his political mission by describing his attack in terms that sound undeniably coital: he trumps her with his lips and stings her at his hips. The coital pleasure of the Gadfly's political mission is also suggested in the only pair of internally rhymed lines we find in his speech—"Dinging and singing, / From slumber I rung her"—lines whose language apes the rhythm of the bawdy limerick, an aural *double entendre* I am certain Shelley expected his audience to appreciate (1.1.239-240).
13. Because Iona's erotic body functions as the site of her political power, it seems only logical that her political triumph at the play's end would be manifested in that very body; and in fact, this is exactly the case. Iona's mounting of the Minotaur—John Bull, or England—not only suggests her political power

but also spectacularizes that power in terms of a gendered transaction. Rumored throughout the play to have been sexually engaged, Pasiphæ-like, with a bull, here we see Iona's sexual transgression celebrated even as its political valences are reversed, so that her once-criminalized transgression metaphorizes her defeat of Swellfoot and her ascension to his seat of power. In the play's final moments, Iona emerges as Shelley's revolutionary hero, albeit only temporarily. Seizing power from the hands of a tyrant, she redistributes it among those whom tyranny had oppressed, and she demonstrates her god-like transformative powers by calling for the beautification of the swine, so that their grunts—throughout the play symbolic of oppression—now burst forth as beautiful music. Finally, Iona displaces religion with liberty as the instructive device of the world: she encourages the pigs' newly beautiful voices to replace the bells in village (church-) towers, lilting through the landscape and thus acting as agents for re-establishing the harmonious connections between the liberated kingdom and the natural world itself.

14. The play closes with Iona joining the chorus of swine in a call for war as all "*Exeunt, in full cry; IONA driving the SWINE, with the empty GREEN BAG*" (349).¹⁰ The play's finale thus resuscitates the tyranny of Swellfoot's reign, since the Queen calls on the pigs to pursue her enemies in precisely the same way Swellfoot employed the Gadfly to sting Iona. Finally, the Green Bag re-emerges as an agent in the play, now drained of its contents but no less symbolic of evil as it was in the hands of the play's first Tyrant. Yoked to jealousy, envy, and selfishness—suggested both by the bag's very color and by its historical function as a mechanism for solicitors' puffed-up self-display¹¹—that instrument of containment and deception closes the play as a representative for the phallus Iona has assumed, as well as for the one she has not: symbolic of Swellfoot's selfish excesses, the Green Bag remarks the transfer of Swellfoot's tyranny into Iona's hands; and visually remarking tyranny's defeat—its emptying or evacuation—the bag reminds us of the potential Iona holds even as its limpness underscores her failure to erect a new order in place of the old. At the close of the play, the Green Bag returns us to the satire's first image of tyranny, Swellfoot's kingly paunch, for both sites call our attention to the selfish pleasures that metonymize tyranny: the paunch, overeating; the bag, revenge.

15. Throughout *Oedipus Tyrannus; or, Swellfoot the Tyrant*, Shelley employs the same devices he poses as the instruments of revolution in his so-called visionary works—specifically, the body and sexual transgression; but in this satire, he demonstrates how these devices may be appropriated by tyrants just as potently as by revolutionaries. In *Swellfoot*, Shelley poses these instruments in a manner inconsistent with his own broader agenda of liberty-through-love in order to demonstrate their innate political power; that is, by exposing the tyrannical uses to which these devices may be put, Shelley departicularizes them from what might otherwise be dismissed as naïve idealism. Instead, Shelley demonstrates how the body and its transgressions affect change at the level of politics and, consequently, in individual lives—whether for good or bad, whether in the interest of oppression or liberation. In *Swellfoot the Tyrant*, Shelley begins to justify his belief that love is, to paraphrase this paper's epigraph, the law that governs the universe; that is, his satire remarks on the ways in which both Iona Taurina's transgressive engagements and her relationship with her husband function to affect the tenor of Swellfoot's regime and, in a broader context, how these engagements (fail to) reconfigure the political landscape of the play. In short, Shelley's *Swellfoot the Tyrant* spectacularizes the processes through which intimate relationships inform political realities, and thus the satire privileges the realm of the erotic as the experiential space from which the moral law of the universe might be re-written.

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Notes

* 12.40.

1 Steven E. Jones appreciates the importance of *Swellfoot* to Shelley's *oeuvre*, and he regards the satire "as a transitional work in Shelley's career, as he moves away from the confident, exhortative energies of *The Mask of Anarchy* and toward the darker, more deeply ironic vision of *The Triumph of Life*" (148).

2 One speech by the Semichorus of Swine in *Swellfoot* echoes Shelley's sentiments rather closely:

I vote Swellfoot and Iona
Try the magic test together;
Whenever royal spouses bicker,
Both should try the magic liquor.
(1.128-131)

3 Here, I follow traditional binary distinctions in coding revolution as feminine since it is deployed in opposition to hegemonic, or masculine, authority: in patriarchal societies, authority is always masculine, and alternatives to authority must, by their very oppositional status, be feminine.

4 Jones points to Shelley's letter of 30 June 1820 to the Gisbornes as "the germ of *Swellfoot the Tyrant*, including all the salient topics—the perceived financial crisis, the carnivalesque violence, the display of the royal domestic dispute, [. . .] and the seriousness of the people's plight [. . .] incongruously mixed in with the ridiculous events" (128).

5 White reports that *A Speech From the Throne* went through an astonishing 50 editions in 1820 ("Shelley's Swell-Foot" 339). The sheer popularity of the pamphlet suggests that Shelley probably knew it. In addition to its use of the phrase "swinish multitude," the following lines from the pamphlet seem to resonate throughout Shelley's satire:

Reform, reform the swinish rabble cry,
Meaning of course, rebellion, blood and riot.
Audacious rascals! you, my Lords, and I
Know 'tis their duty to be starved in quiet.
(qtd. in White, "Shelley's Swell-Foot" 339)

[6](#) White points to an article in the 30 June 1820 *Examiner* in which a chorus of pigs "was used as an instrument of satire against George IV by Professor Porson" (225).

[7](#) The use of the pig as a symbol for the abuse of power is, of course, not specific to the nineteenth century; indeed, George Orwell's novel *Animal Farm* (1945) employs pigs to the same end.

[8](#) The sedition trials involving a number of radical pressmen—among them William Hone, Thomas Jonathan Wooler, and Richard Carlile—were topics of much discussion in early nineteenth-century radical circles, and Shelley would certainly have been aware of these well-publicized contests between the government and the radical press. His decision to pit pressmen against the government in *Swellfoot the Tyrant* may thus have arisen from contemporary contests for authority.

[9](#) See Irigaray (192-197).

[10](#) Jones argues that Iona's exit "suggests that any deeper and more extensive [political] change is yet far in the future" (143). His reading of the satire's end aligns *Swellfoot the Tyrant* with what I will characterize in my (book-length) readings of *Epipsychidion*, *Laon and Cythna*, and *Prometheus Unbound* as the political pessimism that pervades Shelley's so-called "visionary" works.

[11](#) In his *Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue*, Francis Grose defines the phrase "green bag" as follows: "An attorney; those gentlemen carry their clients' deeds in a *green bag*, and, it is said, when they have no deeds to carry frequently fill them up with an old pair of breeches, or any other trumpery, to give themselves the appearance of business."

Reading Shelley's Interventionist Poetry, 1819-1820

Intervention & Commitment Forever! Shelley in 1819, Shelley in Brecht, Shelley in Adorno, Shelley in Benjamin*

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1. Shelley in 1819—not to mention England in 1819—generates extraordinary legacies for artistic and critical history. Among them has been the question of what constitutes the phenomenon we call *interventionist, committed, politically engaged* art and criticism. A number of approaches to Shelley's 1819 have emphasized the distance between apparently activist poems--*The Mask of Anarchy*, for example—and what is deemed Shelley's High Style: presumably aestheticist, representationalist poetry of the "lyric I."¹ Some recent analysts of the grounds and processes of engagement find that the *Mask* and kindred poems successfully, even courageously forego canonical lyric privilege, building or gesturing towards real-world community. Others assess Shelley's interventionism as good-faith (or even bad-faith) failure; they contend that the activist poetry ultimately reveals a baleful formalism and lack of immediate practical consequence that unites it with Shelley's more evidently idealist art. Much of interest has been said on both sides and in between, but it's worth noting that, for understandable reasons, a good deal of this criticism proceeds implicitly or explicitly from Marxian-derived premises that have had great impact on nineteenth- and twentieth-century notions of "commitment." And probably because of yet again-renewed attention across the Humanities, during the last several years, to Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno, these Shelley-interpretations have frequently been in dialogue with, or dependent on, Frankfurt School Critical Theory.
2. The retrojection (the analogizing, arguably anachronistic application to Shelley) of Marxian, Marxian-inflected, and Frankfurt rubric has, with a few exceptions, proceeded without awareness of a remarkably direct literary trajectory that runs in the opposite direction: *from* Shelley right *to* the charged debates of the Frankfurt School and artists alongside it. In a further twist, one of the other great figures of twentieth-century commitment, Jean-Paul Sartre, writes his 1947 manifesto of *engagement* in the immediate aftermath of 1930s and '40s Critical Theory and adjacent artistic constellations. By 1962 it will fall, as if in historical spiral, to an older Adorno to re-represent his and others' positions when he belatedly answers Sartre's "Qu'est-ce que la littérature?" In its German original, "Commitment" (as the relevant Adorno essay is known in English) bears as its title precisely the term for Sartre's doctrine itself, since the same word—*engagement*—is historically used in German (brought over from French, a few centuries ago) to designate the phenomenon at issue. If space permitted, there'd be a complicated story to tell about Shelley's place in Sartre's literary politics, though Shelley has only the briefest of cameos in "Qu'est-ce que la littérature?" (Sartre actually had been prone to worrying, in his earlier correspondence and notebooks, that Shelley had a greatness, and more troublingly, a handsomeness, that had been denied to Jean-Paul.²) But on to the Germans...
3. A few critics have briefly discussed Brecht's interest in Shelley. Steven Jones's illuminating *Shelley's Satire* expands this body of

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Kaufman's subtle, dialectical negotiations of "retrojection" and radical genealogy are just right for this complex topic, a form of literary history that brilliantly illuminates the importance of the Shelley-Brecht "line."

Response

In *Shelley's Satire* the

commentary, not only by offering nuanced interpretation of Brecht's recourse to *The Mask of Anarchy* for his 1947 satire "Der anachronistische Zug oder Freiheit und Democracy," but also by remarking the importance of Brecht's 1938 translation of, and essay on, Shelley's *Mask* (103-105)³. In a footnote, Jones gestures toward the significance of a crux somewhat beyond the limits of his own study, though happily consonant with it (183-84 n.24). This crux has otherwise been virtually ignored by historians of literature, poetics, and critical theory. Jones notices that one of Benjamin's posthumously-published, extremely influential Baudelaire essays (written in 1938) presents a one-stanza quotation and two-sentence analysis of—along with a gnomic reference to—an apparently unpublished Brecht translation of lines from Shelley's rollicking, "Satanic," anti-Wordsworthian satire *Peter Bell the Third*⁴. Jones also observes that *Peter Bell the Third's* famous line about Hell being "a city much like London" reappears in Brecht's 1941 poem "Nachdenkend über die Hölle" ["On Thinking About Hell"]⁵. In fact, these materials are part of a larger cache, which plays a fascinating role in both Modernist art and Critical Theory.

comparison is based on recognizing that both Shelley and Brecht are *satirists*, who thus share certain rhetorical stances, weapons, and assumptions. It was Walter Benjamin who argued that Brecht was a satirist in the (satiric) tradition of Marx himself ("Brecht's Threepenny Novel," *Reflections* 202).

Of course the two writers are ultimately separated by the immense gulf of a century of crucial historical difference. Dialectical historical readings of both must take place across this inevitable divide. With that said, "Skepticism toward Shelleyan hope and idealized 'freedom' in general is a useful antidote for some tempting historical oversimplifications of *our* present. By the same token, Brecht can help us to appreciate what is truly strange, characteristically Romantic in Shelley's satire: its admixture of represented violence and hope" (*Shelley's Satire* 104).

4. In 1936, Brecht, Lion Feuchtwanger, and Wili Bredel become the editors of the new, Moscow-based journal *Das Wort* [*The Word*]. *Das Wort* is established, by leftist exiles from Nazi Germany, as a Popular Front, Communist-led "anti-fascist literary journal"; it publishes texts by everyone from Thomas, Heinrich, and Klaus Mann, to Langston Hughes, Hemingway, Anna Seghers, Lukács, Benjamin, César Vallejo, and others. In June 1937, *Das Wort* publishes *The Mask of Anarchy's* final 55 stanzas as translated by the Expressionist poet, playwright, novelist and critic, Alfred Wolfenstein, who had fled Germany for Prague in 1934, and who would soon, upon the

Wehrmacht's entry into Czechoslovakia, flee to France until it too would be occupied by Hitler.⁶ Back in 1922, the publisher Paul Cassirer—Ernst Cassirer's cousin—had published a slim, gorgeous edition of Wolfenstein's Shelley translations: *Dichtungen* [*Poems*] of Shelley. (Wolfenstein had also written a translation-treatment of Shelley's play *The Cenci* for a 1924 Berlin theatrical production.) The *Dichtungen* had featured excerpts from *Adonais*, *Hellas*, and *Prometheus Unbound*; the entirety of various shorter works (such as "Alastor," "Ode to the West Wind," and "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty"); and a number of still shorter lyrics, including "England in 1819." Though *Dichtungen* hadn't included the *Mask*, Wolfenstein, in the *Dichtungen's* Afterword, quoted liberally from it.

5. Indeed, Wolfenstein's Afterword to Shelley's *Dichtungen* is quite an undertaking: he insists on the radical unity of Shelley's work, the ways that the seemingly idealist and activist modes inhere within each other. He specifically transvalues—or bounces off Swinburne's transvaluation—of the Arnoldian "Shelley the ineffectual angel," conceding that Shelley *was* angelic, provided one remembers the terrifying nature of angelic presence. Bringing together *Prometheus Unbound*, the *Defence of Poetry*, the *Mask*, various Hölderlin poems, and a string of allusions highly resonant for a Left German tradition that tended to think in terms of Promethean assaults on the heavens (from Goethe's work, to Marx's and Engels's lines about the Parisian

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Again one thinks of Benjamin's cabbalistic angel of history, a useful figurative analog to Shelley's shapes of light and a salutary counterweight to Arnoldian reductionist "angels" (cf. Kipperman.) As Kaufman argues here (and has continued to expand

Communards having "stormed heaven itself"), Wolfenstein maintains that Shelley's "idealism" is best understood as poetry's fierce judgment of a world built on oppression and suffering (Nachwort 87-94).⁷

elsewhere), Benjamin's infamous "magic" and Shelley's infamous idealism are both capable of being re-evaluated under a different construction of the aesthetic.

6. In January 1938, six months after publishing Wolfenstein's *Mask* translations, *Das Wort* publishes a lengthy essay on Shelley by Walter Haenisch. Haenisch had left Berlin for Moscow in 1931, to work on the *Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe*, the multi-language Collected Works of Marx and Engels. Haenisch's article on Shelley, less literary and more overtly focussed on particulars of socio-historical context than Wolfenstein's 1922 Afterword, nonetheless shares affinities with it, above all, concerning the unity of Shelley's work. Haenisch treats many of the same poems as Wolfenstein, and, like him, stresses the significance of Shelley's having been primarily a *lyric* poet—a crucial factor, Haenisch indicates, in Marx's and Engels's championing of Shelley. After discussing various poems in relation to their socio-political contexts, Haenisch suggests that an *oeuvre* encompassing both *Prometheus Unbound* and the *Mask* is at one with the project undertaken in *Das Kapital*. (Such an idealist-materialist coalition, incidentally, develops a parallel history on the Western side of the Atlantic in the same era, and one of its guiding lights is the Shelleyan [and, as Russell A. Berman has recently shown, the very steeped-in-German-philosophy] radical scholar-activist W.E.B. Du Bois. Du Bois's Shelleyanism is consciously taken up or shared by a range of figures across Left and African-American culture, extending all the way to veteran Popular Front individuals like Ossie Davis, Ruby Dee, and the labor organizer Ella Reeve "Mother" Bloor, committed Shelleyans all.⁸)
7. So in 1937 and early 1938, Brecht and Benjamin are reading this Shelley-discourse in a journal they're both associated with and for which Brecht, in fact, serves as a principal editor. In June 1938, Benjamin joins Brecht in Svendborg, Denmark, where the two work together for several months, sharing ideas and manuscripts. In July, Brecht writes and gives to Benjamin a group of essays intended for *Das Wort*; there is substantial evidence that Brecht talks through the essays with Benjamin as (or just after) he drafts them.⁹ Some of these essays, which take issue with Lukácsian realism and defend the critical value of experimental art, have been familiar to Anglo-American readers since 1977, when they appeared in *Aesthetics and Politics*.¹⁰ Brecht went ahead and submitted the essays to *Das Wort*, which never published them.¹¹ But in addition to fears about rocking the Orthodox boat, the other editors of *Das Wort* may also have declined to publish Brecht's essays in order to protect Brecht himself. If so, they had good reason; which is to say, this story's materials get grimmer: a few months after *Das Wort* had published Walter Haenisch's January 1938 Shelley essay, Haenisch became one among legions falsely accused, amidst the general insanity in Moscow, of "Trotskyite" and/or "Social-Fascist" espionage. Haenisch was denounced and executed as a "people's enemy."¹²
8. One of these unpublished Brecht essays of July 1938—which unfortunately isn't included in *Aesthetics and Politics*,¹³ and which has never appeared in translation—is "Weite und Vielfalt der realistischen Schreibweise" ["Range and Diversity of the Realist Literary Mode"] (*Werke* 22.1: 423-434 and 22.2: 1035-1037nn.).¹⁴ The essay's central exhibit is Brecht's quotation, translation, and analysis of 25 stanzas from Shelley's *Mask*. (The crackling translation's almost absolute literalness departs intriguingly from Wolfenstein's *Das Wort* translation of the *Mask* the previous year.¹⁵) The "great revolutionary English poet P.B. Shelley," Brecht claims while beginning his translation-commentary, demonstrates how a

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The most telling absence in Brecht's translation of the *Mask* are the most blatantly "idealist" passages in Shelley, the lines on the allegorical Hope and the symbolist Shape, from what is arguably the crux of Shelley's original poem.

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Kaufman's response to the

vital fusion of aesthetic experiment, speculative imagination, and song may lead to, rather than away from, critical mimesis of the real (the latter being virtually synonymous, throughout "Weite und Vielfalt," with commitment) (*Werke* 22.1: 424-425, 430, 432-433; emphasis in original: "den grossen revolutionären englischen Dichter P.B. Shelley").

9. At the same time that he translates and analyzes the *Mask*, Brecht also translates nine stanzas from Part III of *Peter Bell the Third*, which apparently remain unpublished throughout Brecht's lifetime.¹⁶ Brecht immediately gives his *Mask* essay-translation and the *Peter Bell* translation to Benjamin; Benjamin copies out the *Peter Bell* stanzas, preserving them in the pages we know as the *Passagen-Werk* or *Arcades Project*.¹⁷ As already mentioned, Benjamin also quotes, and briefly comments on, *Peter Bell's* "Hell is a city much like London" stanza in his "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire"—an essay whose manuscript Brecht in turn reads and copies out portions of for the fragments *he's* writing on Baudelaire.¹⁸ The Brecht-Benjamin interchange, amounting almost to collaboration, is so intertwined that it's hard to tell the order of influence among these July and August 1938 writings. Limits of space allow me to say here only that a shared set of subsequently-celebrated images and ideas appears in Brecht's Shelley essay, Benjamin's Baudelaire essay, and then Brecht's Baudelaire meditations and later poetry.
10. More remarkable still is an extended passage on Shelley and Baudelaire in the *Passagen-Werk*; based on Brecht's translation of the nine *Peter Bell* stanzas, it's clearly the fuller version of the super-compressed but better-known comparison of Shelley and the French poet that Benjamin offers in "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire." In the *Passagen-Werk* entry "Zur Bilderflucht in der Allegorie" ["On image-flight in allegory"], Benjamin more extensively develops the comparison of Shelley and Baudelaire. The remarks gesture toward a sense of how the two poets' particular approaches to allegory illuminate the mode's modern fate in general:

The incisive effect [of *Peter Bell*] depends... on the fact that Shelley's *grasp* [*Griff*] of allegory makes itself felt. It is this grasp that is missing in Baudelaire. This grasp, which makes palpable the distance of the modern poet [Baudelaire] from allegory, is precisely what enables allegory [in Shelley] to incorporate into itself the most immediate realities... —Shelley rules over the allegory, Baudelaire is ruled by it. (*Arcades* 370, translation slightly emended; emphasis in original translation ["*grasp*"]); *Das Passagen-Werk* I: 468 [*Gesammelte Schriften* vol. V.1: 468] (emphasis in original ["*Griff*"])

Benjamin says a good deal more, but his point isn't to proclaim Shelley the greater poet. He implies instead that a turn in modernity and the history of aesthetic "aura" has made Shelley's critical allegoresis unavailable to Baudelaire. Baudelaire is too distanced from—from what? Benjamin's answer is that Baudelaire feels himself too distant from auratic distance itself; the auratic distance linked to lyric poetry and aesthetic autonomy is, to put it differently, what generates the allegoresis that

response:

A full consideration of adjacent Brecht texts, not possible here because of reasons of space, would establish that the omission of the *Mask's* dream-frame and its more "idealist" vocabulary expresses Brecht's immediately tactical rather than final approach to the question of poetry's "idealism." This is a matter on which Brecht himself will provide extraordinarily interesting evidence when he offers an unexpectedly positive reception, in the immediate aftermath of his reencounter with Shelley, of what is undoubtedly a go-for-broke case of lyric "idealism": Wordsworthian lyric aura. In Brecht's own eyes, his own more-than-a-century-later situation certainly separates him from certain aspects of Shelley's style, and perhaps above all from aspects of Shelley's diction; but Brecht elsewhere readily concedes that he has his own, necessary poetic "idealism," and that the dream-frame or dream-vision in general is far from anathema to his conception of a committed, engaged, and/or interventionist aesthetic.

Shelley can still undertake. The rest of Benjamin's analysis is well known: Baudelaire's intermittently critical triumph will be to make lyric poetry sing—severely and intensely—its own apparent impossibility in the age of art's mechanical or technical reproducibility.

11. While this is not the place for full-scale treatment of allegory's crisis in Baudelaire (and Benjamin's ideas about allegory's career in modern poetics thereafter), a few words are in order. *Allegory* is of course the charged term whose modern reprioritization over *symbol* stems in no small measure from Benjamin's 1928 study of the German play of lamentation, the *Trauerspiel*.¹⁹ For Benjamin, allegory's initial point of departure is that it represents the broken, ruptured truth of attempts at prematurely "symbolic" reconciliation. Hence allegory signifies its own necessarily non-identical—thus potentially critical and constructionist—character. Suffice to say here that the *Passagen-Werk* section about Shelley, Baudelaire, and allegory is one of the key instances where Benjamin articulates his formal theory (of allegory's proto-critical and constructionist nature) together with an historical instance of a lyric poet whom Benjamin and his circle definitely regard as progressive and committed: whom they regard, indeed, as *den grossen revolutionären Dichter*.²⁰
12. The 1938 matrix of Shelley, Baudelaire, and allegory generates two trajectories that presently concern us: towards the later art of Brecht, and the philosophical aesthetics of Adorno. Brecht, already having brooded over the poetic kindling, finds it reignited when, in his already-strange Los Angeles exile, he belatedly learns (in 1941) of Benjamin's suicide at the Spanish border. The news contributes importantly to the devastating *Hollywoodelegien* [*Hollywood Elegies*] and texts bound chronologically, thematically, and formally to them (some of which are gathered in the *Werke's Gedichte im Exil* section). It's rarely been noticed that, among these texts, not only "Nachdenkend über die Hölle" ["On Thinking About Hell"] is indebted to the figure that that poem calls "mein Bruder Shelley." In fact, the larger groupings of related poems and drafts—which include three texts explicitly focused on Benjamin's suicide—are saturated with themes, directly-translated quotations, paraphrases, and images from Shelley: especially from *Peter Bell* and the *Mask*, but from the *Defence of Poetry* and other texts as well.
13. Just as significant, in these poems, are Brecht's very complex treatments of tonal register, his stereoscopically-introduced-and-mutually-dissolving images, and a syntax of deceptive ease and elegance whose unreeling builds rather than releases tension.²¹ All of which, Brecht signals time and again, come in no small part from that Romantic source, Brecht's "Bruder Shelley," who seemed to have found political militance inseparable from lyric impulse and aesthetic autonomy. It is not overshooting the mark to say that Brecht's almost too-terrible decision—to write wartime elegy that could be taken for bitter satire, and vice versa—should count as powerful, and intriguingly *late Modernist*, evidence for the acute readings various critics have offered of *Peter Bell the Third's* historical originality: its relentless insistence on thinking modern lyric and satiric impulse together, and on thinking both in relation to modern poetry's ways of taking history's measure.²² It seems barely necessary to add that Brecht's efforts reinvent, *via Shelley*, exactly the critical possibility Benjamin had seen as only fitfully available—almost against itself, certainly less definitively than *in Shelley*, and perhaps, Benjamin had thought, for what had been its historical endgame—in Baudelaire.
14. Brecht gives the Shelley-infused poems to Hanns Eisler, who works with the *Hollywoodelegien* and who then, one Los Angeles night in October 1942, sits down at the piano and premieres these impossible *lieder* for an audience consisting of Brecht, Hans Winge, and Herbert Marcuse. Brecht only ups the ante by testily noting Eisler's distressing tendency, when Eisler "speaks about, [though] not when he composes" the settings, to drop the elegies' significance down a

Response

"Shelley-infused" usefully expresses a certain kind of intertextuality in literary history that goes beyond "influence"--how (in the culinary sense of infused oils)

rhetorical or formal-stylistic notch (*Bertolt Brecht Journals* 257-258).²³ That's a fantastic micro-dispute to consider, since Eisler, far from undertaking a wholesale genre-stripping or programmatic levelling of still-too-high and auratic elegiac verse, instead so virtuosically runs Schubertian and Schumannesque *lieder*, French *chanson*, and Schönbergian twelve-tone composition in and out of one another, that it is hard to miss the settings' recognizably Modernist *tour de force* of newly-achieved form and voice. It's as if the (proto-post-Modern) "levelling" holistically occurs in what Brecht hears as Eisler's irritatingly interpretive-judgmental comments, so that the work itself can then move on to enact its real, critical desideratum: Modernist virtuosity in the exploration, coordination, and imaginative synthesis of extremely diverse literary-musical materials and dauntingly various stylistic currents. Brecht acknowledges as much when he rather bluntly insists, against Eisler's alleged murmuring about the poems' mere occasionality or jottedness, on the *Hollywoodelegien's* compressed monumentality and *gravitas*: "these are full-scale poems" and "in fact the compositions are probably really important as music too" (*Bertolt Brecht Journals* 238).²⁴

something of the material "essence" of one poet's work can be captured and transmitted through another's work even in the absence of obvious allusion.

15. On the page and in Eisler's settings, the poems exert a profound influence, across at least three continents, on late Modernist poetry and, to a lesser degree, music composition. Indeed, with their complicated reception-histories, the *Hollywoodelegien* and the poems immediately connected to them testify to the unexpectedly continued, vibrant existence of late Modernism, well into the era commonly called post-Modern (and in which Modernism is framed as canonical or reactionary object of critique).²⁵ The very fact of the elegies' Modernist aesthetic and declaredly critical-Romantic lineage, which for Brecht seems indissolubly linked to the poems' unblinking view of commitment's unexpected paths in art and life, would appear substantially to reconfigure recent periodizations and style-characterizations of post-Modernism and its much maligned antecedent.
16. That is, Brecht's late enterprise entails the non-parodic revivification of an ostensibly passé, auratic, "lyric-aesthetic" poetics, a revivification Brecht in part accomplishes by returning to the Shelleyan-Baudelairean imperative that lyric critically reimagine itself. Though not exactly hermetic, Brecht's negative-sideways, backward-forward path towards post-auratic aura effectively identifies lyric vocation with—or as fuel for—Marx's old "ruthless critique of everything existing," which in its turn casts a cold eye upon lyric's critico-political pretensions. Brecht's structuring of this fruitful and constitutive tension between aura and protopolitical critique amounts, astonishingly enough (since it's after all *Brecht* that we're talking about), to a reconjuration of Left Enlightenment aesthetics from elegy ash. Recognition of such a project in his later poetry should begin to unsettle long-standard accounts of how Brecht (or Benjamin, for that matter) alternately models an exchange-value Left cynicism, and a mechanical-reproductionist, exhibition-value "Avant-Gardist anti-aesthetic" (both of which, in solidarity with radically-intended post-Modernist art and theory, oppose themselves to a more auratic, Romantically-derived Modernism).²⁶
17. Meanwhile, Benjamin's reflections on Shelley, Baudelaire and allegory will serve as one of several seeds for Adorno's attempts, after Benjamin's death, critically to preserve and reanimate his friend's work, and to reassess earlier disagreements (including Adorno's and Benjamin's disagreement over the quality of Brecht's Shelley translations themselves).²⁷ In a gestural shorthand, sometimes explicitly and more often by implication, Adorno writes the *Shelley-Bild* into and underneath a key series of texts: "Lyric Poetry and Society," "Commitment," "Parataxis," *Aesthetic Theory*.²⁸ He effectively coordinates Brecht's and Benjamin's Shelley with a range of resonance and *correspondance* that includes Benjaminian angelicism, storm-images for allegory, and projection of "critical" lyric. This Shelley

participates in what may be Adorno's own most enduring legacy, the attempt to uncover and work out a crucial distinction between *aesthetic* and *aestheticization*.

18. Impelled by Benjamin's thinking about allegory, Adorno finds an anti-essentialist, anti-aestheticist constructivism at the heart of Immanuel Kant's aesthetics and the Kantian Critical Philosophy as a whole, which, Adorno suggests, remains surprisingly central to Marxian dialectics and kindred efforts in critical thought. Underlying Adorno's Kantian account is the aesthetic's *quasi*-conceptual and thus *quasi*-social quality. The aesthetic (with lyric traditionally at its apex), while looking like conceptual-objective, "useful," content-determined thought or activity, *only* "looks like" them, only mimes them at the level of form. Aesthetic thought-experience in some way precedes conceptual-objective, content-and-use-oriented thought; in that sense, the aesthetic is "formal" because, rather than being determined by, it *provides the form for* conceptual, "objective" thought or cognition. Aesthetic thought-experience remains "free" (at least, relative to more properly conceptual thought) from pre-existent concepts or cognitive rules. In the Kantian lexicon, this makes the aesthetic a site of "reflective" rather than "determinant" judgment. The aesthetic, then, serves as mold or frame for the construction of "cognition in general," as Kant puts it.
19. The aesthetic serves also as formal and imaginative engine for new, experimental (because previously non-existent) concepts. With its quasi-conceptual and quasi-social character ("a mist, a light, an image"; "all...empty air" [*Mask* 2.103, 121]), the aesthetic can provide a prerequisite of critical thought by offering formal means for developing new (not even necessarily utopian) concepts. Such concepts may bring to light presently-obscured aspects of substantive social reality (aspects of society not already determined by society's own conceptual view of itself). The operative notion is that thought determined by society—by society's own concepts of itself: status-quo, reigning concepts of society—can never give a satisfactory picture of that society. This finally resolves into a fundamental strain of Adorno's aesthetics, to which Shelley contributes far more than an undersong, and that can be expressed as follows: Lyric experiment helps construct and make available the intellectual-emotional apparatus for accessing, and to that extent helps make available the social material of, "the new" ("the new" here being understood ultimately as the not-yet-grasped features of the mode of production and, in fact, of all that is emergent in the social). This constructivist theory and practice sees that experiment in lyric—lyric *as* experiment—helps make new areas of the modern fitfully available *to* perception in the first place. Constructivism by itself guarantees neither progressive subjectivity nor commitment to emancipatory politics. But this construction of perceptual or cognitive capability is prerequisite to such subjectivity, critical thought, and commitment.^{[29](#)}
20. There's one last, decidedly formal piece to this constructivist puzzle of Shelleyan commitment. Adorno hints that that piece is called "Keats." But it'll have to wait for the panel on "Keats's Interventionist Odes of 1819."^{[30](#)}

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Notes

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1 See Shelley, *The Mask of Anarchy* 301-310.

Shelley wrote the *Mask* in response to the infamous "Peterloo" or "Manchester Massacre" of 16 August 1819, in which a mass meeting of some 60,000 people--demanding parliamentary and social reform--was attacked by armed militia and cavalry. Peterloo subsequently became a rallying cry for parliamentary-reform movements, as well as for Britain's nascent labor movement.

2 For the more youthful, anxiously self-conscious meditations on Shelley, see Sartre, *Lettres au Castor et à quelques autres* I: 14, available in English in *Witness to My Life* 7-8; and Sartre, *Carnets de la drôle de guerre* 270, in English in *War Diaries* 74. *War Diaries* translates the now-superseded 1983 French edition of Sartre's "Phoney-War" *Carnets*, which had not included--as the 1995 French edition would--the September-October 1939 entries. Hence the discrepancy in the subtitle-dates of *Carnets de la drôle guerre* and *War Diaries*.

3 See too Jones's "Shelley's Satire of Succession and Brecht's Anatomy of Regression: 'The Mask of Anarchy' and Der anachronistische Zug oder Freiheit und Democracy." As Jones indicates, some earlier English-language critics had also made valuable contributions towards charting the Brecht-Shelley relationship; cf., e. g., S. S. Praver 92-96 and Richard Cronin 39-42.

See also Bertolt Brecht, "Der anachronistische Zug oder Freiheit und Democracy," in *Gesammelte Werke* 4: 943-949; the text is translated as "The Anachronistic Procession or Freedom and Democracy" in *Poems* 409-414. In the later and more comprehensive German edition--the Bertolt Brecht *Werke: Grosse kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe*--the poem appears under the title "Freiheit und Democracy" 15: 183-188. Unless otherwise indicated, all further references to Brecht's German texts are to the *Werke: Grosse kommentierte* edition and are cited by volume and page. All translations of Brecht, unless making specific reference to Willett's and Manheim's *Poems* or unless otherwise noted, are my own.

4 See "Das Paris des Second Empire bei Baudelaire" in Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: Ein Lyriker im Zeitalter des Hochkapitalismus* 63 n.49 (vol. I.2, 562 n.51 of *Gesammelte Schriften*). In English, see "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire" in *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* 59 n.48. For the Benjamin-Adorno disagreements over "Das Paris des Second Empire bei Baudelaire" see my n.27 below.

5 Shelley, *Peter Bell the Third*, "Part Third: Hell," 330, l.147; Brecht *Werke* 15 [*Gedichte* 5]: 46 and *Poems* 367. In the Brecht *Werke*, the poem is known by its first words, "Nachdenkend, wie ich höre," whereas in the older *Gesammelte Werke* (4 [*Gedichte*]: 830), it is formally titled "Nachdenkend über die Hölle," by which title it is still often discussed in the critical literature, even where the later, *Werke* text, is cited.

6 Wolfenstein's translation of the *Mask* stanzas is the first text in the "Übersetzungen" ["Translations"]

section of *Das Wort*'s June, 1937 issue. The translated *Mask* excerpt is titled "Sie Sind Wenige--Ihr Seid Viel!" ["They are Few--You are Many!"]; an introductory note tells *Das Wort* readers that the stanzas come from the last part of Shelley's *Mask*, and that they have been translated by Wolfenstein.

The German title (and text) translates but reverses the *Mask*'s celebrated, twice-repeated line addressing English workers (a line Shelley simultaneously intends as description, incantation, and exhortation/inspiration): "Ye are many--they are few." (In Shelley's text, these words appear at l.155 and again in the poem's final line [l. 372]). Wolfenstein apparently changes Shelley's word order in an attempt to preserve, in German, what he perceives as the essence of the *Mask*'s rhyme-scheme, syntax, and overall rhythm. The reversal may also reflect Wolfenstein's and *Das Wort*'s political judgment about the importance of ending--that is, ending first the bold-faced, all-capitalized, exclamatory title given to the *Mask*-excerpt; then, the repeated phrase within the translated stanzas; finally, the translated text as a whole--with the "many," rather than the ruling class's "few."

[7](#) The *Vermischte Schriften*, along with the poems, short stories, novels, and plays collected in the other volumes of Wolfenstein's *Werke*, reveal Wolfenstein's writings to have been thoroughly saturated by his readings in, and responses to, Shelley. For a valuable discussion of how Shelley infuses Wolfenstein's attempts to couple, or put into dialogue, an experimental poetics and a committed Left politics, see Siebenhaar. See too Fischer and Brown.

[8](#) On Du Bois's passionate Shelleyanism, see the brief published comments of Herbert Aptheker (once Du Bois's younger colleague and close friend, and eventually, editor of the 40-plus volumes of Du Bois's collected writings) 204. (Aptheker has indicated, in correspondence and conversation with the present author, that the above-cited commentary on Du Bois and Shelley represents "only the tip of the iceberg" of Du Bois's recurrent recourse to Shelley.) See also Du Bois's stress on the exemplary status of the second-generation English Romantic poets: "... Byron, Shelley, and Keats, lord, gentleman and cockney, all were social revolutionists." [Du Bois here paraphrases, and adds his distinct emphasis to, a formulation in the book he is reviewing, Annette T. Rubinstein's Marxian-humanist *The Great Tradition in English Literature*.] On Du Bois's initial attractions to, and ultimately radical interpretations of, German philosophical idealism, see Russell A. Berman's important "Du Bois and Wagner."

See too Ella Reeve Bloor's autobiography, *We Are Many* and Ossie Davis's and Ruby Dee's "Martin Luther King: The Dream and the Drum," with its deliberate inclusion and performance of Shelley in tribute to—as the program consistently articulates it—King's militant radicalism.

[9](#) Until the publication of Brecht's *Arbeitsjournal*, the best-known evidence was probably the June-August 1938 section of "Gespräche mit Brecht" in Benjamin, *Versuche über Brecht* 117-135; "Conversations with Brecht" in Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht* 105-121. The Brecht *Werke*'s generous editorial notes add a good deal to the picture; see citations in my n.17 below.

[10](#) The editors of *Aesthetics and Politics*, and other commentators, have asserted that Brecht was only a figurehead for, or, at most, nominally involved in editing, *Das Wort*. See, e. g., *Aesthetics and Politics* 62. Brecht's journals and letters, as well as some of Benjamin's recollections (and Benjamin's own contributions to *Das Wort*) show this to be an inadequate overall analysis. In fact, Brecht's attitudes towards his participation in *Das Wort* ranged from frustration, cynicism, and disgust, to cautious enthusiasm, to energetic determination to shape the journal more towards his liking (including through active solicitation of manuscripts from writers around the world).

See Brecht's correspondence about *Das Wort* in the Brecht *Werke* 28 [*Briefe* 1]: 562 and 569, and 29 [*Briefe* 2]: 9, 13, 19, 20, 21, 25-26, 36, 38, 64, 77, 81, 83-84, 101, 106-107, 126, and 147-148. (Most of these letters can be found in the English translation of an earlier edition of Brecht's letters, *Brecht Briefe*, see Bertolt

Brecht Letters 163, 235, 239, 240, 246, 247, 248, 256, 259, 260, 271, 276, 279, 289, 290, 295, 315, 607, 610, and 611.)

See too, for further evidence of Brecht's ambivalent attitudes towards, and dealings with, *Das Wort*, the Brecht journal entries cited in my n.17 below.

For a measured assessment of the relevant materials and controversies, see Pike, esp. Chapter 8, "The Literary Popular Front, Part I: *Das Wort*."

[11](#) They are now all available, with ample editorial notes, in the Brecht *Werke* 22.1 and 22.2 [*Schriften* 2.1 and 2.2].

[12](#) See the account of Haenisch's fate given by his widow in *Gut angekommen, Moskau*. Also on Haenisch, see Walter 2: 525-526 n. 4 and 4: 422.

[13](#) Nor had it been included in a kindred German volume that preceded *Aesthetics and Politics*, *Die Expressionismusdebatte*.

[14](#) "Weite und Vielfalt" was first published, some sixteen years after its composition, in the series *Brecht Versuche*. The essay was also published--before the 1989-1998 *Werke*'s appearance--in Brecht's *Gesammelte Werke* 8 [*Schriften* 2]: 340-349.

[15](#) Brecht is of course often described, by others and himself, as the Left's *plumpes Denken* ["crude thinking," "crude thought," "vulgar thought"] poet, over against Left writers like Wolfenstein who exhibit a penchant for visionary, sometimes arcane or delicate, Symbolist esotericism. It therefore seems entirely natural that Brecht chooses to render Shelley's lines far more literally than had Wolfenstein. Yet, paradoxically, it is Wolfenstein's translation that yields the familiarly Popular Front verse-cadence of ringing hammerbeat, along with a rhetorical thematics that quickly thins to weak abstraction. Meanwhile, Brecht's scrupulously literal, generally unrhymed translation somehow manages--no doubt due to Brecht's terrific feel for other poets' language, and, more specifically, his obvious sympathy with the *Mask*--to convey Shelley's startling ways of simultaneously condensing and exfoliating image, phrase, and line. Brecht, that is, powerfully grasps and identifies with Shelley's manner of marrying rhythmic propulsion to textural density, whereby through syntax, cadence, diction, and tone, an intense forward movement and stingingly precise denotation coexist with an imagistic counter-impulse that, with understated elegance, deftly builds back into the poem a cumulatively thickening self-reflection. The inspired and brilliant literalism of Brecht's translation--Brecht's ability to see (and then to render into an impressive construction of energy, concretion, and transparency) the *Mask*'s interanimation of the material and the ideational, of grit and philosophically-oriented intellection--results in stanzas notably more literary and poetic than Wolfenstein's.

For Benjamin's implicit, and Adorno's and Elizabeth Hauptmann's explicit, assessments of Brecht's Shelley translations (as well as Brecht's later, possibly ambivalent attitude towards the translations), see my n.27 below.

[16](#) *Werke* 14 [*Gedichte* 4]: 404-405, 662n. Brecht worked on both the *Mask* and *Peter Bell* translations with his close collaborator Margarete Steffin; see *Werke* 14: 662-663nn., and 22.2: 1035-1036nn.

The *Werke* presents Brecht's *Peter Bell* translation as part of a larger text titled "Hölle" ["Hell"], *Werke* 14: 404-409, 662-663nn. "Hölle" begins with the nine *Peter Bell* stanzas, and then segues directly into the 25 *Mask of Anarchy* stanzas translated--and otherwise appearing only--in "Weite und Vielfalt." The textual history provided in the *Werke*'s notes leads one to deduce that publication of the *Peter Bell* translation occurred only in (and then after) 1972, when the translation appeared in Benjamin's posthumously-organized-

and-published *Passagen-Werk*; see my n.17 below.

17 Brecht's translated *Peter Bell* stanzas appear in *Das Passagen-Werk* 1: 563-564 [also found in Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften* 1: 563-564]; in English, see Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* 449-450.

The sequence of this sharing of ideas and manuscripts, and copying out of translations, can be reconstructed by coordinating Brecht's "Arbeitsjournal" entries for the period in question, along with the June-August 1938 sections of "Gespräche mit Brecht" in Benjamin's *Versuche über Brecht* 128-135 ["Conversations with Brecht" in *Understanding Brecht* 114-121], as well as Benjamin's correspondence (particularly with Adorno; see my n.27 below). In addition to the Benjamin texts just cited, see the Brecht *Werke* 26 [*Journale* 1]: 312-323, esp. 315, 317, and 319; these entries can be found in English in *Bertolt Brecht Journals* 6-19, esp. 10, 13, and 14.

18 Brecht, "[Notizen über Baudelaire]" and "[Zu *Les fleurs du mal*]," *Werke* XXII.1 and XXII.2 §*Schriften* 2.1 and 2.2]: 451-453 and 1044-1045nn. Brecht had left these fragments untitled; "Notizen über Baudelaire" and "Zu *Les fleurs du mal*" are the titles supplied, and bracketed, by the *Werke*'s editors.

19 *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels*. [*Gesammelte Schriften* 1.1: 203-430]. In English, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*.

20 It is almost impossible to resist juxtaposing Benjamin's insistence on Shelley's powerful *grasp* of allegory (and Benjamin's consequent insistence on Shelley's artistic grasp of *reality*) with F.R. Leavis's notorious claim, made only two years earlier, that Shelley had had a "weak grasp upon the actual." Leavis's indictment arises amidst his specific dismissal of *Ode to the West Wind*: the poem epitomizes what Leavis deems Shelley's unfortunate manner of being so "essentially lyrical" that, as a poet, Shelley can have "little to do with thinking." For Leavis, Shelley's poetry "induces--depends for its success on inducing--a kind of attention that doesn't bring the critical intelligence into play" (206-08). For two of the most thorough and impressive rebuttals of Leavis's argument, see Wasserman and Keach.

Leavis's judgment, based as it is on Shelley's lyricism (as Leavis sees it, on Shelley's exaggerated, excessively emotion-oriented lyricism) might for that reason seem removed from Benjamin's attention to *Peter Bell the Third*'s biting satire. Yet the surrounding coordinates of Benjamin's discussion--from the Wolfenstein and *Das Wort* preludes, to the Baudelaire and Brecht variations, to the central motif of allegory itself--make clear that back of Benjamin's interest in *Peter Bell* lies exactly this problematic jointure: on one side, an ethereal or seemingly obscure lyric poetics convinced of the need for *via-negativa* coaxing of reality into provisionally apprehendable form; on the other, a righteous truth-telling that aims to call (with equal recourse to clear observation, active intellection, and socio-linguistic precision) a degraded present by its proper name. Productively to motivate the oscillation or shifting combination of the two sides is the whole point of Benjamin's theory of allegory, whose *raison d'etre* is, in a phrase, to gain a grasp upon the actual.

21 Some, but by no means all of these poems (not to mention the drafts printed in the *Werke* notes) have been published in the English *Poems*. See the poems gathered under the titles *Hollywoodelegien* and *Gedichte im Exil*, *Werke* 12 [*Gedichte* 2]: 115-125; in *Poems*, see *Hollywood Elegies* 380-381 and the texts in the section "American Poems 1941-1947." See too "An Walter Benjamin, der sich auf der Flucht vor Hitler Entleibte," "Die Verlustliste," "Nachdenkend, wie ich höre" ["Nachdenkend über die Hölle"], and "Zum Freitod des Flüchtlings W.B.," *Werke* 15 [*Gedichte* 5]: 41, 43, 46, 48; in *Poems*, see "On Thinking About Hell" and "On the Suicide of the Refugee W.B.," 367, 363.

See also the *Werke*'s reprinting of the remarkable 1942 typescript draft that Brecht had provisionally titled "Die Hölle" (which is distinct from the *Werke* text combining the *Mask* and *Peter Bell* translations and titled "Hölle," discussed in my n.16 above); this "Die Hölle" typescript is clearly a preliminary stage of the

Hollywoodelegien. This 1942 "Die Hölle" typescript, moreover, unmistakably arises from the Shelley-matrix, reworking, in fact, the same ideas and even words about "mein Bruder Shelley" (and the figuration of London and Los Angeles as competing versions of Hell) that appear in the 1941 "Nachdenkend über die Hölle." Both "Nachdenkend über die Hölle" and the "Die Hölle" typescript should be traced, of course, back to the Summer 1938 translations, analyses, and discussions of Shelley, particularly to the *Peter Bell* translation. See *Werke* 12: 399-400nn. (The 1942 "Die Hölle" typescript may well have emerged from what would have been a previous, manuscript sketch--evidently not possessed by the Brecht Archive, nor elsewhere known--that would have served as the basis for "Nachdenkend über die Hölle," the *Hollywoodelegien*, and related poems.)

For a more brutal sense of what is at stake in these overlapping materials, contexts, and drafts, where--with Shelley so often providing the stated melody or haunting undersong--Brecht undertakes to write alternately despairing and enraged elegy, see Brecht's seven stark, ultimately-discarded lines from the first sketch of "Die Verlustliste" ["The Casualty List"]. Those lines include: "Wo ist Benjamin, der Kritiker?/...Benjamin ist an der spanischen Grenze begraben./...Ich fahre entlang den Bomberwerften von Los Angeles" ["Where is Benjamin, the critic?/...Benjamin is buried at the Spanish border./...I drive along the bomber-hangars of Los Angeles"]. *Werke* 15: 338-339nn.

[22](#) See, most recently, Chandler's monumental *England in 1819* 483-554, Cox's brief but very suggestive comments in *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School* 211-216, and again, Jones's *Shelley's Satire* 49-69, 149-164.

[23](#) Translation emended: ("wenn er von diesen Kompositionen spricht, nicht wenn er komponiert," *Werke* 27 [Journale 2]: 125). See too the editors' notes, *Werke* 12 [Gedichte 2]: 399-403, and the note in *Poems*, 586.

[24](#) *Werke* 27 [Journale 2]: 125 ["Dies sind volle Gedichte"; "in der Tat haben die Kompositionen wirkliche Bedeutung wahrscheinlich auch als Musik..."].

Eisler's 1942 comments on the Brecht poems may not have been as judgmental as Brecht had initially believed, nor, in any case, do they appear to have represented Eisler's final opinion on the texts: Eisler subsequently observed that the *Hollywoodelegien* were his favorite works among all Brecht's poetry. See Bunge 244, cited in the Brecht *Werke* 12 [Gedichte 2]: 402.

[25](#) The texts have a staggered publication and reception history, dating from Eisler's 1950s recordings of the *Hollywoodliederbuch* [*Hollywood Song-Book*] (which includes the *Hollywoodelegien* and other Brecht poems), and the volumes of Brecht's later poetry, in German and in translation, that appear from the late 1940s onward. With the Brecht volumes in particular, it happens that a significant number of the early 1940s poems from and around the "Shelley-Baudelaire-critical lyric" matrix become readily available in German only in the '50s and '60s, and in some cases are not translated until the '60s and '70s.

[26](#) Here I use *avant-gardist* and *anti-aesthetic* in the very specific sense drawn out by Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde*. For related thoughts about how currents within today's experimental poetry complicate the usual narrative of post-Modernism's superannuation of Modernism, see Kaufman, "A Future for Modernism" and "Everybody Hates Kant."

[27](#) In his 1 February 1939 letter to Benjamin about "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire," Adorno questions the fidelity to Shelley of the Brecht *Peter Bell* translation that Benjamin's essay quotes; Adorno wonders whether such "directness and bluntness" ["Direktheit und Härte"] can really be found in the original. See Adorno and Benjamin, *Briefwechsel 1928-1940*, 397; Adorno and Benjamin, *The Complete Correspondence, 1928-1940*, 304. An editors' note in *Complete Correspondence*, though not indicating that the rest of Brecht's *Peter Bell* translation appears in the *Passagen-Werk*, does provide Shelley's stanza, and comments that "Brecht's translation does follow the English of Shelley's original very closely" (308 n.32).

Interestingly, Adorno's initial doubts concerning the translation's fidelity or quality are later echoed by Brecht's close collaborator and editor Elisabeth Hauptmann, who observes too that Brecht himself had seriously doubted the *Peter Bell* and *Mask* translations' merit; see the Brecht *Werke* 14: 662-663nn. There is no corroborating evidence, from Brecht or others, that Brecht ever actually shared Hauptmann's view or held the one she attributes to him; Brecht's 1954 publication of the *Mask* translation-essay (in the journal *Versuche*) would seem to count as contrary evidence.

Adorno for his part may subsequently have changed his mind--at least somewhat--about the *Peter Bell* translations, which he would have continued to read, preserved as they were in the Benjamin texts that Adorno helped to edit after Benjamin's death. Significantly, the first line of those *Peter Bell* stanzas reappears in one of Adorno's most important discussions of modern poetics, "Parataxis" (1963). As if at once conceding and contesting the same old point, Adorno (here constellating Shelley, Baudelaire, and Hölderlin) quite laudatorily gives the first line from those *Peter Bell* stanzas: but he presents the first half of Shelley's line in German, the second half in English! "Wie Hölderlins Wahlverwandtem Shelley die Hölle eine Stadt ist, much like London..." ["Just as for Hölderlin's kindred spirit Shelley Hell is a city `much like London..."]. See "Parataxis. Zur späten Lyrik Hölderlins," *Noten zur Literatur* 3: 174 [*Gesammelte Schriften* 11: 462], "Parataxis: On Hölderlin's Late Poetry," *Notes to Literature* 2: 122.

For several years, Benjamin had gone back and forth with Adorno (who usually also represented Horkheimer in these colloquies) about Benjamin's Baudelaire texts and related writings. In 1935, Benjamin had submitted a draft of "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire" to the Institut für Sozialforschung's [Institute of Social Research's] house organ, the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* [*Journal of Social Research*]. At that point, Benjamin was conceiving "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire" as the second part of a streamlined, three-part version of the *Passagen-Werk* that would be called *Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century*. In Fall 1938, Benjamin submitted a revised version of the essay, which quoted and briefly discussed the translated *Peter Bell* stanza. For the relevant exchanges about these essays, see *Briefwechsel* 138 ff., 364 ff., and 388 ff.; *Complete Correspondence*, 104 ff., 280 ff., and 298 ff. (Some of these letters are included in *Aesthetics and Politics*'s section on the Adorno-Benjamin debates.)

Though Adorno and Horkheimer had published Benjamin essays about which they had serious reservations--most famously, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"--they did not, even after further Adorno-Benjamin correspondence (in November 1938), publish the revised "Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire." In early 1939 they did, however, publish Benjamin's "Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire" ["On Some Motifs in Baudelaire"], which Benjamin had intended as the "thesis" of *Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century*. "Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire" can be found in Benjamin's *Illuminationen* 201-245, in *Charles Baudelaire: Ein Lyriker im Zeitalter des Hochkapitalismus* 111-164, and *Gesammelte Schriften* I.2: 605-653. In English, see "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" in *Illuminations* 155-200, or in *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* 107-154.

For a lucid and compressed history of the initial controversies over Benjamin's Baudelaire writings, see Jay 197-212, esp. 206-211.

[28](#) See "On Lyric Poetry and Society," "Parataxis: On Hölderlin's Late Poetry," and "Commitment" in *Notes to Literature*; "Rede über Lyrik und Gesellschaft," "Parataxis. Zur späten Lyrik Hölderlins," and "Engagement" in *Noten zur Literatur* [*Gesammelte Schriften* 11]. See too *Aesthetic Theory; Ästhetische Theorie* [*Gesammelte Schriften* 7].

[29](#) For a more sustained discussion of Adornian constructivism, see Kaufman, "Red Kant."

[30](#) For a sketch of the missing Keatsian piece, see Kaufman, "Negatively Capable Dialectics."

Reading Shelley's Interventionist Poetry, 1819-1820

Shelley, Adorno, and the Scandal of Committed Art

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1. The scandal of Shelley's great political ballad, "The Mask of Anarchy," is that its appeal to the power of mass resistance is written from aristocratic exile. Certainly this position does not disqualify its interventionist rhetoric: no one criticizes a Brecht for becoming an outspoken émigré in Denmark in the 1930s. The problematic issue is not the writer's personal safety so much as the nature and expression of his commitment to those masses whose sacrifice he exhorts. The "Mask" appeals to an ultimate and utopian harmony between the masses and the oppressor's troops, grounded in a common nationalism ("the old laws of England") and an idealized shame provoked in that nation by the willing martyrdom of passive protesters who virtually invite the army to "slash, and stab, and maim, and hew." Such an appeal to universal Promethean virtue, shared by proletarian and stormtrooper, may indeed strike us, at the very close of the twentieth century, as so naive as to warp the very real commitment of Shelley's art. This dilemma brings to mind Adorno's famous critique of such "commitment" by an artist like Brecht, who was trapped in the paradox of committed art in advanced capitalism: the intellectual must speak as a kind of ventriloquist, speaking for the proletarian; yet it is the powerful bourgeois he must capture, addressing oppression in the ideological terms and values of the oppressor, appealing to a spurious "harmony" of interest. "In an attempt to bridge the gap" between the fact of oppression and the language in which he must address it for the bourgeois theatre-goer, "Brecht affected the diction of the oppressed. But the doctrine he advocated needs the language of the intellectual" ("Commitment" 187). At the same time, Adorno does allow to art a utopian, ideal aim: literary works "point to a practice from which [as ideal creations] they abstain: the creation of a just life" (194).
2. Most recently, Susan Wolfson has challenged the status of Shelley's "Mask" as one of the great examples of English radical poetry. Is Shelley's political poetry "no more than aesthetic processing of politics?" (195). This poem alights upon a poet dreaming "over the sea," a dream, says Wolfson, "from which he is never seen to awaken" (196). Those words of liberation spoken to the "Men of England" (line 147) arise only "As if" an allegorical Earth *were* speaking to her children, though the actual speaker is obscure, "the words," she points out, arising "by an inexplicable agency. . . borne by fantastic illusion. This dreamy shimmer is a tension that both sustains the poem's idealism and exposes the ideological bind of proffering poetry as the thing to be 'done' in political crisis" (198). Ultimately, Wolfson sees the poem's energizing conflict deriving from the question, "can poetry have political agency or is it 'supererogatory' to political action?" (195).

Response

In fact, can't Shelley be said to be experimenting with a kind of radical "ventriloquism" from the time of his early collection, *Posthumous Fragments of Margaret Nicholson*? The self-conscious balladic simplicity of the *Mask*, including its adoption of the popular-print and pamphlet idioms, is further evidence of his attempt to "throw his voice" into the fray from a position outside it. Though Shelley is concerned about the problem of "virtual representation," we must remember that he was the rogue son of an M.P. who continued to see just representation as his calling, even if he renounced it as his birthright.

Response

As Kipperman suggests below, one can read the cthonic voice—"as if" from the earth—as a figure for a hoped-for *collective* agency, though admittedly led by intellectual orator-poets like Shelley, an idealized form of unacknowledged legislation. Anyway, in the age of General Ludd, the device of a deliberately diffused and "anonymized" voice of hidden radical orators and leaders was conventional.

3. I would argue that this is not quite the real contradiction in Shelley's poem. For one thing, this way of raising the question tends to confuse political *import* with political *impact*. Only within Departments of English (or at MLA sessions) is a "contestatory" utterance seen as a roofbeam thrown on the barricades. But the gestures of poets are more often moonbeams than roofbeams. Contestatory how, to what audience, in what context? Is the "contestation" produced, taken up, and consumed by a comfortable and unmoved bourgeois readership? Or, on the other side, is the "contestation" merely confirmation for the oppressed of what they have already learned, and have always already lived? Brecht, said Adorno, "taught nothing that could not have been understood apart from his didactic plays, indeed, that could not have been understood more concisely through theory, or that was not already well known to his audience: That the rich are better off than the poor, that. . . goodness requires the masks of evil" (*Aesthetic Theory* 247). Adorno warned that the political *import* of art must be sought elsewhere: "That artworks intervene politically is doubtful; when it does happen, most often it is peripheral to the work. . . . Just how far artworks intervene on a practical level is incidentally determined not only by them but far more importantly by the social moment" (*Aesthetic Theory* 242).
4. This leads me to respond to Susan Wolfson's question about the political role of a visionary poetry: the answer is a moving target, and it will be defined only *historically* within the ideological modes and even literary forms, like satire, in which particular classes express their aspirations and fears. And the political import will emerge from the real relationship of these aspirations to the actual total historical and social situation, what Lukács called "class consciousness." In the case of Shelley, the dream vision of an aristocrat may perhaps constitute a more incisive political analysis than a ballad about the rebel framebreaker, General Ludd. In fact, peculiar though it may seem, Adorno would probably see the dream vision section of Shelley's poem as even more subversive than its working-class balladry. (Brecht, who translated this section of Shelley's "Mask," perhaps thought so.) More subversive because it can envision the oppressed *collectively* seeing what the visionary sees, the unmasking of anarchy as the rule of monarchy and the death of tyrants on the bloody field of their own creation as the beginning of a new call to class solidarity and courageous resistance: "A sense awakening and yet tender. . . Had turned every drop of blood / By which [Earth's] face had been bedewed / To an accent unwithstood" (lines 136-37). The call to the "Men of England" that follows is indeed an exhortation not spoken by *any* agent. It is, rather, a call "unwithstood" because, as Steven Jones has implied, it is the ineluctable voice of the historical moment and opportunity itself (112).
5. True, that voice must be mediated by a poet trapped in his own political commitments, agendas, and privileged status. Adorno warned that literature with an explicit political agenda risks "preaching to the saved" and so loses the autonomy from which it might mount an implicit critique of the social totality from whose economic and power relations art abstains. He is particularly—I think unfairly—hard on Brecht in this regard. Art can become "praxis," he says, only by "renouncing persuasion," working "not by haranguing but by the scarcely apprehensible transformation of consciousness" (*Aesthetic Theory* 242-43). I recognize the dangers of tendentiousness. However, I find this a too-restrictive view of the genuine historicity of *political satire* as genre, especially the popular art of the Regency period. As Jones and Michael Scrivener have demonstrated, Shelley's "Mask" evokes the satiric popular cartoons of the day, in which the unmasking of the powerful is often emblemized by their dispersal by a light or a translucent shape, exactly Adorno's "scarcely apprehensible transformation of consciousness" that anticipates a new order of "Liberty" (see Jones

Response

Adorno was uneasy about Benjamin's theory of the "dialectical image," which he found too cabalistic, magical, unmediated—too romantic. It is tempting to connect Benjamin's talismanic *Angelus Novus* with the recurrent angelic shapes in Shelley's poetry, but Shelley's shapes always remain genetically related to the revolutionary figure of Liberty Militant and in the *Mask*, at least, Shelley's "Shape arrayed in mail" is much less "symbolist" than Benjamin's dialectical images are. As

113-117; Scrivener 200-210). This invocation of popular iconology grounds his satire not in an ideal realm from which the powerful are merely lampooned but rather within the actual and bloody struggle of the oppressed both to free their understandings and to appropriate for themselves their land, labor, and nation.

Kipperman deftly suggests in this quotation of Adorno, the Shape is more instrumental and praxis-oriented, a figure of figuration, sure enough, but in the key of Hone and Cruikshank. Shelley's translucent shape means any reader can see through the artifice of the figure—maybe even learn to imagine and project such figures—while still finding it a sufficient inspiration to action.

6. The real conflict and contradiction of this poem, then, emerges not from the political potency of words. It is the conflict over the revolutionary violence that might follow the new comprehension and the new demands of the oppressed. The danger is not at all that one particular poem may be politically superfluous; the danger is that Shelley's "Shape arrayed in mail," imaginary though she may be, allegorizes a moment of new popular consciousness which Shelley's poem simultaneously participates in, records, and exhorts. As part of a broad popular uprising, Shelley's poem may be part of a larger and all-too-effective culture of resistance. So Shelley calls for a *new* assembly, a fantasized repetition of the St. Peter's field gathering, in which the passive victimization of the protesters is transformed into the passive resistance of fully politicized agents. In prescribing this remedy, Shelley can fantasize himself as revolutionary leader, who, though far from the action, can decree "Let a vast assembly be, / And. . . Declare with measured words that ye / Are. . . free" (lines 295-98). The masses, like their poet leader, will arm themselves with "words" that are "swords" (lines 299-300).
7. But make no mistake: the poem's call to non-violence is also a call to resistance, and its treatment of the people as powerful agents is anything but a fantasy. As Jones has put it, the poem "does not merely wish away or dialectically supersede the potential bloodshed and the conflicts it signals; it embodies them in its own structure of images" (110-111). (Adorno: "A successful work, according to immanent criticism, is not one which resolves objective contradictions in a spurious harmony, but one which expresses the idea of harmony negatively by embodying the contradictions, pure and uncompromised, in its innermost structure," "Cultural Criticism" 32.) The remarkable gesture of the poem is the power of definition and of language it *shifts* to the laboring poor. "What art thou Freedom?" asks the poet. His answer, "For the labourer thou art bread," and "clothes, and fire, and food" grounds and determines Freedom's other roles as Justice, Wisdom, Peace, and Love in the following stanzas. Clearly, Shelley identifies this as the only class whose interests and ideals are one. In this instance, the poet surrenders his power of metaphor to the material experience of the silent worker. And while the *poet* may not awaken in the course of the poem, the masses are called upon to 'Rise like lions after slumber' (line 151). The poet directs the masses' understanding only this far: in allowing them to possess for themselves their own experience of Freedom he reminds them that self-possession precludes vengeful violence. If slavery is "hunger" (line 172) it is also "to feel revenge" (line 193). This warning is an index of the power of self-definition, is predicated upon a sudden accession of assured self-command. And there is no telling what such people might do.
8. Shelley's poem, as a sophisticated ballad, may scandalize in its appeal to an unlikely *remedy*, which exposes the work's origin in a paralyzed and distant intellectual's hope to lead a nationalist moral apocalypse. As a ballad and a subversive "masque," however, it is a scandal to literary form and decorum in its *analysis* of oppression and its attribution of Promethean virtue to the hungry, the homeless, and the despised. Shelley's allowing the poor to define freedom as bread even anticipates Adorno's Marxist dictum that all culture begins "in the radical separation of mental and physical work" ("Cultural Criticism" 26). Shelley implicitly critiques his own role and power even while the separation of labor enables this critique. At the same time, from his position of relative autonomy, Shelley can anticipate a harmony of ideal and material experience that scandalizes and should shame the present.

As Adorno put it, "just because culture affirms the validity of the principle of harmony within an antagonistic society, albeit in order to glorify that society, it cannot avoid confronting society with its own notion of harmony and thereby stumbling on discord" ("Cultural Criticism" 27).

9. And what of Shelley's hope for the moral force of the masses' protest? Shelley demands that the poor stand upon their urgent material needs not only as a class demand for satisfaction and power but also as a just sign of their self-respect. Self-respect in itself becomes a categorical demand on the community to reciprocate respect. When the illusory "mask" of anarchy falls away, it is the ruler who is the anarchy, the victims who stand for the absolute moral order of reciprocal justice. Of course, in appealing to a rule of justice grounded in common interests, Shelley does risk invoking what Adorno warned was a spurious universalism that compromises the believability and effectiveness of committed art—as he charges was the case with Brecht. But even Adorno is aware that ideological practices of an era after the triumph of the bourgeoisie and the descent of a European proletariat into fascism cannot be readily applied to analysis of the early nineteenth century ("Cultural Criticism" 21; 29-30). Adorno's warnings, we should recall, respond to both the contemporary sense of a capitalism so totalizing as to absorb dissent ("ideology today is society itself," 31), and also to the modernist era's greatest challenge, the clumsy attempt by bourgeois culture to give human meaning to the horror of Nazism and the Holocaust. He is most astonished at works like Brecht's *Arturo Ui* or Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* which "become obscene" ("Commitment" 184) when they satirize Nazis as lumpen buffoons. Shelley's era is not Adorno's, and his satire is not modernist. We might acknowledge the dangers of the committed art of the intellectual while adjusting our equation of revolutionary force for an era "before Auschwitz," when respect and shame, justice and nationalism, have unsettling (not self-congratulatory) utopian power for lower and middle classes still struggling for power. Shelley evokes the horror of Peterloo as an official act of a threatened elite. This official violence is exposed as a moment in a real crisis of revolutionary class redefinitions (as Nazism after 1933 was not). The idealization and *effective* satire with which Adorno credits *some* committed art has a role to play in this case in defining a revolutionary struggle, despite the risks of such intervention posed by Shelley's own class position and interests.
10. As for Shelley's moral/political hope for popular forgiveness of the tyrant and avoiding revenge in the name of nation building, we dare not, even (especially) in our century call this naive. Before a space can be cleared for forgiveness, a circle must be drawn around the murderers and the tyrants, and that clearing may not be bloodless. Shelley, even in his proleptic rush to the ideal and the hoped-for harmonies of civil life, did not overlook this. But he locates the most deadly and persisting violence with the anarchists. Our bloody twentieth century has rolled over millions like a column of tanks in an acrid night. Standing today on the very horizon of the twenty first, we must believe that it is not naive to hope that the terrible, titanic, scandalous labor of forgiveness—the only true, ideal act of civil nation-building—that this is no throwback to the last century's idealist nationalism but rather a glimmer of light from the next one. It is our utopian anticipation.

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