

# **“Beauty is Goodness, Goodness Beauty”: Shelley’s “Awful Shadow” and “Ethical Sublime”**

**Chung-hsuan Tung**

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## **Abstract**

Truth, Beauty, and Goodness are three great human ideals belonging to epistemological, aesthetic, and ethical categories, respectively. But they are often not easily differentiated. For Plato Goodness is the supreme Form or Idea governing all other Forms or Ideas including Truth and Beauty. For Keats Beauty and Truth are identical. For Shelley “Beauty is Goodness, Goodness Beauty.” Rather than an aesthete, Shelley is primarily a moralist preoccupied with Goodness: his works are often directly linkable to his social, political, and religious status quo and his poetic theory tends towards the pragmatism of doing good. What Shelley calls “intellectual beauty” is but “inner beauty” or “virtuous goodness” that finds its embodiment in an ideal maid or a revolutionary soul mate, who represents Shelleyan virtues. Shelley uses the word “shadow” very often: it can be “awful” in the sense of “very bad” or “awe-inspiring.” Shelley’s “awful shadow” is often no other than “intellectual beauty,” an ideal form originated from the Supreme Goodness. It is connected with the 18<sup>th</sup>-century idea of “the sublime.” Shelley exploits “the sublime” ethically: seeing an invisible, beneficent, supreme power hidden in nature but directing the world in its revolutionary course of change. In the final analysis, Shelley’s “ethical sublime” expresses clearly his Platonism or idealism, explaining meanwhile his radicalism, atheism, pragmatic theory of poetry and defects in writing poetry.

### **Key words and phrase:**

1. truth, beauty, goodness
2. intellectual beauty
3. shadow
4. the awful shadow
5. the sublime and the beautiful
6. the ethical sublime
7. Platonism, idealism, radicalism, atheism

## **I. Truth, Beauty, Goodness**

Truth, beauty, and goodness are said to be “the great transcendentals of the classical tradition” or “qualities of divinity” or “three great ideals ... representing the sublime nature and lofty goal of all human endeavor.”<sup>1</sup> Whatever they are, they are indeed “an ancient and venerable triad of values,” and, as Steve McIntosh conceives them, they “actually serve as attractors of evolutionary development that pull evolution forward ‘from the inside’ through their influence on consciousness.”<sup>2</sup> Western philosophers have from the very beginning been concerned with problems divisible into these three basic categories of ideals or values. Plato’s metaphysical theory of Forms, for example, is primarily concerned with the epistemological category of Truth; his mimetic theory of art and his idea of the artist as divinely inspired have stepped into the aesthetic category of Beauty; and his consideration of justice and other virtues of state and soul deals all too obviously with the ethical category of Goodness. But what exactly are truth, beauty and goodness, respectively?

The word “truth” certainly can refer to a human being’s quality or state of “being true”: to loyalty, trustworthiness, sincerity, genuineness, honesty, etc. It can also refer to a statement’s being in accordance with experience, facts, or reality. And it can ultimately refer to reality itself. A moralist may praise a person for his truthful speech or behavior. A scientist may claim truth for a scientific fact or statement. Yet, it takes a metaphysician to tell us that truth is not just what is verifiable and tangible before our eyes, but, rather, as Plato conceives it, the unchanging Form, the invisible Universal, or the immaterial, abstract Idea.

Besides referring narrowly to good looks or a very good-looking woman, the word “beauty” designates broadly the quality, or the thing having the quality, attributed to “whatever pleases or satisfies the senses or mind, as by line, color, form, texture, proportion, rhythmic motion, tone, etc., or by behavior, attitude, etc.”<sup>3</sup> What provides a perceptual experience of pleasure or satisfaction is sensual or outer beauty; what pleases or satisfies the mind is often such mental or inner beauty as kindness, sensitivity, tenderness, compassion, creativity, or intelligence. But, for a metaphysician like Plato, the real beauty is the absolute form of Beauty, the one abstract Beauty that is distinct from each and all of the beautiful things and separate from them, which is “completely beautiful, purely beautiful, unchangingly beautiful” (Urmson 297).

As an abstract noun, “goodness” indicates the state or quality of being good. But a vast variety of things can be good. Goodness can come from being suitable to a purpose or from producing a favorable result. We have good lamps, good eggs,

good exercise, good excuse, good eyesight, good men, etc. When used in conjunction with “truth” and “beauty,” however, “goodness” is restricted to an ethical sense: it is synonymous with “virtue,” meaning “moral excellence” and referring to such things as kindness, generosity, and benevolence. Plato, it is said, recognizes four cardinal virtues: wisdom, courage, moderation, and justice. But for Plato Goodness or the Good is finally the highest idea and the source of all the rest of ideas.

Although truth, beauty, and goodness seemingly occupy three distinct and separate realms (call them epistemological, aesthetic, and ethical realms, or whatever), philosophers as well as ordinary people often fail to distinguish among them. Ordinary people, for instance, often refer to a loyal, honest person as either “good” or “true” and say that kindness is a person’s “good virtue” or “inner beauty.” This laxity of verbal usage is in effect like the ambiguity found in Plato’s use of the word *kalon* to mean both “beautiful” and “noble” so that “exact translators prefer to render *kalon* as ‘fine,’ which while blander than ‘beautiful’ is suitable to both ethical and aesthetic contexts.”<sup>4</sup> In fact, when Socrates says that beauty is *prepei* (appropriate), he has also mixed up an aesthetic idea with an ethical one. And when Plato ranks goodness as the supreme idea, he has subsumed the idea that “the truly real and the truly good are identical” (Thilly 81).

So far, in introducing the ideas of truth, beauty, and goodness, I have repeatedly referred to Plato on purpose. As many critics have pointed out, Shelley is heavily influenced by Plato: he read Plato and translated Plato’s work, and, as James A. Notopoulos has suggested, his Platonism is a unity of all kinds of Platonism.<sup>5</sup> In relating Shelley and Plato to the topic of truth, beauty, and goodness, however, what I need to emphasize particularly are two points. First, in Plato’s doctrine, truth, beauty, and goodness are all highly valuable ideas or forms, and all ideas or forms are for him “non-temporal, as well as non-spatial”; they are “eternal and immutable” entities that “subsist independently of any knowing mind” though they can be “apprehended by reason” (Thilly 82). Second, in Plato’s doctrine, all ideas or forms “are logically interrelated and constitute a hierarchy, in which the higher forms ‘communicate’ with lower or subordinate forms,” and “the supreme form in the hierarchy is the form of the Good” (Thilly 82). Indeed, as Plato’s cosmology is “an attempt to explain reality as a purposeful, well-ordered cosmos, and the world as an intelligence, guided by reason and directed toward an ethical goal” (Thilly 84), goodness is naturally singled out as “the *logos*, the cosmic purpose” (Thilly 81) to govern all other ideas including truth and beauty.

## II. Shelly vs. Keats

It is well-known that in his "Ode on a Grecian Urn" Keats makes the urn say to man: "Beauty is truth, truth beauty." As Cleanth Brooks has pointed out, "we ordinarily do not expect an urn to speak at all" (155). So it is only in the poet's imagination that the urn is personified and claimed to be able to say anything to man. In fact, when the urn says "Beauty is truth, truth beauty," it is "telling," not so much in words as in what it shows, a generalization which is exemplified by the urn itself. The urn, as described in the poem, represents the eternal, for "when old age shall this generation waste,/Thou shall remain" (46-47). When it remains, it will continue to tell its "flowery tale" and "tease us out of thought/As doth eternity" (4, 44-45), and its "leaf-fringed legend" will forever haunt about its shape with boughs that cannot shed leaves, with figures "for ever piping songs for ever new," and with lovers "for ever panting, and for ever young" (5, 24, 27), while the streets of the little town in another picture on the urn "for evermore/Will silent be" (38-39). If the urn with its pictures and figures represents the eternal, it is like truth or it is a truth. But while the urn represents truth on the one hand, it nonetheless represents beauty on the other hand, for it is called not only "still unravished bride of quietness" and "foster-child of silence and slow time" but also "Attic shape" and "Fair attitude" with "brede/Of marble men and maidens overwrought,/With forest branches and the trodden weed" (1-2, 41-42). The well-wrought urn, in other words, typifies both beauty and truth, and so it is qualified to tell man that "Beauty is truth, truth beauty": a beautiful piece of art like the urn will forever remain, as truth does, to show us its beauty as well as the truth it contains, though what it contains, just as the urn does, may be some plain, guessable facts along with some mysterious details beyond our surmise.

Keats's Grecian urn does contain for him truth and beauty (Brooks 21). Truth and beauty are in fact the two values Keats lived for. As we know, all romantics feel keenly the inevitability of change, the unreliability of phenomena, and the ephemerality of all things. That is why Shelley says, "Naught may endure but Mutability" ("Mutability," 16). But Keats felt even more keenly the romantic agony brought about by change. His own anticipated short life naturally accounts largely for this agony. And his poems, such as "On Seeing the Elgin Marbles," "When I Have Fears That I May Cease To Be," and "Why Did I Laugh Tonight? No Voice Will Tell," largely express that agony. Facing the ephemeral, ever-changing world, romantics naturally aspire after what is eternal, unchangeable, and immortal. This aspiration is uttered most impressively in Keats's "Bright Star, Would I Were Steadfast as Thou Art." And the "still steadfast, still unchangeable" bright star is naturally linkable to the Platonic idea of Truth as the unchanging Form.

Keats, of course, did not actually reach for the bright star, nor did he seek

blindly for the abstract and invisible Platonic truth. For him, “what the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth” and for him “the Imagination may be compared to Adam’s dream—he awoke and found it truth.”<sup>6</sup> So, for Keats, beauty is indeed truth, and beauty is “seized” by imagination. Now, what Keats’s imagination seizes as beauty (“the truth of imagination” as he called it) is naturally the poet’s vision, which can be rendered into poetry. It follows, then, that poetry is Keats’s lifelong goal; it is his embodiment of beauty and truth. He tells us his goal in *Sleep and Poetry*:

O for ten years, that I may overwhelm  
Myself in poesy; so I may do the deed  
That my own soul has to itself decreed. (96-98)

He even tells us that he has his regimen of poetic training: following Virgil, he will first “pass the realm of Flora and old Pan” and then deal with “the agonies, the strife/Of human hearts” (101, 124-5).

In Keats’s poetic career, there were times of course when he felt that “death is intenser than verse, fame, and beauty” (“Why Did I Laugh Tonight?” 13-14), that poesy is not “so sweet as drowsy noons,/And evenings steeped in honied indolence” (“Ode on Indolence,” 36-37), and that “the fancy (i.e., imagination or ‘the viewless wings of Poesy’) cannot cheat so well/As she is famed to do” (“Ode to a Nightingale,” 33, 73-74). Nevertheless, Keats is for sure the most purely devoted poet to poetry and the purest aesthete among the English romantic poets. He seems to be the most wholly immersed in the duad of truth and beauty.

Compared with Keats, Shelley is not so pure an aesthete, for he never seems to be content with the duad of truth and beauty: he yearns more for goodness. Keats, to be sure, also concerns himself with ethics, with the realm of goodness. After claiming “A thing of beauty is a joy for ever” at the very beginning of *Endymion*, he does not merely profess that

Its loveliness increases; it will never  
Pass into nothingness; but still will keep  
A bower quiet for us, and a sleep  
Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing.  
(2-5)

Keats has in fact gone on to tell us a theory of the “pleasure thermometer,” a theory on how immortal delight may derive from “a fellowship with essence,” that is, from purging away mutability from the things of beauty by fusing ourselves “first

sensuously, with the lovely objects of nature and art, then on a higher level, with other human beings through ‘love and friendship’ and, ultimately, sexual love.”<sup>7</sup> This content has indeed combined truth (immortality) with beauty and goodness (love and friendship). However, Keats’s chief concern here is with beauty, not with goodness: the poetic romance of *Endymion* is told for pleasure, not for morality. That is why Keats says in the Preface, “I hope I have not in too late a day touched the beautiful mythology of Greece, and dulled its brightness.”

When Keats touched Greek mythology again in *Hyperion* (1818) or *The Fall of Hyperion* (1819), he had at first meant to be ethical. He proposed to solve the problem of “*unde malum?*” (whence and why evil?) in *Hyperion*. But the answer offered by Oceanus is: “... ‘tis the eternal law/That first in beauty should be first in might” (*Hyperion*, II, 228-9). In Oceanus’ view, Saturn was dethroned not by blank unreason and injustice, but by a higher excellence in the natural progressing of things or the stage-by-stage development of time. Oceanus’ “first in beauty” (instead of “first in goodness”) is a phrase picked by Keats, and it betrays Keats’s propensity for replacing ethical terms with aesthetic ones.

In *The Fall of Hyperion*, the story has grown into a dream vision, and it contains an induction somewhat like Wordsworth’s *The Prelude*, involving the theme of “the growth of a poet’s mind.” In the induction, Moneta admonishes the poet to ascend steps and usurp the height of poetry by becoming one of “those to whom the miseries of the world/Are misery, and will not let them rest” (148-9), that is, by becoming “a sage;/A humanist, physician to all men” (189-90). But this moral tone cannot be sustained by the story of how Hyperion fell in the course of time. Keats’s ethical concern (with the poet’s social or moral function) somehow fails to go well with his beautiful mythology, which is primarily aesthetic rather than ethic in nature. This may be part of the reason why the epic stays unfinished.

Keats’s preoccupation with beauty, rather than goodness, is repeatedly revealed in his letters. We have mentioned that he told Benjamin Bailey (in a letter of November 22, 1817) that “what the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth” (Bush 257). We may recall, too, that to George and Thomas Keats (in a letter of December 21, 1817) he says, “... with a great poet the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration” (Bush 261). It is his preoccupation with beauty, of course, that makes him “hate poetry that has a palpable design upon us” (letter to John Hamilton Reynolds, February 3, 1818, in Bush 263). And it is his preoccupation with beauty, too, that makes him advise Shelley impolitely: “you might curb your magnanimity and be more of an artist, and ‘load every rift’ of your subject with ore” (letter to Shelley, August 16, 1820, in Bush 298).

Shelley showed his magnanimity not only in inviting Keats (who was ill) to

come and stay with the Shelleys in Pisa for the winter, but also in his lifelong fighting for the benefit of mankind. Anyone who reads Shelley's biography is sure to have the impression that Shelley was indeed a revolutionary before a poet. Since his Eton days when from his own experience "he saw the petty tyranny of schoolmasters and schoolmates as representative of man's general inhumanity to man," he has "dedicated his life to a war against injustice and oppression" (Abrams et al, 661). In 1812, he visited Ireland to engage in radical pamphleteering and was seen at several political rallies, in his support for freedom of the press and the extension of equal rights to Catholics and in his hostility to the coercions of church and state. In other years, no matter whether he was in England or elsewhere on the Continent, Shelley never ceased to speak for the revolutionary ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity. When he drowned in 1822, he was collaborating with Leigh Hunt and Byron on the journal *The Liberal*, which, needless to say, was a radical organ free from prosecution by the British authorities but good to publish their revolutionary ideas for the good of society.

Very little of Keats's work is manifestly linkable to his contemporary political or religious status quo. In contrast, very much of Shelley's work is all too easily connected with his reactions to the contemporary affairs of church or state. According to Kenneth Neill Cameron, Shelley has left us a picture of his social philosophy not in his poetry alone, but also in his prose. In his *A Philosophical View of Reform*, Shelley has expressed his theory of historical evolution: "history is essentially a struggle between two sets of forces, the forces of liberty and the forces of despotism" (Cameron 512). In regard to the continent of Europe Shelley "felt that the existing despotic governments could be overthrown only by revolution, and his letters and work show a constant attention to the development of such movements—in Spain, in Naples, in Paris, in Greece, as well as in Mexico, South America and Ireland" (Cameron 514). Shelley's poetry also plainly shows the same social philosophy:

Shelley's analysis of the contemporary situation in England and its reform movement will be found in "The Mask of Anarchy" and "Swellfoot the Tyrant"; his views on the revolutionary movement on the continent, in the "Ode Written in October, 1819," the "Ode to Liberty"—on the Spanish revolution of 1820—the "Ode to Naples"—on the war of the Kingdom of Naples against Austrian domination—and "Hellas"—on the Greek struggle for liberation from the Turkish empire; his interpretation of the rise and fall of the French Revolution and the emergence of the tyranny of the Quadruple

Alliance, in “The Revolt of Islam”; his general theory of historical evolution, in “Queen Mab” and “Prometheus Unbound.” (Cameron 515)

Even Shelley’s poetic theory is widely different from Keats’s in that one tends more towards a pragmatic theory emphasizing the poetic function of doing good while the other tends more towards an objective theory stressing the function of creating beauty. While Keats asserts that “with a great poet the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration,” Shelley believes that “to be a poet is to apprehend the true and the beautiful, in a word the good which exists in the relation,” and that “poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world” (*A Defense of Poetry*, in Ingpen, VII, 111-2 &140). So, for Shelley poetry is not just to delight but to instruct as well. Poetry is, furthermore, the best means for moral training:

A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own. The great instrument of moral good is the imagination; and poetry administers to the effect by acting upon the cause. Poetry enlarges the circumference of the imagination by replenishing it with thoughts of ever new delight, which have the power of attracting and assimilating to their own nature all other thoughts, and which form new intervals and interstices whose void for ever craves fresh food. Poetry strengthens that faculty which is the organ of the moral nature of man, in the same manner as exercise strengthens a limb. (*A Defense of Poetry*, in Ingpen, VII, 118)

### **III. Beauty Is Goodness**

Shelley never let an urn or anything else tell us directly that beauty is goodness. However, as we have suggested above, he did go much further than Keats into the realm of goodness: his life was a struggle for mankind’s moral reformation and social change, and his work was written primarily for the sake of goodness rather than beauty. This is best illustrated in his habit of using ethical terms for an aesthetic object. And his “Hymn to Intellectual Beauty” serves as an obvious example.

As “Beauty” is the subject (and object) of the hymn, we naturally expect to see a piling up of praises for the beauty of the subject or object. But, as the poem

proceeds, what we see is at first an emphasis on the Beauty's being "Intellectual," that is, nonmaterial, thus "unseen among us" (2). Then we find this "Spirit of Beauty" is described as no other than the possessor of what we often call "inner beauty" or "goodness" since it does "consecrate ...," its light "gives grace and truth to life's unquiet dream," it is the "messenger of sympathies," it is expected to "free/This world from its dark slavery," and its spells did bind the poet to "fear himself and love all human kind" (13, 36, 42, 69-70, 83-84).

This "Intellectual Beauty" is best represented by the Being the Poet in *Alastor* images to himself as his ideal love. The Poet "dreamed a veiled maid/Sate near him, talking in low solemn tones": "Her voice was like the voice of his own soul" and "Knowledge and truth and virtue were her theme" (*Alastor*, 151-3, 158). In fact, the maid is "Herself a poet" and her theme includes "lofty hopes of divine liberty,/Thoughts the most dear to him [the Poet], and poesy" (*Alastor*, 159-61). As Shelley explains in the Preface to this poem, the maid is "the vision in which he [the Poet] embodies his own imaginations" and the vision actually "unites all of wonderful, or wise, or beautiful, which the poet, the philosopher, or the lover could depicture" (Ingpen, I, 173). In other words, the maid represents the Poet's ideal beauty and ideal goodness.

Now, we must know that *Alastor* is highly autobiographical. If we cannot agree with N. I. White that "the over-idealistic poet as described in both the Preface and the poem is undoubtedly Shelley" (I, 419), we can at least agree with Evan K. Gibson that "the youth [i.e., the Poet] of the poem has a number of characteristics in common with his creator [i.e., Shelley]" (568). If the poem is "the story of a youth who, after living a life of solitude, falls in love with a vision of his 'soul mate,' a creation of his own mind, and perishes of disappointment" (Gibson 548), this youth is so similar to Shelley himself that we may safely assert that the maid is indeed the embodiment of Shelley's "intellectual beauty," which is but another name for the idealist's idea or form of Goodness.

The maid in *Alastor* is an unnamed person with "intellectual beauty" or virtuous goodness. In *Epipsychidion*, another highly autobiographical poem of Shelley's, the "Sweet Spirit" or "Seraph of Heaven" (1, 21) has a name (Emily), and the maid is identified with Teresa Viviani, a 19-year-old daughter of the governor of Pisa in 1820. Teresa was confined in the Convent of St. Anna, but she attracted Shelley's interest and became his ideal object of love. No matter whether Emily can be identified with Teresa or not, and no matter what biographical facts scholars can gather about the symbols of the Sun, the Moon, the Comet, the Planet, etc., exploited in the poem, we are sure that Emily represents the Being whom Shelley's spirit often "met on its visioned wanderings" and whom Shelley once met but could not behold because she

was “robed in such exceeding glory” (191, 199). As she is “soft as an Incarnation of the Sun” and “her Spirit was the harmony of truth” (335, 216), she can be no other than the archetype of “intellectual beauty” or virtuous goodness. That is why she is said to be “a mortal shape indued/With love and life and light and deity,/And motion which may change but cannot die” (112-4).

In *Epipsychidion*, Shelley refers to Emily as “the Vision veiled from [him]/So many years” (343-4). In Greek, “epi” is a preposition meaning “upon,” and “psychidion” means “little soul.” Thus, Emily is naturally the “little soul” that Shelley asks to mate with. Psychoanalytical critics have interpreted the poem variously. While most critics take Emily as an imagined target for sexual completion (in the sense of physical coition, spiritual merging of souls, or returning to maternal plenitude), Ghislaine McDayter takes her as a case to explain the poet-speaker’s trace of primary castration, a lack projected into the feminine Other. Each psychoanalytical interpretation may be plausible in its own right. Yet, I believe, we need not probe so deeply into the psyche. In the Advertisement, the poem is said to be like the *Vita Nuova* of Dante. In a letter of June 18, 1822 to John Gisborne, Shelley says, “It is an idealized history of my life and feelings” (Ingpen, X, 401). Indeed, the poem is as autobiographical as *La Vita Nuova*. But it is even more like Dante’s work in that Emily has become a muse-like figure, an idealized soul mate and a spiritual inspiration for Shelley, just like Beatrice Portinari, who has become Dante’s idealized, muse-like, soul mate and spiritual inspiration. As we know, Dante’s conception of love is Platonic: for him true love is possible only for the innately good and the noble-hearted; the loved Beatrice is a glorious agent or symbol of the divine, real in body but ideal in soul. As Emily is Shelley’s Beatrice, she is aptly called “A divine presence in a place divine” and apostrophized as “Spouse! Sister! Angel! Pilot of the Fate ...” (*Epipsychidion*, 135, 130).

Shelley’s ideal beauty is indeed the possessor not only of physical or outer beauty but of intellectual or inner beauty. So Ianthe needs Queen Mab’s teaching to become “sincere and good” and have virtue to keep her footsteps in the path she has trod (*Queen Mab*, IX, 200-6), although her soul can now stand “All beautiful in naked purity,/The perfect semblance of its bodily frame,/Instinct with inexpressible beauty and grace” (*Queen Mab*, I, 132-4).

Shelley, as we know, kept his revolutionary spirit all his life and, therefore, the valuable women in his work are often those who can sympathize with his struggle against tyranny and injustice. Cythna, thus, is not just Laon’s sister or sweetheart; she is the hero’s soul mate as well, whose struggle along with Loan is to leave us “All hope, or love, or truth, or liberty” (*Laon and Cythna*, IX, 3718). Shelley calls the revolution of Laon and Cythna “the *beau ideal* as it were of the French Revolution”

(letter to a publisher, October 13, 1817, in Ingpen, IX, 251). According to Lori Molinari, “the revolution Shelley envisions is primarily moral and psychological rather than political or military” (99). What makes the *beau ideal* in the revolution is the couple’s gradualist approach of using the power of words to effect moral reformation.

In *Prometheus Unbound*, moral reformation is also most important, and Asia is also a revolutionary’s soul mate although, unlike the confident, Amazonian Cythna, she is at first “submissive, diffident, eager to learn and quite passive until roused by an intuition of Prometheus’s release” (King-Kele 184). She asks Demogorgon the question of “who made terror, madness, crime, remorse” and reminds him that Prometheus gave mankind hopes, love, fire, speech, etc. (*Prometheus Unbound*, 2.4.19ff.). At the end, after overthrowing tyranny, her union with Prometheus through love brings the world “Gentleness, Virtue, Wisdom and Endurance” (4.562).

As a contrast to Cythna and Asia, Iona Taurina in *Swellfoot the Tyrant* is not the *beau ideal* for a revolutionary heroine. She is not as chastely devoted and wise as Cythna and Asia. Comparing the satirical drama with “Ode to Naples” and “Ode to Liberty,” Thomas H. Schmid remarks: “Where both of the Odes can be seen to use conventional virginal and/or matronly female images to celebrate the possibilities for national independence latent in the 1820 constitutional declarations of Spain and Naples, *Swellfoot the Tyrant* employs a radically eroticized and sexually powerful representation of Caroline of Brunswick to question England’s own readiness for constitutional reform” (76). Iona’s revengeful revolution is not in line with that of *Prometheus Unbound* or *Laon and Cythna*, nor is she depicted as a heroine of virtuous goodness.

Beatrice in *The Cenci*, however, can also be counted as one of those who fit Shelley’s “favorite pattern of tyrant, slaves and resisting heroine” (King-Hele 133). In the play’s Dedication, Shelley mentions the “patient and irreconcilable enmity with domestic and political tyranny and imposture” which, Shelley says, Leigh Hunt’s tenor of life has illustrated (Ingpen, II, 67). In the play, in effect, Beatrice is Shelley’s image of a holy girl ruined by a tyrannical father and a religious authority, who stand for domestic and political tyranny and imposture. She is stained by her father’s rape, coerced into parricide, and forced to become a determined liar, but she remains, in his own words, “the angel of [God’s] wrath” (*The Cenci*, 5.3.114). In other words, Beatrice is still a maid embodying intellectual beauty or virtuous goodness although, as Michael O’Neill has suggested, revenge is “a particularly dangerous form of ‘loathsome sympathy’ for Shelley” (87).

In contrast to the virtuous maids as mentioned above, the Witch of Atlas is a sort of “la belle dame sans merci.” “The all-beholding Sun,” Shelley writes, “had

ne'er beholden/In his wide voyage o'er continents and seas/So fair a creature": "her beauty made/The bright world dim, and every thing beside/Seemed like the fleeting image of a shade" (*The Witch of Atlas*, 58-60, 137-9). Yet, she is in fact "a sexless thing" or "like a sexless bee/Tasting all blossoms and confined to none": she will "pass with an eye serene and heart unladen" among "mortal men" (329, 589-92). She "played pranks among the cities/Of mortal men," but "little did [any] sight disturb her soul" (665-6, 545). She is indeed a wizard-maiden lacking understanding sympathy with the problems of mortal creatures. In other words, she has physical beauty only; she has no real substance of intellectual beauty or virtuous goodness.

For Shelley goodness is certainly the sublimated level of beauty. A woman's physical beauty has to be elevated to the level of intellectual beauty to become immortal and worthy of high esteem. The sublimation or elevation of beauty is a Platonic idea, of course. But Shelley has put this idea into practice not only in dealing with women but also in writing about a thing of beauty. In "To a Sky-Lark," for instance, he elevates the bird to the level of a "blithe Spirit" and a "Scorner of the ground" (1 & 100). What he emphasizes in the poem is not only the fact that the unseen, singing lark can be a symbol of "unbodied joy" (15), but also the fact that the high-in-the-sky lark can be a symbol of high nobility. That is why it can be called "Scorner of the ground" and compared to a hidden poet, a high-born maiden, a golden glow-worm, an embowered rose, etc. When the poet says, "Thou of death must deem/Things more true and deep/Than we mortals dream" (82-84), the sky-lark is indeed sublimated with divinity.

#### **IV. The Awful Shadow**

The word "shadow" occurs very frequently in Shelley's works. If we look closely into its contexts, we will find that the word is very ambiguous in connotation. Shadow is of course a shade or a dark image in direct contrast to light. When the Witch of Atlas is depicted as lying "enfolden in the warm shadow of her loveliness" (*The Witch of Atlas*, 61), the shadow may mean just a shade. However, when Shelley asks that "From the world's bitter wind/[the reader should] Seek shelter in the shadow of the tomb" (*Adonais*, 457-8), the shadow suggests safety in the dark besides its cool shade. When Julian says, "I met pale Pain/My shadow, which will leave me not again" (*Julian and Maddalo*, 324-5), the shadow suggests not only a dark shade but also something perpetually accompanying someone. When in the Conclusion of *The Sensitive Plant* the narrator says, "Where nothing is—but all things seem,/And we the shadows of the dream" (9-12), the shadows suggest insubstantiality besides darkness.

And when in *The Mask of Anarchy* Hypocrisy is described as “Clothed with the Bible, as with light/And the shadows of the night,/Like Sidmouth” (22-240), the shadows connote evil secrecy in addition to any possible sense.

It is difficult and unnecessary to list all possible connotations that go with Shelley’s usage of the word “shadow.” But it is feasible to point out the basic types of connotations existing in Shelley’s mind for the word “shadow.” Shelley, as we have said above, is a Platonist. As a Platonist, he must have been influenced by Plato’s Allegory of the Cave, through which we are told that the things we perceive as real are actually unreal like shadows on a wall while reality is to be found in the ideas or forms which are intelligible only when we ascend into the light of reason or of the Good. Hence, for Shelley the primary connotation of “shadow” is insubstantiality or being unreal.

Nevertheless, shadows as unreal or insubstantial entities are still powerful factors affecting our daily life. Humans are forever under the sway of shadows. According to Carl Jung, everyone carries a shadow, which is a part of the unconscious mind derived from repressed weaknesses, shortcomings, and instincts. Although the shadow is not necessarily evil, it certainly represents “our darker side, the part of ourselves we would prefer not to confront, those aspects that we dislike” (Dobie 57). Hence anybody or anything repugnant to our psyche is a shadow. When to the sky-lark Shelley says, “Shadow of annoyance/Never came near thee” (“To the Sky-Lark,” 78-79), the shadow does carry the repugnant force.

As a repugnant object, any shadow can be described as “awful,” in the colloquial sense of “being very bad or unpleasant.” But for Shelley a shadow is often not repugnant but “awful” in the sense of “awe-inspiring” and “fear-causing.” In *Prometheus Unbound*, Asia sees a “Spirit with a dreadful countenance” (Act 2, 142). The Spirit says, “I am the shadow of a destiny/More dread than is my aspect” (Act 2, 146-7). Here, the Spirit is surely “awful” for his dreadful countenance and dread-causing potentiality. Likewise, when Shelley refers to “Intellectual Beauty” as the “awful shadow of some unseen power” (“Hymn to Intellectual Beauty,” 1), he does regard it as an awe-inspiring presence that causes fear. That is why he further says, “Sudden, thy shadow fell on me;/I shrieked, and clasped my hands in extacy” (59-60). The awful shadow has indeed become “awful Loveliness” (71).

Now, we can assert that although shadows are Platonic nonentities, Shelley is obsessed with two types of shadows. On the one hand, Shelley is strongly opposed to but wholly obsessed with the Jungian type of shadows, which include the despots, devils, villains, tyrants, etc., who find their concrete examples in the poet’s life (his father, the Eton or Oxford authorities, state ministers, kings, church leaders, etc.) and in his works (the Sultan Turnkey, Ozymandias, Jupiter, the Cenci, Anarchy, Mahmud,

etc.). On the other hand, Shelley is strongly awed by but also wholly obsessed with what I would call the Shelleyan type of shadows, which are the embodiments of “Intellectual Beauty” or virtuous goodness or celestial divinity, such as exemplified by the idealized female idols in his works (the unnamed but pursued maid in *Alastor*, the initiated Ianthe in *Queen Mab*, the adored Emily in *Epipsychidion*, the ruined Beatrice in *The Cenci*, etc.), by the idealized, anti-despotic, revolutionary heroes and heroines (Zeinab and Kathema, Laon and Cythna, Prometheus and Asia, etc.), and even by the idealized Demogorgon, the “mighty Darkness” which will “wrap in lasting night Heaven’s kingless throne” (*Prometheus Unbound*, Act 2, 3& 149). All such idealized figures are, as it were, so many Constantias, so many “thronging shadows fast and thick” falling on Shelley’s eyes and striking in him a “deep and breathless awe, like the swift change/Of dreams unseen” till “the world’s shadowy walls are past, and disappear” (“To Constantia,” 7, 23-24, & 33).<sup>8</sup>

The characteristics of Shelley’s “awful shadow” are fully, though sometimes paradoxically, enunciated or suggested in his “Hymn to Intellectual Beauty.” In the beginning of the poem, Shelley says:

The awful shadow of some unseen Power  
Floats though unseen among us,--visiting  
This various world with as inconstant wing  
As summer winds that creep from flower to flower. (1-4)

In these four beginning lines, we are informed that Intellectual beauty is an awful (awe-inspiring) shadow, the shadow belongs to or comes from “some unseen Power,” it is still unseen, but it is there floating among us or visiting this various world inconstantly. This shadow is awful probably because of its origin, its invisibility, and its inconstant visits.

In the second stanza, Intellectual Beauty is hailed as “Spirit of Beauty” and said to be able to consecrate with its own hues all that it shines upon. Here one question arises: If Intellectual Beauty is an unseen shadow, does it have hues and can it shine? If it does, it is certainly mysterious and therefore awful. Anyway, the Spirit is now away from the world and gloom is “cast on the daylight of this earth” (22). In such a gloomy state, the poet goes on to the third stanza and says, “Thy light alone ... Gives grace and truth to life’s unquiet dream” (32-36). Here it is certified that the awful shadow does have light, and it is further suggested that the shadow can give grace and truth to human life, which is like an unquiet dream.

In the fourth stanza, we find this statement first: “Man were immortal, and omnipotent,/Didst thou, unknown and awful as thou art,/Keep with thy glorious train

firm state within his heart” (38-40). This is a belief uttered in the subjunctive mood. The poet believes that Intellectual Beauty, though an awful shadow, has a glorious train; and if it along with the train could keep firm state in man’s heart, man would become immortal and omnipotent. In this stanza, then, Intellectual Beauty is hailed as “messenger of sympathies/That wax and wane in lovers’ eyes” (42-43). And then it is called nourishment to human thought, like darkness to a dying flame (44-45). It is indeed paradoxical that darkness can nourish a dying flame. But, as it is, a dying flame does look all the brighter if it is put in a darker place. Here we see that Shelley is speaking for the awful shadow’s dark, mysterious power to nourish human thought. So, in the last three lines of this stanza, Shelley asks the messenger not to depart as its shadow came, lest the grave should be a dark reality.

Since Intellectual Beauty as the awful shadow is not an evil spirit but a good angel, so to speak, to mankind, it is not a ghost the poet as a boy sought for; it is not among the “poisonous names with which our youth is fed” (53). So, in the fifth stanza Shelley says that the shadow fell on him and made him excited “at that sweet time when winds are wooing/All vital things” (56-57). And, thus, in the sixth stanza, Shelley says that he then vowed to dedicate his powers to this awful Loveliness so that the world would be freed from its dark slavery. And finally in the last stanza Shelley prays:

Thus let thy power, which like the truth  
Of nature on my passive youth  
Descended, to my onward life supply  
Its calm—to one who worships thee,  
Whom, Spirit fair, thy spells did bind  
To fear himself, and love all human kind. (78-94)

From the above analyzed enunciation with its suggestions we can conclude that Intellectual Beauty as the awful shadow is indeed not an evil power but a good, useful power to mankind. Its origin may be the Supreme Goodness. It is mysteriously dark and unseen as a shadow, but it is forever there ready to visit us when we need it. Awful as it is, it has a glorious train and it is therefore able to shine, to give us light, to bring grace and truth, to nourish human thought, to make us sympathetic, to supply calm, and to make us love all humankind. For Shelley, then, the awful shadow is in fact the “awful Loveliness”: it can help him free the world from dark slavery and prevent the world from death, from getting into the grave of a dark reality. Shelley’s good friends (Hogg, Byron, Leigh Hunt, etc.) and beloved women (Harriet, Mary, Claire, etc.) as well as all those heroes and heroines in his works may be counted as

among “the glorious train” that have worked with Intellectual Beauty (the Shellyan awful shadow) to help the poet fight against the bad ghosts (the Jungian awful shadows) personified in the villains, despots, etc., in his life and works.

## **V. The Ethical Sublime**

In “Hymn to Intellectual Beauty,” Shelley has indeed turned intellectual beauty into spiritual goodness, thus exposing his ethical, rather than aesthetic, propensity. In the poem, in actuality, he asks an ethical question that has, perhaps, puzzled him all his life: “Why man has such a scope/For love and hate, despondency and hope?” (23-24). Regarding this question, he further avers: “No voice from some sublimer world hath ever/To sage or poet these responses given--/Therefore the name of God and ghosts and Heaven,/Remain the records of their vain endeavor” (23-28). Shelley (especially the early Shelley), as we know, is an atheist. He does not believe in the doctrines of the Orthodox Church. But, as shown in this poem, Shelley believes in “some sublimer world,” which provides no voice concerning human ethical problems and, yet, must be the abode of “some unseen power” which is the origin of the awful shadow called Intellectual Beauty. Now, what is this unseen Power and what is this sublimer world?

The 18<sup>th</sup> century preceding Shelley’s Romantic Age was an Age of Enlightenment, in which rational inquiries were made into all sorts of things. Among the topics inquired into, the aesthetic ideas of the beautiful and the sublime were very popular. In his “Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful,” Edmund Burke asserts that “whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime” (310). Burke also postulates that

... sublime objects are vast in their dimensions, beautiful ones comparatively small; beauty should be smooth, and polished; the great, rugged and negligent; beauty should shun the right line, yet deviate from it insensibly; the great in many cases loves the right line, and when it deviates, it often makes a strong deviation; beauty should not be obscure; the great ought to be dark and gloomy; beauty should be light and delicate; the great ought to be solid, and even massive. They are indeed ideas of a very different nature, one being founded on pain, the other on pleasure. (311)

Among other examples of the sublime, Burke gives the idea of “general privations” such as Vacuity, Darkness, Solitude and Silence, which, according to Angela Leighton, “cause terror because they are spaces which no longer simply proclaim the infinite spaciousness of God,” but instead they “mark a kind of absence” (23).

Gathering and modifying the general ideas of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century sublime and beautiful, Kant in his *Critique of Judgment* has, among others, these pithy statements:

The beautiful in nature is connected with the form of the object, which consists in having definite boundaries. The sublime, on the other hand, is to be found in a formless object, so far as in it or by occasion of it *boundlessness* is represented, and yet its totality is also present to thought. Thus the beautiful seems to be regarded as the representation of an indefinite concept of understanding, the sublime as that of a like concept of reason. (390)

We call that *sublime* which is *absolutely great*. (392)

... the sublime is not to be sought in the things of nature, but only in our ideas. ... the sublime is that in comparison with which everything else is small. ... the sublime is that, the mere ability to think which shows a faculty of the mind surpassing every standard of sense. (393)

The feeling of the sublime is therefore a feeling of pain arising from the want of accordance between the aesthetic estimation of magnitude formed by the imagination and the estimation of the same formed by reason. (395)

Sublimity ... does not reside in anything of nature, but only in our mind, insofar as we can become conscious that we are superior to nature within, and therefore also to nature without (so far as it influences us). Everything that excites this feeling in us, e.g. the *might* of nature which calls forth our forces, is called then (although improperly) sublime. (396)

Based on such 18<sup>th</sup>-century aesthetic ideas of the sublime and the beautiful as Burke and Kant have expounded, we can see, Shelley’s “some sublimer world” must be a

“great, absolutely great” world, a world “dark and gloomy” to mankind, thus “awful” and “founded on pain.” Besides, it is a boundless world “not to be sought in the things of nature” though we can imagine it as a totality. To approach this world is to feel pain probably because, as Kant supposes, there is “the want of accordance between the aesthetic estimation of magnitude formed by the imagination and estimation of the same formed by reason.” But, I must add, it is even more probably because the world is no longer merely an aesthetic object of Beauty which gives pleasure, but has rather turned into an ethical ideal of Goodness which is ascetic by nature.

As to Shelley’s “some unseen Power,” it naturally refers to the Supreme Goodness that resides in his “some sublimer world.” According to Angela Leighton, the 18<sup>th</sup>-century sublime is an aesthetic

which relies heavily on support from religious belief; which derives its vocabulary from the language of mystical transport; which transforms the large expanses of the universe into images of the Deity; which converts obscure sight into imaginative visionaries; which proclaims the written word inadequate by comparison to the godly imaging of the poet. (23)

Although Shelley remains a radical and an atheist throughout his life, he “cannot subscribe but uneasily and anxiously to such an aesthetic” (Leighton 23). In denying any “poisonous names” (“God and ghosts and Heaven,” etc.) for the imagined Supreme Goodness, however, Shelley’s Platonism had led him to transcend this “various world” of inconstancy into the “sublimer world” of immortality, the chief of which is the only real, omnipotent entity with full light to produce its ethically “awful shadow,” which in turn with its lesser light has shadows coming to visit this “various world,” which is full of unreal and bad shadows.

It becomes clear, then, that in Shelley’s Platonic, ethics-oriented mind, there is an unnamed and unseen Power that stands supreme in the hierarchy of all eternal Forms or Ideas, among which Intellectual Beauty is but an “awful shadow” of the Supreme Power and, yet, it also has its own light to bring us truth, grace, love, hope, etc., so as to defeat and annihilate the Jungian shadows of villainy, tyranny, vice, evil, etc. Thus, Shelley has combined the aesthetic category of the sublime and the beautiful with his ethical ideas into a doctrine-like system which we may call the “ethical sublime.”

Shelley’s idea of the “ethical sublime” is best expressed in “Mont Blanc.”

Mont Blanc, as we know, is the highest peak of the Alps. It is therefore most sublime in terms of landscape. In the poem, however, the sublime peak with its “subject mountains” (62) stands not only for “some sublimer world” with its ravine of Arve, its pines, crags, caverns, ice and rock, rainbows and storms, glaciers, etc., but also for “some sublimer world” in which the “everlasting universe of things/Flows through the mind” (1-2), a world which “has a mysterious tongue” to teach “awful doubt” and “repeal/Large codes of fraud and woe” (76, 80-81), where dwells “apart in its tranquility/Remote, serene, and inaccessible” the “still and solemn power of many sights,/And many sounds, and much of life and death” (96-97, 128-9). This still and solemn power may come down “in likeness of the Arve” from “the ice gulphs that gird his secret throne,/Bursting through these dark mountains like the flame/Of lightning through the tempest” (16-19). The “awful scene” the power creates may launch the poet into “a trance sublime and strange” with “One legion of wild thoughts” seeking “among the shadows that pass by,/Ghosts of all things that are, some shade of thee [the power],/Some phantom, some faint image” (15, 35, 41, 45-47). Such a power may bring “a flood of ruin” (107). It may also become the “breath and blood of distant lands” (123). The voice of such a power is “not understood/By all,” but a poet representing “the wise, and great, and good” may “interpret [it], or make [it] felt, or deeply feel [it]” (81-83).

In interpreting “Mont Blanc,” Angela Leighton claims that “it is the purpose of the poem to address the landscape as a possible sign of some greater Power which the poet desires to realize as a voice” (61). Shelley, according to her, is a skeptic. As a skeptic, Shelley “denies the presence of a creative God behind the landscape”; he “yearns for license to imagine an alternative origin of things, which is the origin also of his own creativity” (62). The desert has come to be “Shelley’s characteristic landscape of the sublime, because it is the landscape of lost presences or absent Power” (Leighton 65). The sublime landscape is then associated with the Power within it, which serves to energize the poet’s imagination. “Such a Power is one that the skeptic denies, but the poet fears to lose” (Leighton 72).

I agree that Mont Blanc typifies for Shelley the sublime aspects of silence and solitude, but I cannot agree that Shelley is so skeptic as to deny the presence of a creative Power behind the sublime landscape and seek instead to create with his own imagination an unnamed deity that is “neither the beneficent Creator, nor the tyrannical Ahrimanes, but an absolutely remote and unknown presence” (Leighton 69). For me, the Power lurking behind Mont Blanc is also the Power pushing the West Wind: it is at once destroyer and preserver, and it is like the spirit of revolution, creative in the sense of ever-changing the imperfect present for the future perfection. Thus, when in the end the poet asks the question—“And what were thou, and earth,

and stars, and sea,/If to the human mind's imaginings/Silence and solitude were vacancy?"—it is not a negative question to deny the "thou" or the Power as nothing but vacancy, but a positive question to suggest that the "thou" or the Power, for all its silence and solitude, is actually not mere vacancy: it is rather a mysterious presence always exercising its influences for the Good. In other words, the concluding question of this poem is like that of "Ode to the West Wind" ("O Wind,/If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?"): it is a prophetic question aiming to ethically console us rather than discourage us.

What lurks behind Mont Blanc may be a "dormant revolutionary potential" which, as Cian Duffy has convincingly explicated, is connected with the Assassins depicted in Shelley's little-known and unfinished short story, *The Assassins* (1814). According to Duffy,

by likening the sect's dormant revolutionary potential to "awful" natural phenomena (the "imprisoned earthquake" or charging "lightning-shafts") Shelley figures the Assassins—in the most explicit possible terms—as the *agents* of Necessity. Violent revolution is itself, these images imply, an awful, *natural* phenomenon—an instance of the *natural* sublime. (90)

Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* is set mostly in a Ravine of Icy Rocks in the Indian Caucasus. The locale is no less sublime than Mont Blanc. It is in truth even more sublime for the moral highness displayed therein. In the Preface to this lyrical drama, Shelley tells us that he has "a passion for reforming the world," that his purpose "has hitherto been simply to familiarize the highly refined imagination of the more select classes of poetical readers with beautiful idealisms of moral excellence," and that "Prometheus is, as it were, the type of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature, impelled by the purest and the truest motives to the best and noblest ends" (Ingpen, II, 174 & 172).

Now, outwardly we do see a revolution in the drama: the Car of the Hour arrives and Jupiter is dethroned, only to sink ever, forever, down. But a prior and greater revolution occurs in Prometheus's heart. He changes his hate for Jupiter into pity. This radical, moral reform is part of the necessity to effect the marital reunion of Prometheus with Asia and to bring about another Golden Age celebrated at the end of the work. Prometheus achieves his sublimity, indeed, less through being physically unbound at the Precipice than through being morally unbound by his hate. His boundless pity for his enemy and his boundless love for mankind are what makes him especially sublime. It is this sublimity that dispels the factor (namely, hate)

causing his disintegration and makes possible his reunion with Asia, who is his soul mate and the symbol of love.<sup>9</sup> And it is this sublimity, as Sandro Jung has suggested, that makes “the essential difference between Aeschylus and Shelley’s *Prometheus Unbound*” (90).

In the drama, Demogorgon is an enigmatic character. Commentators have usually equated Demogorgon with necessity or thought of him as process. Paul Foot reminds us that by etymology the name “Demogorgon” means “people-monster,” and therefore Asia, who descends into his cave to question him, is an “agitator” to rouse people to action (194, 197). This interpretation may be acceptable in a political way of consideration. In an aesthetic and ethical way, however, the etymological sense of “people-monster” may just go to stress the idea of “the awful or sublime aspect to the people” rather than the idea of “the revolutionary people as a monster.” In the drama, Demogorgon is described as “a tremendous Gloom” (1.207), a “veiled form” sitting on an “ebon throne,” and “a mighty Darkness” filling “the seat of power” (2.4.1 & 2-3). Yet, contradictorily, he is also described as “Ungazed upon and shapeless; neither limb,/Nor form, nor outline; yet we feel it is/A living Spirit” (2.4.5-7). He lives in a place where one must go down through “the grey, void Abyss” to reach (2.3.72). He is, therefore, identifiable with the Genius of the Earth and the Sovereign Power of the Terrestrial Daemons. But, according to Thomas Love Peacock’s account, Demogorgon is the father of the Sky, the Earth, and the Underworld as well as the Fates.<sup>10</sup> And for Angela Leighton he is presented “like the Power of ‘Mont Blanc,’ as a bleak and non-sentient alternative to the God of Christianity” (90).

Anyway, when Jupiter calls him “Awful Shade” and asks him what he is, Demogorgon replies, “Eternity,” and says, “I am thy child, as thou wert Saturn’s child,/Mightier than thee; and we must dwell together/Henceforth in darkness” (3.1.51-56). It is paradoxical that the child is said to be mightier than the father. It is also paradoxical to say Demogorgon has “rays of gloom/Dart round, as light from the meridian Sun” (2.4.3-4). And it is even more paradoxical to let a dark entity from the abyss soar high to heaven to dethrone Jupiter and bring him back down to everlasting darkness. All these paradoxes can be understood, nevertheless, if we regard Demogorgon as the greatest Shelleyan shadow, a Form of the supreme and eternal Goodness, which is aesthetically dark and ethically awful but has real light like the Sun to dispel the Jungian shadow of Jupiter and bring hope to mankind by helping, through necessity or process, this world’s another great Shelleyan shadow, i.e., the Prometheus unbound or Goodness reformed.

Shelley’s last and unfinished poem, *The Triumph of Life*, is also fraught with his idea of the ethical sublime. The poem, to be sure, is strongly influenced by

Petrarch's *Trionfi* and Dante's *Divine Comedy*, as seen in its *terza rima* form, its content of procession and victory embedded in the word "triumph," its dream-vision as the framework of the story, and its moral purpose. However, the native influence of Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality" is also there to be felt strongly, as both poems are focused on the same theme: the process of life. And the theme is a sublime topic, especially when it involves reflection upon the purpose and the end of that process.

In Wordsworth's poem, we may recall, life is portrayed as a process of forgetting the preexisting Soul, of losing the "visionary gleam," which is comparable to the starlight's fading "into the light of common day" (54-76). Now, Shelley's *The Triumph of Life* begins with a common day when "the Sun sprang forth/Rejoicing in his splendor, and the mask/Of darkness fell from the awakened Earth" (2-3). On such a day when life goes on as usual, the poet has a somber vision of the human race: he sees a chariot moving with a captive multitude in a procession and then he finds a guide (identified as Rousseau) who helps him make sense of the pageant of life and tells his own life-story. This visionary framework, I think, suggests that the poet has not forgot his soul; he still keeps his visionary gleam; his light has not yet faded into the light of common day.

The light/dark imagery is what brings sublimity into relief in the vision. While some of the captive multitude walk mournfully within the gloom of their own shadow, some flee from it as it were a ghost (58-60). The chariot comes on the silent storm of its own rushing splendor and a deformed Shape sits within it beneath a dusky hood and double cape, crouching within the shadow of a tomb, with a crape-like cloud overhead tempering the light (86-93). The charioteer is a Janus-visaged Shadow and the Shapes drawing the chariot are lost in thick lightnings (94-97). Moreover, the charioteer is blindfolded: he cannot see the chariot beams that quench the Sun. According to Rousseau (who is likened to an old root growing to strange distortion out of the hillside), the shape within the car is "Life" (178-83). Our life is full of shadows and phantoms (Napoleon's, Plato's, Bacon's, Caesar's, etc.), but Life conquers "all but the sacred few" (128). Pontiffs like Gregory and John will just rise "like shadows between Man and god" till the eclipse of the true Sun (288-92). When "a Shape all light" offers Rousseau a crystal glass, he only touches it with "faint lips," but then a new vision bursts and the fair shape wanes in the coming light (352, 358, 411-2).

The light/dark imagery may seem to be confusing. Yet, it is all clear that Shelley is here using the Platonic metaphors of the Sun with its light and shadows from the light, together with Wordsworth's idea of "true light fading into common light rather than into darkness." In Shelley's vision, the true Sun is the Supreme

Goodness: it produces the light of hope, of truth, beauty and goodness. However, the ordinary sun is not the true Sun for ordinary people. The ordinary sun just goes to make all sorts of unreal shadows or phantoms. Our life is the process and outcome of a war, and the outcome is often a triumph, in which the victor is but a deformed Shape beneath a dusky hood, his charioteer but a blindfolded Shadow, and his horses but invisible beings lost in thick lightnings. Victory as embodied in the chariot may have its glory, splendor or lightnings, which may eclipse the true Sun and fade its true light. But, after all, the victor and his chariot, charioteer, horses, and captives are themselves but unreal phantoms or shadows. Only a truly good man can be better than Rousseau and the men divine, and can accept the “Shape all light” and drink from her crystal glass with true effect.

## VI. Conclusion

In Shelley’s *The Triumph of Life*, Plato is not among “the sacred few” that are not conquered by Life. But Shelley is no doubt a Platonist. Like Plato, he is an idealist, believing in the invisible, intellectual Forms or Ideas as the eternal universals and debasing the tangible, physical objects as unreal shadows or phantoms removed from the ultimate reality. So, poetic imitation is for him not “reproduction as nearly as possible of external forms, but imitation of the ideal.”<sup>11</sup> Like Plato, too, he is ethics-oriented, ranking Goodness as the supreme Idea, seeing a purposeful cosmos directed towards the Good, preaching virtuous goodness or “intellectual beauty,” and regarding the “ethical sublime” as higher than the “political sublime” and the “aesthetic sublime.” That is why he describes Julian (his vicarious self) as a man “for ever speculating how good may be made superior” (*Julian and Maddalo*, in Jungpen, III, 177).

In *The Triumph of Life*, military and political giants (Alexander, Caesar, Napoleon, etc.) are also not among “the sacred few” to free themselves from Life’s triumphal chain. In *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley makes Fury lament that “The good want power, but to weep barren tears./The powerful goodness want: worse need for them” (1.625-6). In real life, Shelley had seen tyrants and despots, villains and evils. He was once an enthusiastic devotee to political revolutions and won his name as a radical. But we know his radicalism was but the result of his will to struggle for human freedom, for the ethical ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity.

The church men divine are likewise exempted from “the sacred few” that can detach themselves from the triumphal procession of Life. Shelley describes Julian, i.e., himself as “a complete infidel, and a scoffer at all things reputed holy” (*Julian*

and Maddalo, in Ingpen, III, 177). In real life, Shelley was blamed and punished for being an atheist and skeptic. But in the Advertisement to *The Necessity of Atheism*, Shelley claims that “a love of truth is the only motive which actuates the Author of this little tract” (Ingpen, V, 205). In fact, Shelley is skeptical towards the religious idea of “God” because He is conceived as a revengeful tyrant sitting on a throne in heaven much like an earthly king (King-Hele 35).

Even Rousseau, the guide in *The Triumph of Life*, fails to become one of “the sacred few.” Rousseau has not actually drunk from the crystal glass offered by the “Shape all light.” He is a great thinker but he “feared, loved, hated, suffered, did, and died” (200). Nevertheless, his writings have sparks which kindled a thousand signal fires including the French Revolution and enlightened people with the educational idea of living righteously and close to nature. According to David V. Smith, “Shelley was fascinated by the aesthetic as well as the political genius of Rousseau’s writing” (119), and both Rousseau and Shelley sought to “change [people’s] traditional beliefs on morals and religion” (125). Although Shelley was a revolutionary before a poet, he at last came to understand that Rousseau can be his guide and moral reformation is better than political revolution as a way of setting up the state of Goodness.

In his essay “On Life,” Shelley says, “We live on, and in living we lose the apprehension of life” (Ingpen, VI, 194). He also says that “man is a being of high aspirations ... there is a spirit within him at enmity with nothingness and dissolution” (Ingpen, VI, 194). In *A Defense of Poetry*, Shelley says, “A poem is the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth” (Ingpen, VII, 115). He believes that poetry can awaken and enlarge the mind “by rendering it the receptacle of a thousand unapprehended combinations of thought” and poetic imagination is the “great instrument of moral good” (Ingpen, VII, 117-8). He even asserts that as a poet is “the author to others of the highest wisdom, pleasure, virtue and glory, so he ought personally to be the happiest, the best, the wisest, and the most illustrious of men” (Ingpen, VII, 138). So, unlike Plato, who does not trust poetry in consideration of its ethical function, Shelley considers poetry as the best way of moral reformation. In a time when “the wise want love, and those who love want wisdom” (*Prometheus Unbound*, 627), poetry is Shelley’s only resort for sublimating the Soul.

Shelley’s large quantity of poetry is subject to any new study or interpretation. A lot of his poetry certainly has the defects of shoddy workmanship, unvisualizable descriptions, and incoherent imagery. Such defects are the result of neglecting the intrinsic beauty while striving for extrinsic goodness. Occasionally, of course, as suggested by David Taylor in speaking of his *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley may demonstrate his attention to the intrinsic form of the work as a means to express his

ethical or political idea. Yet, more often than not, his language is abandoned to emotional and sentimental treatment of his theme. And this is where he differs most from Keats. While Keats's primary concern is with Beauty, Shelley's is with Goodness. Keats is Adonais, the beautiful child of Urania; death makes him "a portion of the loveliness/Which once he made more lovely" (*Adonais*, 379-80). Shelley is Alastor, the Spirit of Solitude; he died like the unnamed poet in the poem, in pursuit of his ideal shadow, a form of his intellectual beauty. As an aesthete, Keats does not like Wordsworth's "egotistical sublime" (letter to Richard Woodhouse, October 27, 1818, in Bush 279); I think he does not like Shelley's "ethical sublime," either, for he wishes Shelley to curb his magnanimity (letter to Shelley, August 16, 1820, in Bush 298).

Shelley's magnanimity is seen in his definition of Love: "It is that powerful attraction towards all that we conceive or fear or hope beyond ourselves when we find within our own thoughts the chasm of an insufficient void and seek to awaken in all things that are, a community with what we experience within ourselves" ("On Love," in Ingpen, VI, 201). This magnanimous Love is "the bond and the sanction which connects not only man with man, but with every thing which exists" ("On Love," in Ingpen, VI, 201). And all of Shelley's poetry is the expression of this Love, including the works containing the Jungian shadows (awful for being repugnant) as well as those containing the Shelleyan shadows (awful for being dreadful and admirable) or both.

In "The Two Spirits: An Allegory," Shelley lets a spirit warn the other that the shadow of ruin and desolation is always tracking one's flight of fire like night coming over day. In response to this warning, the other spirit says, "If I would cross the shade of night,/Within my heart is the lamp of love,/And that is day!" (10-12). Harold Bloom takes the two spirits as the Blakean Specter and Emanation (323-5). I think, however, they represent two poetic views of life: one somber, the other shiny. The shiny view is based on the poet's hope for and faith in Love. And I agree with Donald Reiman that Love and Hope are cornerstones of Shelley's ethical philosophy, "Love its motivating force, and Hope for the ultimate triumph of Good over Evil the sustainer of its energy" (542-3).

Shelley's private life may be not so admirable as his poetic career. His irresponsible involvement with women, his tendency towards radicalism, atheism and skepticism, and even his impractical Platonism and idealism may be repugnant to a lot of his contemporary moralists and after. But when we consider his entire poetic career in the light of "Intellectual Beauty" or virtuous goodness or the "ethical sublime," who would not repeat Byron's words written to John Murry at the time of Shelley's death: "You were all brutally mistaken about Shelley, who was, without

exception, the *best* and least selfish man I ever knew. I never knew one who was not a beast in comparison” (quoted in Abrams et al, 663).

## Notes

1. Quoted, respectively, from online passages under the headings of “About Trinity,” “A Philosophy of Living,” and “Truth, Beauty, and Goodness” (a lecture by Rudolf Steiner). The websites are: ([www.trinityschoolinc.org/at\\_mis\\_cmmnctng.html](http://www.trinityschoolinc.org/at_mis_cmmnctng.html); [www.personal.kent.edu/~jicattles/TBG.htm](http://www.personal.kent.edu/~jicattles/TBG.htm); [wn.rsarchive.org/Lectures/TruGoo\\_index.html](http://wn.rsarchive.org/Lectures/TruGoo_index.html)).
2. From the Introduction to his “The Natural Theology of Beauty, Truth, and Goodness” ([www.integralworld.net/mcintosh4.html](http://www.integralworld.net/mcintosh4.html)).
3. From the definition of “beauty” in *Webster’s New World Dictionary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> College Edition, 1982.
4. See the entry of “Plato’s Aesthetics” in the online *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* ([plato.stanford.edu/entries/plato-aesthetics](http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/plato-aesthetics)).
5. Notopoulos differentiates and discusses three kinds of Platonism: natural, direct, and indirect Platonism. See his *The Platonism of Shelley*.
6. See Keats’s letter to Benjamin Bailey (November 22, 1819).
7. See note 7 to *Endymion* in Abrams et al, eds., *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition, Vol. 2, 801.
8. Constantia was one of the nicknames of Claire Clairmont. The poem was written obviously to celebrate Claire, but the name “Constantia” can refer to any constant image whose voice, “slow rising like a Spirit, lingers/Overshadowing [Shelley] with soft and lulling wings” (“To Constantia,” 1-2).
9. M. H. Abrams holds that Prometheus is like Blake’s Albion: he was once whole but has fallen into division, only to redeem his lost integrity through love. See his *Natural Supernaturalism*, 299-307.
10. See note 9 in Reiman & Powers, *Shelley’s Poetry and Prose*, p. 141.
11. The point is made by Melvin Solve in his *Shelley: His Theory of Poetry*, p. 73, and quoted in Earl Schulze’s *Shelley’s Theory of Poetry*, p. 16.

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「美即善，善即美」：  
雪萊的「可怖陰影」與「倫理崇宏」

董崇選

真、善、美為人類三大價值。濟慈 (Keats) 認為美、真相等，雪萊則認為美、善合一。雪萊深受柏拉圖影響，其理想主義以善為至高實體。在此理念下，其詩作闡明「心智美」(intellectual beauty)為「內在美」或「德之善」。其心中常存至善至美之「可怖陰影」，而體現「倫理崇宏」之道德美學。

關鑑字詞：

1. 真、善、美
2. 心智美
3. 陰影
4. 可怖陰影
5. 崇宏與美麗
6. 倫理崇宏
7. 柏拉圖主義、理想主義、極端主義、無神論

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*Chung-hsuan Tung is currently Professor of the Department of Applied Foreign Languages, Chung Shan Medical University, and Part-time Professor of the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, National Chung Hsing University, Taiwan*  
Email: [chtung@dragon.nchu.edu.tw](mailto:chtung@dragon.nchu.edu.tw)