

“Poetry [...] concealed by [...] facts and  
calculating processes”: political economy in the  
prose of Percy Bysshe Shelley

Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

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November 2012

## **Abstract**

This thesis focuses exclusively on Shelley's prose works. Firstly, it asks why few of those critics who admire Shelley's poetry have analysed his prose in detail. Secondly, it explores Shelley's engagement with political economy, with a view to questioning assumptions that he was hostile towards this discipline. Such a reading is indebted to the work of Connell (2001) and Bronk (2009), who argued that Malthusian and Benthamite doctrines may be aligned with literary concerns. However, my thesis extends these arguments by suggesting that Shelley refused to separate economic and aesthetic categories.

Chapter One focuses upon Shelley's early economic interests, culminating in a reading of his Notes to *Queen Mab*. These include Smith's moral philosophy and Spence's use of poetry to promote agrarian ideas. Such influences inspired Shelley to explore not only contemporary economic theories, but also the way that these were expressed. Chapter Two, which addresses Shelley's essays on vegetarianism and political reform, discusses his interest in the ways in which metropolitan reformers like Hunt addressed economic issues in aesthetic language, whilst provincial writers like Cobbett incorporated poetry into their criticism of contemporary hardship. This affinity between political economy and literature can be seen as influencing a term that Shelley introduces in his major essays: – 'Poetry'. Chapter Three, on *A Philosophical View of Reform*, explores how Shelley defines this capitalised word as encompassing all enlightening disciplines, not simply a literary genre. Chapter Four culminates in an analysis of Shelley's treatment of utilitarianism in *A Defence of Poetry*. By engaging with the theories of Mill and Ricardo, it shows that Shelley saw political economy as containing qualities that were 'concealed', yet could be revealed within its 'calculating processes'. Through exploring the way that political economy thus shaped, and was shaped by, his definition of 'Poetry', I present Shelley as a distinctive contributor to nineteenth-century economic thought.

## Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the Arts and Humanities Research Council for funding my PhD, and enabling me to fulfil my research on Shelley. I also acknowledge the financial support of the British Association for Romantic Studies, whose Stephen Copley Award scheme allowed me to undertake archive research in the British Library and University College London. BARS also generously funded my travelling expenses to Glasgow University, where I presented at their international conference. I am also grateful to the School of English, Newcastle University, for funding my research visit to the Bodleian Library at Oxford University.

I would like to thank above all my supervisor, Dr. Michael Rossington, who has continually offered support and inspiration throughout my postgraduate studies, and who encouraged my ideas on Shelley and political economy from their inception. I also thank my secondary supervisors: Dr. Ella Dzelzainis for her advice on the wide-ranging implications of nineteenth-century economic thought, and Dr. Kate Davies who first introduced me to Adam Smith's writings. I am grateful to Professor Claire Lamont for her support for my research and professional development, and to Professor Kate Chedzoy for her feedback in the drafting stages of this project.

I would like to thank my examiners, Professor Sharon Ruston and Dr. Sarah Haggarty, for their interest in this project and its potential.

I also thank Dr. Michael Quinn at University College London for granting me access to Jeremy Bentham's manuscripts and notebooks, and Dr. Bruce Barker-Benfield at the Bodleian Library for granting me permission to undertake research on Shelley's intermediate draft of *A Defence of Poetry*. I am very grateful to staff at the Literary and Philosophical Society and Tyne and Wear Archives, Newcastle upon Tyne, and in the Special Collections department of Newcastle University's Robinson Library. I also thank staff at Durham University Library, UCL Special Collections and the British Library for all their help.

I am grateful to Dr. Katie Harland for her meticulous reading of this thesis, as well as to Dr. Hazel Sheeky for her feedback and interest in my research. I would also like to thank Lucy Andrew, whose support and comments on my work have been invaluable.

Finally, I thank my parents, Les and Susan Stokoe, for their continual support, love and guidance during the drafting of this project. I also acknowledge all my family and friends who have appreciated the significant part that Shelley has played in my life over the past five years.

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**List of Abbreviations**

*Bentham Works* – *The Works of Jeremy Bentham*, ed. by John Bowring, 11 vols (Edinburgh: William Tait, 1843).

*BSM* – *The Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts* facsimile series, ed. by Donald H. Reiman and others, 23 vols (New York: Garland, 1986-2002).

*Complete Poetry* – *The Complete Poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. by Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat, 2 vols to date (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

*Essay* – Thomas Robert Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, ed. by Donald Winch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), repr. from the facsimile edn. for the Royal Economic Society, ed. by J. R. Bonar (London: Macmillan, 1966). Winch's copy-text is the 1803 edition, collated with its five revisions.

*Examiner* – James Henry Leigh Hunt and John Hunt, eds., *The Examiner* (1808-1822), ed. by Yasuo Deguchi, 5 vols (London: Pickering, 1996-98).

*Letters* – *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. by Frederick L. Jones, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964).

*Major Works* – *Percy Bysshe Shelley: The Major Works*, ed. by Zachary Leader and Michael O' Neill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

*Plan* – Jeremy Bentham, *Plan of Parliamentary Reform, in the Form of a Catechism* (1809) (London: R. Hunter, successor to J. Johnson, 1817). All subsequent citations will be from this edition and be given in parentheses in the text, excluding quotations from the manuscript of Bentham's *Plan*, which will be given in footnotes.

*Poems* – *The Poems of Shelley*, ed. by Geoffrey Matthews, Kelvin Everest *et al.*, 3 vols to date (London and New York: Longman, 1989-).

*Political Justice* – William Godwin, *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793), in *The Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin*, ed. by Mark Philp, 7 vols (London: Pickering, 1993), III, 1-447. This series is referred to as *Political and Philosophical Writings*.

*Prose* – *The Prose Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, vol. 1, ed. by E. B. Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

*Register* – William Cobbett, *Cobbett's Weekly Political Register*, 88 vols (London: William Cobbett, 1802-1835).

*Shelley and His Circle* – Donald H. Reiman and others, eds., *Shelley and His Circle*, 10 vols to date (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961-).

*Theory of Moral Sentiments* – Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), ed. by D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie, in *The Glasgow Edition of the Works and Correspondence of Adam Smith*, ed. by R. L. Campbell, A. L. Macfie, D. D. Raphael, A. S. Skinner *et al.*, 7 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976-87), vol. 1, 1-383.

*Thoughts* – William Godwin, *Thoughts Occasioned by Dr. Parr's Spital Sermon, preached at Christ Church, April 15, 1800, being a Reply to the attacks of Dr. Parr, Mr Mackintosh, the author of An Essay on Population, and Others* (London: G. G. and J. Robinson, 1801).

*Treatise* – David Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature* (1739-40), ed. by David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

*Wealth of Nations* – Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of The Wealth of Nations* (1776), ed. by R. L. Campbell and A. S. Skinner, 2 vols, in the *Glasgow Edition*, vol. 2, 13-544 (Books 1-3), 545-948 (Books 4-5).

*Works and Correspondence* – *The Works and Correspondence of David Ricardo*, ed. by Piero Sraffa, 11 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968-84).

## Introduction

### 0. 1. 'A more general view of Poetry': Defining Shelley's Economic Outlook and his Identity as a Prose Writer

On 20 March 1821, Percy Bysshe Shelley sent his publisher Charles Ollier a press copy of his major essay, *A Defence of Poetry*. The *Defence* was Shelley's response to *The Four Ages of Poetry* (1820), an essay written by his friend Thomas Love Peacock, which argued that socio-economic development led to a corresponding decline in the arts. It has often been suggested that Shelley was hostile towards this account of social progress and its origins in the doctrines of contemporary political economy. However, by demonstrating that Shelley's view of poetry encompasses theories of sympathy, self-interest and universal prosperity, this thesis suggests that he perceived political economy as something that shaped, as well as being shaped by, the aesthetic principles for which he is better known.

In order to support such a reading, it is important to clarify Shelley's definition of the 'poetry' that he wished to 'defend'. In a letter sent to Peacock on 21 March 1821, he remarked: 'I have taken a more general view of what is Poetry than you have, and [you] will perhaps agree with several of my positions without considering your own touched' (*Letters*, II, 275). This belief that Peacock could support aspects of Shelley's 'positions' suggests that the latter's criticism of the *Four Ages* rested upon its interpretation of political economy, rather than a condemnation of it. However, what is most interesting here is Shelley's capitalised word 'Poetry', especially in relation to his belief that this term was more 'general' than Peacock's definition of poetry in its conventionally literary sense. By 1821, Shelley's interest in the relationship between economic and aesthetic ideas had culminated in a definition of 'Poetry' that was unrestricted to the literary sphere. This became his term for all insights that inspired intellectual progress, and included political, philosophical, and mathematical modes of thought alongside aesthetic ideas. Furthermore, his emphasis upon generality not only encompassed a range of progressive disciplines, but even implied that these different kinds of knowledge derived from the same enlightening origins.

Such an interpretation illuminates Shelley's comments on Peacock's essay. Rather than suggesting that economic doctrines undermine poetry, he implies that political economy contains a greater social and even literary potential than its contemporary

proponents acknowledged. However, Shelley's use of the term 'Poetry' marks the culmination of an intellectual progression that can be observed within his prose oeuvre. In order to explore the way that Shelley's early interest in political economy developed into an understanding of how the discipline related to aesthetic modes of thought, it is thus important to justify my exclusive focus upon his prose works.

Shelley's skills as a prose writer have been obscured by his reputation as a poet. In particular, a proper understanding of political economy in his work has been precluded by the fact that he is defined as a 'Romantic' writer. Many critics regard the visionary insights of Shelley's poet figures as reacting against what are viewed as the reductive solutions to social hardship expressed by political economists. For example, Richard Bronk describes the *Defence* as 'a sustained attack upon political economy [...] for imagination alone can ensure that we do not succumb to the limitations that characterise its discourse'.<sup>1</sup> Bronk portrays 'imagination' here as something that rescues the human intellect from the limiting effects of political economy and its doctrines. This reflects the focus of his research, which encompasses a wide-ranging study of the way that early nineteenth-century literature and political economy can be perceived as interrelated, yet presents Shelley's work as a notable exception to this interpretation. However, I argue that Bronk's reading of the Shelleyan imagination as connected solely to the visionary insights of poets is questionable.

In many ways, Shelley can be viewed as attracted more to debates on human nature and moral philosophy that characterised Enlightenment thought than the aesthetic outlook that is attributed usually to Romantic-era writing. In this thesis, I argue that he was particularly interested in the ways in which imagination related to concepts of human sympathy, intellectual development and economic growth. It can thus be said that although his interest in political economy may at first be viewed as inimical to common understandings of Romanticism, Shelley's writing can be seen to extend the ways in which nineteenth-century attitudes towards social reform, universal prosperity and human creativity may be understood. In order to pursue such a reading of Shelley's prose, this thesis focuses exclusively upon his interest in and attitude towards political economy as it was understood in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Such a methodology excludes a more detailed engagement with economic theory. Nevertheless, I argue that an exploration of Shelley as an economic thinker, and the ways in which this challenges previous studies that present him as opposed to political

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Bronk, *The Romantic Economist: Imagination in Economics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 45.

economy as a discipline, is a necessary and worthy contribution to Shelley scholarship. This difficulty in addressing Shelley's commitment to socio-economic progress has been selectively addressed. For example, Paul Dawson produced a study of his political thought, which explored the way that Shelley's socio-economic ideas were celebrated by Chartists and other social reformers. Furthermore, Michael Scrivener investigated the way that Shelley's philosophical and aesthetic interests manifest themselves in his reform proposals.<sup>2</sup> However, there remain tensions in nineteenth-century scholarship in relation to what are viewed as Shelley's non-literary interests.

Shelley's engagement with political economy has been neglected not only because its doctrines are perceived as incompatible with the Romantic outlook, but also because it is expressed predominantly in prose form. Contemporary scholarship frequently focuses upon Shelley's poetry at the expense of his prose, and many studies either look for political or social meanings in his poetry, or engage with his prose only fleetingly. Furthermore, editions of the prose are currently incomplete or unsatisfactory. David Lee Clark's *Shelley's Prose, or the Trumpet of a Prophecy* (1954), provides an overview of Shelley's prose oeuvre, yet suffers from inaccuracies including in the dating of his works. E. B. Murray's *The Prose Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (1993) is limited to the pre-1818 essays and pamphlets. By undertaking a chronological study of Shelley's prose, I argue that these works provide important insights into his views on form and genre.

These illuminating qualities in Shelley's prose can be observed when he emphasises the importance of persuading economic thinkers to 'agree' with his statements about 'Poetry' in his letter of 21 March 1821. This suggests that works like the *Defence* not only align economic and literary modes of thought, but also explain the reasoning behind such 'positions'. His concept of the unity in all forms of knowledge is often only expressed in his poetry, reinforcing notions that his views on the poet were incompatible with the realities of contemporary hardship. However, the first part of Shelley's statement questioning 'what is Poetry' suggests that the purpose of his prose is more complex than a simple expansion of the ideas in his verse. Instead, Shelley's exploration of 'Poetry' within a prose medium can be seen to question conventional notions of form. This not only challenges distinctions between different kinds of knowledge, but also raises questions concerning the differences between poetry and

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<sup>2</sup> Scrivener's study is of particular interest in terms of the connections it draws between 'poetry and social change'. See Michael Henry Scrivener, *Radical Shelley: The Philosophical Anarchism and Utopian Thought of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), p. 218. See also P. M. S. Dawson, *The Unacknowledged Legislator: Shelley and Politics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980).

prose. In this respect, my thesis argues that although Shelley scholarship has extracted various political and social readings from his poetry, a close analysis of his prose reveals significant poetical meanings.

In the subsequent sections of this Introduction, I contextualise Shelley's receptiveness to political economy within contemporary and critical responses to the discipline. Such an approach suggests that his belief in the social, philosophical and even literary potential of political economy validates his inclusive definitions of 'Poetry'. The first section sketches the science of political economy in the early nineteenth century. The second provides an overview of the thesis as a whole, which explores Shelley's economic outlook between his first major prose work, the *Notes to Queen Mab* (1813) and his final substantial essay, *A Defence of Poetry* (1821).

## **0. 2. 'A Beneficial Conjunction?': Political Economy and Historical Movements**

In order to explore Shelley's engagement with political economy, it is necessary to contextualise the discipline within its wider historical framework. By 1821, political economy had undergone a series of transitions that culminated in the rise of utilitarian doctrines. It has become something of a commonplace to perceive these changes as transforming political economy from a discipline that encompassed moral philosophy and historical study, into a singular concern for the 'greatest happiness for the greatest number'.<sup>3</sup> Elie Halévy, for example, believes this transition to be characterised by the 'excessive confidence and narrow vision' of Jeremy Bentham, whom he holds responsible for aligning political economy with a theory of social change based upon calculation and systemisation.<sup>4</sup> This portrayal of utilitarian political economy can be viewed as inimical to modern-day interpretations of the Romantic outlook, particularly as the latter's emphasis upon individuality became challenged by such a legislative approach to morals and politics.

Stefan Collini summarises this tension by describing the dichotomy 'between, on the one hand, the temper of rational science [...] issuing in some kind of reforming politics; and, on the other hand, the temper of essentially Romantic cultural critique [...] hostile to the soulless reasonings of political economy'.<sup>5</sup> The Lake Poets contributed to this

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<sup>3</sup> Jeremy Bentham, 'Commonplace Book' (1774-5) in *Bentham Works*, x, 91-138 (p. 124).

<sup>4</sup> Elie Halévy, ed., *The Growth of Philosophic Radicalism*, trans. by Mary Morris (London: Faber, 1972), pp. xvi-xvii.

<sup>5</sup> Stefan Collini, *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain, 1850-1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 185-6.

schism, particularly the perceived incompatibility of political economy with ‘cultural’ concerns. For example, Southey condemned the discipline as symptomatic of ‘the corrupt tendency of society’, whilst Wordsworth presented its theorists as deluded by abstractions.<sup>6</sup> However, I suggest that both the process by which political economy developed and early nineteenth-century responses to it, were more complex than this notion of a ‘soulless’ science might suggest. Before such a reading can be justified, it is important to define what ‘political economy’ actually meant to nineteenth-century writers.

The subject that was termed ‘political economy’ was first introduced in universities by the lawyer George Pryme in his first course of lectures on the discipline at Cambridge in 1823. Pryme described the ways in which these studies situated the preoccupations of economists within a social context. However, he emphasised that they also extended political debates to encompass wider national concerns. He distinguished political economy from ‘pure politics’: ‘though it may seem less interesting than Political Philosophy, its utility is more extensive, since it is applicable alike to a despotism and a democracy’.<sup>7</sup> This emphasis upon the ‘extensive’ concerns of political economy implies that the discipline incorporated economic questions into government policy in a way that orientated the legislative concerns of ‘pure politics’ towards contemporary issues relating to finance. As a result, social inequality and parliamentary corruption were examined alongside the consequences of inflation, the depreciation of gold currency and commercial growth. However, Pryme’s suggestion that its debates contained both a despotic and democratic potential calls into question Halévy’s account of the way that political economy evolved.

Central to this narrative is the connection such critics make between economic and political change, specifically the tumultuous events of the late eighteenth century. For example, the founding text of political economy, Adam Smith’s *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776), places emphasis upon the role of individuals in national prosperity. The wide-ranging themes of *The Wealth of Nations*, including human sympathy and the functions of education and literature in society, have led Donald Winch to describe Smith’s work as embodying ‘the political economy of

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<sup>6</sup> Robert Southey, *St. Thomas More: or, Colloquies on the Progress and Prospects of Society* (London: John Murray, 1829), p. 262. See also Wordsworth’s description of political economists seeing ‘by artificial lights’ that ‘level down the truth/To certain general notions’ in *The Prelude*, Book XII (1805), ll. 209-212. See *The Major Works*, ed. by Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 375-590 (p. 574).

<sup>7</sup> George Pryme, *A Syllabus of a Course of Lectures on the Principles of Political Economy* (London, 1823), p. 3; p. 6.



revolution'.<sup>8</sup> Although Smith died in 1790, Winch's description suggests that his connection between intellectual and economic progress not only anticipated the French Revolution, but was also instrumental to the philosophies behind it. Reflecting upon the catalysts leading up to 1789, James Mackintosh remarked that 'the alliance between philosophers and the monied interest represented a beneficial conjunction that secured freedom'.<sup>9</sup> Although Smith was no egalitarian, Mackintosh's account suggests that his focus upon economic 'interests' had become aligned with egalitarian philosophies. A notable example of this can be seen in the parallels between William Godwin's emphasis upon the 'exercise' of individual 'understanding' in *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793), and Smith's view of moral philosophy as inspiring socio-economic development (*Political Justice*, III, 205). Such a politicised reading of political economy can also be traced in the common perception that the failures of the French Revolution impacted upon responses to Smith's founding doctrines.

The declining sense of intellectual and social possibility following insurrection and prolonged wars can be seen as informing Thomas Robert Malthus' *Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798). Malthus, with his belief that humanity could never escape its propensities towards selfishness and excess, rejects Godwin's theories of human perfectibility. Criticising such an outlook, he insists that society should 'reason from nature up to nature's God, and not to presume to reason from God to nature' (*Essay*, p. 350). These remarks not only emphasise the limitations of 'reason', but also show the ways in which Malthus transformed Smith's views on the 'nature' of individual desire into Anglican justifications for population control and social inequality. However, equally significant is the way that Malthusian doctrines became regarded as synonymous with government oppression. For example, in his first response to Malthus' criticism of *Political Justice* in 1801, Godwin comments that 'Establishment advocates could not have found a doctrine more effectual to shut out all improvement forever' (*Thoughts*, p. 63). Such an alignment of the *Essay* with 'Establishment' values can be seen as anticipating Malthus' reputation for casting a pessimistic light upon questions of socio-economic improvement. However, Godwin's remarks are also suggestive of shortcomings in this politicised reading of Malthusian principles. It is significant that he argues that the government appropriated the arguments of the *Essay* for their own ends, rather than suggesting that Malthus had

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<sup>8</sup> Donald Winch, *Riches and Poverty: An Intellectual History of Political Economy in Britain, 1750-1834* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> James Mackintosh, *Vindiciæ Gallicæ: Defence of the French Revolution* (1791) (Oxford: Woodstock, 1989), pp. 136-9.

allied himself with Tory policies. This more nuanced view of Malthus is justifiable when the latter's reputation as an apologist for immutable natural laws is contextualised within his Whig outlook, his interest in questions of rhetoric and philosophy, and his innovative approach to Enlightenment political economy.

Such politicised readings of economic developments can also be observed in relation to the way that Collini aligns utilitarian doctrines with questions of social reform. He regards Bentham's transformation of the 'greatest happiness' principle into a legislative system as having influenced figures like Mill and Ricardo in their transformation of Smith's founding principles into a series of economic laws.<sup>10</sup> However, such differences between Malthus' scepticism towards social improvement and the progressive doctrines of utilitarianism are far from clear cut. Although Bentham and his followers were committed to Reform, the former maintained that 'perfect happiness belongs to imaginary philosophic regions'.<sup>11</sup> This belief that socio-economic perfection was an unattainable ideal characterised by the 'philosophic' approaches to political economy that he desired to eliminate, suggests that utilitarian Reform was limited to laws that were of Bentham's making. These attempts to interpret political economists in the context of revolution, counter-revolution and reform can thus be seen as underestimating the complexities of their theories. Furthermore, they present a linear account of economic development that fails to recognise the way that such thinkers engaged with their predecessors. However, a new mode of interpretation calls into question the idea that political economists sought to render the innovations of the past outmoded. It also undermines the notion that at its various stages, political economy alternated between upholding 'despotic' and 'democratic' regimes.

Emma Rothschild acknowledges that in the progress of political economy, 'the doctrines of successive founding figures [were] refined, diffused and eventually transcended'.<sup>12</sup> Such a description suggests that the idea of historical stages in political economy is useful. This can be seen in Rothschild's account of the 'three large phases' that characterised nineteenth-century political economy, of which only the first is a main concern of this thesis.<sup>13</sup> However, she implies that this process of transcending

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<sup>10</sup> Collini, *Public Moralists*, p. 186.

<sup>11</sup> Jeremy Bentham, *Bentham Works*, I, 195.

<sup>12</sup> Emma Rothschild, 'Political Economy', in *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Political Thought*, ed. by Gareth Stedman Jones and Gregory Claeys (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 748-80 (p. 751).

<sup>13</sup> Rothschild draws attention to the ways in which the attempts of James Mill and David Ricardo to transform Smith's principles into a series of inflexible laws, were subject to a counter-revolution in the 1840s. John Stuart Mill, whose works lie outside the scope of this thesis, played an important role in this reaction against utilitarian political economy. Finally, she describes the way that this was followed by a

the limitations of its founding ideas was achieved through engaging with, rather than transforming such doctrines themselves. Rothschild's allusions to refinement and diffusion suggest that rather than being inspired by the historical circumstances in which they occurred, advances in political economy should be seen as arising from a dialogue between contemporaries and their predecessors. She can thus be seen to adopt a similar position to Winch, with whom I agree, that it is 'unwise for intellectual historians to commit themselves to the view that ideas reflect events'.<sup>14</sup> This is supported by Rothschild's assertion that political economy had 'an odd and disorientating relationship to the political dichotomies of the time', because its theorists cannot be categorised by factional labels that fail to encompass the complexities of their views. However, what is most interesting is that she regards political economy to be primarily 'a drama [...] of the nature of human nature'.<sup>15</sup> It is this preoccupation with humanity and its relation to the wider socio-economic sphere, which, I argue, both reveals the complexity of political economy and challenges linear concepts of its development.

It was this tendency to both engage with established theories and to add to them more original insights that, I suggest, attracted Shelley to the outlook of political economists. He was particularly interested in the way that this method impacted upon the differing views of human nature adopted by economic thinkers, and the ways in which these were underpinned by approaches to imagination. For example, Smith's belief that individuals could identify with and benefit others through their own self-interest centred upon imaginative sympathy. The importance of imagination in political economy can also be seen as manifesting itself in the ways that Smith's successors sought to develop his precepts. Whilst Malthus admired the connection Smith made between the moral and economic spheres, he rejected the notion that self-interest could inspire the individual to look beyond himself. In contrast, Bentham and his followers sought to transform Smith's view of self-interest into a legislative system that alienated the imaginative faculty altogether. Shelley can be seen as engaging with these debates on human nature. However, rather than simply exploring the way that imagination was both aligned with, and alienated from economic development, I suggest that he believed that this process contained the potential to encompass more aesthetic modes of thinking. In order to justify this reading, it is necessary to engage with wider critical responses to

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counter-counter revolution against inductive approaches to political economy in the 1870s, an event that still impacts upon present-day understanding of economics. See Rothschild, 'Political Economy', p. 751.

<sup>14</sup> Winch, *Riches and Poverty*, p. 7.

<sup>15</sup> Rothschild, *Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Political Thought*, pp. 751-2.

this relationship between Romanticism and political economy, and Shelley's place within them.

### **0. 3: Shelley and a 'Romantic' Political Economy**

So far, I have suggested that Shelley's economic interests question separations of his poetry from his identity as what we would now term a social scientist. However, it is also necessary to explain in more detail why political economy is often excluded from nineteenth-century literary scholarship. In order to answer this question, it is important to acknowledge that 'political economy', with its connection to government policy and human motives, is an outmoded term in the twenty-first century. As a result of the movement to marginalise studies of national prosperity into a narrow science during the late nineteenth century, political economy was replaced with the more focused term, 'economics'. Stavros Ioannides and Klaus Nielsen, in their study of this movement, describe present-day economics as 'a withdrawn state, [having] degenerated into mathematical exercises'.<sup>16</sup> This concept of a withdrawal in economics from human-centred preoccupations is important when confronting the difficulties experienced by Romanticist scholars in their approaches to political economy.

In his determination to question the schism between Romanticism and political economy, Philip Connell provides a comprehensive study of this cultural dilemma. Engaging with sources from across the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Connell challenges the reluctance of Romanticist scholars to re-examine their conceptions about political economy. He remarks, 'however sophisticated and self-interrogating literary scholars have proved themselves in questioning "Romantic ideology", the same kinds of sceptical self-awareness have seldom been extended to their use of such concepts as [...] "political economy"'.<sup>17</sup> This desire to redress assumptions about the mathematical methods of political economy and the aesthetic characteristics of Romantic literature leads Connell to situate economic questions within a range of political, philosophical and educational concerns. His belief that political economy exerted cultural influence upon society informs his argument that the discipline could be viewed as compatible with the arts, specifically in terms of the way that it is treated in early nineteenth-

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<sup>16</sup> Stavros Ioannides and Klaus Nielsen, eds., *Introduction to Economics and the Social Sciences* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2007), p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> Philip Connell, *Romanticism, Economics and the Question of 'Culture'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. vii.

century literature. Although Connell mentions Shelley's engagement with political economy in his major prose works, he confines his analysis to Shelley's admiration of the legislative aspects of the discipline. In contrast, I argue that Shelley's prose not only challenges Romantic perceptions of political economy, but also posits an uncertainty towards such aesthetic and economic categories.

This approach informs Chapter One, which both introduces Shelley's economic interests and explores his conviction that political economy contained literary qualities. It begins by questioning readings such as Dawson's, which suggest that the utopian strands of Shelley's thought led him to 'lack the conceptual equipment to analyse economic structures'.<sup>18</sup> In contrast, I suggest that Shelley's attraction to Smith's works, as well as his interest in Enlightenment concepts of the mind and human nature, influenced him as much as Godwin's revolutionary philosophy. Shelley's admiration of Smith has been identified by James Chandler, who acknowledges that 'the reconstitution of the case that we find in Smith's moral philosophy, is reiterated through much of what we think of as mainline Romanticism'.<sup>19</sup> However, Chandler's study perpetuates the tendency amongst literary critics to admire Smith's progressive philosophy at the expense of analysing his economic innovations. In contrast, my exploration of Shelley's 1812 Irish pamphlets argues that Shelley both identified the relationship between Smithian economics and moral philosophy and sought to orientate these aspects of Smith's thought towards resolving contemporary hardship.

Shelley's interest in alleviating the suffering of the poor informs the main focus of Chapter One. This chapter explores the Notes he wrote to accompany his first major poem, *Queen Mab*. I suggest that this work reflects the extension of Shelley's interest in classical political economy to provincial agrarian arguments, particularly the 'Land Plan' of Thomas Spence. Shelley's receptiveness to Spence's attempts to abolish property rights has been interpreted by Paul Foot as reflecting his levelling outlook.<sup>20</sup> Foot focuses upon Shelley's preoccupation with the plight of the working poor, particularly his involvement with the Tremadoc Embankment project that inspired the Notes. However, I suggest that Shelley was not only attracted to a range of economic outlooks, but also to the ways in which these were articulated. His interest in Spence's expression of his economic principles in poetry can be seen to impact upon his ideas concerning the functions of poetry and prose in the Notes. I also explore the way that

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<sup>18</sup> Dawson, *The Unacknowledged Legislator*, pp. 47-8.

<sup>19</sup> James K. Chandler, *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 230.

<sup>20</sup> Paul Foot, *Red Shelley* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1980), p. 92.

Shelley's attraction to Erasmus Darwin's tendency to express theories of agriculture and industry in verse contributed to his belief that political economy contained literary qualities.

These arguments are extended in Chapter Two, which charts developments in Shelley's economic outlook and in his ideas about the way that these should be expressed. The first part explores Shelley's receptiveness to utopian ideas when he was writing his essay on vegetarianism – *A Vindication of Natural Diet* (1813). Shelley's engagement in this work with figures such as Joseph Ritson and John Frank Newton, who believed that the evils of commerce could be redressed by a 'return to nature', is often regarded as eccentric. However, I argue that Shelley was interested in the idea that vegetarianism raised economic questions. For example, his scepticism towards the idea of a 'natural' state can be seen as inspiring an interest in the doctrines of Bernard Mandeville. Mandeville's admiration of subversive human 'passions' suggested that nature could not provide the solution to socio-economic corruption. This attraction to the non-rational may be seen as not only as contributing to Shelley's view of commerce, but also as enlightening him into the ways in which political economy could incorporate verse, fable and myth into its narratives. Whilst Ritson and Newton deployed these techniques in order to criticise commerce, Mandeville utilised both poetry and prose in order to express his views on the benefits of self-interest. These outlooks can be viewed as both strengthening Shelley's belief in the literary qualities of political economy, and inspiring him to extend these ideas.

The second part of Chapter Two focuses upon the political prose Shelley wrote in 1817. Following his involvement with Leigh Hunt's circle in 1816, Shelley became absorbed by the contemporary Reform crisis. Jeffrey Cox argues that the aesthetic preoccupations of the Hunt circle should be seen to reflect their belief that poetry could become the most effective weapon against tyranny.<sup>21</sup> This conviction can be observed in Hunt's writings on political economy, which depict issues such as inflation in poetry and drama. However, I argue that Shelley was not only attracted to Hunt's expression of socio-economic issues in literature, but also to the latter's awareness of labouring-class hardship. Kevin Gilmartin notes that generalisations of 'liberal' and 'radical' politics cannot be so easily mapped onto Hunt's writing.<sup>22</sup> This becomes particularly marked in his economic views, which often combine his literary outlook with the

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<sup>21</sup> Jeffrey N. Cox, *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School: Keats, Shelley, Hunt, and their Circle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 54.

<sup>22</sup> Kevin Gilmartin, *Print Politics: The Press and Radical Opposition in Early Nineteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 196.

language and agendas of the provincial reformers. I suggest that this aspect of Hunt's writing inspired Shelley to engage with one provincial reformer in particular.

In 1817, Shelley became a regular reader of the shrewd, polemical defence of labourers expressed in William Cobbett's *Weekly Political Register*. As I will argue, Shelley first expressed his 'contempt for Cobbet [*sic*]' to Godwin in a letter of 29 July 1812 (*Letters*, I, 318). However, his letters of 1818 and 1819 suggest that he was receiving the *Register* on a regular basis. For example, on 9 November 1818, Shelley praises Peacock for reading 'the *Cobbets* [*sic*] on your breakfast table', thus implying that he was also familiar with Cobbett's weekly bulletins on the national crisis (*Letters*, II, 53). Furthermore, it is significant that he includes Cobbett amongst the authors he had been recently reading in a letter to Peacock of 20-21 June 1819. Amidst his references to Shakespeare and Peacock's own *Nightmare Abbey* (1818), Shelley remarks: 'Cobbet [*sic*] still more & more delights me, with all my horror of the sanguinary commonplaces of his creed. His design to overthrow Bank notes by forgery is very comic' (*Letters*, II, 99). Shelley remains suspicious of Cobbett's determination to incite the common people in their present state of understanding. Nevertheless, his attraction to Cobbett's eccentric plan to rebel against inflationary legislation by flooding the Bank of England with counterfeit currency, suggests that he read the latter's economic views with interest. Cobbett's distaste for what he viewed as the abstractions of classical political economists, has led Noel Thompson to conclude that 'working-class attitudes to political economy embodied a strong anti-intellectualist strain'.<sup>23</sup> However, I argue that Cobbett's writing reflects a sophisticated engagement with contemporary economic theories. It also draws parallels with the 'intellectual' rhetoric that Thompson views his work as opposing. For example, Cobbett often incorporates Miltonic imagery and poetic language into his diatribes against paper money, specifically in connection to his elegiac view of an agricultural England. Just as in his response to utopian narratives, Shelley believed that the literary qualities of political economy could be deployed not to reclaim a pre-industrial paradise, but to orientate commercial developments towards socially-beneficial ends. Nevertheless, I argue that the impact of these tensions in the expression of economic views by reformers across the reform factions is evident in his pamphlets of 1817. Both *A Proposal for Putting Reform to the Vote Throughout the Kingdom* and *An Address to the People on the Death of the Princess Charlotte* question assumptions that Shelley sought to reconcile political

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<sup>23</sup> Noel W. Thompson, *The People's Science: The Popular Political Economy of Exploitation and Crisis, 1816-34* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 9.

differences. Instead, I argue that this expression of economic analysis in literary forms led him to identify an unacknowledged point of union between so-called ‘liberals’ and ‘radicals’.

This notion that political economy could not only be aligned with literature but could itself contain literary qualities informs the introduction to Chapter Three, which focuses upon the Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*. The Preface contains some of Shelley’s most important statements in relation to his view that ‘Poetry’ includes all enlightening disciplines. Consequently, I argue that rather than presenting Poetry as a substitute for financial systems, Shelley’s work emphasises that Poetry could be found within contemporary political economy. This reading informs my exploration of Shelley’s major prose work of 1819 – *A Philosophical View of Reform*. Arguably his most sustained engagement with political economy, this essay provides an overview of the origins of socio-economic corruption, its present incarnation, and the way that this must be addressed through contemporary reform. However, whilst Shelley begins with a historical narrative, I explore his second section first in order to suggest that his discussion of present economic theories shapes his approach to the past. This examination of contemporary political economy focuses upon Shelley’s response to Malthus’ *Essay* with a view to questioning assumptions that he dismissed its doctrines. Shelley objected to Malthus’ deployment of Smith’s precepts in order to justify inequality. Nevertheless, I argue that he identified in Malthus’ use of rhetoric and literary allusion more dynamic qualities that could be developed in contemporary political economy.

These ideas lead into Shelley’s treatment of the past. He suggests that the negative consequences of economic expansion derive from the misinterpretation of its progressive impulse at different historical points. Such a theory underpins Shelley’s analysis of Reform and its future, in relation to his first detailed reading of utilitarian doctrines. By engaging with Bentham’s systematic approach to socio-economic development, Shelley refines his belief that political economy could not so easily be aligned with tyrannical or libertarian outlooks. Instead, he suggests that even the most oppressive economic principles contained an impulse that could escape such constraints, whilst those that were committed to ‘progress’ required careful examination. Jerrold Hogle has explored Shelley’s scepticism towards generalising political economy in this way. As he remarks, ‘aspects of “tyrannical” modes generate rebellious energy, providing ammunition for later forms of resistance’.<sup>24</sup> Contrary to those who

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<sup>24</sup> Jerrold E. Hogle, *Shelley's Process: Radical Transference and the Development of his Major Works*



appropriated political economy to uphold a reactionary or revolutionary agenda, Shelley thus identified an ‘energy’ within its doctrines that defied such alignments. Hogle portrays this process of ‘resistance’ as a way of transforming economic methods to make them compatible with more aesthetic outlooks. In contrast, I suggest that Shelley viewed political economy as already ‘Poetic’.

Such ideas inform Chapter Four, which explores the ways in which Shelley expanded his interest in utilitarian political economy in *A Defence of Poetry* (1821). Beginning with a reading of Peacock’s *The Four Ages of Poetry*, I question the view that he sought to replace its narrow attitudes to social progress with the insights of the poet. Rather than viewing utilitarianism as an adversary to poetry, its doctrines inspired Shelley to scrutinise his own concept of what poetry really was. As well as his expressed admiration for aspects of Peacock’s views on history and contemporary literature, I argue that Shelley possessed a detailed knowledge of other utilitarian thinkers. For example, he was attracted to the work of James Mill, whose writings, such as *The History of British India* (1818), reflected a dynamic approach to intellectual development. This chapter also explores Shelley’s receptiveness to David Ricardo, a figure whose mathematical methods seem at first, far removed from poetic preoccupations. However, I suggest that Shelley was not only attracted to Ricardo’s *On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* (1817), but also viewed its methodology as containing qualities that could be included within his definition of ‘Poetry’. Shelley’s study of utilitarian doctrines led him to believe that contemporary attitudes towards political economy could be extended. However, they also inspired him to embark upon a study of the ways in which ‘Poetry’ could be redefined.

As in *A Philosophical View*, Shelley divides his essay into sections on past, present and future. However, the *Defence* contextualises economic questions within a wider narrative of social and intellectual progress. My close readings show the ways in which Shelley’s engagement with utilitarian doctrines inspired him to re-evaluate his conceptions about Enlightenment political economy. I argue that Smith and Hume’s discussions of philosophy and imagination in their founding doctrines implied that the calculative methods of utilitarian political economy contained a more extensive social potential. Finally, I explore the way that Shelley’s study of utilitarian doctrines influenced his proposals about how the future should be made. These suggest that, rather than negating the role of literature in contemporary society, utilitarianism had the potential to become the most powerful embodiment of Poetry in the early nineteenth

century. Although Maureen McLane remarks that in this respect Shelley ‘aims to free poetry from the calculating faculty’, I argue that he seeks to free the ‘Poetry’ inherent within the calculating faculty itself.<sup>25</sup>

I began this Introduction by suggesting that Shelley’s concept of political economy in relation to his ‘general view’ of ‘Poetry’ questions previous readings of his reaction to this discipline. I argued that representations of Shelley as either hostile towards political economy or seeking to reconcile the discipline with literary concerns, are both inadequate. I also suggested that it is in Shelley’s prose that his ideas about Poetry are most vividly expressed. Such an exploratory approach to genre and form arguably explains why Shelley was so attracted to political economy. Contrary to critical attempts to align them with a narrative of revolutionary and counter-revolutionary movements, I suggest that political economists, in both their doctrines and their rhetoric, continually evaded such simplifications. In order to support this reading of Shelley in relation to political economy, it is important to begin by exploring his earliest economic interests.

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<sup>25</sup> Maureen McLane, *Romanticism and the Human Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 20.

**Chapter One: Political Economy, Radical Agrarianism and Shelley's Style in the  
Notes to *Queen Mab***

**1. 1. 'Why is it Visionary, have you tried?': Shelley's Early Economic Interests**

On 26 July 1811 Shelley wrote to his friend Elizabeth Hitchener describing his anger towards economic exploitation and outlining his proposals to redress social inequality. Such themes in Shelley's letters and early prose are often seen to reflect his hostility towards the rise of commerce and its perpetuation of the divides between rich and poor. Alan Weinberg, for example, comments that 'Shelley viewed commerce as inimical to beneficial human relationships'.<sup>1</sup> Weinberg regards this notion of economic expansion as alienating humanity to underpin Shelley's early attraction to revolutionary philosophies. However, in this chapter I argue that Shelley's preoccupation with alleviating socio-economic hardship, and the various techniques he employs to achieve this, cannot simply be aligned with a desire to revive 1790s ideals. Instead, I suggest that even his earliest writing reflects his attraction to political economy as a discipline, as well as an interest in the way that its theories were both expressed and disseminated.

Far from reflecting a desire to replace established economic systems with utopian alternatives, Shelley's letter to Hitchener is suggestive of his admiration for the doctrines of political economy:

What can be worse than the present aristocratical system? Here are in England ten millions, only 500,000 of whom live in a state of ease; the rest earn their livelihood with toil & care – If therefore these 500,000 aristocrats who possess resources of various degrees of immensity were to permit them to be resolved into their original stock, that is, entirely to destroy it, if each earned his own living, which I do not see is at all incompatible with the *height* of intellectual refinement, then I affirm each would be happy & contented [...] – 'But this paradise is all visionary!' – Why is it visionary, have you tried? The first inventor of the plough doubtless was looked upon as a mad innovator. (*Letters*, I, 127)

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<sup>1</sup> Alan Weinberg, "'All Things are Sold': The Degrading Intrusiveness of Commerce with Reference to Shelley's *Queen Mab V*", *Keats-Shelley Review*, 20 (2006), 102-119 (p. 111).

Shelley's emphasis upon 'each' earning 'his own living' may be seen as being influenced by Godwin's views on utopian communities in *Political Justice*. However, the letter's emphasis upon equalising agricultural 'stock' implies his receptiveness to the work of Adam Smith. Shelley's arguments about the economic importance of all sectors of society may be seen to parallel Smith's views on 'intellectual refinement' and equality in *The Wealth of Nations*. This attraction to classical political economy is also implied by Shelley's citations of statistics and emphasis upon social happiness, which, I will suggest, are reminiscent of the mathematical techniques that characterise both Malthusian and utilitarian methodology.

In addition to these undertones of classical political economy is the sympathy Shelley expresses for labourers. This preoccupation with the welfare of those who work 'with toil & care' may be viewed as a reflection of his interest in agrarian ideas. Certainly, his attack upon the 'aristocratical system' and desire to 'destroy' unearned privileges may be viewed as sharing parallels with the agendas of provincial writers like Spence and Cobbett. However, Shelley's remarks not only contain allusions to educated and provincial approaches to political economy, but also suggest that he was experimenting with the ways in which these could be expressed. It is significant that he combines these economic observations with a very different kind of rhetoric, fusing such practical analysis with a 'visionary' and apparently unobtainable 'paradise'. These characteristics of Shelley's early prose are in keeping with what Weinberg presents as his desire to eradicate economic theories that are 'inimical' to his egalitarian desires. However, I argue that these shifts in language reflect instead Shelley's belief that the doctrines of political economy contained a greater social, moral and even literary potential than contemporary approaches to them acknowledged. Such a reading is supported by the way that Shelley connects his 'visionary' desires to economic innovations like the 'plough', rather than restricting them to the intellectual outlook that informed Godwinian philosophy.

These remarks in Shelley's letter may thus be seen to embody the aims of this chapter, which begins with his earliest engagement with political economy in his Irish pamphlets of 1812, and culminates in an exploration of his first major prose work – the Notes to *Queen Mab* (1813). I argue that Shelley's anger towards the concept that 'all things are sold' is more complex than Weinberg's reading of his hostility towards commerce would suggest (*Queen Mab*, Note to V, 177).<sup>2</sup> It will be argued that in his

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<sup>2</sup> Shelley, Notes to *Queen Mab* (1813) in *Poems*, I, Note to V, 177. All subsequent citations from this work will be from this edition and will be given in parentheses, abbreviated as *Queen Mab*, in the text.

early prose, he explores the way that the progressive potential within political economy has been restricted, rather than destroyed, by contemporary approaches to the discipline. Focusing upon his attraction to Enlightenment political economy and its discussion of morals and philosophy, I argue that Shelley presents the theories of Smith and Hume as complementary to practical developments in agriculture and industry.

Secondly, I explore the way that Shelley's preoccupation with labouring-class hardship drew him to provincial periodical writers, specifically Spence's attempts to abolish private property. My close reading of Spence focuses not only upon his levelling principles, but also his experimentations with form and genre. By suggesting that Shelley was drawn to Spence's bricolage techniques in his periodical *Pigs' Meat*, which combine verse, myth and economic analysis, I suggest that such provincial writers influenced the rhetoric as well as the themes of the Notes. Finally, I argue that Shelley's interest in political economy was closely related to his fascination with scientific discovery, particularly his conviction that traditionally empirical disciplines could be expressed in aesthetic language. This chapter concludes by exploring the ways in which Erasmus Darwin employs poetry to articulate his discoveries in relation to agriculture and industry, and incorporated aesthetic language into the notes he wrote to accompany such verse. By drawing attention to Darwin's questioning of concepts of genre, it will be suggested that his work influenced Shelley's treatment of poetry and prose in the Notes.

Overall, this chapter argues that Shelley's view of political economy and its scientific implications has been insufficiently studied in comparison with the aspects of the Notes that are viewed as more characteristic of his thought: atheism, free love and revolutionary philosophy. Stephen Behrendt explores the reasons behind this separation. He suggests that Shelley's division of the Notes into a series of essays should be viewed as a compositional technique, rather than an attempt to isolate particular ideas:

Long regarded as a 'canonical' writer, Shelley nevertheless wrote much that has historically not been regarded as part of the English literary canon. Any thorough examination of Shelley's corpus must come to grips with this

seeming paradox and consider what it reveals about literary taste, critical judgement, and the cultural factors involved in canon formation.<sup>3</sup>

Behrendt's comment about 'canonical' definitions of literature suggests that the attempts of scholars to categorise Shelley's ideas undo his attempts to subvert notions of genre and the forms of expression that are deemed appropriate for different disciplines. In line with Behrendt's point, I argue that Shelley's Notes embody a distinctive exploration of the social, philosophical and literary potential of political economy.

Although the scope of this chapter is concerned with the prose Shelley wrote between 1812 and 1813 his interest in political economy, as is evident in his letter of 26 July 1811, can be traced prior to this. Shelley's earliest writing does not focus primarily upon economic issues, yet it is important to provide a brief overview of how his attraction to such ideas began. When Shelley was sent to Syon House Academy in 1802, he was taught by two tutors who encouraged his nascent enthusiasm for scientific experiments and their role in social improvement. The first of these mentors was Adam Walker, a figure whose research explored the ways in which the human and natural worlds could 'mutually work for each other'.<sup>4</sup> Walker's speculations on the superior resilience of plants compared to animals, and the case he makes for encouraging vegetable cultivation for economic benefit, may be seen as shaping Shelley's interests in agriculture. The second tutor, with whom Shelley engaged to a greater extent at Eton in 1809, was James Lind. Lind was a radical figure who not only encouraged Shelley's views on the connection between science and the arts, but also introduced him to reading material that may have influenced his interest in political economy.

Lind had extensive connections amongst Darwin's Lunar Society who were pioneers in industry, manufacturing and agriculture. It is thus possible that he first introduced Shelley to Darwin's fusion of socio-economic observations with poetry. As Desmond King-Hele summarises, 'Lind infected Shelley with the Lunar spirit'.<sup>5</sup> Lind also encouraged Shelley to read the works of Condorcet and Voltaire, and, significantly, Godwin's *Political Justice*. Shelley was attracted to Godwin's conviction of the infinite powers of the human mind, and he related such philosophy increasingly to his scientific

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<sup>3</sup> Stephen C. Behrendt, 'Literary History and Shelley's Prose Fiction', in *Zastrozzi and St. Irvyne* by Percy Bysshe Shelley (Ontario: Broadview Literary Texts, 2002), 9-26 (p. 9).

<sup>4</sup> Adam Walker, *Analysis of a Course of Lectures on Natural and Experimental Philosophy* (Kendal: Walker, 1790), p. 42.

<sup>5</sup> Desmond King-Hele, *Erasmus Darwin and the Romantic Poets* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), pp. 189-90.

interests. This suggests that Lind contributed not only to Shelley's appreciation of revolutionary philosophy, but also to his attempts to combine such an outlook with socio-economic aims. In addition to Lind's belief that science could improve the world, he introduced Shelley to the technique of pamphleteering, owned his own printing press, and distributed subversive literature. This interest in empirical theories and the way that these were both expressed and conveyed to a wider audience, may be seen as characterising Shelley's first attempt at pamphleteering.

Shelley's attendance at Oxford ended with his notorious expulsion on 25 March 1811 for printing and distributing his essay against institutional Christianity, *The Necessity of Atheism*. However, it is rarely acknowledged that it was at Oxford where Shelley began to expand his economic interests. Soon after his arrival, Shelley began a friendship with Thomas Jefferson Hogg. Hogg's reminiscences are to be treated with caution, as he often provides a romanticised portrayal of Shelley. However, his account is useful in terms of identifying Shelley's economic interests. Hogg was puzzled by Shelley's attraction to political economy, yet the pair embarked on a period of intensive study.

Evidence from Shelley's letters and Hogg's account suggests that their reading included an analysis of Smith's works. For example, Shelley's letters from this period include Smith amongst the various sceptics and radicals that he and Hogg admired. Indeed, on 6 February 1811 he writes to his father describing the works of 'Dr. Adam Smith' as 'characterised by the strictest morality', and his interest in moral 'sentiments' is suggestive of Smith's influence upon developing his scientific and economic interests in order to benefit humanity at large (*Letters*, I, 50-1).<sup>6</sup> In the same letter, it is significant that he describes Smith as amongst 'the directors of literature & morality', and as promoting 'the best interests of mankind' (*Letters*, I, 50-1). Not only does this alignment of 'morality' with human 'interests' imply that Shelley was as familiar with Smith's economic works as with his essay on moral philosophy, but his association of Smith with literary forms of writing suggests that he was already regarding political economy as having the potential to embrace aesthetic concerns.

Shelley was practical in his exploration of the economic advantages that could be inspired by scientific discovery. Hogg recalls his comments on chemical experiments:

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<sup>6</sup> Soon after Shelley and Harriet Westbrook returned to London from Dublin, following their flight from the Tremadoc Embankment project in March 1813, Hogg recalls that Harriet was reading from Shelley's book collection, including 'Smith's Theory of Moral Sentiments'. See Thomas Jefferson Hogg, *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 2 vols (London: Edward Moxon, 1858), II, 420.

‘What is the cause of the remarkable fertility of some lands, and of the hopeless sterility of others? [...] by chemical agency the philosopher may work a total change, and transmute an unfruitful region into a land of exuberant plenty’.<sup>7</sup>

It is interesting that Shelley maintains that ‘total change’ could only be achieved through the ‘chemical’ and ‘philosophical’ methods of science and political economy, as opposed to political activism. Indeed, his views on the ‘exuberant’ possibilities of agriculture may be seen to parallel Smith’s belief that farming, and the labourers involved in it, were the key to perpetual economic growth. For example, in the same excerpt from Hogg’s biography, it is significant that Shelley may be seen to contemplate Smith’s concerns for the intellectual deterioration of the labourer. He expresses anger that ‘the larger proportion of the human species’ is ‘wholly consumed in severe labour’, and that it has ‘no leisure for recreation or the high improvement of the mind’. This concern for the labourer’s leisure may be seen to reflect Shelley’s reading of Godwin, rather than Smith (see *Political Justice*, III, 439). However, Shelley’s acceptance that ‘want’ and ‘insufficient provision’ are issues that cannot easily be remedied by the equalisation of labour, draws greater parallels with Smith’s ideas about the way that self-interest can generate universal prosperity.<sup>8</sup> Although I return to Shelley’s interest in Smith’s thought in both his Irish pamphlets and the Notes to *Queen Mab*, these allusions in Hogg’s account imply that his awareness of Smith’s works was more intensive than is usually supposed in this period.

Richard Holmes supports this argument that Shelley’s interest in Smith’s scepticism and moral philosophy extended to his ideas about agricultural development. He suggests that his ‘intellectual diet seems to have been a richer and richer one of sceptics and radicals: David Hume, [...] Godwin, and even the political economist Adam Smith’.<sup>9</sup> However, I suggest that rather than viewing Smith as an anomaly in Shelley’s reading at Oxford, the latter’s alignment of political economy with a range of moral, social and even literary concerns appealed to his concept of the discipline’s progressive potential. Indeed, contrary to Donald Reiman’s assertion that Shelley’s economic views are confined to ‘the viewpoint of a landed aristocrat’, his emphasis upon agricultural

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, I, 49-50.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, I, pp. 48-9.

<sup>9</sup> Richard Holmes, *Shelley: The Pursuit* (London: Harper Perennial, 2005), p. 43.



developments implies that technology fascinated him.<sup>10</sup> There is also a suggestion that Shelley's reading of Malthus, whose finite view of the world's provisions is here contradicted by this progressive approach to agriculture, was influential.

Shelley's interest in political economy may also be seen to complement his study of the philosophies that inspired his notorious pamphlet. Notwithstanding the influence of Godwin and materialists like Holbach upon its rejection of divine law, *The Necessity of Atheism* can be regarded as primarily indebted to Hume. Indeed, Hogg remarks that during their time at Oxford, 'Hume's Essays' were a favourite book of Shelley's, and the latter was 'always ready to put forward in argument the doctrines they uphold'.<sup>11</sup> Shelley admired Hume's argument that 'belief' is dictated by the 'degree' of impressions upon the mind.<sup>12</sup> As a result, the mind can only make a 'decision' on truth or falsehood based upon the strength of impressions from the 'senses' or 'experience'.<sup>13</sup> However, Shelley's allusion to Hume's doctrines has wider significance in relation to the intellectual origins of such ideas.

Hume's philosophy grew out of the Scottish Enlightenment tradition to which Smith's work on human sentiments and political economy also belonged. The two often discussed ideas and concluded that the mind had infinite potential, specifically the imaginative faculty, which they interpreted in different ways. Hume's view of the mind was developed by his interest in imagination, which he presents as able to re-organise and create new ideas from sense impressions. In contrast, Smith perceived imagination as a moral faculty. These ideas will be explored later, but it is important to observe that Shelley connected his attraction to Enlightenment philosophy to the human 'interests' that informed political economy (*Necessity*, p. 5). Both Shelley's earliest preoccupations and the ideas in *The Necessity of Atheism* thus contain suggestions that he was contemplating theories that informed Enlightenment political economy. They also illuminate his restless desire to respond to contemporary hardship following his expulsion from Oxford. However, it is in the political pamphlets he wrote whilst in Ireland the following year that his interests in the social, moral and literary potential of political economy became most developed.

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<sup>10</sup> Donald H. Reiman, 'Shelley as Agrarian Reactionary', in *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, ed. by Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (London: Norton, 2002), 589-600 (p. 592).

<sup>11</sup> Hogg, *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, I, 70.

<sup>12</sup> Hume: 'Every chimera of the brain is as vivid and intense as any of these inferences, which we formerly dignified with the name of conclusions, concerning matters of fact'. See *Treatise*, p. 84.

<sup>13</sup> Shelley, *The Necessity of Atheism* (1811), in *Prose*, 1-6 (p. 3). All subsequent citations from this work will be from this edition and will be given in parentheses, abbreviated as *Necessity*, in the text.

## 1. 2. 'Bettering the Condition of Humankind': Shelley in Ireland and Wales

Shelley first mentioned his idea for the work that would become *Queen Mab* to Hitchener on 10 December 1811: 'I intend it to be by anticipation, a picture of the manners, simplicity and delights of a perfect state of society; tho' still earthly' (*Letters*, I, 201). Shelley's emphasis upon 'earthly' progress implies that this 'perfect state' could only be realised by engaging with existing socio-economic theories. It is significant that at the height of his receptiveness to Godwin's philosophy, Shelley was already planning to participate in Irish affairs. His description of Ireland to Godwin as 'constituting a part of the great crisis of opinions' affirms his belief that practical economic change was vital in dispelling imminent revolution (*Letters*, I, 234). It was in this frame of mind that he departed for Dublin in February 1812.

Scrivener suggests that Shelley's Irish pamphlets reflect tensions in his thought between 'the Paine-Thelwall strategy', which appealed to the masses, and 'the Coleridge-Godwin strategy', which appealed to the intellectual elite.<sup>14</sup> However, Shelley was also interested in Ireland from the perspective of a political economist. He saw a country whose lands had been seized by the English government, and whose working people lived in poverty. In hoping to effect change in Ireland, Shelley may be seen as emulating Thomas Paine, whose *Rights of Man* had been embraced by the United Irishmen.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, on 14 February 1812, he asserted that his publications would 'better the condition of human kind' in a practical economic sense (*Letters*, I, 255). Shelley's awakening to the contemporary poverty speculated by the works of Smith, Godwin and Malthus impacted powerfully upon his rhetoric. His primary aim in his first pamphlet, *An Address to the Irish People* (1812) was to appeal to the labouring classes. This is outlined in its advertisement: 'It is the intention of the Author to awaken in the minds of the Irish poor, a knowledge of their real state'.<sup>16</sup> Shelley hoped to 'awaken' this 'knowledge' by sending the work to alehouses, throwing copies into carriages and distributing them personally amongst labourers. These techniques not only parallel Paine's desire for revolution in thought and government, but also Spence's emphasis upon the equalisation of land rights, which was condemned by Bentham as

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<sup>14</sup> Scrivener, *Radical Shelley*, p. 6.

<sup>15</sup> Paine's *Rights of Man* had been lauded as 'the Koran of Belfast', by leading United Irishman Wolfe Tone. See T. A. Jackson, *Ireland, Her Own: An Outline History of the Irish Struggle for National Freedom and Independence*, ed. by Desmond Greaves (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1991), p. 101.

<sup>16</sup> Shelley, *An Address to the Irish People* (1812), in *Prose*, 9-36 (p. 8). All subsequent citations from this work will be from this edition and will be given in parentheses, abbreviated as *Address*, in the text.

‘concerting mischief in alehouses’ (*Plan*, p. iii). Paul O’Brien remarks that, in relation to Shelley’s Irish publications, many critics ‘ignore the hundreds of pamphlets that were read in the circles [he] moved in’.<sup>17</sup> Shelley’s interest in agrarian propaganda supports such a reading, and is suggestive of his receptiveness to a range of economic thinkers.

One of the most interesting features of the *Address* is that it opens with a claim that has undertones of the core doctrine of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759). I have argued that there are suggestions in Hogg’s account of Shelley’s interest in agricultural development, which may be traced back to a possible reading of *The Wealth of Nations*. Furthermore, Shelley’s praise for Smith’s views on morality in his letters and his philosophical preoccupations in *The Necessity of Atheism*, imply that the theories of the Scottish Enlightenment can be included amongst the free-thinking ideas that attracted him during his Oxford days. However, I suggest that by 1812, he may also be seen to relate Smith’s speculations on human sympathy to the economic crisis in Ireland. Smith believed that it was through imagining oneself in the place of others that economic progress could be made. His view of political economy depends upon the co-dependence of different sections of society, and he summarises this by remarking:

Our senses will never inform us of what [our brother] suffers. They never did, and never can carry us beyond our own person, and it is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his sensations [...] It is the impressions of our own senses only, not those of his, which our imaginations copy. By the imagination, we place ourselves in his situation.  
(*Theory of Moral Sentiments*, p. 9)

Smith acknowledges that imagination has a power that the ‘senses’ do not. This is a capacity to apply sensory impressions to one’s own ‘conception’, and thus identify with the ‘situation’ of others. Whilst such views relate to Hume’s philosophy, they interpret imagination in a way that is not usually viewed as compatible with Enlightenment rationality. Shelley’s attraction to this moral faculty and its relevance to economic progress questions readings of his solely visionary imagination. This may be seen in the first sentence of the *Address*: ‘I am not an Irishman, yet I can feel for you’ (*Address*, p. 9). It is significant that he expresses ideas that may also be found in Smith several times throughout the pamphlet, advocating the importance of ‘feeling’ when

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<sup>17</sup> Paul O’Brien, *Shelley and Revolutionary Ireland* (London: Redwords, 2002), p. 102.

contemplating divisions between Protestants and Catholics (*Address*, p. 10). These remarks suggest that Shelley's criticism of the desire 'to get money and titles and power' is more complex than a simple condemnation of political economy (*Address*, p. 9).

The pamphlet sometimes suffers from a condescending style. Nevertheless, the oppression of 'the very poor people' is explored in detail (*Address*, p. 17). Shelley's attempt to write in language accessible to all incorporates Hume's emphasis upon the mind, or 'the little power a man has over his belief', expressing similar arguments as *The Necessity of Atheism* in a very different style (*Address*, p. 15). This leads into remarks that are suggestive of Godwin's support for employing 'leisure time in reasoning' (*Address*, p. 18). However, Shelley implies that such intellectual improvement involves acknowledging the potential of economic principles. It is at this point that his tone shifts from Godwinian disinterestedness into the language of a political economist. He contemplates the way that wealth encourages man to improve himself:

People say that poverty is no evil – they have never felt it, or they would not think so. That wealth is necessary to encourage the arts – but are not the arts very inferior things to virtue and happiness – the man would be very dead to all generous feelings who would rather see pretty pictures [...] than a million free and happy men. (*Address*, p. 26)

Such remarks are comparable with Smith's criticism of abject 'poverty', and this portrayal of 'the arts' as inferior to remedying inequality does not suggest that art has no use, but rather that 'leisure' must exist alongside economic prosperity. It is interesting that Smith perceived art as 'unproductive labour', yet regarded its cultivation as necessary to 'freedom' and 'happiness' amongst workers (*Wealth of Nations*, I, 47). Shelley seems to recognise Smith's use of irony in this context, in that by definition, both he and Smith can be viewed as 'unproductive' in setting down their ideas in a literary manner. These parallels suggest that Shelley's comments on art and leisure may be traced back to Smith, rather than Godwin. *Political Justice* was influenced by Smith's belief that morality was founded upon sympathy, evident in its subtitle's profession to 'enquire into' the 'influence on morals and happiness'. However, Godwin's concept of equalising labour in his writings falls short of Smith's complex

discussion of the benefits of self-interest, and his acknowledgement that economic prosperity depended upon inequality amongst different social classes.<sup>18</sup> In contrast, Shelley's concerns over poverty here and determination to educate a self-interested society about its capacity to identify with others may be seen to draw closer to Smith's arguments in *The Wealth of Nations*, than Godwin's reading of them.

Shelley's attraction to classical political economy becomes evident in his reference to Mandeville:

If there is anyone *now* inclined to say that "private vices are public benefits", and that peace, philanthropy and wisdom will ruin the human race, he may revel in his happy dreams; though were *I* this man, I should envy Satan's Hell. (*Address*, p. 36)

This condemnation of Mandeville's view of selfishness as beneficial to 'public benefit', may be viewed as reinforcing Shelley's admiration for Smith, who modified such an outlook in his work. It also exemplifies the ease with which he shifts from one rhetorical technique to another. Shelley moves from his attempts to address labourers, to the 'philanthropic' concerns of Enlightenment political economy, and finally into the prophetic language that characterises Spence's agrarian tracts. The subtlety with which Shelley fuses his visionary ideas with financial practicalities refutes Kenneth Neill Cameron's belief that he 'had no more concept of an expanding economic foundation as a prerequisite for the accomplishment of an egalitarian state than Godwin'.<sup>19</sup> In fact, Shelley demonstrates greater sophistication in his analysis of political economy than Godwin's aspirations for the future.

Shelley's apparent 'simplification' of language in the *Address*, as opposed to his desire to gain the support of the intellectual classes in his *Proposals for an Association of Philanthropists*, is deceptive. Although he is appealing to labourers, his suggestion of alternative ways to view existing economic doctrines illuminates the pamphlet. Shelley expands upon such themes in this second work, as is implied in its full title: 'proposals for an association of those philanthropists who [are] convinced of the

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<sup>18</sup> Certainly Godwin's rather simplistic suggestion that in a rational, equal and just society, each individual would need only to labour for 'half an hour' every day, may be viewed as unacceptable to Smith's understanding of the way that labour is both divided and sustained in *The Wealth of Nations*. See *Political Justice*, III, 439.

<sup>19</sup> Kenneth Neill Cameron, *The Young Shelley: Genesis of a Radical* (New York: Macmillan, 1950), p. 140.

inadequacy of the moral and political state of Ireland'.<sup>20</sup> These allusions to 'moral' and 'political' concerns suggest that Smith's philosophy remained at the forefront of Shelley's mind. This becomes clear in the opening paragraphs, which may be interpreted as a presentation of Smith's views on human sympathy as complementing Shelley's belief in an 'association' that diffuses enlightened ideas:

A recollection of the absent, and a taking into consideration the interests of those unconnected with ourselves, is a principal source of that feeling which generates occasions, wherein a love for human kind may become eminently useful and active. (*Proposals*, p. 41)

Shelley paraphrases Smith's ideas about 'feeling' in order to validate his support for intellectual and social 'activity'. However, there is a sense that at this point in his career, he misinterprets Smith's view that 'sympathy' derives from within self-interest. This may be seen in his belief that humanity can become disconnected from the self. Nevertheless, the *Proposals* indicate that even in 1812, Shelley was determined to reconcile his utopian ideals with Smith's moral philosophy. This may be seen in the description of his 'associations': 'Philanthropy imperiously exacts of her votaries, that occasions like these [opportunities for intellectual cultivation] are the proper ones for leading mankind to their own interest' (*Proposals*, pp. 41-2). Such emphasis upon sympathy illuminating the potential of individual 'interest' draws closer to Smith's precepts than to Godwin's reading of them. Shelley's solution to the crises in Ireland involved a Godwinian emphasis upon gradual intellectual development. However, it is interesting that he follows a caricature of Godwin sitting passively 'by his own fireside' with the remark that 'Generous feeling dictates no such sayings' (*Proposals*, p. 44). This emphasis upon 'feeling', following his portrayal of sympathy and interest in a way that parallels Smith's views, may be read as reflecting Shelley's inability to agree with Godwin's views on a society in which self-interest could gradually be shown to be erroneous.<sup>21</sup>

The *Proposals* are perceived as more radical than the *Address*, in terms of their desire to establish the intellectual assemblies that Godwin aligned with Illuminist

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<sup>20</sup> Shelley, *Proposals for an Association of Philanthropists* (1812), in *Prose*, 41-54 (p. 39). All subsequent citations from this work will be from this edition and will be given in parentheses, abbreviated as *Proposals* in the text.

<sup>21</sup> Although Godwin admired Smith's moral philosophy, he maintained that humanity could eventually develop beyond a self-interested society. This can be seen when he describes how individuals could 'forget' their 'own interest'. See *Political Justice*, III, 395.

agendas. Additionally, the *Proposals* engage with 1790s rhetoric, reprising the various techniques Shelley included in the *Address*, albeit for a different readership. For example, he repeats Paine's emphasis upon the 'constitution', as well as the latter's belief that 'Government' exists to secure the rights of the governed (*Proposals*, p. 47). However, underpinning such allusions is the concept of property rights. It is significant that Shelley is derisive of the Norman Conquest, as this was a popular theme in Spensonian literature for describing the origins of 'all-sufficient landlords'.<sup>22</sup> Shelley comments 'the first William parcelled out the property of the aborigines at the conquest of England', and his allusion to 'alehouse politicians' suggests a receptiveness to the traditional meeting places of agrarian radicals (*Proposals*, p. 48). Shelley invokes millenarian rhetoric reminiscent of Spence's periodicals, when contemplating the notion that addressing Irish suffering is only one example of a means to achieving egalitarian ends. He describes Ireland as, 'the foreground of a picture in the dimness of whose distance I behold the lion lay down with the lamb and the infant play with the basilisk' (*Proposals*, p. 42). This employment of Scripture as allegory implies that Shelley's revolutionary desires were rooted firmly in economic practicalities.

The *Proposals* contain Shelley's first direct allusions to Malthus' population theories. He displays awareness of the contemporary tendency to deploy Malthus' principles in order to uphold reactionary values. For example, Shelley engages with Malthus' views on protectionism in agriculture:

Are we to be told that [war, vice and misery] are remediless, because the earth would, in case of their remedy, be overstocked? That [...] the poor are to pay with their blood, their labour, [and] their happiness for the crimes which the hereditary monopolists of the earth commit? (*Proposals*, p. 53)

Shelley's allusions to 'war, vice and misery' paraphrase arguments expressed in the *Essay* on the inevitability of human suffering. These recall alterations Malthus made in the 1803 edition regarding the benefits of educating the poor to restrain their sexual urges.<sup>23</sup> Shelley's criticism of 'hereditary monopolists' may be viewed as a comment upon Malthus' defence of the landlord class, an aspect of the *Essay* with which he

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<sup>22</sup> Thomas Spence, *The Real Rights of Man* (1795), in *The Political Works of Thomas Spence*, ed. by H. T. Dickinson (Newcastle upon Tyne: Averro, 1982), 1-2 (p. 2).

<sup>23</sup> Malthus describes 'vice', 'misery' and 'moral restraint' as 'preventive checks' to population increase in this second edition. See *Essay*, p. 29.

would take issue in his later essays. Nevertheless, his agreement with ‘Mr. Malthus’ that political economy is a subject that unites ‘physical’ and ‘moral’ topics implies frustration, rather than hatred, towards the latter’s principles (*Proposals*, p. 53). These themes will be explored further in Chapter Three, in relation to the revival of Shelley’s interest in the *Essay* in his 1819 works. The *Proposals* are viewed by Cameron as expounding Shelley’s views on intellectual ‘associations’ and their capacity to diffuse enlightened ideas.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, the underlying themes of this pamphlet also reveal his determination to align such an outlook with practical economic change.

Shelley’s final Irish pamphlet, *A Declaration of Rights*, was written following his speech to the remnants of the United Irishmen on 28 February 1812. This goes beyond factional agendas in favour of an ‘extension of the franchise, redress of economic exploitation, and ultimate advances to republican states’.<sup>25</sup> However, Shelley’s anti-Christian views were not well received, and he realised that his belief in intellectual development could not be effected in the midst of such divided motives. Although he abandons his ‘ill-timed’ desire for an association, Shelley describes its potential to Godwin in a letter of 18 March 1812: ‘It is indescribably painful to contemplate beings capable of soaring to the heights of science [...] without attempting to awaken them from a state of lethargy so opposite’ (*Letters*, I, 276). This theme of gradually awakening the oppressed through philosophical, scientific and economic innovations is expressed powerfully in the conclusion of Shelley’s *Declaration*. This includes an echo of Milton’s Lucifer inciting the fallen angels to ‘Awake!- arise! – or be for ever fallen’.<sup>26</sup> Having argued that the employment of Biblical imagery by figures like Spence reflected a commitment to practical change, Shelley’s cadence becomes complex. By encouraging the Irish nation to ‘arise’, Shelley is not so much inciting radical action as persuading its people to recognise their intellectual, moral and socio-economic potential.

There is a tendency to dismiss Shelley’s treatment of ‘the Irish question’ as seeking to impose 1790s values upon a troubled contemporary climate. For example, Holmes remarks that his desire to emulate Paine propaganda techniques and attraction to Illuminist agendas is reflected by the ways in which his pamphlets lapse into ‘resurrecting the language of the nineties’.<sup>27</sup> However, I suggest that Shelley believed that by uniting Enlightenment speculations on morality and economics with the

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<sup>24</sup> Cameron, *The Young Shelley*, p. 156.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155.

<sup>26</sup> Shelley, *A Declaration of Rights*, in *Prose*, 58-60 (p. 60).

<sup>27</sup> Holmes, *Shelley: The Pursuit*, p. 122.



philosophies expressed in the revolutionary decade, he could incite a change which would benefit the future. The Irish experience also anticipated his reaction to economic hardship in England. It appears that Shelley had become distracted from writing *Queen Mab* in Dublin. However, his developing ideas about the relationship between intellectual improvement and economic progress, impacted upon the prose he wrote on his return to England. By the time Shelley arrived in Wales, the economic situation had sparked widespread social unrest. On 27 February 1812, Lord Byron condemned the death penalty for frame-breaking in the House of Lords: ‘Will you erect a gibbet in every field [...] are these the remedies for a starving and desperate populace?’<sup>28</sup> Byron’s speech was a reaction against the harsh punishments administered to participants in the first Luddite riots in Nottingham. These measures did not prevent violence from breaking out again by April, in Manchester, Bolton, Carlisle, Bristol, Truro and Barnstaple. Shelley remained dedicated to promoting socio-economic progress within this explosive climate, and continued to distribute his Irish pamphlets. However, whilst he was developing his views on social change, the alliance between politics and economic power had intensified.

In June, Shelley read about the imprisonment of radical publisher Daniel Isaac Eaton, which centred on the latter’s publication of Paine’s deist views. He responded by writing *A Letter to Lord Ellenborough*, the chief judge presiding over Eaton’s trial. Much has been said about the *Letter*’s anti-religious opinions, yet it also relates its criticism of ‘dogmatic’ modes of thinking to philosophical, political and socio-economic debates.<sup>29</sup> Such an approach anticipates Shelley’s themes in *Queen Mab*, to the extent that several paragraphs were incorporated into the Notes. This suggests that Shelley’s attempts at prose writing were developing gradually into a larger project, in which his economic interests would become central to his response to contemporary corruption. On 18 August, Shelley sent Hookham a seven-hundred line sample of *Queen Mab*. He declared that ‘the Past, the Present and the Future are the grand and comprehensive topics of this Poem. I have not yet exhausted the second of them’ (*Letters*, I, 324). This outlines Shelley’s technique of analysing the ‘present’ situation as a means of explaining the shortcomings of the past and shaping the way that the ‘future’ should be made. By September, news reached him of an opportunity to put these economic views into practice.

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<sup>28</sup> Lord Byron, 27 February 1812, in *Parliamentary Debates*, published under the superintendence of T. C. Hansard, 21 (1812), 1-1262 (p. 971).

<sup>29</sup> Shelley, *A Letter to Lord Ellenborough* (1812), in *Prose*, 64-72 (p. 69).

Shelley regarded William Madocks, a Whig MP and member of the Hampden Club, as the kind of social pioneer he aspired to be. In 1800, Madocks had built a new town in North Wales by salvaging two thousand acres of land from the sea, and named it after himself; Tremadoc. Madocks believed in the economic potential of the town, and had begun an Embankment project that had reclaimed over three thousand acres of land.<sup>30</sup> When Shelley learned that Madocks had run into financial difficulties, he was eager to give aid. Shelley's awareness both of the theories of political economy and their social potential benefited from his practical experience in Tremadoc, and became refined in the Notes he appended to *Queen Mab*. With this in mind, Shelley's approach to political economy in the Notes will now be explored.

### **1. 3. 'A Commerce of Good Words and Works': Shelley and Political Economy in the Notes to *Queen Mab***

Shelley's interest in political economy was an incentive for his participation in the Tremadoc project. However, before the development of the scattered economic observations of his earlier pamphlets can be explored, it is important to think about the way that he expressed such ideas. *Queen Mab* as a poem is commonly perceived as the culmination of Shelley's early revolutionary outlook. However, this image of Shelley seeking to revive 1790s ideas becomes complicated by the techniques he employs to articulate his views. Shelley was writing the poem by April 1812. However, on 26 January 1813 he informed Hookham of plans to append a series of notes to it. He declared: 'The notes to *Queen Mab* will be long and philosophical. I shall take the opportunity which I judge to be a safe one of propagating my principles [...] a poem very didactic is I think very stupid' (*Letters*, I, 350). These comments reveal important aspects of Shelley's approach to form, which suggest that *Queen Mab* and its Notes comprised a carefully staged intellectual project.

Shelley describes the Notes as 'philosophical', an intellectual approach to the contemporary crisis that recalls Godwin's distance from political practice. However, he believed that it was through prose, rather than poetry, that 'principles' could be 'safely' propagated. This outlines his determination that the visionary aspirations of his poem

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<sup>30</sup> D. L. Thomas, 'Madocks, William Alexander (1773–1828)', rev. by H. C. G. Matthew, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/17761>> [accessed 17 December 2008].

must be read alongside prose that explored the practical means for achieving them. It is the Notes, rather than the poem, that he intends to be ‘didactic’, reflecting his understanding that enacting the iconoclastic aims of *Queen Mab* in the contemporary economic climate would be disastrous. Nevertheless, it is not so much that the poem and Notes can be viewed as visionary and practical respectively, but rather that both embody these outlooks through different forms of expression. As William St. Clair observes, ‘the prose was for understanding, the verse for creating sympathetic involvement, in line with Shelley’s theory that reading could help to change the world’.<sup>31</sup> This concept of different modes of reading is reflected in that each Note is keyed to a specific line from Shelley’s poem, and although they reflect identical themes, they vary in the way that these issues are approached.

Such sophistication in Shelley’s style is often overlooked by those who view the Notes as merely expanding upon the revolutionary themes of the poem. That he presents this union of visionary aspirations with practical developments as unforced, is evident in his concept of readership. Shelley emphasised to Hookham that his intended readers comprised the new generation of the intellectual classes. In a letter of March 1813, he described his work as ‘a small neat Quarto, on fine paper and so to catch the aristocrats: They will not read it, but their sons and daughters may’ (*Letters*, I, 361). This supports interpretations of *Queen Mab* as reflecting a utopian vision, accessible only to an intellectual elite. Such readings are reinforced by the fact that Shelley did not translate many of his philosophical quotations. However, his notion of ‘catching’ aristocratic readers implies that, having appealed to upper-class aesthetic sensibilities in the poem, it was his intention to emphasise the ways in which the enactment of its visionary themes was a future possibility. The publication history of the poem and Notes will be explored later, but having outlined Shelley’s intentions in terms of expression and style, it is important to return to his treatment of political economy.

Shelley’s enthusiasm for the Embankment project is evident in his commitment to fundraising and personal involvement with the plight of the poor. However, he was soon confronted with the consequences of distorted approaches to political economy. Local quarry owner Robert Leeson criticised the seditious mentality of Embankment workers, who were protesting over low wages. Leeson remarked: ‘Money *must be got* [...] I think it is madness feeding so many mouths if it could be dispensed with, as most

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<sup>31</sup> William St. Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 318.

of the men eat more than their work is worth'.<sup>32</sup> Leeson's view of human life as 'dispensable' in relation to wages and subsistence is suggestive of reactionary appropriations of Malthusian doctrines. Furthermore, his emphasis upon the accumulation of 'money' indicates a worrying distortion of commerce that goes beyond Malthus' agricultural outlook.

It was this exposure to contemporary economic hardship that may be seen as a major source of inspiration for Shelley's Notes. Instead of gravitating towards Godwin's philosophical speculations on property, Shelley expanded his studies into the eighteenth-century origins of political economy.<sup>33</sup> Connell aligns Shelley's view of political economy with Cobbett's criticism of Smith as an apologist 'for a haughty and corrupt political order'.<sup>34</sup> However, the following section argues that Shelley's assessment of classical political economy was more complex than Cobbett's interpretation of it. Through identifying Smith's anticipation of revolutionary thought and his affinity with Shelley's interdisciplinary viewpoint, it will be suggested that Smith's economic principles shaped the Notes in a way that has been underestimated.

#### **1. 4. 'Uniform, Constant, and Uninterrupted Efforts': Shelley and Adam Smith**

Smith is perceived as one of Shelley's main targets in the title of the first Note on political economy, 'and statesmen boast of wealth!' (*Queen Mab*, Note to V, 93-4). However, his economic outlook is presented frequently in an anachronistic light. The fraught political climate of the 1790s has led many to associate Smith's ideas relating to free market economics and the function of the ruling classes as an inspiration for anti-Jacobins. However, once such ideas are reinstated in the context of the 1770s, it becomes clear that it is not Smith's principles that are reactionary, but the social climate in which they became politicised. As Gordon Brown remarks:

Smith has the reputation of an apologist for *laissez-faire* at its most heartless, but this reputation was born in the shadow of the French

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<sup>32</sup> Robert Leeson, quoted in Elizabeth Beazley, *Madocks and the Wonder of Wales* (London: Faber and Faber, 1997), p. 81.

<sup>33</sup> Matthews and Everest cite Godwin as Shelley's main influence on inequality, but the sophistication of his arguments in relation to economic theory go beyond Godwin's philosophy. Note to *Poems*, I, 364; 368.

<sup>34</sup> Connell, *Romanticism, Economics and the 'Question of Culture'*, p. 207.

Revolution, where it was not safe to admit that his work could be interpreted in any other way.<sup>35</sup>

In contrast, it will be argued that Shelley absorbed much from Smith's commitment to ensuring economic prosperity, as well as his interests in philosophy and education. Although critics recognise Hume's influence upon Shelley's thought, it is unfortunate that Shelley's receptiveness to Smith has been overlooked. It is with a view to redressing this that an analysis of Shelley's receptiveness to Smith must begin, not with *The Wealth of Nations*, but with *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*.

Smith published this work in 1759, and its influence upon his 'labour theory of value', or the notion that wealth is defined by the labour required for its production, is often understated (*Wealth of Nations*, I, 47). This view of Smith as concerned for the interests of the labouring classes, as well as their contribution to national wealth, is expressed throughout *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. This work is concerned primarily with social utility and human sympathy. Nevertheless, the economic consequences of presenting individual morality as complementing universal interests become evident. Smith believed that mutual sympathy amongst different economic sectors would result in a mode of commerce that benefitted the manufacturer, labourer and landlord. However, he encountered difficulties when juxtaposing these progressive views with the exploitation of labourers. Smith's admission in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* that Mandeville's views 'in some respects border upon the truth' can be interpreted as an acceptance of socio-economic reality (p. 313). However, it may be argued that his views that public good can be achieved through acknowledging the self-interest of the individual, approaches the philosophical doctrine of Necessity. This emphasised that both the human and natural worlds were perpetually in a state of progress and change. Such an alignment of Enlightenment philosophy with socio-economic development reflects the range of Smith's interests, and explains why his ideas may be viewed as anticipating 1790s doctrines of human perfectibility.

Smith related the doctrine of Necessity to his most significant economic theory: the 'invisible hand', or the idea that we are often 'led to promote an end' which is no part of our 'intentions' (*Wealth of Nations*, II, 456). Smith believes that selfish 'intentions' could be reconciled with social perfectibility. He outlines this notion in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, which explains his support for social hierarchy in *The Wealth of*

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<sup>35</sup> Gordon Brown, Foreword to Iain McLean, *Adam Smith, Radical and Egalitarian: An Interpretation for the Twenty-First Century* (Edinburgh : Edinburgh University Press, 2006), i-xi (p. viii).

*Nations*: ‘The rich consume little more than the poor, and in spite of their natural selfishness and rapacity, though they mean only their own conveniency, [...] they divide with the poor the produce of all their improvements’ (p. 184). Smith’s belief in the national benefits that could be gained by pursuing personal ‘conveniency’ reflects his application of the capacities of the moral sentiments to economic practice. Furthermore, his identification of the co-dependence of ‘rich’ and ‘poor’ is unsupportive of the attempts to regulate labourers that characterised later models of political economy.

Smith rejected any theory that reduced human beings to statistics. Sections of *The Wealth of Nations* anticipate the increasing politicisation of political economy exemplified in later approaches to Malthusian doctrines. Smith incorporates demographic evidence, expressed through practical examples, to refute ideas about the positive consequences of poverty:

Poverty seems favourable towards generation. A half-starved Highland woman frequently bears more than twenty children, while a pampered fine lady is often incapable of bearing any. Barrenness is very rare among those of inferior station. Luxury seems frequently to destroy altogether, the powers of generation. (*Wealth of Nations*, I, 96)

Smith criticises those who make decisions about who is eligible to reproduce, suggesting that the ‘powers of generation’ cannot be defined by social standing. Malthus acknowledged the fertility of the working classes and sought to promote celibacy amongst them. Nevertheless, he regarded their ‘generation’ as a threat, whereas Smith viewed it as vital for the production of wealth. Smith defines wealth in commercial as well as agricultural terms. He was suspicious of the Physiocrats, who believed that ‘land is the only source of wealth’.<sup>36</sup> Smith remarks that, ‘good roads, navigable rivers put the remote parts of the country more nearly upon a level with those in the town’ (*The Wealth of Nations*, I, 163). This union of ‘country’ and ‘town’ differs from Malthus’ later opinions, which supported public works only when they were unconnected to the production of wealth. In contrast, Smith’s hatred of trade monopolies promotes commerce as complementary to humanitarian aims.

In principle, Smith was an egalitarian. His core belief rested upon ‘the uniform, constant, and uninterrupted effort of every man to better his condition’. That Smith

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<sup>36</sup> McLean, *Adam Smith: Radical and Egalitarian*, p. 62.

connected this ‘uninterrupted’ progress to ‘national, as well as private opulence’ reflects that he perceived intellectual and economic development as interrelated (*Wealth of Nations*, I, 343). A crucial factor in this process was education. Smith shared Godwin’s belief in the intellectual superiority of the middle classes, and his desire that this imbalance be redressed with the progress of time. Like Godwin, Smith was aware of contemporary limitations upon leisure amongst the poor:

The man whose whole life is spent in performing a few simple operations, has no occasion to exercise his invention in finding out expedients for removing difficulties which never occur [...] The minds of a great body of the people are in danger of degenerating, whilst other elements of civilisation are advancing. (*Wealth of Nations*, II, 782)

Rather than attempting to address this ‘degeneration’ through parochial education, Smith is adamant that schools throughout the ‘advancing’ social spectrum should be independent from the established church. This support for religious dissent reflects Smith’s hatred of monopolies in both economics and morality, and questions reactionary readings of his principles. Indeed, Smith’s thought was embraced by revolutionary figures. Richard Price supported the egalitarian undertones of his labour theory of value, whilst Thomas Jefferson described *The Wealth of Nations* as ‘the best book to be read on the subjects of money and commerce’.<sup>37</sup> Iain McLean remarks that ‘in Smith’s hands, economics becomes a radically egalitarian discipline’, and this reading of his principles may be identified in Shelley’s treatment of classical political economy in the Notes.<sup>38</sup>

### **1. 5. ‘Seen By All Who Understand Arithmetic’: Shelley and Classical Political Economy**

Shelley admired Smith’s humanitarian approach to ‘wealth’, as can be seen in the declaration in his opening paragraph to the first Note on political economy, ‘there is no

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<sup>37</sup> Letter from Thomas Jefferson to J. Norvell, 14 June 1807, in *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. by Andrew A. Lipscomb, 20 vols (Washington DC: Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association, 1903), XI, 222-6 (p. 226).

<sup>38</sup> McLean, *Adam Smith: Radical and Egalitarian*, p. 80.

real wealth but the labour of man' (*Queen Mab*, Note to V, 93-4). However, he identifies Smith's difficulties in addressing an increasingly commercial economy:

Were the mountains of gold and the valleys of silver [...] no one comfort would be added to the human race. In consequence of our consideration for the precious metals, one man is able to heap to himself luxuries at the expense of the necessaries of his neighbour. (*Queen Mab*, Note to V, 93-4)

By contemplating the gold standard, Shelley goes beyond Godwin's simplistic assessment that 'the most industrious and active member of society is frequently with great difficulty able to keep his family from starving' (*Political Justice*, III, 424). However, Shelley's alignment of 'real wealth' with labour alone, and his underestimation of the importance of 'the precious metals', suggests that he has not yet attained Smith's level of analysis in relation to metallic currency. Smith attempted to confront the problems posed by gold currency by propounding a similar emphasis to Godwin upon civic duties. However, he connected this to wealth and its production, with 'money binding together all the relations between civilised society.'<sup>39</sup> In contrast, Shelley dismisses this monetary view of society in favour of radical support for the rights of labourers. Following his experiences of exploitation in Ireland and Wales, Shelley felt justified in criticising Smith's view of a harmonious relationship between rich and poor:

A speculator takes pride to himself as the promoter of his country's prosperity, who employs a number of hands in the manufacture of articles [...] The nobleman, who employs the peasants of his neighbourhood in building his palaces, flatters himself that he has gained the title of patriot by yielding to the impulses of vanity [...] whilst the cultivator of the earth, he without whom society must cease to subsist, struggles through contempt and penury. (*Queen Mab*, Note to V, 93-4)

Although Shelley admired Smith's views on sympathy and its relation to commerce, he

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<sup>39</sup> Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, quoting the Marquis de Mirabeau, *Philosophie Rurale ou économique générale et politique de l'agriculture, pour servir de suite à l'ami des Hommes*, 2 vols (Amsterdam: Marc Michel Rey, 1766), I, 53.



asserts that these must be developed further in relation to the economic crisis of the Napoleonic period. This celebration of the ‘cultivator of the earth’ is suggestive of Shelley’s agricultural focus at this point in his thinking, but this excerpt implies that his general grasp of political economy was advanced. Despite his criticism of ‘speculators’, Shelley’s concept of common interests between investors in the National Debt and aristocratic landowners, anticipates the more sophisticated analysis of economic corruption seen in his later essays. Whilst his hostility towards ‘patriotic’ pretensions suggest that the incendiary Painite rhetoric of his Irish pamphlets still underpins his thought, such examples confirm the clarity of his economic outlook.

John Pollard Guinn suggests that Shelley, like Smith, ‘makes utility the measure of the value of wealth [...] hence the most fundamental art is cultivation of the land’.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, Shelley’s criticism of wealth does not reject Smith’s hopes for a universally prosperous society. Instead, Shelley expresses anxiety that wealth becomes distorted in a way that seeks material gain without social benefits. He comments that ‘wealth is a power usurped by the few, to compel the many to labour for their benefit. The laws which support this system derive their force from the ignorance of their victims’ (*Queen Mab*, Note to V, 93-4). This emphasis upon usurpation, rather than a portrayal of wealth as negative, may be viewed as reflecting Shelley’s detailed engagement with Smith’s arguments. His suggestion that this ‘ignorance’ can be rectified, implies that both wealth and commerce can be reclaimed for the benefit of the labouring classes, a concept he would later expand when exploring his agrarian interests.

Shelley expresses this enthusiasm for agrarian developments in a footnote appended to one of his Notes on vegetarianism. This theme is usually viewed as being in keeping with his utopian outlook. However, that he includes a detailed summary of his observations in Tremadoc reinforces the ways in which the Notes analyse the social potential within existing economic approaches. Shelley describes ‘the author’s experience, that some of the workmen on an embankment in North Wales, in consequence of the inability of the proprietor to pay them [...] have supported large families by cultivating small spots of sterile ground by moonlight’ (*Queen Mab*, Note to VIII, 211-2). Despite this criticism of Leeson and other ‘proprietors’, Shelley expresses wonder towards the capacity of labourers to ‘cultivate’ life from ‘sterility’. This not only questions Malthusian conclusions, but also reflects Shelley’s attraction to Enlightenment theories of agricultural progress. Such enthusiasm for combining agrarian approaches with classical political economy is reflected in *The Wealth of*

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<sup>40</sup> John Pollard Guinn, *Shelley’s Political Thought* (The Hague: Mouton, 1969), p. 42.

*Nations*. Smith was fascinated by ideas of self-sufficiency and supported agricultural labour, rather than pasturage, which provided an uneasy potential for monopolisation through enclosure. Shelley's vegetarianism has been viewed in a moral context, but Smith's discussion of its economic benefits parallels his thoughts on the subject:

A corn-field of moderate fertility produces a much greater quantity of food for man, than the best pasture of equal extent [...] If a pound of butcher's meat was never supposed to be worth more than a pound of bread, this greater surplus would everywhere be of greater value, and constitute a greater fund both for the profit of the former, and the rent of the landlord.  
(*Wealth of Nations*, I, 164)

Smith's alignment of practical concerns such as the 'fertility' of the soil with the theories of classical political economy and its discussions of 'value', 'profit' and 'rent' is a technique that Shelley imitates in his Notes. Indeed, when one compares this passage to Shelley's Note on vegetarianism, it becomes clear that his sources were more wide-ranging than is usually supposed. Shelley employs Smith's arguments in order to refute Malthus' views of a finite nature. Later in the Notes, he condemns the latter's Anglican justifications for inequality as based upon unfounded 'hypotheses' (*Queen Mab*, Note to VII, 13). However, he also discusses the economic advantages of agriculture:

The quantity of nutritious vegetable matter consumed in fattening the carcass of an ox would afford ten times the sustenance [...] The most fertile districts of the habitable globe are now actually cultivated by men for animals, at a delay and waste of aliment absolutely incapable of calculation [...] Again, the spirit of the nation that should take the lead in this great reform would insensibly become agricultural; commerce with all its vice, selfishness and corruption would gradually decline. (*Queen Mab*, Note to VIII, 211-2)

These observations reveal contradictions in Shelley's tone. For example, he struggles to reconcile his views on an improved mode of commerce with the 'vice, selfishness and

corruption' that characterises its contemporary incarnation. His emphases upon 'calculation' and the proportional produce of pasturage and agriculture parallel Smith's language. Furthermore, his commitment to 'reform', and 'agricultural' improvement suggests that this condemnation of 'commerce' is complex. Rather than articulating a hostility towards trade, Shelley's faith in the progressive 'spirit of the nation' reflects his belief that a more enlightened commercial outlook could be realised.

Smith's influence may even be seen in Shelley's enthusiasm for potato cultivation. This is conventionally attributed to the thought of Dr. William Lambe, who emphasised its 'peculiar suitability to the health of the human constitution'.<sup>41</sup> However, Shelley's involvement with agrarianism on the Tremadoc Project, and the fact that Lambe did not publish these opinions until 1815, suggests that he was receptive to the economic benefits of potato cultivation as early as 1812. Smith comments: 'Should this root ever become [...] the favourite vegetable food, the same quantity of cultivated land would maintain a greater population' (*Wealth of Nations*, I, 176). Timothy Morton has identified a paradox in acknowledging both Shelley's utopian desires and his sound awareness of Smithian economics:

If Shelley can be aligned with both Lambe and an avowed opponent such as Adam Smith on the issue of potato production, something strange happens to the professed universalism of his rhetoric [...] Lambe's allocation of sustainable resources to a growing population of urban poor overlooks their demand for desirable living standards and their social degradation.<sup>42</sup>

Although Morton upholds a reading of Shelley as hostile to Smith's principles, it is interesting that he views Smith as more compatible with Shelley's desires for intellectual and social development. It can thus be argued that although the Notes might appear to condemn political economy, they in fact engage with a social potential that is already within its principles.

One of the most striking examples of Shelley's engagement with classical political economy, is his support for Smith's views about the right of all classes to education. Just as Smith was concerned about the degeneration of labourers, Shelley condemns the

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<sup>41</sup> William Lambe, *Additional Reports on the Effects of a Peculiar Regimen in Cases of Cancer, Scrofula, Consumption, Asthma and Other Chronic Diseases* (London, J. Mawman, 1815), p. 220.

<sup>42</sup> Timothy Morton, *Shelley and the Revolution in Taste: The Body and the Natural World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 165.

deprivation of the poor with regard to ‘those comforts of civilisation, without which [...] man is far more miserable than the meanest savage’ (*Queen Mab*, Note to V, 211-2). This concern about a return to a ‘savage’ state echoes Smith’s fears about an inverse relationship between commercial and intellectual development. It also engages with Smith’s interest in the way that society had developed from primitive to commercial (*Theory of Moral Sentiments*, p. 183). Shelley expands this theme when he adds, ‘to subject the labouring classes to unnecessary labour, is wantonly depriving them of any opportunities of intellectual improvement’ (*Queen Mab*, Note to V, 211-2). The parallels with *Political Justice* here are evident. Godwin remarked that labour, ‘being amicably shared among all the active members of the community would be burthensome to none [...] all would have leisure to let loose his faculties in search of intellectual improvement’ (*Political Justice*, III, 430-1). Nevertheless, Shelley’s allusion to ‘unnecessary’ labour, as well as his description of contemporary commerce as ‘diseased’ implies a deeper assessment of the problematic relationship between economic development and education in 1813 (*Queen Mab*, Note to V, 211-2).

In conclusion, perceptions of Shelley’s hostility towards Smith in the Notes may be challenged by an appreciation of his admiration for the latter’s economics, ethics, and concepts of perfectibility. However, Shelley was beginning to realise that Smith’s principles alone could not provide answers to the crisis of 1813. It is for this reason that his Notes also encompass the practical efforts of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century agrarianism.

### **1. 6. Shelley, Thomas Spence and ‘The People’s Farm’**

Shelley’s interest in agrarian issues saw him asserting universal land rights in order to correct feudal abuses. This campaign can be observed as far back as the Levellers’ cause during the English Civil War. However, rather than supporting radical demands for the dissolution of private property, Shelley only advocated this step as an effect of intellectual enlightenment. Furthermore, he believed that agrarian principles complemented his ideas about establishing a new kind of commerce. These ideas are embodied by the thought of Thomas Spence, whose updating of levelling principles in the late eighteenth century will now be explored in relation to Shelley’s Notes.

One of Spence’s most enduring observations is his criticism of reactionary views of

the poor as little more than animals. This is expressed powerfully in the title of his periodical, *Pigs' Meat, or Lessons for the Swinish Multitude* (1793), a satire of Edmund Burke's remark that 'learning' would be destroyed by a revolution. Burke was writing prior to the Reign of Terror, yet was disturbed by the National Assembly, which gave 'splendour to obscurity'.<sup>43</sup> In contrast, Spence believed that the expression of labouring-class hardship constituted its own kind of 'splendour'. He was convinced that giving a voice to this underclass was crucial in redressing economic abuses. Spence developed a sophisticated bricolage technique in his periodicals, which encompassed a variety of revolutionary, philosophical and millenarian arguments. As a result, his work challenges interpretations of the agrarian movement as provincial in outlook and rudimentary in agenda. Malcolm Chase comments that agrarianism 'resisted the imposition of capitalistic work forms, with labour negotiating what shape industrialising society should assume'.<sup>44</sup> This description of agrarianism resisting contemporary abuses and then shaping a new kind of commerce, draws close to Shelley's vision of a progressive economy. In order to suggest that parallels can be drawn between the Notes and Spence's ideas, it is important to explore the latter's outlook more closely.

Spence was convinced that it was only through abolishing private property that other social evils could be redressed. This belief culminated in his declaration that, 'all lordship in the soil be abolished, and the territory declared to be the people's farm'.<sup>45</sup> This slogan, 'the people's farm', became the definition of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century agrarianism, but it also offers a concise summary of Spence's agenda and abilities. Its emphasis upon 'the people' aligns Spence with revolutionary rhetoric, yet his concept of a functional and self-sufficient 'farm' also reveals a commitment to practical development in his writing. This section argues that Shelley was receptive to both 'Spences', in terms of the latter's employment of revolutionary propaganda, and his plans to implement economic improvements.

Spence's involvement in philosophical debate can be seen in his address to the Newcastle Philosophical Society in 1775. The title of his lecture, *The Rights of Man*, preceded Paine by nearly twenty years. Paine's polemic denounces tyrants, and discusses various themes, from the failure of kingship to provisions to be made for the poor. However, Spence focuses on the single issue of land ownership in order to assert

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<sup>43</sup> Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), ed. by J. C. D. Clark (California: Stanford University Press, 2001), p. 335; p. 2.

<sup>44</sup> Malcolm Chase, *The People's Farm: English Radical Agrarianism 1775-1840* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 3, 6.

<sup>45</sup> Thomas Spence, *Constitution of a Perfect Commonwealth*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (London: The Hive of Liberty, 1798), p. 16.

the rights of the labouring classes. Mary Ashraf explores the way that Spence ridicules Paine's 'constitutional mythology' as a middle-class preoccupation, whereas he preferred to speak concretely of labour conditions.<sup>46</sup> Although Paine contemplated property rights in his *Agrarian Justice* (1795-6), the revolutionary figurehead merely recommended returning ten per cent of the total land revenue to the people. In contrast, Spence was not content with condemning landlords, but criticised the system that had created them. Nevertheless, Newcastle's Philosophical Society considered these notions dangerous and Spence was expelled. This reflects the way that Spence's 'Land Plan' compelled the Society to draw sharp distinctions between bourgeois dissent, and revolutionary ideas that called 'fundamental principles' into question.<sup>47</sup>

Spence believed that an economy founded upon equal landownership would provide a solution to the evils of contemporary commerce. He often used millenarian language in order to articulate such views, reflecting his Dissenting education. Spence had been taught in Newcastle by the radical preacher James Murray. Murray endorsed violence in the manner of a religious crusade. However, he also admired Harrington's *The Commonwealth of Oceana* (1656), and modified the latter's belief that revolutions secure the landed classes into an advocacy of the claims of labourers.<sup>48</sup> Such wide-ranging influences resulted in Spence's periodicals drawing together multiple voices. As Iain McCalman comments, Spence believed that 'the age of reason paralleled God's promise of the Millennium, and he was happy to lace them together'.<sup>49</sup> However, his millenarian language is often misinterpreted as an over-simplification of his agrarian ideas. For example, he writes:

You will be your own masters. And then you may return to your natural occupation of tillage, until the whole earth be as the Garden of Eden. Every land will literally be flowing with milk and honey. Trade will then be genuine. For none will be in trade and manufactures, but those who can live well by them.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> P. M. Ashraf, *The Life and Times of Thomas Spence* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Graham, 1983), p. 55.

<sup>47</sup> Robert Spence Watson, *The History of the Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle Upon Tyne (1793-1896)* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Walter Scott, 1897), p. 16.

<sup>48</sup> Ashraf, *Life and Times*, pp. 24-5.

<sup>49</sup> Iain McCalman, *Radical Underworld: Prophets, Revolutionaries and Pornographers in London, 1795-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 66.

<sup>50</sup> Thomas Spence, *Supplement to the History of Robinson Crusoe* (Newcastle upon Tyne: T. Saint, 1782), p. 28. All subsequent citations from this work will be from this edition and be given in parentheses, abbreviated as *Supplement*, in the text.

This pre-lapsarian emphasis upon ‘tillage’ as man’s ‘natural occupation’ favours an Edenic idyll. However, such remarks also emphasise the centrality of industrialisation to agrarian ideas. Spence seamlessly combines these prophetic declarations with an anticipation of a ‘genuine’ form of trade, presenting agriculture as an ally rather than an enemy of ‘manufactures’. This focus upon redressing the concept of ‘mastery’ through radical means, and then transforming the corruptive elements of commerce so that it can benefit society, reflects the sophistication of Spence’s thought.

Spence’s devotion to economic progress becomes evident in his description of the transformation of his agricultural democracy into a trading nation. Such theories rested upon a sophisticated philosophical basis. Spence admired Harrington’s support for trade in everything except landed property, which illustrates his belief in liberating commerce from corruption:

All men to Land may lay an equal Claim;  
But Goods, and Gold, unequal Portions frame:  
The first, because, all Men on Land must live,  
The second’s the Reward Industry ought to give.<sup>51</sup>

This emphasis upon the ‘reward’ of ‘Industry’ suggests that Spence was amenable to the potential of commerce. It can thus be argued that Shelley would have been more receptive to Spence’s arguments than the escapism of Cobbett, who lamented that ‘before the enclosure Bill passed, every Poor Person had a little Garden and Cottage and Orchard’.<sup>52</sup> In contrast, Spence comments that his society would have ‘every Appearance of Opulence, flourishing with Trade and Manufactures’ (*Supplement*, pp. 10-11). It is significant that Spensonia was popular amongst industrial workers in the early nineteenth century who extended Spence’s arguments to machinery.

Spence’s arrival in London in December 1792 marked a transition in his career, in that he began to associate with like-minded individuals. He was recruited to Division 12 of the London Corresponding Society in early 1793, yet remained committed to promoting his distinctive economic beliefs. He began as a lone bookseller, eventually establishing his own press, ‘The Hive of Liberty’. This reference to Mandeville’s

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<sup>51</sup> Thomas Spence, *Reign of Felicity* (London: The Hive of Liberty, 1796), p. 10.

<sup>52</sup> William Cobbett, quoted in Chase, *The People’s Farm*, p. 89.

depiction of labourers as worker bees implies that Spence's understood classical political economy, and suggests that his levelling principles were informed by them. Such activities culminated in the publication of *Pigs' Meat* in 1793. Ashraf describes the way that this periodical contrasted with those written by 'middle class reformers who were sure that the common people would elect men of education, or else fail to achieve anything on their own account'.<sup>53</sup> This belief in the labouring classes as capable of bringing about active change, is evident in Spence's outline of his periodical's purpose:

To promote among the Labouring Part of Mankind proper Ideas of their Situation, of their Importance and of their Rights, and to convince them that their forlorn condition has not been entirely forgotten, neither by their Maker, nor by the most enlightened Men in all Ages.<sup>54</sup>

Spence's assurance to the poor that their hardship has not been 'forgotten' by God or by 'enlightened Men' reflects the wide-ranging styles and ideas embraced by the periodical.

*Pigs' Meat* demonstrates a vast historical awareness and Spence emerges as well-read in many literary conventions, including the Italian tradition that Shelley so admired. For example, he subverts Machiavelli's *The Prince* (1515) to uphold the rights of 'the people' (*Pigs' Meat*, p. 6). *Pigs' Meat* even engages with *The Wealth of Nations*, evident in Spence's fury that the poor 'are reduced to automata, with neither the means nor leisure necessary to acquire instruction' (p. 18). This emphasis upon the importance of 'leisure' implies Spence's reading of Godwin, but his concerns over the 'reduction' of the poor to 'automata' has undertones of Smith. Such allusions suggest that, not only were Shelley's Notes informed by Spence's arguments, but that the latter's periodicals were also receptive to similar sources. There is evidence to support Shelley's attraction to Spensonian propaganda techniques. Spence and his followers infuriated Home Office officials with wall chalkings, a technique adapted from the LCS to publicise 'Spence's Plan'.<sup>55</sup> Seven years after printing the Notes, Shelley alluded to this very visual depiction of language in his *Letter to Maria Gisborne* (1820). He

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<sup>53</sup> Ashraf, *Life and Times*, p. 54.

<sup>54</sup> Thomas Spence, Preface to *Pigs' Meat, or Lessons for the Swinish Multitude*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (London: The Hive of Liberty, 1793-6). All subsequent citations will be from this edition and will be given in parentheses, abbreviated as *Pigs' Meat*, in the text.

<sup>55</sup> Ashraf, *Life and Times*, p. 22.



describes a ‘wall/white with the scrawl/Of our unhappy politics’.<sup>56</sup> It is significant that this poem was written during the year of the Cato Street Conspiracy, the most activist and incendiary plot planned by the Spencean Philanthropists. Such an allusion to tactics favoured by the Spenceans thus suggests that Shelley was describing the promotion of the Land Plan. Spence’s other propaganda techniques included distributing coins bearing levelling slogans to passing crowds at Tyburn, publishing broadside songs and writing street-ballads in order to appeal to the poor. These share affinities with Shelley’s use of similar forms in *The Mask of Anarchy* (1819), yet Spence’s influence upon Shelley’s early prose cannot be underestimated.

Part of the reason why Spensonia has been misconstrued relates to the adoption of Spence’s ideas by the Spencean Philanthropists, an organisation formed after his death in 1814. Whilst Spence employed religious allegory in order to highlight social grievances (such as describing God as ‘a very notorious Leveller’), Thomas Evans and his followers adopted a literal interpretation of Scripture.<sup>57</sup> The Spencean Philanthropists gained a reputation as one of the most seditious reform factions through their involvement with the Spa Fields Riots and the Cato Street Conspiracy. However, even under Evans the Spenceans were swift in distancing themselves from Luddite principles. Spence’s emphasis upon prosperity based upon labour, rather than permitting wealth to become lost in mathematical hypotheses, questioned Malthusian conclusions, which Evans described as the ‘merciful, Christian mode of starvation’.<sup>58</sup> This suggests that the Spenceans believed that their agrarian ideas postulated a form of political economy that promoted, rather than alienated labouring-class concerns.

Spence’s economic contributions and the way in which he articulates them by experimenting with different modes of rhetoric, had a wide-reaching legacy. It is significant that Richard Carlile, who distanced himself from Spencean extremism, insisted that ‘The sentiment of Thomas Spence, that THE LAND IS THE PEOPLE’S FARM, is incontrovertible’.<sup>59</sup> I argue that Shelley was aware of this impact of Spence’s ideas when he was involved in the Tremadoc project. It thus remains to identify echoes of agrarian thought in the Notes.

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<sup>56</sup> Shelley, *Letter to Maria Gisborne* in *Poems*, III, 457, ll. 266-8.

<sup>57</sup> Thomas Spence, *The Real Rights of Man* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Thomas Spence, 1775), p. 22.

<sup>58</sup> Thomas Spence, *Christian Policy the Salvation of Empire*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (London: The Hive of Liberty, 1816), p. 18.

<sup>59</sup> Richard Carlile, *The Republican* (1816), quoted in Chase, *The People’s Farm*, p. 2.

### **1. 7. 'Working for Themselves': Shelley and the Agrarian Movement**

The key evidence for Shelley's reading of Spence in 1813 can be observed in his Note on vegetarianism. Shelley was receptive to the advocates of natural diet whom he encountered in Godwin's circle between October and November 1812, whose medical and moral arguments influenced the Notes. However, this section argues that at least initially, Shelley gravitated towards approaches to vegetarianism expressed during the 1790s. The most notable aspect of this revolutionary vegetarianism was its alignment of tortured animals with working-class hardship. Although vegetarianism was not one of Spence's agendas, he engaged with this animal imagery in his periodicals in order to highlight that labourers were oppressed not through murder, but through the increasingly negative effects of contemporary commerce. Shelley's friend, Thomas Love Peacock, whom he met at this time later satirised this political connotation of vegetarianism, lampooning such thinkers 'for a kind of coy identification with the working classes'.<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless, Shelley was attracted to this 'identification' between the murder of animals and the oppression of the poor. The Notes reflect the way that he superimposes vegetarian arguments upon agrarian ideas in a similar way to Spence in his periodicals.

Shelley incorporates vegetarian imagery into his views on industrialisation. He comments: 'The bull must be degraded to the ox, and the ram into the wether, by an unnatural and inhuman operation, that the flaccid fibre may offer a fainter resistance to rebellious nature' (*Queen Mab*, Note to VIII, 211-212). Shelley's opinions about the present 'unnatural' state of man, in which the murder of animals is symbolic of an inhumane society, contemplate the idea of a return to nature. However, the way in which he compares the 'degradation' of animals to the 'inhuman operation' of commerce, implies that he already perceives economic progress as more complex than submitting to the rebellion of nature. It is significant that he regards vegetarianism primarily in an economic light, evident in his remark that 'the change which would be produced by simpler habits on political economy is sufficiently remarkable'. Shelley's comments on 'the waste of pasturage', echo Spence's fury towards enclosures, whilst his promotion of vegetarianism is concerned with enabling labourers to provide for

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<sup>60</sup> Thomas Love Peacock, 'Dinner by the Amateurs of Vegetable Diet', *The Medical Advisor*, 1 (1823), 10-16 (p. 13).

themselves (*Queen Mab*, Note to VIII, 211-2). This becomes clear when he remarks:

The use of animal flesh and fermented liquors, directly militates with this equality of the rights of man. The peasant cannot gratify these fashionable cravings without leaving his family to starve [...] The peasantry work, not only for themselves, but for the aristocracy, the army, and the manufactures. (*Queen Mab*, Note to VIII, 211-2)

Shelley aligns his criticism of ‘the use of animal flesh’ with ‘the rights of man’, signifying that his vegetarianism is bound up with human ‘equality’. However, it may be argued that these ‘rights’ relate not to Paine’s political rhetoric but to Spence’s view that the rights of man were to be found in common land ownership. It is thus with economic, rather than moral benefits in mind, that Shelley condemns the desire for ‘fashionable cravings’.

Shelley’s description of the way that the peasantry are exploited by the ‘aristocracy, army and manufactures’ reflects his belief that social change must acknowledge economic reality. Rather than depending upon an exploitative landlord, Shelley asserts the right of the labourer to support himself, confirming his belief that both agriculture and commerce could be ‘organised for the liberty, security and comfort of the many’ (*Queen Mab*, Note to VIII, 211-2). Morton presents Shelley’s vegetarianism as freeing society from contemporary commerce. He remarks: ‘Blood and gold pollute a primal goodness while providing artificial luxury’.<sup>61</sup> However, when Shelley’s vegetarianism becomes fused with the outlook of a writer like Spence, such divisions between the ‘primal goodness’ of the land, and the ‘polluting’ influence of commerce become complicated. This is evident in his emphasis upon taking ‘the benefits and reject[ing] the evils of the system, which is now interwoven with all the fibres of our being’ (*Queen Mab*, Note to VIII, 211-2). This conviction of the ‘benefits’ of the commercial ‘system’ reflects greater parallels with Spence than with utopian writers like Lambe.

It can be argued that what attracted Shelley most to Spence’s ideas was the way in which they challenged Malthusian arguments. In 1798, Malthus contemplated the possibility of adopting a national vegetarian diet in relation to economic progress:

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<sup>61</sup> Morton, *Shelley and the Revolution in Taste*, p. 94.

The only chance of success would be the ploughing up of all the grazing countries and putting an end to the use of animal food. Yet the soil of England will not produce much without dressing, and cattle seem to be necessary to make that species of manure which best suits the land. (*Essay*, p. 187)

Agrarian thinkers interpreted this support for pasturage as maintaining the divide between rich and poor. Catherine Gallagher comments that Malthus recognised that pasturage alienated labourers, but ‘seemed to derive the benefits of a population “check” from such deprivation’.<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, Shelley adds to such arguments his fondness for employing Malthus’ statistical methods in order to repel his conclusions. He incorporates mathematical examples in order to highlight the economic benefits of vegetarianism. Shelley comments in a footnote that, ‘of 18,000 children born, 7,500 die of various diseases’. However, he adds ‘and how many more of those that survive are not rendered miserable by maladies not immediately mortal?’ (*Queen Mab*, Note to VIII, 211-2). Shelley’s statistics are punctuated by sharp alliteration. This relates the ‘maladies not immediately mortal’ to Malthus’ conclusions on the inevitability of human hardship, and his underestimation of agrarian methods.

By engaging with the way in which agrarian writers re-orientated economic theories, Shelley became convinced that commerce could complement social progress. However, it is important to examine Shelley’s style in more detail, as this not only impacted upon the reception of *Queen Mab* and its Notes, but also raised questions about the way that economic issues should be articulated. Consequently, it remains to explore his growing belief that political economy could assume a literary, as well as scientific form. Shelley’s fascination with scientific experiments in relation to economic improvement has been touched upon. The following section will look more closely at the ways in which Shelley expresses such views, focusing upon his fusion of scientific and aesthetic approaches.

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<sup>62</sup> Catherine Gallagher, ‘The Body Versus the Social Body in the Works of Thomas Malthus and Henry Mayhew’, *Representations*, 14 (1986), 83-106 (p. 88).

### **1. 8. 'Enlisting Imagination Under the Banner of Science': Shelley, Political Economy, and Literary Form**

Shelley's scientific interests were an important influence upon his perception of political economy. Nevertheless, what distinguishes his treatment of science in the Notes is less his application of its theories to economic progress, and more the way in which he expresses them. This section considers the way that Shelley's distinction between *Queen Mab* and its Notes reflects his increasing belief that poetry and prose could be employed to articulate innovations in non-literary disciplines, such as science and political economy. By expressing scientific and economic theories in verse, and expanding upon these themes in prose Notes that adopt a poetic style, Shelley challenges such dichotomies between art and science. This has interesting consequences for political economy. Shelley's exploration of how economic innovations relate to imagination in a way that goes beyond Smith's moral philosophy, suggests that political economy is not only compatible with literature, but can be viewed as a literary form.

An important figure who shared Shelley's concept of uniting economics with literary expression is Erasmus Darwin. Darwin's influence upon the scientific theories of the Notes has been remarked upon by King-Hele.<sup>63</sup> More recently, Sharon Ruston has provided an important study of the way in which Darwin's theory of life was 'read and much admired by Shelley'.<sup>64</sup> These explorations of the impact of Darwin's discoveries in Shelley's poetry and drama are valuable for the evidence they provide of the latter's scientific awareness. However, Shelley's experiments with form and genre provide an alternative context through which his agenda can be explored. My secondary reading in relation to Shelley and science is thus necessarily selective. Although this chapter draws upon Darwin's wider scientific contributions, these are discussed in relation to the way that Shelley regards the latter's works as complementing his own ideas about the relationship between science, literary form, and its economic implications.

Darwin's claim to 'enlist imagination under the banner of science' involved

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<sup>63</sup> King-Hele, *Erasmus Darwin and the Romantic Poets*, p. 2.

<sup>64</sup> Sharon Ruston, *Shelley and Vitality* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 29.

expressing scientific knowledge using a poetic form'.<sup>65</sup> This section argues that Shelley was not only receptive to Darwin's technique, but that he also developed its unorthodox employment of poetry into an equally unusual prose style. In comparing Shelley and Darwin, Carl Grabo acknowledges the former's more sophisticated combination of poetry and science:

Darwin was a scientist with the imaginative grasp of a poet, but wholly deficient in the congruous association of words and images. Shelley, a poet endowed with those faculties which Darwin lacked, had also greater powers of imagination, and enough knowledge of science to grasp the implications of scientific theory.<sup>66</sup>

Whilst Grabo suggests that Darwin and Shelley each possessed 'faculties' lacked by the other, his suggestion that Shelley had 'greater powers of imagination' has important implications for his treatment of political economy. Robert Mitchell argues that 'science can only orient itself towards its proper goals on the basis of a unifying, poetic narrative that governs its process'.<sup>67</sup> However, it may be said that through reading Darwin, Shelley applied this concept of a 'poetic narrative' not only to science, but also its contributions to socio-economic development.

Evidence of Shelley's reading of Darwin can be seen as early as 1811, when in the midst of a diatribe against social abuses, he comments in a letter of 25 July: 'equality in politics like perfection in morality appears now far removed from even the visionary anticipations of what is called the wildest theorist. *I then am wilder than the wildest*' (*Letters*, I, 126). Despite the revolutionary emphasis upon 'equality', Shelley's aspirations for 'perfection in morality' is suggestive of his continuing fascination with Smithian political economy. Nevertheless, his union of economic concerns with an admiration for 'wild' speculations implies his reading of one figure in particular. It is interesting that, following a meeting with Darwin in January 1796, Coleridge had

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<sup>65</sup> Erasmus Darwin, *The Botanic Garden*, 2 vols (London: J. Johnson, 1799), I (*The Economy of Vegetation*, 1791), iii. All subsequent citations from this work will be given in parentheses, abbreviated as *Botanic Garden*, in the text.

<sup>66</sup> Carl Grabo, *A Newton Among Poets: Shelley's Use of Science in Prometheus Unbound* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1930), p. 32.

<sup>67</sup> Robert Mitchell, "'Here is thy Fitting Temple": Science, Technology and Fiction in Shelley's *Queen Mab*', *Romanticism on the Net*, 21 (2001). <[www.erudit.org/revue/ron/2001/v/n21/005964ar.html](http://www.erudit.org/revue/ron/2001/v/n21/005964ar.html)> [accessed 10 October 2008].

coined the term ‘Darwinising’ to mean ‘speculating wildly’.<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, Shelley refers to Darwin directly in a letter written three days later, describing the latter’s geological discoveries (*Letters*, I, 129). By 1813, Shelley’s contemplation of this wild theorist had become fused with his commitment to practical economic change. However, it is through his style, as well as his scientific theories, that Darwin’s influence upon the Notes must be explored.

### **1. 9. ‘Wilder than the Wildest’: Erasmus Darwin, Science and Literature**

Desmond King-Hele suggests that in order to comprehend Darwin’s achievements fully, it is necessary to appreciate ‘his medical activities, be proficient in every science, versed in the history of technology, and be an experienced literary critic’.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, Darwin’s desire to extend the capacity of science beyond his acclaimed medical talents led to the foundation of the Lichfield Lunar Society in 1765. His conviction that science was inspired by the insight of the individual, rather than deduced from general rules, is expressed in his description of the Society to Matthew Boulton. He exclaims, ‘what rhetorical, metaphysical, mechanical and pyrotechnical inventions will be bandied from one to another of your troupe of philosophers!’.<sup>70</sup> Darwin emphasises that the insights of scientific geniuses must be conveyed ‘from one to another’, reflecting his interest in the way that scientific ideas were articulated. Furthermore, he aligns science with ‘rhetorical’ and ‘metaphysical’ inventions. This suggests that he not only regarded advances in science in a practical light, but also believed that they could be expressed in a literary manner. This aspect of Darwin’s thought is complex and before it can be approached, it is important to explore his contributions to economic progress.

Industrialists such as James Watt and Josiah Wedgwood have been credited with advances such as pottery factories and steam engines, but Darwin is often overlooked as the initiatory force behind these figures. Darwin was critical of the distortion of industrialisation and its emphasis upon monetary gain at the expense of human suffering. However, his approach to economic progress had little in common with contemporary hostility towards industrialisation. The difference between Darwin’s

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<sup>68</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ‘Notes on Stillingfleet’, repr. in *The Athenaeum*, 2474 (1875), 422-23 (p. 423).

<sup>69</sup> King-Hele, *Erasmus Darwin* (New York: Macmillan, London: St. Martin’s Press, 1963), p. 168.

<sup>70</sup> Letter to Matthew Boulton (1767) in *The Scientific Correspondence of Joseph Priestley*, ed. by Henry Carrington Bolton (Philadelphia: Collins, 1891), 198-203 (p. 199).

celebration of technological progress, and the suspicion of figures such as Blake towards commerce, is illustrated by their responses to the burning of the Albion Mills in 1791. Blake celebrated the downfall of the ‘dark satanic mills’ that had inspired his poetry.<sup>71</sup> In contrast, Darwin remarked that ‘Albion Mill is no more [...] London has lost the advantage of possessing the most powerful machine in the world!’ (*Botanic Garden*, I, 292). It is ironic that the mill, designed by Boulton and Watt to be a symbol of human power, should have been regarded with such hatred during the revolutionary era. Indeed, Blake supported Darwin’s libertarian ideas, and provided illustrations for his poetry.

Darwin’s greatest enactment of his scientific theories was his contribution to the Grand Trunk Canal in 1766. This was one of the Lunar Society’s most successful projects, creating a canal that connected Manchester to the salt-producing areas of Cheshire. Darwin’s involvement in this scheme reflects his conviction of the relationship between science and economic progress. However, it was during this project that his interest in the progressive quality of both the human and natural worlds intensified. In 1767, huge fossil bones were dug up from the canal. Darwin’s analysis of these fossils led him to extend his scientific knowledge beyond his previous concerns. Contemporary geologists perceived fossils merely as a way of identifying the age of rocks. In contrast, Darwin realised that these discoveries contained great importance for the future of humanity, and within two years had ‘come to believe in what we now call biological evolution’.<sup>72</sup>

Ideas about evolution are attributed to Darwin’s grandson Charles, who commented that the former’s expression of scientific discoveries through poetry, ‘is quite incomprehensible in the present day’.<sup>73</sup> However, it was the senior Darwin’s interdisciplinary approach to science, which rendered ‘comprehensible’ the notion that humanity had not always existed. This conviction culminated in 1789 with Darwin’s publication of an epic poem on the structure of vegetation, entitled *The Loves of the Plants*. This work proved popular, due to its use of plant reproduction as a metaphor for human sexuality. However, beneath this appealing veneer, Darwin asserts that ‘all the productions of nature are in their progress to greater perfection’ (*Botanic Garden*, II, 9). This emphasis upon ‘greater perfection’ may be viewed as applying Godwinian ideas to a biological sphere. In *The Economy of Vegetation*, published as Part I of *The Botanic*

<sup>71</sup> Preface to *Milton* (1804) in *William Blake: Selected Poetry*, ed. by Michael Mason (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 161-173 (p. 161), l. 8.

<sup>72</sup> King-Hele, *Erasmus Darwin and the Romantic Poets*, p. 8.

<sup>73</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Life of Erasmus Darwin* (London: Murray, 1879), p. 92.



*Garden* in 1791, Darwin approaches Godwin's arguments about the despotism of a monogamous society in his plant allegories, arguing that Love 'laughs at all but Nature's laws' (*Botanic Garden*, I, 490). However, whilst his argument is revolutionary, his personification of 'Love' raises questions about the way that socio-economic ideas should be articulated. As a result, Darwin's style becomes as interesting as his inter-disciplinary ideas.

The structure of Darwin's poem develops theories on the intersections between science, economics and literature that were prevalent during the revolutionary decade. Darwin's use of classical mythology was mocked by Godwin, who described it to Shelley on 10 December 1812 as 'a perpetual sparkle' (*Letters*, I, 341). However, such allusions reflect Darwin's engagement with a much older tradition, which included the expression of science through poetry by Lucretius in *De Rerum Natura*. Lucretius had argued that all intellectual and natural progress occurs as a result of 'the turbulent interaction of atoms'.<sup>74</sup> Darwin developed this fusion of science and poetry in order to argue that both disciplines came into existence through the infinite powers of the mind. Like Lucretius, he believed that mythology symbolised man's progressive understanding of the world, remarking: 'Philosophers of all ages have imagined that the world had its infancy and its gradual progress to maturity, this seems to have given origin to the antient allegory of Eros, or Divine Love, producing the world from the egg of Night, as it floated in Chaos' (*Botanic Garden*, I, 8). Such allusions to 'progress' originating from 'chaos' have Lucretian overtones. However, Darwin not only fuses science with literary expression, but also contemplates the function of poetry and prose.

Darwin includes long explanatory notes alongside *The Botanic Garden*. These attempt to catalogue the entirety of modern science in a way that surpasses the dedications prefacing the poem. Indeed, the verses of Cowper and Hayley, which celebrate Darwin's 'poetic birth' (*Botanic Garden*, I, viii) seem oblivious to the latter's inter-disciplinarity, evident when one compares their praise to the index to his notes. This encompasses: 'Shooting Stars. Lightning. Rainbow Colours of the Morning and Evening Skies. Twilight. Fire-Balls. Aurora Borealis. Planets. Comets. Fixed Stars. Sun's Orb' (*Botanic Garden*, I, xix). Whilst such dedications commend Darwin's incorporation of science into poetry, this index reveals his skill in writing highly poetic prose. The rapidity with which he details flowing transitions between a range of phenomena, presents spectacular natural occurrences in an aesthetic light. Like

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<sup>74</sup> Hugh Roberts, *Shelley and the Chaos of History* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), p. 252.

Lucretius, and unlike Shelley, Darwin intended his poem to be didactic. However, in the Interlude between Cantos I and II of *The Loves of the Plants*, Darwin differentiates between the function of his poem and its notes, stating that ‘poetry admits of but few words expressive of very abstracted ideas, whereas prose abounds with them’. Despite his didactic aims in the poem, Darwin admits that prose is a more ‘expressive’ medium for conveying complex ‘ideas’. This may be seen as corresponding with Shelley’s views on the separate functions of poetry and prose in the Notes.

Perhaps the most significant element of *The Botanic Garden* is Darwin’s application of his proto-evolutionary theories to contemporary debates on political economy.<sup>75</sup> Darwin shares an affinity with Shelley in acknowledging the realities of the natural and human worlds, and even contemplates the benefits of vegetarianism:

There are some circumstances of [Nature’s] economy which seem to contribute more to the general scale of happiness than others: When the unfeeling seed or egg are consumed by animals, the animal receives pleasure. But the method of supporting animal bodies by the destruction of other living animals would appear to be a less perfect part of the economy of Nature than those before mentioned. (*Botanic Garden*, I, 32-3)

Darwin’s emphasis upon a ‘scale of happiness’ refers to utilitarian theories, and he approaches similar conclusions reached by Bentham in relation to benefiting ‘the greatest number’. However, King-Hele suggests that, by applying this philosophy to the animal and vegetable kingdoms, Darwin resolves Bentham’s later problems in justifying such a theory, and emphasises that utility is a ‘natural’ process.<sup>76</sup> Roy Porter has explored the ways in which Darwin’s use of a classical style of poetry to express scientific ideas impacts upon the way that he conveys ‘pleasures and pains’ as being

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<sup>75</sup> Peter Bowler acknowledges that it is important to recognise that ‘much important work was done in geology and natural history’ by eighteenth-century scientific figures. However, although he includes Erasmus Darwin amongst these, Bowler is cautious about to what extent his work influenced his grandson’s ideas. For Bowler, Erasmus Darwin’s approach to the human and natural worlds is more reflective of 1790s doctrines of perfectibility, than it is a forerunner of a theory of evolution. Furthermore, Martin Priestman remarks that the senior Darwin’s belief in a first cause (‘a superior ENS ENTIVM’) distinguishes him from the arguments of the *Origins of Species*, notwithstanding his rejection of Christian revelation. See Peter J. Bowler, *Evolution: The History of an Idea* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, CA, and London: University of California Press, 1989), p. xiv. See also Martin Priestman, *Romantic Atheism: Poetry and Freethought, 1730-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>76</sup> King-Hele, *Erasmus Darwin*, p. 90.

part of the perfectibility process in nature.<sup>77</sup> Nevertheless, I suggest that this emphasis upon measuring happiness according to a quantifiable scale implies that Darwin was more familiar with the debates of contemporary utilitarianism than is often recognised. He was fascinated by the survival of species in the face of savagery, and this led him to assume an optimistic outlook towards what would later be termed ‘natural selection’ in the work of his grandson Charles.

In 1794, Darwin pushed the boundaries between science and the arts still further, publishing the first volume of *Zoonomia*, which ‘ranged over biology, psychology and also ventured gaily into philosophy, religion and physics’.<sup>78</sup> Although past criticism confines Shelley’s reading of Darwin to *The Botanic Garden*, this wide-ranging content draws close to his aims in the Notes. In *Zoonomia*, Darwin propagates his views on the dangers of alcohol. His method of immediately withdrawing liquor from the diet of the afflicted had, according to his friend Maria Edgeworth, ‘persuaded the local gentry to become water-drinkers’.<sup>79</sup> However, Darwin’s fusion of scientific and literary styles becomes significant when he applies the myth of Prometheus, a favourite amongst second-generation Romantic poets, to promote abstinence. Darwin remarks, ‘the punishment of those who steal this accursed fire is a vulture gnawing the liver; and well allegorises the poor inebriate lingering for years under painful hepatic diseases’.<sup>80</sup> This alignment of myth with medical doctrines would be employed by vegetarian writers such as Lambe, in order to promote their utopian views. However, Darwin suggests that such ‘allegorising’ can be applied in order to improve commercial society and its taste for luxuries.

Grabo remarks that Darwin’s importance to Shelley lies ‘not in the minor scientific details, but in the theory of the cause to which the evolution of forms may be assigned’.<sup>81</sup> Notwithstanding this somewhat anachronistic description of Darwin as possessing a firm understanding of ‘evolution’, Grabo’s account exemplifies the tendency to align Darwin’s discoveries with Shelley’s utopian ideas. However, the importance of Darwin’s ‘minor’ innovations, specifically those scientific ‘details’ that had implications for contemporary political economy, cannot be underestimated. Indeed, his combination of science, philosophy, and political economy in his treatise on agriculture *Phytologia* (1800), parallels Shelley’s interest in land cultivation. In 1777,

<sup>77</sup> Roy Porter, *Flesh in the Age of Reason* (London: Penguin, 2005), p. 55.

<sup>78</sup> King-Hele, *Erasmus Darwin*, p. 46.

<sup>79</sup> F. A. Edgeworth, *A Memoir of Maria Edgeworth*, 3 vols (London: privately printed, 1869), II, 82.

<sup>80</sup> Erasmus Darwin, *Zoonomia, or the Laws of Organic Life*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. 2 vols (London: J. Johnson, 1794-6), I, 353.

<sup>81</sup> Grabo, *A Newton Amongst Poets*, pp. 69-70.

Darwin transformed eight acres of swamp in Lichfield into a herboretum, and he believed that agriculture constituted a significant body of knowledge.<sup>82</sup> His alternative title for his work was *The Philosophy of Gardening and Agriculture*, reflecting his desire to combine a ‘philosophy’ of agriculture with a practical analysis of its methods. Darwin suggests that agriculture is a vital form of subsistence, in that the sugar-making process carried on in vegetable vessels, ‘is the greatest source of life to all organised beings’.<sup>83</sup> Consequently, *Phytologia* became recognised as having founded agricultural chemistry. Like Spence, Darwin believed that advances in industry complemented, rather than undermined ‘spade cultivation’.<sup>84</sup> This suggests that agrarian ideas united a variety of eighteenth-century thinkers in a way that went beyond their political or class affiliations.

Darwin died in 1802, but his most controversial work was yet to be published. It appeared the following year as *The Temple of Nature: Or the Origins of Society*. This was a poem written in the Augustan style, once again combined with extensive explanatory notes. Darwin’s description of ‘A Poem with Philosophical Notes’ (*Temple of Nature*, title page) differs slightly from Shelley’s ‘Philosophical Poem with Notes’ (*Queen Mab*, title page), in that Darwin implies a greater distinction between poetry and prose.<sup>85</sup> Although Shelley acknowledged the respective merits of each form, he was more intent on using his poem and notes in a complementary sense. Darwin may be seen as anticipating later theories of evolution here, in which through ‘reproduction, organic beings are gradually improved’ (*Temple of Nature*, p. 2). King-Hele identifies Malthusian undertones in this stanza:

So human progenies, if unrestrain’d  
By climate friended and by food sustained  
O’er seas and soils, prolific hordes! Would spread  
Ere long, and deluge their terraqueous bed;  
But war, and pestilence and disease and dearth,  
Sweep the superfluous myriads from the earth.  
(*Temple of Nature*, IV, ll. 369-74)

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<sup>82</sup> Anna Seward, *Memoirs of the Life of Dr. Darwin* (London: J. Johnson, 1804), p. 125.

<sup>83</sup> Erasmus Darwin, *Phytologia* (London: Joseph Johnson, 1800), p. 66. All subsequent quotations from this work will follow in parentheses, abbreviated as *Phytologia*, in the text.

<sup>84</sup> Chase, *The People’s Farm*, p. 138.

<sup>85</sup> Erasmus Darwin, *The Temple of Nature* (London: Joseph Johnson, 1803). All subsequent citations from this work will be given in parentheses, abbreviated as *Temple of Nature*, in the text.

It is easy to see Malthusian parallels in Darwin's concerns over 'unrestrained' progenies and the abundance of 'food'. However, whilst Malthus would perceive 'disease and dearth' as precluding a progressive society, Darwin views the same destructive quality as a means of ensuring it.

*The Temple of Nature* develops Darwin's experiments with rhetoric and style. He combines his interest in volcanic activity with visionary speculations on the potential of science. Darwin believed that 'volcanic eruptions may exert sufficient power to raise continents' (*Temple of Nature*, Notes, p. 14). This statement raises possibilities in relation to political economy. If, through the 'power' of eruptions, new 'continents' could be created, then Malthusian arguments that present nature as inimical to population increase may be challenged. At times, Darwin's language even adopts a millenarian tone: 'All the suns, and planets which circle round them, may again by explosions produce a new world; which in process of time may resemble the present one, and at length undergo the same catastrophe!' (*Temple of Nature*, Notes, pp. 166-7). These speculations on 'suns', 'planets' and 'catastrophe', coupled with their exclamatory punctuation, share parallels with Shelley's study of astronomy and geology in the Notes. However, it is Darwin's fusion of these themes with his belief in producing 'new worlds', that draws closest to Shelley's desire for a practical realisation of his utopian ideas.

The view of Darwin as a political radical was not unfounded. Aside from his contacts within the Lunar and Derby Philosophical Societies, Darwin corresponded with Benjamin Franklin and Rousseau. He also had affiliations with figures who were influential within Romanticism. Coleridge described Darwin as possessing 'a greater range of knowledge than any other man in Europe'.<sup>86</sup> Godwin praised him as 'a phenomenon', and shared his publisher, Joseph Johnson.<sup>87</sup> These associations suggest that Darwin may be included within the radical circles of the 1790s. Although he remained detached from political activism, Darwin's revolutionary sympathies can be observed in *The Temple of Nature*. Describing his use of classical imagery, he remarks: 'The halo around the head is a part of the universal language of the eye, designating a holy person, wings on the shoulders denote a good angel, to which may be added the cap of liberty' (Notes, p. 21). This reference to 'the cap of liberty' could allude to a

<sup>86</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, quoted in King-Hele, *Erasmus Darwin*, p. 168.

<sup>87</sup> C. Kegan Paul, *William Godwin: His Friends and Contemporaries*, 2 vols (London: Roberts Brothers, 1876), I, 261.

radical publication founded in the 1790s that shared this name.<sup>88</sup> Such hypotheses suggest that this last poem was most radical of Darwin's writings. It was responsible for the castigation of his work, evident in the derision of Rees' *Cyclopedia* of 1819, which stated that Darwin's 'sophisms [...] have long ceased to be popular'.<sup>89</sup> Such disfavour led to his work falling out of print between 1825 and 1973. However, it was Darwin's alignment of science with this 'language of the eye' that can be said to have attracted Shelley to his work in the Notes.

### **1. 10. 'Subconscious Borrowing': Shelley, Darwin and the Notes to *Queen Mab***

Darwin's influence upon the Notes is identifiable in their scientific allusions. However, there are also more subtle references to his belief that science could be expressed through poetry, and his view of the complementary relationship between verse and prose. King-Hele observes that it is important to recognise that Shelley 'was not just an outright, but also a "subconscious borrower"' of Darwin's work.<sup>90</sup> As a result, this section explores, not only the way that Darwin's definition of science influenced Shelley's economic outlook, but also the way that such 'subconscious borrowing' can be traced in the way that he expresses these ideas.

Shelley's admiration for Darwin's wide-ranging intellect is implied in the Notes, when he aligns advances in astronomy with the infinite possibilities of the human mind. He comments that, 'millions of suns are ranged around us, all attended by innumerable worlds [...] keeping the paths of immutable necessity' (*Queen Mab*, Note to I, 252-3). Shelley's concept of 'innumerable worlds' as subject to 'immutable necessity' parallels Darwin's belief in science as a vindication of revolutionary arguments concerning perfectibility. Furthermore, the awe-inspiring tone Shelley adopts in such remarks mirrors Darwin's reverential, and at times, millenarian language, when discussing the scope of the universe. Such parallels may be seen in Shelley's concept of 'the plurality of worlds' as 'a most awful subject of contemplation', which is reminiscent of Darwin's hypotheses on the 'explosion' of new worlds (*Queen Mab*, Note to I, 252-3). Shelley adopts Darwin's theories and style in order to assert that the cosmological potential of the external world, can also be observed within the human minds that seek to interpret

<sup>88</sup> Gilmartin, *Print Politics*, p. 197.

<sup>89</sup> Rees *Cyclopedia*, quoted in Grabo, *A Newton Amongst Poets*, p. 69.

<sup>90</sup> King-Hele, *Erasmus Darwin and the Romantic Poets*, p. 2.

it. As a result, this infinite power of the intellect becomes focussed upon contemporary approaches to social change and political economy.

It is significant that Shelley contemplates ‘fossils’ when relating geological discoveries to the progress of the human mind (*Queen Mab*, Note to VI, 45-6). Applying such Darwinian preoccupations to his views on human perfectibility, he remarks,

there is no great extravagance in presuming that the progress of the perpendicularity of the poles may be as rapid as the progress of intellect; or that there should be a perfect identity between the moral and physical improvement of the human species. (*Queen Mab*, Note to VI, 45-6)

Whilst Shelley’s alignment of polar ‘perpendicularity’ with the ‘progress of intellect’ can be viewed as Darwinian in outlook, he adds to this his own fascination with imminent social development, gained as a result of his experiences in Tremadoc. His contemplation of progress has implications not only for geology, but also for the ‘moral and physical improvement’ of the impoverished labourers he observed in Wales. His comment on the ‘perfect identity’ of bodily and intellectual development, draws parallels with his attraction to Smith’s views on education. By applying Darwinian methodology to local concerns about the deterioration of the labourer’s intellect, it could be argued that Shelley seeks to develop the strands of Darwin’s thought that have economic potential. It is interesting that in early 1813 he ordered ‘all possible documents on the Procession of the Equinoxes’ (*Letters*, I, 349), which suggests he was more receptive to Darwin’s proto-evolutionary view of life than is often recognised.

As well as suggesting Shelley’s attraction to Darwin’s methodology, this Note also reveals important stylistic influences that can be attributed to the latter. At times, Shelley’s prose becomes highly poetic in a way that mirrors the notes to *The Botanic Garden* and *The Temple of Nature*. It is significant that amidst his discussion of astronomy, Shelley cites ‘evidence afforded by the history of mythology’ (*Queen Mab*, Note to VI, 45-6). This contemplation of ‘mythology’ can also be seen in Darwin’s scientific challenges of religious superstition, yet it relates further back to Lucretius, whose expression of scientific theories in verse Shelley both cites and imitates in the Notes. Whilst Shelley draws upon Darwin’s application of the Lucretian style to revolutionary concerns, he also utilises this technique in order to arrive at his own

conclusions. For example, he cites Lucretius directly in order to relate his poetic metaphors to contemporary economic grievances. The Note begins with Lucretian imagery: ‘Suave mari magno turbantibus æquora ventis/E terrâ magnum alterius spectare laborem’ (It is pleasant, when winds are raging over a great sea, to watch from shore the strenuous efforts of another; *Queen Mab*, Note to V, 58).<sup>91</sup> However, Shelley connects this metaphor for human pleasure to Smith’s concerns about commercial expansion. Lucretius describes men: ‘Nocteis atque dies niti præstante labore/Ad summas emergere opes, rerum que potiri’ (striving night and day with egregious effort to get to the top in wealth and power; Note to V, 58).<sup>92</sup> By relating natural metaphors to Smith’s fears over the inverse relationship between ‘wealth’ and morals, Shelley can be seen as engaging with Darwin’s employment of Lucretian expression and developing it into a description of the plight of the poor.

Shelley also demonstrates his skill in advancing the Lucretian method in relation to a different text. Engaging with Darwin’s belief in natural regeneration as vindicating the progressive ideals of the 1790s, Shelley cites a passage from Homer. This not only employs natural metaphors in order to uphold theories of perfectibility in the human and natural spheres, but also anticipates Shelley’s mature ideas about the relationship between poetry, politics, and social change. He comments that ‘as with the generations of leaves, so with those of men. The wind showers the leaves on the ground, yet the flourishing wood puts out buds, the season of spring follows’ (*Queen Mab*, Note to V, 4-6).<sup>93</sup> Shelley’s fascination with ‘regeneration’ prevails throughout his oeuvre, and his recurring use of winds, leaves and seasons adopts its own vitality in the works he wrote in Italy. However, at this point, it is important to observe that his early receptiveness to the style of Darwin and Lucretius, inspired his later perception of political economy as having literary potential.

Shelley’s economic outlook is indebted to Darwin in the way that he admired, yet could never quite assent to the latter’s alignment of the human and animal worlds. King-Hele notes that Shelley denied ‘that life was the end-product of messy and chancy slaughter, rather than a reflection of some divine ideal’.<sup>94</sup> This idealistic assessment of Shelley is simplistic, in terms of the latter’s commitment to practical economic

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<sup>91</sup> Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, trans. by W. H. D. Rouse, rev. by Martin Ferguson Smith, Loeb Classical Library (London: Heinemann, 1975), II, ll. 1-14, quoted by Kelvin Everest and Geoffrey Matthews in *Poems*, I, 363.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid*, I, 363.

<sup>93</sup> Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. by A. T. Murray, ed. by William F. Wyatt, Loeb Classical Library (London: Heinemann, 1924), Book VI, ll. 146-9, quoted in Everest and Matthews in *Poems*, I, 363.

<sup>94</sup> King-Hele, *Erasmus Darwin and the Romantic Poets*, p. 207.



development. Nevertheless, it can be said that Shelley was uneasy with Darwin's depiction of the animalistic qualities of human beings, as he identified an uncomfortable parallel with Malthusian theories. He remarks that 'the origins of man, like that of the universe, is enveloped in impenetrable mystery' (*Queen Mab*, Note to VIII, 211-2). This defies Darwin's claim to having de-mystified the 'origins' of human life. However, his ambivalence towards Darwin's founding principle does not prevent Shelley from admiring the latter's oeuvre. Perhaps the clearest distinction between Darwin and Malthus that Shelley noticed, was Darwin's scepticism towards religious dogma. In contrast to Malthus' Anglican rhetoric, Shelley engages with Darwin's criticism of religious principles that deny the progressive quality in nature. He queries 'whether it is more probable the laws of nature, hitherto so immutably harmonious, should have undergone violation, or that man should have told a lie' (*Queen Mab*, Note to VII, 135-6). This juxtaposition of 'harmonious' natural laws with the 'lies' of religious superstition anticipates Shelley's complex engagement with Malthusian doctrines in his prose of 1819.

Shelley's admiration of Darwin's style and theories is not restricted to these universal, and at times, cosmological debates on socio-economic progress. The Notes also reveal that he contemplated the latter's views on vegetable diet and human health, in relation to his agrarian interests. Shelley mentions Darwin's medical methods when he remarks 'all depends upon breaking through a pernicious habit resolutely and at once' (*Queen Mab*, Note to VIII, 211-2). Such comments may be seen to refer to Darwin's 'resolute' approach to liquor drinking in his medical practice. Shelley's observations allude to meat-eating, referring to Prometheus 'inventing an expedient for screening from his disgust the horrors of the shambles' (*Queen Mab*, Note to VIII, 211-2). However, having drawn attention to Darwin's employment of the myth of Prometheus as an allegory that teaches abstinence, it is likely that Shelley was aware of this parallel. Certainly, Darwin's criticism of the 'horrors' of alcohol from the perspective that it precludes the progress of a healthy species, cannot have escaped his notice.

Darwin emphasised the benefit of a balanced diet of meat and vegetables in humans, because their teeth and length of their intestines are intermediate between those of carnivorous and herbivorous animals.<sup>95</sup> Shelley preferred Lambe's assertion that 'the human frame is one fitted to a pure vegetable diet' (*Queen Mab*, Note to VIII, 211-2). Nevertheless, it can be suggested that Shelley incorporates Darwin's medical views

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<sup>95</sup> King-Hele, *Erasmus Darwin*, p. 62.

into his beliefs about the infinite potential of agriculture, which in turn seek to undermine the reactionary incarnation of contemporary political economy. Despite his belief in the progressive powers of nature, Darwin was practical in his acceptance of death. Therefore, his contemplation of vegetarianism must be viewed in a different context to Shelley's ideas. King-Hele remarks that Shelley's picture of 'a "happy earth" would not have been convincing to Darwin, who saw the struggle for existence as central to life'.<sup>96</sup> However, Shelley's vegetarian arguments are more wide-ranging than Darwin's medical interests. By encompassing contemporary debates on social class and morality, he incorporates Darwin's scientific theories and his way of expressing them, into his approach to political economy.

By concluding this study of Shelley's receptiveness to Darwin, I also conclude my exploration of the former's treatment of political economy in the Notes. The Notes to *Queen Mab* have been interpreted by some critics as reflecting Shelley's early revolutionary and utopian outlook. However, this chapter has argued that they also reveal his detailed understanding of classical political economy and agrarian preoccupations. By exploring his receptiveness not only to recognised influences like Godwin and Hume, but also to writers as diverse as Smith, Spence and Darwin, this chapter has questioned readings of Shelley's limited economic understanding. For Shelley, political economy united practical projects like the Tremadoc Embankment with the infinite potential of the human mind expressed in Enlightenment and revolutionary philosophies. However, this chapter has also suggested that as early as 1813, Shelley was convinced that political economy could be viewed as a literary, as well as social form. He links the discipline to classical and eighteenth-century debates on the relationship between art and science, as well as experiments with poetry and prose. By drawing attention to these features in his early work, I suggest that the Notes mark the beginning of a distinctive approach to political economy that would characterise Shelley's later prose. Before this development can be charted any further, it remains to mention the significant afterlife of *Queen Mab*.

### **1. 11. The Legacy of *Queen Mab* and its Notes**

Despite his enthusiasm for the Tremadoc Project, Shelley fled Wales suddenly in March

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<sup>96</sup> King-Hele, *Erasmus Darwin and the Romantic Poets*, p. 199.

1813. His relationship with Madocks had become sour, as he realised that the latter did not share his radical views. In addition, his belief in uniting practical developments with the insights of a philosophical and visionary intellect alienated the concerns of overseers, who were faced with financial and construction worries. Shelley vented his frustration to Hogg on 7 February 1813:

Had you known the variety of the discomfitures I have undergone, you would attribute my silence to anything but neglect. I allude to the embankment affairs, in which I thoughtless engaged [...] *Mab* has gone on but slowly, although she is nearly finished. They have teased me out of all poetry. (*Letters*, I, 351-2)

Although Shelley perceived the ‘discomfitures’ he experienced in ‘embankment affairs’ as hindering the completion of his poem, these remarks are unreflective of the ways in which this practical involvement shaped his views on the capacity of ‘poetry’ itself. Through his experiments with style, rhetoric and genre, in structuring both poem and notes, it can be said that Shelley’s first major work was defined by his detailed analysis of political economy and its literary potential.

Shelley’s belief in the complementary functions of poetry and prose can be observed in their composition process. He had completed *Queen Mab* by February, and its Notes by May, but Hookham had decided that the finished work was too ‘much against every existing establishment’ to carry under his own imprint by 21 May (*Letters*, I, 368). Shelley himself printed the work, and it can be suggested that his desire to separate the poem and its Notes had a legal as well as aesthetic agenda. Neil Fraistat argues that Shelley hoped that ‘much subversive material might go “unnoticed” if it were tucked away in the radical primer at the back’.<sup>97</sup> Despite Shelley’s commitment to challenging socio-economic abuses, the Notes emphasise that intellectual improvements must be enacted prior to political ones. Shelley’s experiences in Ireland and Wales had cooled his revolutionary ardour, and his distrust of activism led him to exercise caution in printing his work. In order to avoid its rhetoric becoming misunderstood by those who had not yet attained a higher level of reasoning, the price of the work was high. Shelley printed around two hundred and fifty copies, seventy of which were distributed in

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<sup>97</sup> Neil Fraistat, ‘The Material Shelley: Who Gets the Finger in *Queen Mab*?’ , *Wordsworth Circle*, 33:1 (2002), 33-6, (p. 35).

England, Ireland and America, but *Queen Mab* underwent a complicated history that continued beyond his lifetime. Eight years later, the remaining hundred and eighty copies were bought by radical booksellers, most notably William Clark, who sold them to a working-class readership. Between 1821 and 1845, it is estimated that fourteen or more separate editions were published. Working-class enthusiasm for *Queen Mab* can be observed in Carlile's appraisal in both his *Champion* and *Republican*:

*Queen Mab* is a philosophical poem, and is remarkably strong in its exposure and denunciation of Kingcraft and Priestcraft [...] In addition to the Poem itself, there are Notes [...] of equal bulk, equal beauties and equal merit. Every thing that is mischievous to society is painted in this work in the highest colours.<sup>98</sup>

Carlile's celebration of all that is 'mischievous to society' justifies Shelley's fears about misinterpretations of his work. However, Carlile's descriptions also suggest that Shelley's desire for an egalitarian mode of political economy had been partially realised. Certainly Carlile's recognition that the Notes are of 'equal merit' as the 'philosophical poem', implies his receptiveness to Shelley's experiments with genre and style.

Not all the effects of these pirated editions were positive, and some wreaked havoc with Shelley's structure. In 1832, Jane Carlile produced an edition that printed the Notes at the bottom of the page, thus 'altering the balance that Shelley had tried to create between the poem and Notes'.<sup>99</sup> Such alterations ensured that this became the most notorious of Shelley's works. It is significant that reviews of *Queen Mab* appeared in publications that had Spencean affiliations, having drawn attention to Shelley's receptiveness to Spence's periodicals. For example, notable Spencean George Cannon reviewed Shelley's work in *The Theological Enquirer* in March 1815.<sup>100</sup> This recognition of Shelley's distinctive approach to political economy continued into the next generation. During the 1840s, *Queen Mab* became adopted by the Chartist movement, and George Bernard Shaw famously declared the work to be 'the Chartists'

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<sup>98</sup> Richard Carlile, quoted in Newman Ivey White, ed., *The Unextinguished Hearth: Shelley and his Contemporary Critics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1938), pp. 96-7.

<sup>99</sup> Fraistat, 'The Material Shelley', p. 35.

<sup>100</sup> Stephen C. Behrendt, *Shelley and His Audiences* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), p. 89.

Bible'.<sup>101</sup>

Shelley's reaction to these pirated editions of his work has been construed as negative. However, his remarks on Clark's pirated edition of 1821 are revealing, in terms of the different opinions he conveyed in letters to his publisher and those to his friends. He wrote to Charles Ollier on 22 June, placing distance between himself and his early work:

A poem, entitled *Queen Mab*, was written by me at the age of eighteen, I dare say in a sufficiently intemperate spirit – but even then was not intended for publication [...] I doubt not but that it is perfectly worthless in point of literary composition, and that in all that concerns moral and political speculation [...] I regret this publication, not so much from literary vanity, as because I fear it is better fitted to injure than to serve the cause of freedom.  
(*Letters*, II, 304-5)

There are many inaccuracies in these protestations. Shelley was twenty, not eighteen, when he wrote *Queen Mab* and its Notes, and already experienced in writing political prose. In addition, the work was certainly 'intended for publication', obstructed only by Hookham's reticence. Stephen Behrendt suggests that Shelley's 'repudiation applies more to his poem as a poem, than to the libertarian principles articulated therein'. This is evident when his declarations on 'injuring the cause of freedom' appear secondary to the 'worthless' literary value of the work. Shelley's deliberately defensive stance is reiterated by his insistence that Ollier pass one copy of this letter to the *Examiner* for publication. However, he does not blame Clark for republishing the poem, and instead attacks the system that imprisoned him. Behrendt argues that in seeking to publicly 'restrain' *Queen Mab*, he was actually hoping to excite new interest in it.<sup>102</sup> This is given credence when Shelley's outrage is contrasted with the mischievous letter he wrote on 16 June to John Gisborne:

*Queen Mab*, a poem written by me when very young, in the most furious style, with long notes against Jesus Christ, & God the Father, & the King, &

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<sup>101</sup> George Bernard Shaw, 'Shaming the Devil About Shelley' (1892), in *Pen Portraits and Reviews* (London: Constable, 1932), 236-46 (p. 241).

<sup>102</sup> Behrendt, *Shelley and His Audiences*, p. 84.

the Bishops, & marriage, & the Devil knows what, is just published by one of the low booksellers [...] You may imagine how much I am amused – For the sake of a dignified appearance however, & really because I want to protest against all the bad poetry in it, I have given orders to say that it is all done against my desire. (*Letters*, II, 300-1)

It is interesting that it is the Notes Shelley describes in great detail, rather than the poem itself. This suggests that his reference to ‘furious style’ refers, less to revolutionary ideas than to his early experimentations with form. Shelley’s emphasis upon ‘dignified appearance’ suggests that his true motives are based upon criticising his early expression. Nevertheless, this comment upon ‘bad poetry’ is concerned with the immaturity of verse, rather than the potential of his economic outlook in the Notes.

Shelley published a revised and abridged form of *Queen Mab* in later works such as *Alastor*, and attempted to revise it in *The Daemon of the World* in 1816. As a result, it can be argued that it was the articulation, as well as the principles of both poem and Notes that continued to fascinate him. His experiences on the Tremadoc Embankment had inspired him to transform the economic ideas of his early prose into a writing style that presented political economy in a literary light. These ideas would be challenged and refined between 1813 and 1817.

**Chapter Two: Political Economy, Literary Form and Social Reform in Shelley's  
Prose between 1813 and 1817**

**2. 1. The 'Peculiar Mode' of Passion: Shelley, Political Economy and Literary Form**

Following the printing of *Queen Mab* and its Notes in May 1813, Shelley's commitment to economic progress intensified. He had suggested that revolutionary doctrines could be viewed as compatible with the theories of classical political economy, as well as innovations developed by pioneers in science, agriculture and industry. As a result, the Notes promoted a mode of economic progress that nurtured the powers of the human mind, whilst giving rise to practical improvements. Such an interpretation of political economy challenged contemporaries who deployed the principles of Smith and Malthus in order to justify inequality. Referring to this politicisation of political economy in the 1810s, Connell comments that 'what inspired interest in political economy was often not so much the theoretical problems occupying economists, as the social questions with which the discipline found itself linked'.<sup>1</sup> However, even as early as the Notes to *Queen Mab*, it was these interpretations of economic doctrines to justify oppressive social policies that Shelley condemned, rather than the preoccupations of such theorists themselves.

Shelley's belief in the progressive potential of political economy is important when exploring the growth of his economic outlook between 1813 and 1817. This conviction was refined by his engagement with those figures he had first encountered through Godwin's acquaintance in October 1812. Shelley's participation within what is termed 'the Bracknell circle' was regarded as a period of distraction by some contemporaries. For example, Peacock perceived Shelley as susceptible to eccentric figures, under whose influence his economic interests became sidelined:

Shelley was surrounded by a numerous society, all in great measure of his own opinions in relation to religion and politics, and the larger portion of

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<sup>1</sup> Connell, *Romanticism, Economics and the Question of 'Culture'*, p. 6.

them in relation to vegetable diet [...] opinions utterly uncondusive to any practical result.<sup>2</sup>

It is true that Shelley gravitated towards the Bracknell circle because its salon environment appealed to his lingering desire for an association of intellectuals. However, Peacock's treatment of Shelley's radical 'opinions' underestimates the motives which lay behind his utopian ideas. His description of Shelley's vegetarianism as 'uncondusive' to 'practical results' suggests that despite the satirical tone of these remarks, Peacock overlooks the range of his economic interests. In the Notes, Shelley had connected Enlightenment doctrines on human sentiments to commercial expansion, and a vegetable diet to agricultural progress. Now, in the midst of the Bracknell circle, he began to develop such arguments in order to promote human well-being. Although his prejudices against the Bracknell circle colour Peacock's account, his emphasis upon practicality is suggestive of Shelley's commitment to economic endeavours in Tremadoc. Therefore, it is appropriate to remark that Shelley was 'surrounded' by such radicals, but that he maintained a distance from their wilder ideas. Peacock's contribution to Shelley's economic outlook is discussed later. However it is questionable to assume, as Cameron does, that it was Peacock who helped keep his mind focused upon economic problems.<sup>3</sup> In contrast, this chapter argues that Shelley demonstrated an ability both to extract from and at the same time scrutinise aspects of the utopian outlooks found amongst those of the Bracknell circle.

Shelley was more receptive than impressionable. Merle Williams describes him as 'able to dismantle and reconfigure sequences of argument, reformulating his own guiding assumptions'.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, it is more productive to approach the prose that was written alongside the Notes to *Queen Mab* as a reflection of his difficulties with the 'assumptions' expressed in his earlier work. It is true that Shelley cited John Frank Newton and Joseph Ritson in the Notes and in the essays on vegetarianism he published between 1813 and 1815. However, it is important to approach his prose of this period as a means of reinforcing an awareness of their intellectual differences. Shelley's ability to retain a distinctive identity within educated circles would resurface three years

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas Love Peacock, 'Memoirs of Percy Bysshe Shelley', first printed as three articles in *Fraser's Magazine*, June 1858, January 1860 and March 1862, quoted in *Peacock: Memoirs, Essays and Reviews*, ed. by Howard Mills (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1970), p. 38.

<sup>3</sup> Cameron, *The Young Shelley*, p. 223.

<sup>4</sup> Merle A. Williams, 'Contemplating Facts, Studying Ourselves, Aspects of Shelley's Philosophical and Religious Prose', in *The Unfamiliar Shelley*, ed. by Alan M. Weinberg and Timothy Webb (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 119-221 (p. 218).



later, in his involvement with Leigh Hunt's Hampstead coterie. Referring to Hunt's group, Jeffrey Cox comments on Shelley's attitude towards collective opinion, and his description is also relevant to the Bracknell period. He suggests that Shelley sought an 'association as a means of cultural production, and also as a site of opposition'.<sup>5</sup> Such an emphasis upon 'opposition' implies that he thrived upon questioning group mentalities. Cox also suggests that identifying the subtleties of Shelley's doubts is difficult. He cites Jean-Paul Sartre's view that 'the intellectual thinks *in* the idea, signifying that it is the sign of his belonging to a determined group (since its ideology is known), and also an undefined group (since the individual will never be known by all members)'.<sup>6</sup> Cox observes that it is this 'determined group' which is more commonly analysed in literary criticism, as is supported by past explorations of the ways in which different circles influenced Shelley. However, it is equally important to analyse Shelley's prose for elements of the 'undefined'. It is only through examining the extent of his doubt that a comprehensive insight into his intellectual development can be gained.

Whilst still involved with the Tremadoc Embankment project, Shelley wrote a letter to Hogg on 7 February 1813, which may be seen to summarise his early views on Enlightenment political economy:

Reason is only an assemblage of our better feelings, passion considered under a peculiar mode of its operation [...] A more elevated spirit has begun to diffuse itself which without deducting from the warmth of love or the constancy of friendship [...] scarce suffers true Passion & true Reason to continue at war. (*Letters*, I, 352)

Shelley begins by redefining 1790s concepts of 'reason' as a faculty that is inclusive, rather than suspicious, of 'feeling'. By emphasising that reason in its most sophisticated form acknowledges that human 'feelings' complement perfectibility, Shelley may be regarded as advancing a revolutionary outlook that has political economy at its centre. I suggest that his concept of this 'more elevated spirit' active within the mind, recalls his interest in Smith's arguments regarding human relationships. 'Love' and 'friendship' derive from the individual's capacity to identify with others from within his

<sup>5</sup> Cox, *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School*, p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> Cox, citing Jean-Paul Sartre, *Search for a Method*, translated by Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Knopf, 1963), pp. 135-6.

preoccupation with the self. This translates into economic terms as it is recognised that the pursuit of personal gain inspires national prosperity – Smith’s ‘invisible hand’. That Shelley describes this ‘spirit’ as ‘diffusing itself’ implies that uniting human ‘passions’ with social, political and economic progress becomes inevitable as ‘true reason’ is increasingly understood.

By mid 1813, Shelley was starting to extend the claim that reason was a ‘peculiar mode’ of passion into a sophisticated approach to reform. However, not only did figures like Newton and Ritson regard self-interest to be ‘at war’ with revolutionary ideals, they also maintained this suspicion towards human ‘passions’ in a way that undermined the progressive impulse in Smith’s philosophy. Shelley’s belief in the benefits of ‘passion’ thus led him to defend his admiration of political economy amongst those who regarded its conclusions as unnatural. However, Shelley’s engagement with such figures also allowed him to develop other aspects of his economic outlook that may be observed in the Notes to *Queen Mab*. These relate to Shelley’s interest in style, particularly in terms of the way that his economic ideas were expressed. Chapter One explored Shelley’s attraction to the way in which figures like Spence and Darwin experimented with form and genre in order to express economic and scientific principles. It thus suggested that he was already considering the idea that political economy could be viewed in a literary light. Although Shelley’s experiments with style in his prose of 1813 are remarked upon, the second part of this chapter focuses upon this issue in detail, by exploring the political essays Shelley wrote while involved with Hunt’s circle between 1816 and 1817.

Rather than analysing the impact of economic theories upon the social crises of 1816-1818, this chapter argues that Shelley identified political economy as a discipline that not only provoked debate across class divides, but also influenced the rhetorical techniques of different political factions. E. P. Thompson suggests that critics of the Liverpool Administration succeeded in ‘opposing to the facts of orthodox political economy their own facts and arithmetic’.<sup>7</sup> This emphasis upon ‘opposition’ towards figures like Smith and Malthus is true of provincial writers like Cobbett, who were suspicious of classical political economy. However, I argue that rather than applying an alternative mode of ‘facts’ and ‘arithmetic’ to existing economic theories, such writers were in fact liberating political economy from its contemporary incarnation. This chapter suggests that both Hunt and Cobbett confronted economic change through concepts of language, as well as through practical proposals. Hunt’s discussion of

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<sup>7</sup> E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1963), p. 225.

economic affairs often fuses an allusive style with radical, and even revolutionary rhetoric. This calls into question the ‘liberal’ reputation of the *Examiner* and its concepts of readership. Similarly, the polemics of the *Political Register* incorporate literary references in order to construct a form of economic discourse that is accessible to labourers. These engagements with political economy generate stylistic tensions within the factional interests of metropolitan and provincial reformers. I suggest that the discipline inspired such figures to identify the ways in which their rhetoric revealed an existing point of union that traverses political divides. However, this chapter explores Shelley’s conviction that this alliance could be extended to encompassing universal interests, in a legislative as well as rhetorical sense. Such ideas impacted upon the prose he wrote during the crises of 1817, which may be seen as engaging, not only with economic principles, but also with the ways in which they were articulated.

Before a detailed discussion of the literary potential of political economy can be undertaken, it is important to investigate the way that Shelley’s economic outlook developed following the printing of the Notes to *Queen Mab*. By exploring his involvement with the Bracknell circle, it will be argued that Shelley’s interest in political economy shaped his social and philosophical opinions. It also allowed him to consider the ways in which the theories of eighteenth-century political economy could be interpreted as resolving rather than justifying the evils of contemporary commerce. Such an outlook becomes evident in his essay on vegetarianism, *A Vindication of Natural Diet*. However, before the *Vindication* can be explored, it is necessary to examine the ways in which the Bracknell circle addressed contemporary economic corruption. The following section thus begins with an exploration of Newton’s work. This may be seen to have appealed to Shelley’s belief in the literary potential of political economy, but Newton employs these ideas in order to undermine socio-economic progress.

## **2. 2. ‘We are all Subject to Strong Prejudices and Passions’: Shelley and John Frank Newton**

The core philosophy of the Bracknell circle is embodied in Newton’s belief that ‘it was

not man we have before us, but the wreck of man'.<sup>8</sup> Newton was convinced that this 'wreck' of humanity could only be restored to health by adopting a vegetarian diet and rejecting commercial values. He depicts meat-eating and economic corruption as reciprocal. For Newton, digesting animal flesh inspires selfish 'passions' in the brain, which in turn lead to predilections for luxuries such as manufactured commodities. This negative view of passion has interesting implications for Shelley's attraction to Smith's principles. However, although Shelley read Newton's arguments with a critical eye, aspects of the latter's work may be seen as influential on his economic outlook. Newton's *The Return to Nature* (1811) has been viewed as eccentric, not least because he had no medical training, and his work is more a recourse to experience than a reputable treatise on health. However, this section argues that his writing reveals a surprising economic clarity and sophisticated ideas about the literary as well as ethical implications of vegetarianism.

Even in the structure of his treatise, Newton presents vegetarianism as conducive to national prosperity. He conceived *The Return to Nature* as being the 'first part' of a larger work, as he hoped two others would extend this discussion of natural diet into an exploration of 'Poverty' and 'War' (*Return*, p. 67). This suggests that Newton's discussion of economic issues was not restricted to an advocacy of vegetarianism, but presented a natural diet as an economic solution. His engagement with contemporary political economy may be observed throughout the treatise:

A writer on population of some celebrity has contended that the destructive operations of whatever sort by which men are killed off, are so many blessings [...] although no point can be more clearly demonstrable than that the earth might support at least ten times the number of inhabitants that are now upon it. (*Return*, p. 67)

This 'writer on population' is unmistakably Malthus. What is most interesting is the way in which Newton juxtaposes the latter's 'destructive' checks against the potential of the 'earth' to sustain its population. By remarking that a society based upon agriculture rather than pasturage could support 'ten times the number of inhabitants', Newton may be seen to engage with Malthus's arithmetic ratios. This suggests that his

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<sup>8</sup> John Frank Newton, *The Return to Nature* (London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1811), p. 66. All subsequent citations will be from this edition and will be given in parentheses, abbreviated as *Return*, in the text.

determination to redress corruption manifested itself in a suffering present, as well as in an utopian future.

In addition to his interest in agrarian issues, Newton's essay is committed to justifying his vegetarian outlook through scientific means. He is interested in theories that also attracted Shelley in the Notes to *Queen Mab*. This can be seen in comments that draw close to Darwin's account of natural selection:

This quickening of the step of death upon us, though it [...] is not unfavourable to that of creation in general; for had it not been the heavenly dispensation that man, by living on animal food should become unhealthy and rapidly perish, in the long progression of centuries he would have cleared the earth of all other animals. (*Return*, p. 62)

Newton's portrayal of death here as beneficial to 'creation' is reminiscent of Darwin's acceptance that individuals will perish in order to improve the 'species' as a whole. However, whilst Darwin's emphasis is upon progress in this respect, Newton presents such deaths as a merciful destruction of 'unhealthy' humans who devour animal flesh. Rather than endorsing science and political economy for their own sake, he accepts only those inventions that can restore the earth to its natural state. What makes Newton's narrative distinctive is that this notion of humanity's decline has been decreed by a 'heavenly dispensation'. Although Malthus's population principle was justified along Anglican precepts, his *Essay* stressed the benefits of industriousness as a means to limit poverty. In contrast, Newton offers a very different account of man's deterioration, which provides an elegiac narrative of how the 'golden age' was destroyed.

This aspect of his essay leads into one of the most important themes in Newton's writing: his employment of Scripture in order to uphold vegetarian arguments. Newton's essay posed challenges to the millenarian rhetoric Shelley may have encountered in Spence's periodicals. Rather than presenting Biblical prophecy as anticipating a just form of industry, Newton manipulates the themes of Genesis in order to depict humanity diverging from its natural state. This is demonstrated when he describes 'the Scripture account of Paradise' as 'written by divine command for the purpose of acquainting man with his origins' (*Return*, p. 3). This attribution of human 'origins' to a deity implies that Newton's account of creation differs from that of

Darwin and Shelley. Nevertheless, it soon becomes clear that the Fall narrative he describes is far removed from orthodox Christianity:

Man is created and placed in a garden [...] in its midst stand two trees, the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Of the fruit of one of those trees he is encouraged to partake, of the other he is forbidden. Had this elegant story been an allegory instead of an historical narration, I should have thought it evident that these trees represented the two kinds of food which Adam and Eve had before them, viz. the vegetables and the animals. (*Return*, pp. 4-5)

Newton's retelling of temptation in the Garden of Eden aligns the 'knowledge of evil' with meat-eating. This encourages the reader to associate deviation from a vegetable diet with satanic impulses. What is interesting about these remarks is Newton's comparison of 'allegory' with 'historical narration'. I have suggested that he favours the notion of a creative deity. However, Newton is perceptive in considering the employment of Scripture as 'allegory' in order to promote personal agendas. This suggests that his use of religious rhetoric not only articulates his vegetarianism. It also implies his awareness of the power of language to express such ideas.

Newton was convinced that any development of the natural state was inherently corrupt. This becomes apparent in his treatment of pre-Christian mythology. Newton engages with the fable of Prometheus in order to uphold his vegetarian doctrines. Presenting Prometheus as a symbol of humanity, he comments that the Titan 'first taught the use of animal food, and of fire with which to render it more digestible to the taste. Jupiter, foreseeing the consequences of these inventions [...] left the newly-formed creature to experience the sad effects of them' (*Return*, p. 9). These observations have similarities with Darwin's depiction of health becoming damaged by the 'effects' of commercial luxuries. However, Newton's scorn for 'inventions' reflects his retrospective rather than forward-thinking approach to political economy. This becomes clear in his damning assessment of Prometheus: 'Perhaps it was from a feeling, that after having been the first to instruct mankind in the culinary and other uses of fire, [Prometheus] owed [man] an antidote to the effects of his pernicious discoveries' (*Return*, pp. 10-11). It is significant that Newton criticises all 'uses of fire' rather than just 'culinary' ones, a point that is suggestive of his opposition to industry.

Despite his admiration for such experiments with allegory, it can be argued that Shelley would not have been sympathetic to this depiction of Prometheus. Certainly in his later works he celebrates the Titan as a symbol of human heroism, which overthrows tyranny through its commitment to intellectual discovery.

Newton's experiments with different kinds of rhetoric are wide-ranging. *The Return to Nature* cites literary figures like Swift, Milton and Rousseau, as well as the philosophies of Bacon, Hume and Godwin. Furthermore, Newton's engagement with classical writers encompasses extensive Greek and Latin translations. Nevertheless, his solution to a humanity 'ruined' by dietary and economic corruption may be seen to undermine his detailed understanding of science and rhetoric. It also came into conflict with the theories of classical political economy. Newton depicts Adam Smith as 'a man of strong intellect and high estimation', reflecting his admiration for Smith's agricultural outlook (*Return*, p. 31). Nevertheless, there are points at which the essay confronts Smith's views on self-interest directly. From the outset, Newton acknowledges that 'we are all subject to strong prejudices and passions' (*Return*, p. 2). By mentioning 'passion' and 'prejudice' in the same sentence, Newton may be seen to reject Smith's belief in the positive relationship between self-interest and the moral sentiments. He outlines his view that passions have been created by the 'dire effects' of an animal diet when he describes human nature:

Men are more to be commiserated than blamed for being driven by impulses, arising out of causes not sufficiently investigated, into the baseness of avarice, or the trammels of ambition. Many a headlong passion has been excited by the food and drink which have stimulated the brain through the stomach, and many an example of fatal despair has been exhibited to the world. (*Return*, p. 65)

This depiction of 'avarice' and 'ambition' as passions that arise as a result of 'food and drink' was rejected by political economists like Mandeville, Smith, and Malthus. However, in remarking that the origins of passion have not been 'sufficiently investigated', Newton summarises his own shortcomings. Despite his attraction to scientific theories and different kinds of rhetoric, his belief that 'despair' can be the only outcome of passion leads him to underestimate the non-rational aspects of humanity. Newton wonders why it is that humans 'prefer' luxuries over 'a healthy and temperate

life' (*Return*, p. 1). Whilst self-interest could undoubtedly cause misery, Smith had hypothesised that it was necessary in understanding the preoccupations of others.

It was this partial approach to human nature and tendency to overlook the benefits of commercial expansion that led Shelley to reject Newton's conclusions. Nevertheless, his receptiveness to Newton's employment of religious allusion and mythology may be seen as influencing his economic outlook. It also attracted him to other writers who had impacted upon those within the Bracknell circle, particularly Joseph Ritson, who is the subject of the following section.

### **2. 3. 'Whether such Qualities be Natural or Not': Shelley and Joseph Ritson**

Soon after their introduction in October 1812, Newton encouraged Shelley to order the works of writers who had influenced his own views in *The Return to Nature*. Arguably the most important of these was Joseph Ritson's *Essay on the Abstinence of Animal Food, as a Moral Duty* (1802). The emphasis upon morality in the title of Ritson's work is important. Reiman and Fraistat suggest that Ritson emphasises the moral effects of vegetarianism, whilst Newton explores its medical value.<sup>9</sup> To present Ritson as concerned with the moral implications of industrial society necessitates an understanding of the way that these arguments relate to established economic doctrines. I have explored the ways in which moral questions underpinned the Enlightenment origins of political economy. Smith emphasised that qualities such as self-interest were not only natural, but vital in sustaining economic development. In contrast, it can be argued that Ritson's treatment of morality sought to present vegetarianism as a remedy for what he viewed as the corrupt propensities generated by commercial expansion.

Before Ritson's *Abstinence* can be analysed, it is necessary to mention Shelley's attitude towards him as a writer. In contrast to Newton's admiration for Ritson, who was a political radical and accomplished scholar, Shelley was curiously reluctant to acknowledge him in his *Vindication*. Reiman and Fraistat have explored the way that Shelley disguised both his direct borrowings from Ritson and the sources to which he was introduced by the latter's works.<sup>10</sup> Murray considers that this could be attributed to the fact that Ritson had died in 1803 from a nervous condition that undermined both his

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<sup>9</sup> Reiman and Fraistat, *Complete Poetry*, II, 651.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 652.



and Shelley's arguments for the benefits of a vegetable diet.<sup>11</sup> Alternatively, Reiman and Fraistat point to Hogg's remark in his biography of Shelley, that Ritson's opinions led him to be 'stigmatized [...] as a wretched maniac'.<sup>12</sup> However, having argued that Shelley was drawn to Smith's enlightened view of self-interest, it can also be suggested that this caution about citing Ritson was the result of his determination to redress idealistic views of humanity. Newton's depiction of humanity as intrinsically rational and in harmony with an uncorrupted natural world was influenced by Ritson's even more virulent rejection of civilization. As a result, it can be argued that Shelley was comfortable with citing Ritson only after he had scrutinised this concept of a 'natural' humanity.<sup>13</sup>

Despite Ritson's reputation for eccentricity, the sophistication of his economic ideas and experiments with style are often overlooked. Like Newton's essay, the *Abstinence* incorporates a range of scientific and philosophical sources. Nevertheless, Ritson goes beyond Newton's emphasis upon reshaping Fall narratives, instead investing vegetarian arguments with Jacobin ideals. Ritson's admiration for the spirit of the French Revolution may be observed in the introduction to his essay. He remarks: 'Since in every part of the world is plac'd some supereminent species of animals, for instance, in heaven the gods, upon the earth men, it is necessary that the human race should be perpetual'.<sup>14</sup> Ritson upholds Enlightenment doctrines that present humanity as 'supereminent', due to its rational faculties. He also rejects the nascent evolutionary theories propagated by figures like Darwin, by insisting upon the 'perpetual' existence of 'the human race'. Ritson regarded his atheism and rational assessment of humanity as libertarian. However, his distrust of commercial expansion and the more 'passionate' aspects of human nature would come into conflict with the theories of classical political economy.

Although Ritson's arguments may be seen to reject industrial development, there are points at which the essay seeks to justify this along economic lines. For example, he remarks that 'much of the bread-corn, which went directly to the nourishment of human bodies, now only contributes to it, by fattening the flesh of sheep and oxen. The mass and volume of provisions are hereby diminish'd' (*Abstinence*, p. 85). Ritson's

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<sup>11</sup> Murray, in *Prose*, p. 396.

<sup>12</sup> Hogg, *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, II, 87; Reiman and Fraistat, *Complete Poetry*, II, 652.

<sup>13</sup> Shelley cites Ritson's arguments in a footnote to his second vegetarian essay, *On the Vegetable System of Diet*, written at least a year later. This relates to a point he makes on how the 'natural aliment' of various animals has been corrupted in detriment to their health. See Murray, in *Prose*, p. 152.

<sup>14</sup> Joseph Ritson, *Essay on the Abstinence from Animal Food, as a Moral Duty* (London: Richard Phillips, 1802), p. 4. All subsequent citations will be from this edition and be given in parentheses, abbreviated as *Abstinence*, in the text.

arguments about the way in which pasturage ‘diminishes’ human provisions may be seen to parallel Shelley’s observations in the Notes. It is interesting that Ritson cites Smith directly in relation to the benefits of an ‘agricultural economy’ (*Abstinence*, p. 81). However, Ritson may be seen as undermining Smith’s progressive approach to farming and its inventions, in his belief that developments in agriculture inspired what he views as the corrupt commercial values of the late eighteenth century. It is this criticism of ‘the destructive industry of the human species’ that leads him to condemn economic expansion (*Abstinence*, p. 34).

Ritson presents the natural world as a provider, through which primitive man ‘fed upon the fruits of the trees’ (*Abstinence*, p. 9). He promotes the benefits of forest dwelling by discussing the difficulties of producing corn:

Before [grain] is cast into the ground, there must be ploughs to till it, harrows to break the clods [...] Man never could have existed on the earth, had he been under the necessity of deriving his first nutriment from the corn-plant [...] Nature presented to him at first his food already dressed.  
(*Abstinence*, pp. 64-5)

Ritson’s argument here is unusual. Although it engages with agrarian preoccupations, it goes beyond notions of an agricultural ‘golden age’. By depicting the ‘fruit’ of trees as the optimal form of subsistence, Ritson may be seen to restructure the stadial theory of civilisation popular amongst political economists. Smith had viewed the age of agriculture as preceding industrialisation, and succeeding the age of hunter-gatherers. In contrast, Ritson replaces this first stage of meat-eating and savagery with a vision of sylvan purity. He is unorthodox in his portrayal of agriculture as unnatural, arguing that ‘the corn plant’ can only supply food through the intervention of ploughing, rather than offering the immediate sustenance of trees.

Ritson’s justification for such forest-dwelling communities are underdeveloped. He comments that trees afford ‘incorruptible timber, for [...] the means of building durable habitations’ (*Abstinence*, p. 65). Nevertheless, his argument that ‘timber’ can be used for ‘building’ necessitates corrupting raw materials in a manner to which he had objected in relation to agriculture. This questions whether Ritson’s discussion of the way that trees are cut down to build ‘habitations’ is really any different to his criticism of the idea that corn must first be harvested before it can provide human sustenance.

Such examples explain perhaps why Shelley was reluctant to align himself with Ritson in the *Vindication*. Certainly his objection to ‘ploughs’ and ‘harrows’ would have jarred with Shelley’s admiration of the inventive spirit of the Lunar Society. However, Ritson’s influence may be seen in the way in which Shelley aligns such anti-commercial views with experiments in literary form.

Ritson incorporates poetic allusions in order to support his claims on the ‘natural’ state. For example, he cites classical writers like Ovid in passages that uphold his views on the unnaturalness of agriculture: ‘The teeming earth, yet guiltless of the plough/And unprovok’d did fruitful stores allow’ (*Abstinence*, p. 166).<sup>15</sup> This depiction of a ‘guiltless’ earth supports Ritson’s view that agriculture was the first step in cultivating corrupt industrial outlooks. Ritson’s allusion to the *Metamorphoses* is interesting, in that Ovid’s poem outlines the ‘Creation of the World’ beginning not with the hunter-gatherer state favoured by political economists, but with the forest-dwelling communities described by Ritson. By engaging with this classical rhetoric, Ritson is able to justify his view of humanity by citing venerable predecessors. He then aligns their outlooks with his revolutionary views on the superiority of the human species and their ‘natural’ impulses. This becomes important to his depiction of a vegetable diet as corrupted by economic development.

Morton describes Ritson’s attitude to civilisation as seeking to arrest ‘the disfiguration of flesh’ with ‘the promise of an imaginary plentitude’.<sup>16</sup> This belief that Ritson associates ‘plentitude’ with the eradication of meat-eating supports an economic reading of his works. Furthermore, Morton’s emphasis upon an ‘imaginary’ nature is important, in terms of identifying shortcomings in Ritson’s outlook. Ritson’s ideal human state was one of temperance, self-sufficiency and reason. Nevertheless, he acknowledges the limitation of these views when he remarks that, ‘the only mode in which man can be useful, is to be mild, benevolent, humane, whether such qualities be natural or not’ (*Abstinence*, p. 40). Although Ritson concludes that man can only ‘be useful’ by cultivating his ‘benevolent’ qualities, his final remark is perceptive in its consideration of whether these impulses are really ‘natural’ to the human species. This draws close to the counter arguments of a political economist like Smith, who regarded self-interest as natural to humanity, rather than an undesirable effect of dietary or commercial corruption. However, Ritson fails to pursue this line of thought, preferring

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<sup>15</sup> This citation in Ritson’s *Abstinence* is from Ovid, *Metamorphoses Volume I: Books I-VIII*, trans. by Dryden, Pope, Congreve and Others (London: J. Tonson, 1736), Book I, ll. 137-8.

<sup>16</sup> Morton, *Shelley and the Revolution in Taste*, p. 157.

instead to promote his version of humanity.

In conclusion, it can be argued that Ritson's experiments with scientific ideas and poetic form influenced Shelley's belief that political economy had literary as well as social potential. However, a recurring theme in the *Vindication* may be seen in Shelley's attempts to deploy these experiments with style in order to question restrictive views of humanity. Before Shelley's essay can be explored there remains one important influence upon his thought that must be acknowledged. Chapter One suggested that Shelley was already familiar with Mandeville's work in his Irish pamphlets. However, the next section suggests that Shelley's contemplation of Mandeville through reading Ritson's essay occasioned a more detailed study of the *Fable*.

#### **2. 4. The 'Vile Ingredients' of the 'Wholesome Mixture': Shelley and Mandeville**

Despite Shelley's allusions to Mandeville's maxim on the 'benefits' of vice, his awareness of the latter's economic doctrines appears underdeveloped in his Irish pamphlets (*Address*, p. 36). Chapter One suggested that in 1812 Shelley engaged with Smith's refinement of Mandeville's views on human selfishness, by asserting that this impulse could cultivate the moral sentiments. As a result, he appears to cite Mandeville through Smith, rather than undertaking a detailed analysis of the former's founding ideas. However by 1813, Shelley's attraction to Mandeville's works was revived as a result of his scepticism towards the rational view of humanity favoured by the Bracknell circle. This resulted in a very different interpretation of *The Fable of the Bees* (1714) than the one in Ritson's essay.

Ritson read the *Fable* prior to writing the *Abstinence*, which cites Mandeville by name (p. 217). He admired Mandeville's belief that meat-eating was unnatural due to the 'disgust' that a self-interested being would never inflict upon himself (*Abstinence*, p. 53). Mandeville remarked 'we are born with a repugnancy to killing, and consequently the eating of animals, for it is impossible that a natural appetite should ever prompt us to do what we have an aversion to'.<sup>17</sup> However, Shelley explores more deeply Mandeville's assessment of the 'natural' state as one of beneficial human passions. By engaging with Mandeville's doctrines, he was able to justify his progressive view of commerce amidst the myth-making of the Bracknell circle. Furthermore, I argue that

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<sup>17</sup> Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees, or Private Vices, Public Benefits* (Edinburgh: W. Gray and W. Peter, 1714), p. 144. All subsequent citations from this work will be from this edition and will be given in parentheses, abbreviated as *Fable*, in the text.

Shelley was also attracted to the way that Mandeville's economic views were articulated. F. B. Kaye comments that 'the *Fable of the Bees* is concerned with so wide a range of thought that it is of import, not only to specialists in the history of economics and philosophy, but also those whose interest is primarily literary'.<sup>18</sup> That Mandeville was as equally interested in 'literary' expression as in 'economics' becomes evident when exploring his experiments with form and concepts of readership.

*The Fable of the Bees* can be viewed as two separate works united in a single volume. Mandeville first published it as a poem, *The Grumbling Hive, or Knaves Turn'd Honest* in 1705. This presented contemporary England as an allegory of worker bees in a corrupt, yet prosperous hive. Ruled over by 'kings' rather than being oppressed by 'tyranny' or liberated by 'wild Democracy', the bees are happy with their luxurious society but troubled by their lack of virtue (*Fable*, ll. 9-10). One day, a higher power grants their desire to be virtuous, resulting in an 'honest', yet unprosperous society. The poem itself attracted little attention. Many readers overlooked the fact that Mandeville's rhyming couplets and employment of fable concealed sophisticated arguments about morality and economics. This perception of Mandeville's poem parallels the awareness Shelley demonstrated in relation to the poem and Notes to *Queen Mab*. Just as Shelley knew he could 'catch' readers with the visionary style of the poem and then expand its socio-economic themes in prose Notes, Mandeville employs a similar marketing strategy in his *Fable*. Soon after the poem was published he began work on a series of prose discussions that illuminated its socio-economic arguments.

Mandeville's *Fable* was inspired by the debates on national prosperity that were preoccupying economic thinkers over seventy years before Smith published *The Wealth of Nations*. Chief amongst these was whether national spending or saving was more beneficial to economic growth. Going against the general belief that saving money could revive the economy in times of recession, Mandeville argued that spending on luxuries was not only vital to financial expansion, but also grew out of a human tendency towards self-aggrandisement. Whilst John Maynard Keynes admired Mandeville for founding this 'paradox of thrift', the latter's skill in linking financial questions with ideas about human nature has been relatively overlooked.<sup>19</sup> It was this aspect of Mandeville's thought that attracted Smith to his doctrines, especially in terms

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<sup>18</sup> Bernard Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees or Private Vices, Publick Benefits*, ed. by F. B. Kaye (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1988), Preface.

<sup>19</sup> John Maynard Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* (London: Macmillan, 1936), p. 361.

of his belief that human morality dictated the shape political economy would take. In Chapter One, I drew attention to the way that Smith conceded in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* that Mandeville's views on the self-interest of human beings 'in some respects border upon the truth' (p. 313). Indeed, it was in this work that Smith began to re-orientate this selfish propensity in order to benefit society at large. However, the *Fable* itself provides important insights into the way that the individual relates to society.

The reason that Mandeville's *Fable* met with such hostility was that it depicted human nature as contradicting Enlightenment ideas of a rational and benevolent society.<sup>20</sup> From the outset, Mandeville insisted upon the 'necessity of vice', arguing that society encourages human beings to cultivate their natural propensity for selfishness and ambition (*Fable*, p. vii). This becomes clear when he comments upon 'the vileness of the ingredients, that altogether compose the wholesome mixture of a well-ordered society' (*Fable*, p. iv). Mandeville argues that it is only through the 'vile' qualities of a self-interested nation, that society can advance towards a 'wholesome' economy, with its commercial outlook and demand for luxuries. Parallels may be drawn between Mandeville's view of selfish 'ingredients' and Smith's later concept of 'the invisible hand', which brought about national prosperity through the self-interest of individuals. However, Mandeville insists that these impulses remain 'vile', whereas Smith sought to present self-interest in a more enlightened manner.

Mandeville's intelligent use of paradox can be observed in the poem when he offers the reader a choice between a virtuous, primitive existence and a corrupt yet prosperous society. He divides rhyming couplets by contemplating each scenario, such as in his description of the hive: 'Every part was full of vice/Yet the whole mass a paradise' (*Fable*, l. 5). This skill in questioning whether the bees (and thus eighteenth-century England) should sacrifice their commercial 'paradise' for a virtuous society is also evident in his prose expansions. Mandeville's discussion may be seen as having important implications for Shelley's desire to reconcile an agricultural past with the industrial future:

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<sup>20</sup> The Grand Jury of Middlesex presented the poem and its notes as a public nuisance, and what Mandeville called 'an abusive Letter to Lord C.' appeared in the *London Journal* for 27 July 1723. This caused Mandeville to publish, in the *London Journal* for 10 August 1723, a defence of his work against the 'abusive Letter'. He reprinted this defence upon sheets of a size such that they could be bound up with the 1723 edition, and included this defence in all subsequent editions, together with a reprint of the letter to Lord C. and the Grand Jury's presentment (quoted in Kaye, *The Fable of the Bees*, p. 2).

The first desirable blessings for any society are a fertile soil and happy climate, a mild government and more land than people. These things will render man honest and sincere [...] but they shalt have no arts or sciences; they must be wholly destitute of what we call the comforts of life [...] Man never exerts himself but when he is rous'd by his desires. (*Fable*, p. 152)

These observations not only emphasise the idea that humanity is regulated by self-serving 'desires', but also anticipate the arguments of later political economists with remarkable clarity. Mandeville's remarks on a 'fertile soil' that can sustain small communities foreshadow the Malthusian argument that society can only be 'happy' when its subsistence outstrips population. He presents such a society as an unobtainable ideal and asserts that human vice will always resurface, creating the positive side-effects of commercial 'comforts', 'arts' and 'sciences'. Whilst writers like Spence later argued that an agricultural society could be compatible with commercial expansion, Mandeville presents a contradiction between what is desirable and human 'desires' themselves.

Mandeville's belief that civilised man is a 'taught animal' draws attention to his distinction between 'society' and 'civilisation' (*Fable*, p. 174). He regards society as beneficial, in terms of developing human abilities to employ 'avarice' and 'ambition' in the cause of economic progress. However, he perceives 'civilisation' as negative in relation to the artificial code of morality it 'teaches' to human beings. It can be argued that Ritson's admiration for Mandeville's vegetarian outlook reflects only a partial comprehension of the latter's ideas about civilised man. Like Ritson and Newton, Mandeville believes that meat-eating has arisen from the advance of civilisation. However, unlike them, he regards this process as a means of distorting man's natural tendency towards self-preservation. The result is a distinctive interpretation of natural diet, which focuses upon the idea that an 'aversion' to meat-eating is the product of human selfishness. Mandeville remarks: 'Nature taught your stomach to crave nothing but vegetables, but your fondness for change perverted your appetites' (*Fable*, p. 148). This connects the 'perversion' of self-interest with a 'fondness' for living in civilised communities. Essentially, Mandeville and such vegetarian writers employ the same argument. All condemn the distortion of the natural state by custom; they only differ in their definitions of human nature.

Having suggested that Mandeville rejects the idea of a rational humanity, it is important to explore stylistic aspects of the *Fable* which may also have appealed to

Shelley. Mandeville's depiction of humans as 'animals' attests to his skilful use of literary form. By expressing these views in a fable, Mandeville's allegory of worker bees contains a more subversive agenda than the simple attraction of readers to its unusual morality tale. By identifying the bees with different social classes, Mandeville presents an underlying economic argument that complicates his separation of poetry and prose. He employs poetry in order to highlight social themes, and experiments with different kinds of rhetoric within prose annotations that expand upon the narrative of the poem. This not only draws attention to the ways in which poetry and prose relate to each other, but also has similarities with Shelley's experiments with form in his Notes to *Queen Mab*. Nevertheless, it can be countered that there were aspects of Mandeville's thought that Shelley would have regarded as underdeveloped. It is at this point that his preference for Smith's transformation of Mandeville's theories, rather than Mandeville's original conclusions, becomes apparent.

Shelley's admiration for Smith may be viewed as preventing him from accepting Mandeville's belief that 'without great vices, is a vain UTOPIA seated in the brain' (*Fable*, p. 13). Shelley was increasingly sceptical towards 'utopian' outlooks that failed to acknowledge realities in both the economic and moral spheres. However, Smith presented him with a compromise between human 'vice' and social idealism. Smith believed that it was only through an awareness of the self that humans could sympathise with others, and that individual gain could benefit all sections of society. There is an instance in the *Fable*, in which Mandeville draws close to Smith's conclusions. Criticising the hypocrisy of a 'civilised' society, he comments: 'Our English law allows [butchers] not to be of any jury upon life and death, as their practice itself is sufficient to extinguish in them tenderness' (*Fable*, p. 144). Mandeville argues that if society excludes butchers from jury service, as a result of their exposure to 'death', it cannot allow meat to be consumed when its raw state causes aversion in self-interested beings. However, the notion that a butcher's profession extinguishes his natural 'tenderness' marks a transition in Mandeville's argument. He seems to develop his belief in humanity's attraction to vice into the view that this self-interest allows the individual to identify with other sentient beings. This aspect of Mandeville's thought remains underdeveloped, and he considers the way that humans relate to animals, rather than each other. Nevertheless, it is clear why Smith identified socio-economic potential in Mandeville's theories in terms of refining these nascent ideas about human sympathy.

In conclusion, it can be argued that there was much in Mandeville's *Fable* that would have appealed to Shelley's developing ideas on human nature. By asserting that



selfishness and ambition were intrinsic to humanity, rather than the by-products of commerce and its taste for luxuries, I suggest that Shelley derived from Mandeville a more complex economic outlook than Ritson did. Furthermore, Mandeville's experiments with style would have appealed to his growing belief in political economy as being itself possible to express in a literary form. However, his admiration for Smith's views on human sympathy convinced him that Mandeville's principles required further development. As a result, the next section explores the way that Shelley's *Vindication* engages with, yet develops the ideas to which he was receptive during his association with the Bracknell circle.

### **2. 5. 'Furious passions and evil propensities': A *Vindication of Natural Diet***

*A Vindication of Natural Diet* has proven difficult to date, and opinions differ amongst Shelley's editors. What is agreed is that Shelley wrote the pamphlet at some point between October 1812 and November 1813, due to the fact that he mentions in its appendix that he and Harriet had 'lived on vegetables for eight months' at its completion.<sup>21</sup> Shelley comments that they had 'forsook meat' by 14 March 1812 (*Letters*, I, 274), which for Clark and Cameron places the composition date at November 1812. If this is true, then the essay was written before the Note to *Queen Mab* on vegetarianism. Cameron supports this interpretation by drawing attention to the fact that the Note makes grammatical revisions to the pamphlet, implying that the latter was already set in type before the Note was completed.<sup>22</sup> Murray upholds this reading although he places the date at Spring 1813, around the time that the Notes were being finalised. This is due to an internal reference in which Shelley remarks that in April 1814, 'a statement will be given that sixty persons, all having lived more than three years on vegetables [...] are in *perfect health*'. To this he adds that, 'more than two years have now elapsed' suggesting that the pamphlet was finished in April 1813 (*Vindication*, p. 91).<sup>23</sup>

Such doubt was reassessed in 1989, when Matthews and Everest argued that the differences between the pamphlet and the Note pointed to corruption of the *Queen Mab*

<sup>21</sup> Shelley, *A Vindication of Natural Diet* (1813), in *Prose*, 82-91 (p. 91). All subsequent citations from this work will be from this edition and be given in parentheses, abbreviated as *Vindication*, in the text.

<sup>22</sup> Cameron, *The Young Shelley*, pp. 376-7.

<sup>23</sup> Murray, in *Prose*, p. 360; David Lee Clark ed., *Shelley's Prose: The Trumpet of a Prophecy* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1954), p. 87.

text in printing the *Vindication* from it.<sup>24</sup> This suggests that the pamphlet was published from the Note in Spring 1813. Donald Reiman and Neil Fraistat provide an informative account of the difficulties in dating the *Vindication*. They conclude that the pamphlet was completed first, due to the more sophisticated ideas relating to vegetarianism expressed in the Note.<sup>25</sup> They, along with Clark, believe that these refinements reflect Shelley's further reading.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, it is useful to focus less upon the similarities between the pamphlet and the Note on vegetarianism, and more upon their differences. The Note includes an additional paragraph that contemplates the idea that diet is not solely responsible for mental and physical health.<sup>27</sup> Its absence in the pamphlet thus implies that Shelley's thoughts on human nature were developing during this period. If the pamphlet was written first, it may be seen as reflecting the way that Shelley's early attraction to Enlightenment political economy was called into question by his receptiveness to the Bracknell circle. The *Vindication* is filled with criticism of the 'furious passions and evil propensities of the human heart' (p. 82). However, rather than attributing these 'propensities' to a lapse from the ideal natural state, it is important to recognise Shelley's developing ideas regarding such 'passions'. The following reading of the *Vindication* thus focuses upon Shelley's growing suspicion of a 'rational' nature. It also explores his conviction that the literary styles adopted by utopian writers could be employed in order to promote, rather than undermine, commercial expansion.

Shelley's attraction to the ways in which vegetarian writers employed different kinds of rhetoric in order to advance their views, can be seen in the title page of the *Vindication*. He copies the quotation from Hesiod, relating to the myth of Prometheus bestowing the 'gift of fire' and 'woe' upon mankind, directly from Newton's translation in *The Return to Nature*.<sup>28</sup> This interest in Newton's incorporation of myth into his version of the Fall narrative is expressed in Shelley's first sentence. He remarks: 'I hold that the depravity of the physical and moral nature of man originated in his unnatural habits of life' (*Vindication*, p. 77). Shelley's curiosity regarding the 'origins' of 'depravity' leads him to engage with Newton's view that 'moral' corruption can be traced back to a rejection of natural existence. However, whilst Newton aligns this with

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<sup>24</sup> Matthews and Everest, *Poems*, I, 265.

<sup>25</sup> Reiman and Fraistat, *Complete Poetry*, II, 653.

<sup>26</sup> David Lee Clark, 'The Date and Source of Shelley's *A Vindication of Natural Diet*', *Studies in Philology*, 36 (1939), 70-76 (p. 71).

<sup>27</sup> Cameron, *The Young Shelley*, p. 376. This paragraph discusses how 'mental and bodily derangement is attainable in part to other deviations from rectitude and nature than those which concern diet' (*Queen Mab*, Note to VIII, 211-2). Shelley's discussion of these 'other deviations' implies that he had refined his misgivings towards the concept of 'a return to nature' by the time he wrote the Notes.

<sup>28</sup> Murray, in *Prose*, p. 361.

meat-eating and the rise of commercial values, Shelley perceives such an interpretation as jarring with his commitment to economic progress.

Evidence for this can be seen in the way that his receptiveness to Newton shifts into a discussion of Darwinian theories on evolution. Drawing upon his scientific interests in relation to the decline of humanity, Shelley remarks: ‘the date of this event, seems to have also been that of some great change in the climates of the earth, with which it has an obvious correspondence’ (*Vindication*, p. 77). Tensions can be seen here between Shelley’s objective in exploring the ‘event’ that marked mankind’s corruption, and geological ‘changes’ that reflect his receptiveness to contemporary science. Following this insistence that geological changes are obviously related to social corruption, Shelley appears to overstate his case for linking such a decline to meat-eating. Engaging with the way that Newton and Ritson deploy Biblical events in order to promote vegetarianism, Shelley remarks:

The allegory of Adam and Eve eating of the tree of evil, and entailing upon their posterity the wrath of God [...] admits of no other explanation, than the disease and crime that have flowed from unnatural diet. (*Vindication*, p. 77)

This description of the Fall as an ‘allegory’ may be seen to engage with Newton’s unorthodox religious beliefs. However, it also recalls his attraction to the way that writers like Lucretius and Darwin perceive myth as an expression of how early humanity understood the world. Shelley combines this with Ritson’s belief that ‘unnatural diet’ is solely responsible for ‘disease’ and ‘crime’. Nevertheless, it is unusual for him to rule out the possibility of ‘other explanation’ in his writing. It can thus be suggested that he questions such accounts of this decline through this employment of Biblical rhetoric.

Shelley’s view of myth develops as he turns his attention to pre-Christian religions. Like Newton, Shelley is attracted to the fable of Prometheus. However, he utilises this myth to express doubts about the corrupting influence of human passions. He begins by paraphrasing Newton’s translation of Hesiod, which argued that ‘before the time of Prometheus, mankind were exempt from suffering’, and may be seen to refer to Newton’s arguments concerning the way that Prometheus ‘applied fire to culinary purpose’ (*Vindication*, p. 78). However, he follows this remark with comments that have echoes of Mandeville’s views on vegetarianism. He describes the way that fire

‘invent[ed] an expedient for screening from [man’s] disgust the horrors of the shambles’ (*Vindication*, p. 78). By alluding to Mandeville’s portrayal of meat-eating as incurring a ‘shambolic’ revulsion in selfish beings, Shelley can be seen to question the view that ‘unnatural’ diet is the cause of human irrationality. These tensions in Shelley’s approach to moral and economic development culminate in his description of Newton’s essay as only one ‘interpretation of the fable of Prometheus’ (*Vindication*, p. 78).

Shelley cites a large section of *The Return to Nature*, including references to contemporary literature. For example, he alludes to Newton’s citations of Pope’s *Essay on Man* in order to present humanity as natural beings. It is interesting that the section Shelley selects discusses the way that ‘disease to luxury succeeds’, which in turn inspires ‘fury passions’ in man (*Vindication*, p. 79).<sup>29</sup> This citation refers to the last four lines of Pope’s third Epistle that Newton quotes in full. It can thus be suggested that Shelley wanted to draw attention to its remarks upon commerce and humanity. His next comments imply that society has been corrupted by human ‘passions’ and their consequences of ‘penury, disease and crime’ (*Vindication*, p. 79). Nevertheless, there is a sense that Shelley remains troubled by this negative view of human passions, especially when he reprises his employment of Biblical allusion in order to query Ritson’s view of man as a superior species. He comments: ‘The supereminence of man is like Satan’s, a supereminence of pain’ (*Vindication*, p. 79). I argue that these remarks recall Shelley’s attraction to Smith’s belief that human passions, like self-interest, are fundamental to universal prosperity, notwithstanding the negative effects that they can also generate. He may thus be seen as suggesting that man can only become ‘supereminent’ by acknowledging that his propensities have the potential to cause ‘pain’, but also the power to inspire social, moral and economic progress.

As if recognising that these arguments require deeper exploration, Shelley’s narrative returns to Newton and Ritson’s views of ‘crime’ as the product of ‘violent passions’ (*Vindication*, p. 81). Shelley’s interest in whether criminality originates from the influence of ‘unnatural’ habits or from within the ‘human heart’ itself can be seen in the passage he uses to test the validity of each proposition:

Who will assert, that had the populace of Paris drank at the pure source of the Seine, and satisfied their hunger at the ever-furnished table of vegetable

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<sup>29</sup> Alexander Pope, *Essay on Man, Moral Essays and Satires*, ed. by Henry Morley (London, 1905), Epistle, III, IV, 19.

nature, that they would have lent their brutal suffrage to the proscription-list of Robespierre? (*Vindication*, p. 82)

Shelley's conviction that 'vegetable nature' could never have inspired the 'brutal' impulses that led to the Reign of Terror recalls Ritson's alignment of vegetarian discourses with radical politics. However, Shelley questions this when he adds: 'Could a set of men, whose passions were not perverted by unnatural stimuli, look with coolness on an *auto da fé*?' (*Vindication*, p. 82). This transition from the 1790s to the tactics of the Spanish Inquisition anticipates Shelley's fondness for constructing historical narratives in his later prose. Nevertheless, the interest in this passage lies in the way that Shelley defines 'perversion' as the product of 'unnatural stimuli', not of 'passions' themselves. By moving from a depiction of passions as unnatural to an argument about the way that passions can be distorted, Shelley seems to juxtapose the utopian views of Newton and Ritson with the moral outlooks of Mandeville and Smith. In contrast to Newton and Ritson's belief that human 'passion' is a negative side effect of commercial values, Shelley seems to support the political economists' idea that these non-rational qualities are intrinsic to humanity itself.

This tension in Shelley's thought is supported by his employment of mathematical techniques to combat social 'disease'. He comments: 'Pregnant indeed with inexhaustible calamity, is the renunciation of instinct [...] arithmetic cannot enumerate, nor reason perhaps suspect, the multitudinous sources of disease in civilised life' (*Vindication*, p. 83). Shelley's connection of 'calamity' with 'the renunciation of instinct' appears to uphold meat-eating as solely responsible for social 'disease'. However, his allusion to 'arithmetic' and its attempts to identify 'multitudinous' causes for such evils reflects his scepticism about a sole 'source' of disease. This admiration for economic methods may be seen in the remark that reason 'cannot' provide all the solutions to social corruption. By suggesting that reason has its limits, Shelley upholds the views of Mandeville and Smith on the complexity of human 'instinct'. He implies that social 'disease' arises less as the product of 'unnatural' human passions and more through the ways in which these impulses are distorted by contemporary attitudes to commerce.

Shelley acknowledges that 'a return to nature' cannot 'instantaneously eradicate predispositions that have been slowly taking root in the silence of innumerable ages' (*Vindication*, p. 87). Whilst this emphasis upon 'eradicating' corruption corresponds

with Newton and Ritson's beliefs, there is a sense that Shelley possesses a more sophisticated view of these 'predispositions'. Having considered whether self-interest is a product of social disease, or a natural human impulse, Shelley is discerning in his assessment of 'unnatural habits' (*Vindication*, p. 87). His belief that impulses like self-interest could be reconciled with a vegetarian diet is reflected when he remarks that the consumers of 'plain fare' possess greater powers of 'sympathy' than the 'hypocritical sensualist' (*Vindication*, p. 88). This criticism of 'sensuality' appears to uphold Newton and Ritson's view of a 'rational' humanity. However, Shelley discusses sympathy in full awareness that such an ability depends upon an acknowledgement of man's tendency towards self-interest. Consequently, it can be argued that he not only considers Mandeville's belief that vegetarianism is connected to man's 'natural' selfishness, but also validates Smith's views that it is only through self-awareness that human beings can sympathise with others.

Shelley's *Vindication* concludes by asserting the universality of his vegetarian outlook in an appendix. He argues that its message is relevant to 'the young enthusiast', 'the elderly man' and 'the ardent devotee of truth and virtue' (*Vindication*, p. 88). This may be seen as a reflection of his determination to extend his views beyond the insularity of the Bracknell circle. Whilst Shelley comments that Newton's 'mode of reasoning' is 'conclusive', it can be argued that he regards Newton's rejection of the non-rational aspects of human nature as far from definitive (*Vindication*, p. 90). It is significant that Shelley concludes the pamphlet by referring to 'his own experience' of vegetarianism, rather than paraphrasing the views of the Bracknell circle (*Vindication*, p. 91).

By the time Shelley published the *Vindication*, he had developed a sophisticated view of humanity and its relation to the natural world. By engaging with the way in which Ritson and Newton justified their belief in 'a return to nature', Shelley was confronted with an outlook that presented man as a rational being who flourished in a primitive existence. However, his attraction to the variety of sources such writers cited in their works led him to revisit aspects of political economy he had only briefly encountered. I have argued that Shelley's admiration of Smithian principles was enhanced by his study of Mandeville's founding ideas. Mandeville's doctrines led Shelley to believe that selfish propensities were natural to humanity. By exploring the way that Smith developed such theories in order to present self-interest in a more enlightened manner, he was able to refute Ritson's and Newton's condemnation of human passions.

This section of the chapter has also discussed the notion that Shelley was drawn to experiments with form and style in order to convey his vegetarian ideas. Attention has been drawn to his engagement with Newton's interest in Fall narratives and mythology, as well as Ritson's incorporation of philosophy and literary allusion. However, I suggested that Shelley emulated such techniques in order to promote commercial development. This interest, not only in the doctrines of political economy, but also the way in which they were expressed, would develop in the prose he wrote during 1817. Through his association with the Hunt circle he became reintegrated within the political scene. However, this was not to be a revival of his early enthusiasm for 1790s ideals, but an active participation within the struggle for contemporary reform. Shelley's determination to unite social change with his ideas about the literary potential of political economy is discussed in the remainder of this chapter.

## **2. 6. 'Tell me of the Political State of England – Its Literature': Shelley and the Reform Movement**

Interpretations of Shelley's thought have suffered from attempts to divide the year 1816 into two parts: the development of his aesthetic theory during the Geneva summer and his reintegration into the struggles for political reform on his return to England. Dawson describes Shelley's difficulties in reconciling these two perspectives in his prose: 'Shelley has in mind a poetical discharge of feeling, but the imbalance between institutions and opinions is to be restored politically too'.<sup>30</sup> However, Chapter One suggested that even in his earliest prose, Shelley was convinced that literature played a crucial role in articulating 'political' ideas. This can be observed from his interest in writing highly poetical prose in the Notes to *Queen Mab* to his experiments with rhetoric in order to question utopian concepts of humanity. As a result, such distinctions between Shelley's political outlook and his 'poetical' preoccupations become complicated.

There are suggestions that at this point, Shelley was interested in merging these ideas about the social power of literature with developments he had made in his economic outlook. Writing to Peacock from Geneva, he follows his desire to know of 'the political state of England – its literature' with a damning criticism of political

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<sup>30</sup> Dawson, *The Unacknowledged Legislator*, p. 171.

economists. He remarks in a letter of 17 July 1816, ‘leave Mammon [...] to those who delight in wickedness and slavery – their altars are stained with blood or polluted with gold, the price of blood’ (*Letters*, I, 490). That Shelley defines the ‘political state’ at home in terms of ‘literature’ indicates his belief that the articulation of reform was as important as its principles. Furthermore, his connection of literature to economic affairs suggests that he increasingly related his views on the rhetorical power of political economy to the contemporary crisis.

Shelley aligns ‘Mammon’, Spenser’s mythical personification of capital gain, with the union of ‘gold’ and ‘blood’ that underpins the production of commercial luxuries. Certainly, the remainder of his letter, which concerns his request to Peacock for the latter to find Mary and himself a house of a ‘sylvan nature’, implies that he had not abandoned the idea of a forest-dwelling utopia, and the solution it could provide to the evils of commerce and industrialisation (*Letters*, I, 490). Nevertheless, his discussion of economic affairs in this mythical manner may be seen to reflect his belief that, whilst abuses in contemporary political economy cannot be denied, its founding precepts contained literary potential. Shelley’s interest in the way that economic arguments were expressed would become crucial to his engagement with a range of writers across the Reform movement. By recognising that political economy was a discipline that caught the attention of metropolitan figures like Hunt, as well as provincial radicals like Cobbett, Shelley observed tensions in their writing that questioned such factional divides. This section argues that by perceiving political economy in a literary light, Shelley constructed a mode of reform that went beyond party interests.

In exploring Shelley’s economic outlook between 1816 and 1817, it is necessary to redress misconceptions relating to his return to England. Following the resumption of his correspondence with Hunt in December 1816 and his inclusion within the latter’s Hampstead circle, it has been supposed that Shelley tempered his revolutionary outlook as a response to his involvement with this liberal coterie. Cameron remarks that ‘snobbish attacks on radical reformers were typical of *The Examiner* attitude’.<sup>31</sup> However, such interpretations not only depend upon generalisations about the differences between ‘radical’ and ‘liberal’ factions, but also engender the divisions between metropolitan and provincial culture against which Shelley’s economic theory can be viewed as reacting. Gilmartin has outlined the complexities of such political divides by commenting that during this period, the term ‘liberal’ was only coming into

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<sup>31</sup> Cameron, *Shelley: The Golden Years* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), p. 124.



its modern usage.<sup>32</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* confirms that use of the word ‘liberal’ to denote a political movement originated in the war of the Spanish patriots in 1807.<sup>33</sup> Hume had employed the term to describe an outlook ‘favourable to the freedom and security of citizens’ in his *History of England*.<sup>34</sup> However, it was the conflict on the Iberian peninsula that, as Boyd Hilton suggests, led this term to become politically charged.<sup>35</sup> During the 1810s it also proved ambiguous, as is reflected by the desire of seditious magazine *The Cap of Liberty* to appeal to ‘a liberal and enlightened public’.<sup>36</sup> These problems in assigning labels to factions whose politics were complex necessitate a more nuanced approach to the reformers with whom Shelley engaged.

For example, Cox depicts Leigh Hunt as the metropolitan ‘leader of the literary left’.<sup>37</sup> This section argues that Hunt was one of the most important influences upon Shelley in his desire to promote the ‘literary’ potential of political economy. Hunt did not share Shelley’s ability to amalgamate different disciplines, as can be seen in the sharp distinction he makes between ‘politics and poetics’ in his work.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, his writing may be seen to parallel Shelley’s experiments with literary form. Hunt’s liberalism is complex, in terms of his ability to fuse a highbrow style with admiration for radical principles. As Iain McCalman remarks ‘politeness competed with more plebeian values throughout nineteenth-century radicalism, and to expose these qualities in Hunt does not exclude him from participation’.<sup>39</sup> McCalman presents Hunt as a writer of polite literature who engages with the ‘values’ of provincial radicals. However, this section argues that Shelley identified elements in Hunt’s literary approach to economic affairs that not only questioned his ‘liberal’ reputation, but also undermined such labels altogether.

Cameron argues that as a consequence of bitter struggles within the reform movement, ‘to the moderates, the radicals were irresponsible extremists, and to the

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<sup>32</sup> Gilmartin, *Print Politics*, p. 197.

<sup>33</sup> ‘Liberal, adjective and noun’, *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (first published online December 2011) <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/107863?redirectedFrom=liberal#eid>> [accessed 6 February 2012].

<sup>34</sup> David Hume, *A History of England*, 6 vols (London: T. Bensley for Robert Bowyer, 1754-62), I, 65.

<sup>35</sup> Boyd Hilton, *A Mad, Bad and Dangerous People?: England 1783-1846* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 559.

<sup>36</sup> [Multiple Contributors], *Cap of Liberty*, 1 (1819), 1-267 (p. 80).

<sup>37</sup> Cox, *Poetry and Politics*, p. 89.

<sup>38</sup> This was the name of Hunt’s 1810 poem, ‘Politics and Poetics, or the Desperate Situation of a Journalist Unhappily Smitten with the Love of Rhyme’, which explored how poetry could aid, but never enact political reform.

<sup>39</sup> Iain McCalman, *Radical Underworld: Prophets, Revolutionaries and Pornographers in London, 1795-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 26.

radicals, the moderates were weak opportunists'.<sup>40</sup> However, having suggested that Hunt's attitude to economic reform challenged such notions of opportunism, it is important to recognise that this reputation for extremism amongst provincial writers is equally questionable. Although Shelley's reading of William Cobbett's *Political Register* was limited prior to 1816, he admired the latter's skill in addressing labourers. In addition to exploring the way in which Cobbett experiments with language in his economic arguments, this section suggests that the latter possessed a more sophisticated awareness of political economy than is usually assumed. Overall, by uncovering the stylistic tensions generated in the work of liberals and radicals, this section argues that Shelley was able to present political economy as underpinning a successful mode of reform. The following section thus begins by examining Shelley's association with so-called 'liberal' principles, embodied by the work of Leigh Hunt.

### **2. 7. 'Sterling, Solid and Wasted Away': Leigh Hunt and Metropolitan Political Economy**

I have suggested that Hunt's journalistic style led him to acquire a reputation as the figurehead for liberal politics and bourgeois poetry. However, his position as a political commentator operating within a literary context presents him as attempting to traverse the boundaries between different traditions. As Nicholas Roe remarks: 'The juxtapositions possible in the *Examiner* between reports of dreadful battles and lyrical celebrations of life, presented a powerful contrast between two kinds of society.'<sup>41</sup> It is Hunt's amalgamation of a 'lyrical' style with 'powerful' political statements that proves problematic in situating him within a particular reform faction. As Hunt remarked over the impartiality of the *Examiner*, 'it began with being of no party; but reform soon gave it one'.<sup>42</sup> His alignment of his periodical's allusive style with the 'party' of 'reform' reflects his belief that art could shape social change. This section explores the way that Hunt's work questioned the separation of 'liberal' and 'radical' values, and the ways in which poetry and prose were viewed. It also suggests that Hunt's belief in the power of literature extended to his assessment of the economic crisis. Roe, Cameron and others have focused upon the way that Hunt expresses his political stance in a poetic style.

<sup>40</sup> Cameron, *Shelley: The Golden Years*, p. 123.

<sup>41</sup> Nicholas Roe, *Fiery Heart: The First Life of Leigh Hunt* (London: Pimlico, 2005), p. 171.

<sup>42</sup> Leigh Hunt, *Autobiography* (1850) (London: Kessinger, 2006), p. 203.

However, Hunt's conviction that form and rhetoric would play as important a role in resolving economic hardship as theories on population and the gold standard has been relatively overlooked.

Before Hunt's economic outlook can be considered, it is important to identify the way that his development as a writer raises questions about his 'liberal' reputation. From the outset, he was devoted to uncovering corruption in both home and foreign affairs. This preoccupation culminated in his resignation from the War Office in 1808 following the scandal of the Convention of Cintra, which criticised the British military. This event contributed to the establishment of the *Examiner*, which far from being the mouthpiece for bourgeois sentiments, was founded as an outlet for Hunt's political activism. As he commented on the Cintra affair on 30 October 1808: 'A reform in military matters will do away but one corruption; A REFORM IN PARLIAMENT WILL PURIFY THE WHOLE CONSTITUTION!' (*Examiner*, 1, 690). Hunt asserts that 'reform' must be achieved through the improvement of existing parliamentary institutions. Nevertheless, the capitalised statements and emphasis upon purifying the government recall the staccato directness of Cobbett's *Register*. They are even reminiscent of 1790s cadences, particularly in terms of Paine's emphasis upon the 'constitution'. Consequently, it can be suggested that even at the inception of the *Examiner*, Hunt was interested in the way in which periodical writing could absorb a variety of rhetorical techniques. These experiments would develop as he sought to combine his commitment to reform with his own literary influences.

Hunt considered himself a contributor to the 'reform of periodical writing', referring to his eighteenth-century predecessors.<sup>43</sup> He depicts Addison and Steele as drawing attention to the cultural importance of political debate. As A. R. Humphreys comments, 'the philosophical trend of the early eighteenth century was making intellectual discourse abstract. The periodical essayists reversed this; they embedded it in real life'.<sup>44</sup> This commitment to reclaiming 'abstract' discourse in the cause of contemporary reform can be understood to have inspired Hunt throughout his career. Furthermore, it suggests that his 'politics and poetics' were centred upon a practical desire for change, rather than experiments with form for their own sake. As he remarked on 7 March 1811, 'matters of taste and literature are more connected with the character of the times than most people imagine' (*Examiner*, 4, 161). By arguing that

<sup>43</sup> Hunt, *The Reflector* (1811), quoted in McCalman, *Radical Underworld*, p. 27.

<sup>44</sup> A. R. Humphreys, *Steele, Addison and their Periodical Essays* (London: Longmans and Green, 1959), p. 17.

literature related closely to ‘the character of the times’, Hunt calls his bourgeois reputation into question. Gilmartin suggests that this relates especially to the socio-economic crisis of the 1810s, during which he, ‘more than anyone else wrote along the widening faultline within radical culture that was increasingly defined in class terms’.<sup>45</sup> As a result, it is important to investigate elements in Hunt’s writing that connect literature to reform and thus destabilise ‘class’ divisions, before his views on political economy can be fully appreciated.

The early *Examiner* was active not only in its attempts to politicise literature, but also in its emphasis on the idea that social hardship must be regarded in a cultural context. Both Hunt and his brother John were sued for libel following their criticism of the Cintra scandal. Although they were acquitted, the language of the periodical became increasingly outspoken, such as in its condemnation of ‘wasters of human and national life’ on 11 March 1811 (*Examiner*, 4, 147). The period prior to Hunt’s imprisonment of 1813 for criticism levelled towards the Prince Regent has been regarded as the most radical of his career. Many reformers, including Cobbett, criticised Hunt’s ‘cooled’ political voice following his release (*Register*, 28, 196). However, it is perhaps more accurate to acknowledge Hunt’s increased caution, which changed his expression into a more subtle exploration of the connection between poetry and reform. It is thus important to investigate the way that Hunt’s engagement with a wide range of rhetorical registers influenced his views on socio-economic change.

In contrast to Cameron’s reading of Hunt’s ‘snobbish’ attitude towards the labouring poor, from the outset he was preoccupied with the same issues that concerned provincial radicals. Gilmartin remarks that *The Examiner* ‘assisted Cobbett in establishing the pattern by which the independent weekly fed off and refashioned the discourse of the more respectable daily press’.<sup>46</sup> This alliance with Cobbett thus suggests that Hunt shared the former’s concern for the plight of labourers, and his belief that literary form was not socially exclusive. The concept of Hunt ‘assisting’ the provincial radicals is supported by the sympathy he expressed towards the negative effects of industrialisation. He remarked on 24 January 1808: ‘Commerce is but the vigour of the extremities and not of the trunk of the body politic’ (*Examiner*, 4, 15). This separation of commerce from ‘the body politic’ recognises its corruption. Nevertheless, Hunt’s emphasis upon its ‘vigour’, implies that commerce contains a dynamic potential that could benefit the reform movement. This suggests that Hunt believed that political

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<sup>45</sup> Gilmartin, *Print Politics*, p. 199.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, p. 217.

economy was inherently progressive and lay at the heart of social change. Furthermore, his contemplation of the way that manufacturers could benefit labourers may be seen as aligning Hunt with even more radical writers than Cobbett. Not only does Hunt's commercial outlook support Robert Owen's socialist principles, but it can also be seen to parallel Spence's belief that advances in industry could put an end to poverty.

It is significant that in 1817, Hunt engaged with Cobbett's marketing strategies. Hunt described his *Indicator* as 'an accomplished specimen of the Twopenny Trash'.<sup>47</sup> This alludes to Cobbett's decision to print two versions of his *Political Register* in November 1816, the cheaper of which was intended to be accessible to the poor. It can be argued that this would have appealed to Hunt's view that the role of periodicals was to reconcile the opinions of different social classes. Gilmartin suggests that in contrast to Cobbett, Hunt was 'less concerned with the impact of corrupt commerce, than with its tendency to divide writers from a public with whom they were once personally acquainted'.<sup>48</sup> However, I argue it was not so much that Hunt was 'less concerned' with the 'impact' of economic abuses, as that he sought to awaken the 'public' to the ways in which the act of 'writing' could construct viable solutions to them.

I have drawn attention to elements in Hunt's writing that reflect his attraction to the rhetoric and strategies of provincial periodicals. However, it is also important to explore his interest in confronting the economic crisis through literary means. In the midst of an essay on 'Public Spirit of the Times and the State of Parties', Hunt employs his allusive style to launch an attack upon inflation, inspired by the counterproductive tactic of substituting gold currency for paper banknotes. On being asked by a government representative whether paper represents money, Hunt replied:

Yes, just as you and your friends represent the people, unlike in every possible respect, and as superabundant as the popular strength has been sterling, solid, and wasted away in foreign wars. Like you also, it is of no real value but to the minister.<sup>49</sup>

This discussion of 'real value' is suggestive of Hunt's economic understanding. Debates over the ways in which wealth could be defined by currency were central to the mathematical treatises of economists like Mill and Ricardo. Indeed, Hunt was attracted

<sup>47</sup> Leigh Hunt, *Correspondence*, ed. by Thornton Hunt, 2 vols (London: Smith and Elder, 1862), I, 149.

<sup>48</sup> Gilmartin, *Print Politics*, p. 204.

<sup>49</sup> Hunt, *Reflector*, 1 (1810), 1-453 (pp. 451-2).

by the utilitarian theories of Jeremy Bentham, to which the *Examiner* referred, and by which it increasingly became defined, in the 1820s. This may be seen as early as 1811, when Hunt paraphrases Bentham by remarking that ‘the comforts of common men are, after all, the great end of the greatest statesmen’.<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, his emphasis upon ‘common men’ reiterates Hunt’s determination to construct a form of address that reconciled such philosophical concerns with a focus upon contemporary hardship. This is evident in his use of ‘sterling, solid’ currency as a metaphor for a just mode of representation, uniting the highbrow style of his periodical with the concerns of provincial writers.

Hunt’s tendency to ‘make literature act on and in politics’ is apparent in his assessment of the reform crisis.<sup>51</sup> However, he was equally capable of making the economic crisis act on and in literature. This concept of political economy assuming a literary guise manifested itself in 1815, when he extended the stylistic experiments of the *Examiner* into a masque drama, *The Descent of Liberty*. This explored the socio-economic implications of Napoleon’s defeat, and was criticised for ‘pursuing idealisation, rather than confronting the real problems faced by the people’. However, as Cox suggests, ‘cultural despondency was a “real” problem for the people, connected with their financial distress’.<sup>52</sup> This recognition of the ‘cultural’ significance of political economy validated Hunt’s belief that ‘distress’ could be alleviated by constructing new forms of expression. His economic outlook prior to 1816 may thus be seen, not only to question the dichotomy between ‘liberal’ and ‘radical’ ideas, but also to incorporate such opinions into his views on the potential of literature.

So far, this section has questioned Hunt’s bourgeois reputation by exploring his receptiveness to a range of economic outlooks. I have argued that he believed the modes of rhetoric adopted by provincial radicals, political economists and even revolutionary writers could be accommodated within the literary register of the *Examiner*. How Hunt’s relationship with Shelley extended these views on the socio-economic potential of literature will now be considered. Shelley first wrote to Hunt on 2 March 1811, but unnerved him with his enthusiasm for the ‘methodical’ removal of the ‘enemies’ of freedom (*Letters*, I, 54). However, by 1816, this tension in their political beliefs may be seen as informing their respective ideas concerning the way that political economy could encompass a range of moral, social and literary meanings. The

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<sup>50</sup> *Examiner*, quoted in Carl Woodring, *Leigh Hunt’s Political and Occasional Essays*, ed. by Lawrence Huston Houtchens (London: Columbia University Press, 1962), p. 41.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>52</sup> Cox, *Poetry and Politics*, p. 58.

renewed relationship between Shelley and Hunt was perhaps the most intellectually compatible to emerge from what Cox calls the 'Hunt circle'.

Cox argues that for Shelley, Hunt combined 'poetical, critical and political skills in a way no one else did'.<sup>53</sup> This sense of Hunt 'combining' poetry with political debates reiterates his perception of literature as separate from legislative measures. However, it can be argued that through his association with Shelley, Hunt became awakened to the possibility that genre as well as style could be re-evaluated. Rather than simply expressing economic ideas in a literary way, Shelley's prose was reaching towards the idea that political economy could be regarded as a literary form in its own right. Shelley and Hunt may thus be viewed as informing each other's economic outlook, particularly the way that political economy could resolve factional tensions. Hunt's influence may be observed in Shelley's *Essay on Christianity* (1817), when Shelley comments that 'Refinement in arts and letters' is 'distorted from its natural tendency to promote benevolence and truth, [becoming] subservient to lust and luxury'.<sup>54</sup> He aligns his view that 'lust' and 'luxury' result from misguided perceptions of human passions with Hunt's belief that literature had become sidelined as a result of such commercial attitudes. This leads him to conclude that political economy required an alternative form of expression, as well as an alternative perception of its principles.

In conclusion, this section has explored the way that, through his experiments with rhetoric in relation to the financial crisis, Hunt's reputation as a 'liberal' became complicated. By combining provincial modes of address with the allusive style of the *Examiner*, he recognised that a united reform movement could only be achieved by acknowledging the cultural value of political economy. The renewed association between Hunt and Shelley in 1816 benefited both writers. Hunt influenced Shelley's situation of his subversive approach to genre firmly within the contemporary crisis; similarly, Shelley may be seen to have expanded Hunt's belief that political economy was not only culturally important, but that it also contained literary potential. Having drawn attention to the fact that Shelley admired experiments with form and style in the work of so-called 'liberal' reformers, it is necessary to explore his engagement with radical writers. Paul Foot suggests that 'with the depth of feeling and sacrifice which inspired [provincial reformers], he had no contact whatever'.<sup>55</sup> It is true that Shelley's associates consisted largely of the city intelligentsia. However, his experiences on the

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<sup>53</sup> Cox, *Poetry and Politics*, p. 40.

<sup>54</sup> Shelley, *Essay on Christianity*, in *Prose*, 247-64 (p. 247).

<sup>55</sup> Foot, *Red Shelley*, p. 164.

Tremadoc Embankment project, as well as his receptiveness to provincial periodicals, suggest that he was more aware of economic hardship than is usually assumed. It is with this in mind that Shelley's interest in William Cobbett, arguably the most eloquent voice of the provincial radicals, must be considered.

## **2. 8. 'Talk of Roads, Canals and Bridges': William Cobbett and Provincial Political Economy**

Cobbett began his career as a staunch defender of the Tory administration, but a view of the government at close quarters converted him to become its most radical nemesis. In order to understand Cobbett's reasoning, it is necessary to explore the way that his economic outlook was central to this *volte-face*. Throughout his life, Cobbett was a tireless campaigner for the rights of the poor. When the government ceased to serve its function in upholding what he described on 4 May 1811 as 'the general happiness of the people' he felt justified in withdrawing his support (*Register*, 19, 589). Cobbett considered himself a defender of English values, and perceived the government as the guardian of the rights of man. As a result, he always placed the 'happiness' of the working people above political factions. It is this vital consistency in Cobbett's thought that accounts for the extreme shifts in his outlook. He was determined to remain 'the Poor Man's friend', amidst the crisis of inflation, increased enclosures and commercial corruption.<sup>56</sup> This led him to promote an economic approach that upheld the rights of labourers, whilst avoiding revolutionary sentiments.

The first part of this section explores the way that these consistencies informed Cobbett's attitude towards political economy. The direct, often blunt observations of the *Political Register* are viewed as reflecting Cobbett's distrust towards metropolitan reformers. However, Gilmartin has suggested that Cobbett's attempts to conserve aspects of rural life result in 'contradictions' in his writing.<sup>57</sup> He remarks that Cobbett's 'preoccupation with the material world is taken to prove his ignorance about more elevated spheres of culture, [yet] he provides an account of how dominant attitudes were cultivated, a salutary reminder of the material dimension of cultural processes'.<sup>58</sup> This suggests that Cobbett not only engaged with 'more elevated' language, but that he also

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<sup>56</sup> George Spater, *William Cobbett: The Poor Man's Friend* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 5.

<sup>57</sup> Gilmartin, *Print Politics*, p. 54.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 172.



considered the way that such ‘cultural’ attitudes are defined. This became crucial to his attempts to create a form of economic discourse for the labouring classes, and belief that successful reform must acknowledge provincial culture. As a result, the second part of this section focuses less upon Cobbett’s economic views and more on the ways in which he expresses them.

Cobbett began his career as a defender of Pitt’s regime in 1790s America, and his polemics against growing Jacobin values ensured that he returned to England in 1800 a national hero. In gratitude for this loyalty, the government sponsored the foundation of *Cobbett’s Weekly Political Register*. The *Register* began life as a Tory publication, delivering news in the form of letters to the editor. At the cost of one shilling, it was hardly accessible to a widespread readership. Nevertheless, from its inception Cobbett adopted the forthright tone that would become crucial to his changing political stance. At first, Cobbett upheld English government as the last defence of the people against the growing threat of revolution. However, his irritation towards party divisions led him to remark on 4 February 1804: ‘My opinions shall be declared, notwithstanding the insinuations that they may bring forth of my being an enemy of my country, an appellation which is bestowed upon all who doubt the talents of ministers’ (*Register*, 9, 182). Cobbett’s willingness to ‘doubt’ his previous allegiances becomes significant with regard to the object of these ‘opinions’. His first-person mode of address suggests that he is judging political parties personally, in terms of the extent to which they protect the rights of the people, rather than aligning himself with Tory values for their own merits.

It is important to emphasise that Cobbett’s shifting political views were connected to his assessment of the economic crisis. As George Spater comments, ‘he had attacked the Jacobins because of their disregard for law and religion. Now he attacked the governors of England because of their indifference which had led to the creation of more than a million paupers’.<sup>59</sup> Cobbett’s awareness of increased taxation in order to fund the continuing French war, strengthened his belief that these ‘governors’ were betraying the nation. The *Register* provides a sharp contrast with other government-established newspapers, which downplayed the deterioration of English economy. Instead, Cobbett regarded economic decline as the epicentre of governmental corruption. On 9 September 1811 he compressed his hatred of abstracts, or ‘tyranny aggravated by complexity’ into one term: the ‘system’ (*Register*, 19, 1060). For Cobbett, this embodied a range of economic problems, which he described on 4 July

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<sup>59</sup> Spater, *William Cobbett: The Poor Man’s Friend*, p. 195.

1812 as including the ‘system of public corruption, Pitt system, system of beggary, system of paper money’ (*Register*, 21, 3). Cobbett’s use of such a term to define widespread crisis provoked criticism from metropolitan writers. Nevertheless, the complex issues which the ‘system’ encompassed may be seen to question the idea that he was ignorant of the theorists he criticises. Indeed, its analysis of the ‘paper money’ crisis that preoccupied economists like Mill and Ricardo and his discussions of the ‘beggary’ that underpinned the problematic Poor Laws suggest that Cobbett was instead seeking to redefine the way in which such matters were addressed. It was this hostility towards the ‘system’ that eventually led to his imprisonment in 1810. Following his release in June 1812, Cobbett’s determination to ‘teach the poor how to know the cause of all their misery’ became even stronger (*Register*, 25, 168).

Cobbett’s commitment to the rights of the labouring poor led him to devise ways of expressing economic solutions in a language that this section of society could understand. This involved liberating economic reform from the abstractions of political economists whilst conserving agricultural values. Although Spater describes the language used in the *Register* as ‘free from affectation’, this style can be viewed as maintaining Cobbett’s vision of England.<sup>60</sup> He reminisced upon rural culture on 6 June 1814, recalling with distaste the way that ‘contempt was expressed in the sayings of those amongst whom I was born and bred; in doing which we conducted down to earth the sentiments of the “Squires and Lords”’ (*Register*, 28, 759). These remarks are interesting in that they acknowledge the way in which the ‘sayings’ of labourers were influenced by their overlords. Spater’s remark that Cobbett sought to employ the *Register* in ‘bringing language back into its perfect correspondence with the world’ is perceptive.<sup>61</sup> Cobbett’s preoccupation with rediscovering the origins of labouring-class language is suggestive of his recognition that the past was flawed. His desire for its ‘perfect correspondence’ with economic reform implies that it is not really the language of the agricultural past he wishes to reclaim, but an idyll of how it should have been. This desire to reconcile social realities with individual vision reveals a surprising parallel between Cobbett and Romanticism. Certainly, his emphasis upon speaking to labourers in accessible language may be compared with the preoccupations of the Lake Poets. Nevertheless, Cobbett defended the right of labourers to a better existence, rather than promoted an idealistic view of rural life to the metropolitan classes. Cobbett realised that the only way to reform the system was to adopt a writing style which

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<sup>60</sup> Spater, *William Cobbett: The Poor Man’s Friend*, p. 2.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 175.

recognised that social ideals could only be achieved by acknowledging economic realities. This led him to write in matter-of-fact prose that was interspersed with glimpses of a liberated, and even poetic labouring-class voice.

Before Cobbett's experiments with style can be discussed, it is important to emphasise that his desire to reinvent the language of political economy impacted upon his identity as a reformer. His belief in substituting what he viewed as the abstractions of classical political economists with a straight-talking assessment of hardship may be seen in his response to Malthusian principles. In the 1801 edition of his *Essay*, Malthus had argued that gluts in the market brought about by the overproduction of luxuries could be resolved by a scheme of public works that improved living conditions without adding to monetary wealth. I have suggested that Cobbett recognised little meaning in terms like 'wealth' and 'capital'. Nevertheless, his reaction to Malthus's view of public works suggests that his understanding of economic principles was sound. On 22 May 1813 he commented: 'Talk of roads and canals and bridges! These are no signs of national prosperity. They are signs of accumulated, but not of diffused property' (*Register*, 27, 589). These remarks combine an incredulous commentary with shrewd economic analysis. Cobbett's discussion of 'accumulated' and 'diffused' property is suggestive of his awareness of Malthus' arguments regarding the dangers of excessive capital. Additionally, his instruction to 'talk' of social consequences shows that his first-person style operates as a dialogue between himself and his readers. This encourages them to see that economic debate could be reclaimed from the complexity of Malthusian economics. Cobbett may thus be seen as skilful in combining a sophisticated economic analysis with his desire to construct a form of political economy that reflected provincial culture.

So far, I have portrayed Cobbett as a writer who employed economic discourse in order to promote the values of the rural poor. However, it is also important to draw attention to his ideas concerning the merits of literature. As Gilmartin suggests, 'far from abandoning the highest powers of language to transform the world, Cobbett's prose operated as if those powers inhered reciprocally in language and in the conditions to be transformed'.<sup>62</sup> This view of Cobbett as transforming rather than abandoning the literary style that informed the writing of Hunt or Shelley, reflects his engagement with alternative forms of rhetoric. The remainder of this section thus considers his important statements on the literary potential of political economy. Cobbett distrusted aesthetics as a medium for conveying his principles, a characteristic that would lead metropolitan

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<sup>62</sup> Gilmartin, *Print Politics*, pp. 176-7.

reformers to regard him in a condescending light. He expressed his contempt for ‘all the tribe who artfully select terms to bewilder the public’ on 16 February 1808, and was wary of the efforts being made to educate the labouring classes (*Register*, 21, 20). Nevertheless, although Cobbett’s addresses are greatly removed from this artful style, he may often be seen to appropriate literary allusions for the labouring-class cause.

Although an Anglican, Cobbett often expressed his plans for economic reform in Dissenting rhetoric. Addressing suffering labourers on 15 June 1815, he remarked:

Mine are none of those spies under the garb of affection, those satanic interlopers who [...] are plotting in their malignant hearts, how they shall transform your Paradise into a place resembling the Hells they have left behind them. (*Register*, 31, 739)

Leonora Natrass argues that Cobbett employed such language in relation to economic issues because it created ‘a black-and-white assessment of the writing of Cobbett’s enemies as falsehood, and his own as truth’.<sup>63</sup> By evoking a contrast between an agricultural ‘Paradise’ and the ‘Hell’ of contemporary corruption, Cobbett may be seen to interpret economic turmoil in terms of Christian morality. Nevertheless this quotation, with its ‘satanic’ imagery also has Miltonic undertones. Nigel Smith acknowledges Cobbett’s reading of Milton in the *Register*, yet argues that he ‘brings down Milton’s range of ideas to a one-dimensional preoccupation with money’.<sup>64</sup> However, this alignment of socio-economic affairs with Miltonic imagery suggests that Cobbett’s understanding of the former’s ‘range of ideas’, and the way that these are articulated, is more detailed than is usually assumed.

Cobbett expresses his admiration for Milton’s writings on several occasions, and applies the latter’s language to a range of contemporary issues. For example, on 30 January 1816 he cites Milton’s defence of the press in *Areopagitica* in relation to government tactics intended to curb journalistic freedom:

The very devils of the British press, and their arch employers (to speak in the language of Milton) seem now to contract themselves into the smallest

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<sup>63</sup> Leonora Natrass, *William Cobbett: The Politics of Style* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 107.

<sup>64</sup> Timothy Morton and Nigel Smith, eds., *Radicalism in British Literary Culture, 1650-1830: From Revolution to Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 176.

size, viewing as far as devils can, the dismal consequences of that war which they so heartily supported. (*Register*, 30, 26)<sup>65</sup>

This admiration for Milton's 'language' had also permeated Cobbett's anger towards the Treaty of Ghent in 1814, which had concluded the Anglo-American war and biased British subjects against the Americans. Adopting similar imagery to that which he uses in his address to starving labourers, Cobbett remarked of the treaty on 14 January 1815:

The print was, upon this occasion, the trumpet of all the haters of freedom; all those who look with Satanic eyes on the happiness of the free people of America [...] enjoy the spectacle of the hell that burns in their bosoms. (*Register*, 27, 33-54)

Nattrass identifies undertones of *Paradise Lost* in these statements. She suggests that 'when Cobbett says that "hell [...] burns in their bosoms", we are reminded of Milton's Satan: "Which way I fly is Hell; myself am Hell"'.<sup>66</sup> However, Cobbett not only incorporates Milton's poetry into his diatribes against contemporary corruption. He also alludes to *Areopagitica*, Milton's treatise that is expressed in highly poetic prose. In this respect, Cobbett may be viewed as concerned with the form and style of his writing, as well as its content. Furthermore, his expression of issues such as the liberty of the press and the manipulation of the poor in Miltonic language, implies that Cobbett perceived experiments with form and rhetoric as playing a vital role in overcoming class divides. As a result, his allusions to Milton not only present Cobbett's opposition to highbrow culture in a more complex light, but are also suggestive of the way that literature could benefit labouring-class preoccupations. Nigel Smith comments that during the Reform crisis of the 1810s 'the relationship between literacy and liberty was as prominent as during the English Civil War'.<sup>67</sup> Such parallels between this period and the events of the 1640s are particularly significant in terms of Cobbett's belief in the

<sup>65</sup> In *Areopagitica*, Milton had presented the oppression of the liberty of the press in a Biblical context: 'it was the same politic drift that the devil whipped St. Jerome in a lenten dream, for reading Cicero'. Cobbett can be seen as employing Scripture in a similar way in relation to England in 1816. See John Milton, *Areopagitica* (1644), in *The Complete Prose*, ed. by D. M. Wolfe *et al.*, 8 vols (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1953-82), II, 533-575 (p. 537). All subsequent citations from this work will be from this edition and will be given in parentheses, abbreviated as *Areopagitica*, in the text.

<sup>66</sup> Nattrass, *William Cobbett: The Politics of Style*, p. 107. See Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. by Barbara K. Lewalski (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), Book IV, l. 75.

<sup>67</sup> Morton and Smith, *Radicalism in British Literary Culture*, p. 10.

socio-economic potential of Milton's 'literacy'.

Milton's Biblical and philosophical allusions, as well as the intimidating Greek and Latin titles of his prose, led Coleridge to criticise his lack of 'sympathy with the people to be governed'.<sup>68</sup> However, Sharon Achinstein emphasises that Milton's discourse was also intended to illuminate the social usefulness of the poor.<sup>69</sup> This may be observed in *Areopagitica*, when Milton employs the metaphor of agricultural labour in order to encourage intellectual discovery. He comments: 'What could a man require more from a Nation so prone to seek after knowledge? What wants there to such a pregnant soil, but wise labourers, to make a knowing people a Nation of Prophets?' (*Areopagitica*, II, 554). That Milton connects 'prophecy' to the 'knowingness' of 'labourers' suggests that the voice of workers is as vital to the increase in 'knowledge' as the creations of poets. It is this aspect of Milton's thought in which Cobbett is interested, not only in terms of identifying the vitality of provincial language, but also in his experiments with style.

Cobbett's interest in expressing economic hardship in the language of prophecy may be viewed as questioning factional divides. This is reflected in his decision to publish the two versions of the *Register* in 1816. Although these were intended to attract separate readerships, Cobbett incorporates literary allusion as well as economic analysis, into both versions. Natrass suggests that he employs 'poetic prose' in order to 'talk across his readers, expressing a world view'.<sup>70</sup> Such experiments with form, as well as the idea of constructing a universal mode of address, draw parallels with the preoccupations of metropolitan figures like Hunt. Cobbett's emphasis upon a 'world view' destabilises the dichotomy between 'liberal' and 'radical' reformers during this period. It suggests that political economy could be viewed as sparking an underlying point of union amongst reformers. In identifying its rhetorical as well as social potential, figures across various factions were increasingly coming into dialogue with each other and re-evaluating the ways in which the future should be made.

Cobbett's support for provincial orators like Henry Hunt compelled him to flee to America in March 1817. However, he lost none of his commitment to reform in England, continuing to publish the *Register* and write 'in our glorious cause' (*Register*, 35, 810). The importance Cobbett placed upon the act of writing is evident in his

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<sup>68</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, quoted in Roberta F. Brinkley, ed., *Coleridge in the Seventeenth Century* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1955), p. 473.

<sup>69</sup> Sharon Achinstein, *Milton and the Revolutionary Reader* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 19

<sup>70</sup> Natrass, *William Cobbett: the Politics of Style*, p. 172.

refusal of Sidmouth's attempt to bribe him to retire to his estate. He remarked: 'The sole condition was *future silence*. Life was scarcely worth preserving with the consciousness that I [was] at the mercy of a Secretary of State'.<sup>71</sup> It is Cobbett's refusal to remain 'silent' in the cause of economic change that best defines his identity as a reformer. Many key Romantic figures, such as Wordsworth, Byron, and Keats, were regular readers of the *Political Register*, even if there is little evidence of Cobbett's awareness of their work. Shelley had been elitist in dismissing Cobbett, describing him to Godwin as 'unrefined' on 29 July 1812 (*Letters*, I, 318). However, by late 1816 he had become an enthusiastic reader of the *Register*. Dawson suggests that Shelley was more receptive to Cobbett's 'no-nonsense analysis than the complexities of the political economists'.<sup>72</sup> However, to present Cobbett's writing as opposing political economy is to overlook his sophisticated engagement with issues such as taxation, wealth and labour. It can be argued that what Shelley admired most was not Cobbett's attempt to simplify political economy, but his effort to re-evaluate the way that its 'complexities' were expressed. The next section suggests that he was more interested in these stylistic and cultural contradictions than in seeking to unite interest groups. Nevertheless, whilst Hunt and Cobbett viewed literature as a means of complementing economic debate, Shelley regarded political economy as a literary form in itself. It is this aspect of his writing that informs the following readings of his 1817 pamphlets.

### **2.9. A Proposal for Putting Reform to the Vote Throughout the Kingdom.**

Shelley's first political pamphlet of 1817, *A Proposal for Putting Reform to the Vote Throughout the Kingdom*, is regarded as a reflection of the intellectual reform favoured by the Hunt circle, which simultaneously expresses his support for the radical cause. James Bieri observes the contradictions in its tone, remarking that Shelley believed 'he was a radical who, living under conditions like those of England in 1817, had to couch his message in moderate terms for it to be accepted'.<sup>73</sup> Scrivener, Cameron and Dawson share this view that Shelley adopts a 'moderate' stance in order to successfully implement his radical ideals. Furthermore, Cox emphasises that such an outlook distinguished him from Hunt's associates, ensuring that he was both 'particularised and

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

<sup>72</sup> Dawson, *The Unacknowledged Legislator*, p. 49.

<sup>73</sup> James Bieri, *Percy Bysshe Shelley: A Biography* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), p. 377.

fully integrated within the circle'.<sup>74</sup> However, I have argued that Hunt recognised the benefits of traversing boundaries between different kinds of rhetoric when addressing the subject of economic reform. As a result, to present Shelley as 'integrated' within the Hunt circle is to situate him less within a group that promoted metropolitan values as in an environment in which his experiments with style could thrive. Murray notes that the *Proposal* does not 'provide a section detailing the underlying economic motives for reform'.<sup>75</sup> He argues that Shelley did not wish to exacerbate factional disputes by undertaking the focused economic analysis that informs his later essays. Shelley was convinced that economic change was the fundamental issue upon which reform depended. However, he also understood that the rhetorical techniques employed to express such issues reflected an unacknowledged point of union amongst the reform factions. As a result, his *Proposal* should be not be regarded as excluding economic debate, but rather emphasising that such an alliance could already be observed in rival forms of discourse.

The emphasis upon unity expressed in the *Proposal* has been attributed by Murray to the volatile political atmosphere in which Shelley was immersed.<sup>76</sup> In December 1816 riots broke out during radical speeches at Spa Fields, resulting in the suspension of Habeas Corpus in early 1817. However, Shelley's experiments with form, style and even genre attest to his belief that economic change depended upon language as well as principles. His interest in the rhetorical implications of political economy may be seen even in his authorship techniques. His pseudonym, 'The Hermit of Marlow' may be viewed as reflecting his sense of detached observation from his perspective within Hunt's literary coterie.<sup>77</sup> However, this can also be seen as indebted to his interest in political economy. Connell suggests that Shelley's sobriquet shares similarities with Bentham's self-description as 'The Hermit of Westminster', reflecting his bookish condemnation of contemporary politics.<sup>78</sup> Shelley's alignment of Hunt's literary style with Bentham's pseudonym, is thus suggestive of a greater literary potential of political economy than either writer recognised.

This preoccupation with the stylistic techniques adopted by reform factions lies at the heart of Shelley's *Proposal*. Whilst his incorporation of radical and liberal rhetoric

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<sup>74</sup> Cox, *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School*, p. 8.

<sup>75</sup> Murray, in *Prose*, p. 419.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 419.

<sup>77</sup> Shelley, *A Proposal for Putting Reform to the Vote Throughout the Kingdom* (1817), in *Prose*, 169-177 (p. 169). All subsequent citations from this work will be from this edition and be given in parentheses, abbreviated as *Proposal*, in the text.

<sup>78</sup> Connell, *Romanticism, Economics and the Question of 'Culture'*, p. 217.



has been acknowledged, his efforts to challenge such labels through exploring economic discourse reveal a more complex agenda. This may be understood to have inspired the confident tone in which he writes:

Every one is agreed that the House of Commons is not a representation of the people. The only theoretical question that remains, is whether the people ought to legislate for themselves, or be governed by laws and impoverished by taxes originating in the edicts of an assembly which represents somewhat less than a thousandth part of the entire community. I think they ought not to be so taxed and governed. (*Proposal*, p. 171)

Shelley's assertion that 'every one' agrees upon the necessity of reform implies that a united movement does not rest upon debating 'theoretical questions', but recognising that metropolitan and provincial factions already share fundamental values. This is not to say that Shelley does not support a political stance, as his support for radical reform is expressed indirectly. The choice of 'the people' seems to lie not between despotism and moderate reform, but between despotism and legislating 'for themselves'.

However, Shelley's support of such a position is complicated, in that he does not specify whether this 'legislation' should take place along liberal lines or radical proposals. His first-person mode of address thus implies that he has contemplated the complexities of these factional tensions in detail.

It is significant that he situates this notion of an existing point of union amongst reformers within an economic context. His remark that labourers were 'impoverished' by taxation is suggestive of the pressure placed upon the lower sections of society, following the abolition of the income tax in 1816 and its replacement by new taxes on commodities.<sup>79</sup> Additionally, his criticism of the fact that privileged government ministers represent only 'a thousandth part' of society is reminiscent of his engagement with the statistical methods favoured by political economists. However, despite relating these observations to different reform factions, he may also be viewed as suggesting that economic debate is instrumental in promoting a sense of unity. In his comment that he does not 'think' the people 'should be so taxed and governed', Shelley incites his readers to respond to such opinions. Furthermore, he may be seen as compelling them to consider the ways in which their use of rhetoric and language can go beyond factional

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<sup>79</sup> Cameron, *The Young Shelley*, p. 137.

interests.

It is at this point that the *Proposal* may be seen to incorporate the experiments with style that Shelley observed in a range of reform writing. This becomes evident in the way his narrative shifts from criticising taxation into Miltonic imagery. Shelley engages with Milton's depiction of society as a hospital, corrupted by mental rather than physical disease: 'An hospital for lunatics is the only theatre where we can conceive so mournful a comedy to exhibit as this mighty nation now exhibits: a single person swindling a thousand of his comrades out of all they possessed' (*Proposal*, p. 171).<sup>80</sup> Shelley's alignment of Milton's metaphor with the economic decline of 'this mighty nation' emphasises his application of this imagery to the contemporary crisis. However, it can be argued that he was also receptive to the ways in which other reformers employed Miltonic rhetoric in their responses to socio-economic turmoil. Shelley's description of Milton's hospital as a 'mournful comedy' is reminiscent of Hunt's portrayal of economic debate in literary and even dramatic forms. However, his discussion of individuals 'swindling' thousands recalls Cobbett's alignment of Miltonic allusions with labouring-class concerns. Cobbett's influence may be seen in Shelley's remark that, 'it is the object of the Reformers to restore the people to a sovereignty thus held in their contempt' (*Proposal*, p. 171). Cobbett's view that labourers should be accorded their rightful 'sovereignty' involved remaking the language of political economy into an accessible form. However, Shelley implies that political economy, along with its rhetorical power, was already uniting reformers across factional divides.

Shelley's interest in the way in which addressing economic issues inspired experiments with style can be observed in his remarks on implementing reform. His view of the complexities of provincial periodical writing leads him to sympathise with Cobbett. The *Register* had condemned generalised views of all provincial reformers as 'having it in view to excite people to commit assassinations' on 4 January 1817 (34, 4). The contrast Shelley makes between sedition and Cobbett's sophisticated employment of rhetoric, can be seen in his choice of language:

We should be guilty of [a] great crime [...] if after unequivocal evidence that it was the national will to acquiesce in the existing system we should, by partial assemblies of the multitude, or by any party acts, to excite the

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<sup>80</sup> Milton describes a 'Lazar House', in which are house inmates tormented by 'Dæmoniac Phrenzie' and 'moaping Melancholie'. See *Paradise Lost*, Book XI, l. 479.

minority to disturb this decision. (*Proposal*, p. 172)

Shelley's commitment to the promotion of 'the national will' and distrust of 'assemblies of the multitude' highlights his distance from violent uprisings. However, he expresses this not in the language of metropolitan reformers, but in the rhetoric of Cobbett's *Register*. Shelley's reference to 'the existing system' may be alluding to Cobbett's term for a variety of socio-economic abuses. That he employs radical language in order to condemn seditious practices suggests that lasting reform is more complex than a mere reconciliation of different factions. By pointing to the sophisticated responses to economic turmoil expressed by various reformers, Shelley implies that generalisations of 'party' become undermined by an attention to language and concepts of readership.

It is important at this point to outline Shelley's reform proposals. His essay is divided into six main points, which relate to ascertaining the desire for reform and compelling the House of Commons to carry out the general will. However, the interest lies, not so much in Shelley's policies, but in the rhetorical shifts that occur in his writing. Shelley's attraction to these tensions in reform writing becomes clear in his description of the movement as a whole, and the respective tactics adopted by the different factions involved within it: 'Liberty [...] has been nurtured (I am scarcely conscious of a metaphor) with their very sweat and blood and tears: Some have tended it in dungeons, others have cherished it in famine' (*Proposal*, p. 174). This impassioned prose recalls the highbrow rhetoric of metropolitan reform writing, in particular the literary style of the *Examiner*, especially in its personification of 'Liberty'. However, Shelley's awareness that 'some' reformers have 'tended' Liberty 'in dungeons' appears to refer to Hunt's imprisonment of 1813, calling into question the latter's reputation for bourgeois gentility. Similarly, Shelley's remark that others have 'cherished' Liberty in famine seems to allude to ultra-radicals like Spence, who were impoverished by their efforts to combine levelling principles with philosophical debate. It is true that he maintains a sense of separation between the different reform factions and the outcomes of their tactics, distinguishing between 'some' who have adopted activist measures, and 'others' who have protested and been imprisoned. This may be viewed as reflecting Shelley's awareness that factional divides were deeply embedded within the Reform movement. Nevertheless, his implication that all reformers are united in the cause of 'Liberty' suggests that he is highlighting the complexity of attitudes towards reform. Furthermore, his portrayal of these tensions in a literary context illuminates his

comment that he is ‘scarcely conscious’ of distinctions between ‘metaphor’ and factional interests.

It is significant that Shelley had already enacted an economic protest of his own. Mary remarks that he and Peacock had devised a scheme for a local movement based on a refusal to ‘pay their taxes as illegally imposed’.<sup>81</sup> Not only was this an unorthodox method of direct action, it also implies that Shelley believed economic change to depend upon the decisions of individuals. This can be observed in his comments on funding reform:

Should any plan resembling that which I have proposed, be determined on by you, I will give £100, being a tenth part of one year’s income, towards its object. And I will not deem so proudly of myself as to believe that I shall stand alone in this respect when any [...] consistent scheme for public benefit shall have received the sanction of great and good men. (*Proposal*, p. 174)

This quotation is remarkable in that Shelley combines his philanthropic tendencies with a summary of the ways in which his attitude towards political economy has evolved. For example, his discussion of ‘public benefit’ can be read as referring to Mandeville, rather than Smith. Earlier in this chapter, I argued that Shelley’s admiration for Smith’s connection between sympathy and self-interest was called into question. However, by citing Mandeville in a philanthropic, rather than selfish context here, Shelley appears to hold Smith in even greater regard. This relates to the way that the latter had liberated ‘public benefit’ from its connection to ‘private vice’. It can thus be argued that Shelley aligns his support for Smith’s enlightened view of self-interest with his conviction that different reform factions were already united through the rhetoric they employed. I have explored the ways in which Hunt and Cobbett experimented with form in order to promote their respective agendas. However, Shelley realised that within such interests ‘a certain degree of coalition’ may be identified amongst reformers (*Proposal*, p. 175).

Shelley was realistic in identifying the problematic aspects of his arguments. He supports ‘annual parliaments’ as ‘cultivating’ sympathy amongst reformers. However, he rejects universal suffrage, ‘in the present unprepared state of public knowledge’ in

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<sup>81</sup> ‘To Leigh Hunt, 2 March 1817’, in *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, ed. by Betty T. Bennett, 3 vols (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980-88), I, 29.

true Godwinian style (*Proposal*, p. 175). Despite this recognition that labourers were ‘unprepared’ for participation in the voting process, it is interesting that he situates questions of suffrage within an economic context. He comments that it is appropriate that only those who paid ‘a certain small sum in *direct taxes*’ should have voting rights (*Proposal*, p. 175). Although this favours those with higher incomes, Shelley’s emphasis upon ‘direct’ taxation implies his awareness that the economic crisis placed ‘indirect’ pressure upon labourers. Shelley’s sense of the way that reform rhetoric was influenced by economic debate is reflected in his invocation of Paine to warn against the dangers of premature revolution. He considers that ‘a pure republic may be shewn [...] to be that system of social order the fittest to produce the happiness and promote the genuine eminence of man’ (*Proposal*, p. 176). By relating ‘a pure republic’ to intellectual ‘eminence’, Shelley may be seen to align 1790s rhetoric with the concerns of the intelligentsia. However, his emphasis upon social ‘happiness’ implies that lasting reform can only be achieved through a recognition of the way in which economic debate might inspire unity. Shelley’s fusion of utilitarian language with his hopes for ‘genuine’ social change implies that the literary affinities expressed by reformers will inevitably be extended to a political sphere.

Shelley’s belief that reformers were already intrinsically united is evident in the importance he placed upon marketing the pamphlet. He advised Ollier on 22 February 1817 to ‘not advertise sparingly: and get as many booksellers as you can to take copies on their own account’ (*Letters*, I, 534). This emphasis upon advertisement is reflected in Shelley’s mailing list, which included Cobbett, Cartwright, Burdett, Cochrane, Owen, Place and Brougham. As well as appealing to reformers, Shelley also hoped that his pamphlet would reach the ultra-radical publisher William Hone (*Letters*, I, 533), and it was through this work that he established contact with Richard Carlile. Apart from being mentioned in the *Examiner* and condemned by Southey in the *Quarterly Review*, the pamphlet was largely overlooked.<sup>82</sup> However, Shelley’s conviction in the literary qualities of political economy would culminate in his second and arguably most important pamphlet of 1817.

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<sup>82</sup> Murray, in *Prose*, p. 420.

## **2. 10. An Address to the People on the Death of the Princess Charlotte**

On 9 June 1817, a rebellion occurred amongst impoverished labourers in Derbyshire, who had attempted to march in Nottingham in a protest over increased taxes. This unrest has been referred to by historians as the Pentridge Uprising. A piece by Castlereagh describes the growing sense of empowerment amongst provincial workers, albeit in alarmist terms: ‘Looking to the history of the revolutionary spirit, it appears to have descended from the better-informed ranks in which it formerly betrayed itself, to those lower reaches in which it is now principally to be found’.<sup>83</sup> This emphasises that concepts of revolution had evolved from the rational philosophies of the 1790s, into those that encapsulated the socio-economic crises of the 1810s. Particularly important is the division into higher and lower ‘ranks’, which upholds views of the Reform movement as split between the educated and labouring classes. In drawing attention to experiments with form and style across a range of reform writing, I have argued that such divisions are questionable. Nevertheless, in suggesting that these tensions can be seen only in terms of rhetoric, rather than the political principles of 1817, it is important to avoid underestimating such factional agendas.

This may be seen in the different ways in which reformers reacted to the Pentridge revolt. The *Examiner*, *Political Register*, *Black Dwarf* and other publications followed the trials of the rebels sympathetically, yet upheld the values of their respective interest groups. Gilmartin describes Hunt as empathising through ‘a personal and transcendent, rather than public and engaged version of independence’.<sup>84</sup> It can be argued that to present Hunt as disengaged from ‘public’ independence is to overlook radical elements in his writing. However, his political standpoint was always one of moderate reform, incorporating ‘personal’ touches such as his concerns over the future of periodical writing. Similarly, Cobbett asserted his allegiance to the working people in his response, fuelling rumours that the rebels were led astray by William Oliver, a government agent provocateur, whom he described on 1 November 1817 as the true ‘creator of insurrection’ (*Register*, 33, 949).

This exacerbation of political divisions as a result of the Pentridge Uprising may be seen to undermine Shelley’s desire for mutual understanding. However, his *Proposal* implies that the power of language which united reformers in their responses to economic affairs, could also be extended to political practice. Shelley was developing

<sup>83</sup> Lord Castlereagh, 24 February 1817, in Thomas Hansard, *Annual Register*, 58 (1817), 42-55 (p. 43).

<sup>84</sup> Gilmartin, *Print Politics*, p. 197.

these ideas throughout 1817. However, it was the June uprising that infused them with contemporary purpose. Scrivener remarks that the Pentridge Uprising inspired Shelley to ‘participate in a new cultural sensitivity’.<sup>85</sup> This awareness of the tensions within metropolitan and provincial culture is reflected in his response to more than one contemporary crisis. On 6 November 1817 Princess Charlotte, the popular daughter of the unpopular Prince Regent, died in childbirth. This prompted, as Foot remarks, ‘a torrent of lamentation flowing into the royalist propaganda machine’.<sup>86</sup> Such ‘lamentation’ included an announcement of national mourning, yet this coincided with the execution of the Pentridge rebels two days later. This organised grief was capitalised upon by the Tory press which according to Murray, helped obscure the Derby executions by ‘devoting most of [its] pages to accounts of the [funeral] and its aftermath’.<sup>87</sup> It also referred to the hangings only to absolve government involvement in the uprising.

Such propaganda was seized upon by Hunt. He lambasted government publications in the *Examiner* for encouraging a ‘dangerous lack of proportion’ between the princess’s death and the injustice of the executions.<sup>88</sup> Murray regards Hunt’s comparison of the two events as influential upon Shelley during this period, because Shelley visited Hunt daily between 9 and 12 November.<sup>89</sup> In contrast to the *Examiner*’s appeals to educated readers, Shelley was inspired to write a pamphlet addressed to the labourers. However, he goes beyond experiments with rhetoric in order to endorse the cause of provincial radicals. Instead, his pamphlet may be read as extending the tensions inspired by economic debate, in order to emphasise the inherent unity amongst reformers. Shelley’s belief that these ideas must be urgently dispersed can be seen in his opportunistic approach to publication. He had completed the pamphlet by 12 November as *An Address to the People on the Death of the Princess Charlotte*, urging Ollier to ‘send it to press without an hour’s delay’ (*Letters*, I, 566).

Shelley’s *Address* reflects his skill in approaching economic questions in a literary, as well as social sense. The radical tone of the pamphlet can be observed even in its title, with its emphasis upon ‘addressing’ the ‘people’.<sup>90</sup> This recalls his attempts to engage the Irish poor in 1812. However, by 1817 he had abandoned all notion of

<sup>85</sup> Scrivener, *Radical Shelley*, p. 135.

<sup>86</sup> Foot, *Red Shelley*, p. 55.

<sup>87</sup> Murray, in *Prose*, p. 450.

<sup>88</sup> Leigh Hunt, quoted in Dawson, *The Unacknowledged Legislator*, p. 176.

<sup>89</sup> Murray, in *Prose*, p. 450.

<sup>90</sup> Shelley, *An Address to the People on the Death of the Princess Charlotte* (1817), in *Prose*, 229-39 (p. 229). All subsequent citations from this work will be from this edition and be given in parentheses, abbreviated as *Charlotte*, in the text.

reviving 1790s ideals, in favour of exploring the way that revolutionary rhetoric could be employed in order to inspire a united Reform movement. This is reflected in the powerful epigraph he includes on the title page. Shelley cites Paine's criticism of Burke's 'aristocratic aesthetic', which encouraged its reader to 'pity the plumage but forget the dying bird' (*Charlotte*, p. 229).<sup>91</sup> Scrivener aligns this comparison between the 'plumage' of monarchy and the death of social liberties, with Shelley's sympathy for oppressed labourers.<sup>92</sup> However, I argue that Shelley recognises that this dichotomy between revolutionary values and defenders of the *ancien regime* becomes complicated in relation to the contemporary crisis. He implies that this conflict between socio-economic change and reactionary 'aesthetics' has become destabilised as a result of the tensions that reformers express in their language.

Shelley emphasises that these stylistic experiments must be regarded as a crucial part of reform agendas, rather than perceived as anomalous to factional interests. This becomes clear in the way that he distinguishes himself from the kind of rhetoric that seeks to perpetuate class divides. For example, it is significant that Hunt presented the princess as a superior being on 9 November 1817:

If any dreary sceptic should ask why the sorrow is so great for this young woman, any more than another, we answer, because this young woman, is representative of all others – because she stood on high, embodying the ideal as well as actual images of youth and promise. (*Examiner*, 10, 705-6)

This portrayal of Charlotte as an 'ideal', as well as an 'actual' image of 'youth' may be seen as a reflection of Hunt's attempts to merge his beliefs on a just form of monarchy with his views on the contemporary crisis. However, its effect is to imply that only this highbrow language is appropriate for mourning the death of royalty. It is interesting that even the *Black Dwarf*, with its indignant commentary on the Derby executions, employs a literary style to mourn the princess. Although I have drawn attention to the ways in which reformers experiment with language in relation to economic affairs, there remains a conscious sense of unorthodoxy when this occurs in a political sense. In contrast, Shelley's pamphlet is distinctive in the way that it seeks to extend this literary potential of political economy to a contemporary sphere. From the outset he suggests

<sup>91</sup> Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man, Common Sense and other Political Writings*, ed. by Mark Philp (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 1995), p. 102.

<sup>92</sup> Scrivener, *Radical Shelley*, p. 135.



that this form of highbrow expression has a function, but it is not the glorification of a privileged individual.

Contrary to Hunt's idealisation of Charlotte, Shelley employs visceral and provocative rhetoric to depict her death. He comments, 'she is an inanimate as the clay with which she is about to mingle. It is a dreadful thing to know that she is a putrid corpse, who but a few days since was full of life' (*Charlotte*, p. 231). This juxtaposition of royal grandeur with the 'putrid' realities of death parallels Paine's demystification of monarchy. However, it can be argued that such a description in Paine would be employed in order to present the suffering of the people as negating the death of the princess. In contrast, Shelley does not permit his anger to overtake his humanitarian ideals. Instead, he employs this radical language in order to promote a sense of universality amongst all classes. This may be seen in the way that he charts a sense of progression in his essay.

It is significant that he numbers his paragraphs, as can be seen in the movement from this literary approach to economic hardship in II, to an engagement with Smith's philosophy in III. These themes imply that in 1817, reformers separated their literary responses to political economy from the political issues that divided them. Shelley's belief that humans 'cannot truly grieve for every one who dies beyond' their personal 'circle' is reminiscent of Smith's view of man as a self-interested being (*Charlotte*, p. 232). Nevertheless, his view that the 'liberal mind' can 'depart' from 'within that circle' is suggestive of Smith's conviction that it is through self-interest that sympathy is generated. Shelley is thus skilful in suggesting that the unity that is inspired through rhetorical approaches to political economy can be extended through recognising its social potential. This may be seen when he relates such views on 'the bond of social life' to the Pentridge Uprising (*Charlotte*, p. 232).

Shelley's next paragraph engages with the *Examiner's* discussion of the Pentridge rebels. Like Hunt, he observes that 'the news of the death of the Princess Charlotte, and of the execution of Brandreth, Ludlam and Turner arrived nearly at the same time'. However, in contrast to Hunt's idealised depiction of Charlotte, Shelley argues that the grandeur that infuses portrayals of her death should be deployed in order to mourn the 'excellencies' of 'thousands' (*Charlotte*, p. 233). Just as, in the opening of the pamphlet, he described Charlotte's death in the language of the radical press, he now aligns Hunt's emphasis upon 'beauty' and 'virtue' in the cause of 'universal' mourning (*Charlotte*, p. 233). This develops further as he relates such alternative objects of public grief to the failures of contemporary kingship. Shelley comments: 'Princes are

prevented from the cradle from becoming anything which may deserve that greatest of all rewards [...] public admiration' (*Charlotte*, p. 233). By transferring blame from 'princes' to the cultural traditions that uphold their superiority, Shelley implies that 'greatness' derives, not from noble birth, but from the 'admiration' bestowed upon those who promote liberty.

Shelley's exploration of the literary potential of economic discourse contracts suddenly, in order to emphasise that 'the execution of Brandreth, Ludlam and Turner is an event of quite a different character from the death of the Princess Charlotte' (*Charlotte*, p. 233). The *Examiner* and other reform periodicals emphasised such differences between the fate of the rebels and the death of the princess, in order to condemn the government. In contrast, Shelley criticises the disproportionate reaction to the deaths by emphasising the common humanity amongst the deceased. It is thus unsurprising that he employs vivid accounts of the executions in order to provoke a sympathetic reaction amongst his readers. The sensationalist tone of these descriptions may be partially explained by the fact he had culled eye-witness accounts from various periodicals. However, he transforms their propaganda into an eloquent vindication of his belief in uniting reformers. Shelley comments, 'when man sheds the blood of man, revenge, hatred and a long train of executions, and assassinations [...] is perpetuated to remotest time' (*Charlotte*, p. 234). Shelley uses revolutionary imagery here in order to identify with provincial radicals. Nevertheless, his criticism of 'assassinations' as well as 'executions' presents the failures of the 1790s as a warning to his contemporaries. Rather than allowing the Derby executions to exacerbate class divisions, Shelley encourages reformers to cultivate the sympathetic impulse that could already be identified in their writing on economic affairs.

It is at this point that Shelley's pamphlet embarks upon its most sustained engagement with contemporary political economy. Unlike the *Proposal*, the *Address* may be seen to unite Shelley's understanding of economic affairs with an analysis of how this corruption came into being. This can be observed in the way that he traces the present crisis back to measures taken to fund 'the American war':

The government [...] improved the method of anticipating the taxes by loans, invented by the ministers of William III, until an enormous debt had been created [whose] *mere interest* amounts to more than twice as much as the lavish expenditure of the public treasure, for maintaining the standing

army, and the royal family, and the pensioners, and the placemen.  
 (*Charlotte*, p. 235)

Shelley's discussion of the 'invention' of public credit anticipates the wider historical focus of his later prose. However, his recognition that the National Debt had, by 1817, accumulated an 'enormous' interest that far exceeded the original 'loans' attests to the depth of his economic awareness. His criticism of 'the standing army' and 'royalty' parallels Cobbett's polemics against military barracks and the excesses of the Regent. However, his references to 'pensioners' and 'placemen' allude to investments in the debt that are more akin to Ricardian attitudes towards inflation. Although Cobbett discussed inflation in detail, his views on restoring gold currency often lapse into the condemnation of speculators. It is true that Shelley goes on to criticise 'public creditors' for 'gambling in the funds' (*Charlotte*, pp. 235-6). Nevertheless, that he engages with such issues suggests that he was receptive to the theories of classical political economy in a way that Cobbett was not.

Shelley's determination to 'put the thing in its simplest and most intelligible shape' may be viewed as a way of engaging with Cobbett's desire to render the abstracts of political economy accessible to the labouring classes (*Charlotte*, p. 236). However, he extends Cobbett's emphasis upon intelligibility by asserting that it is reactionary misinterpretations of political economy which are to be deplored, rather than its enlightening principles. This reiterates his conviction that the social as well as literary potential of economic discourse must be acknowledged amongst reformers, going beyond their views on 'appropriate' political language. When Shelley summarises the 'alternatives' as 'despotism, a revolution or reform', he contemplates each as a viable possibility (*Charlotte*, p. 237). However, his engagement with reform rhetoric, as well as its principles, convinced him that political economy would play a crucial role in whatever outcome arose.

Shelley's determination to highlight the literary and social power of political economy culminates in his powerful final paragraph. He returns to the royal death in order to expand his ideas about the employment of majestic imagery to express universal 'lamentation' (*Charlotte*, p. 238). However, rather than aligning himself with the plight of the Pentridge rebels, he emphasises that this grief should 'fill the great city' as well as 'the boundless fields' (*Charlotte*, pp. 238-9). This may be read as reflecting his sympathy with both metropolitan and provincial reformers, and more importantly,

the underlying sympathy they have for each other. Shelley begins by commenting: ‘A beautiful Princess is dead – she who should have been the Queen of her beloved nation, and whose posterity should have ruled it forever’ (*Charlotte*, p. 237). This may be viewed as an engagement with the qualities that Hunt and others believed to be personified by Princess Charlotte: the tradition of kingship, the relationship between ruler and ‘ruled’. However, Shelley does not separate these ‘beautiful’ qualities from the troubled social climate. Instead, he implies that it is possible to express political upheaval by using language that unites radical agendas with ‘the cherished arts’. This is impressively upheld when Shelley reveals that the ‘princess’ he mourns is not Charlotte, but the cause at the heart of the Reform Movement: ‘LIBERTY is dead’ (*Charlotte*, p. 239). By subverting class boundaries through the literary experiments inspired by economic debate, Shelley draws together his arguments concerning a united Reform movement. He displays a poignant humanity when he acknowledges that Charlotte’s death is worthy of ‘private grief’. Nevertheless, he asserts that it is only by mourning the death of Liberty that reformers can extend their tensions in language to a social sphere. Shelley once again aligns these questions of rhetoric with Smith’s moral philosophy. He remarks that the present crisis both instils ‘the sympathy of an universal curse’ amongst reformers, and reveals the ‘fettters’ that ‘bind our souls’ (*Charlotte*, p. 239). This suggests that cultivating civic sympathies reveals the social potential of economic precepts, and thus undermines those who seek to ‘bind’ the enlightening power of political economy itself.

Shelley’s description of the death of Liberty is arguably the most powerful statement in the pamphlet:

If some glorious Phantom should appear, and make its throne of broken swords and sceptres and royal crowns trampled in the dust, let us say that the Spirit of Liberty has arisen from its grave, and left all that was gross and mortal there, and kneel down and worship it as our Queen. (*Charlotte*, p. 239)

Shelley’s optimism is evident in that he does not conclude with the demise of Liberty, but with her resurrection. Although his descriptions of trampled crowns and broken sceptres is reminiscent of 1790s rhetoric, it is interesting that he employs poetic language in order to portray them. By uniting such rhetoric with the death of Liberty,

Shelley reiterates the importance of these tensions in language. His image of the ‘phantom of Liberty’ recurs throughout his oeuvre. It would reappear two years later in his sonnet ‘England in 1819’, in which he comments that ‘a glorious Phantom may/Burst to illumine our tempestuous day’.<sup>93</sup> This fusion of poetic imagery with ‘tempestuous’ politics implies that Shelley went beyond Hunt’s view of poetry and politics as complementary to one another, or Cobbett’s deployment of literary allusion in order to promote provincial concerns. Instead, Shelley’s receptiveness to a range of reform writing led him to conclude that engagement with economic questions inspired a form of rhetoric that undermined factional divisions. Furthermore, he believed that political economy not only promoted such tensions in language, but that its principles also enabled a sense of social sympathy that could unite the Reform Movement.

### **2. 11. Shelley’s ‘Historical’ Agenda**

This chapter has explored the way that Shelley became compelled to justify his belief in the enlightening potential of political economy as a result of his receptiveness to a variety of writers between 1813 and 1817. Its earlier sections suggested that he was attracted to the utopian outlook of figures like Ritson and Newton, but became suspicious of their rejection of the non-rational aspects of human nature. Such writers argued that qualities like self-interest were the result of ‘unnatural’ propensities brought about by the rise of commerce. However, this went against Shelley’s admiration for Smith’s belief that self-interest is not only intrinsic to man, but also inspires his ability to sympathise with others. Consequently, I suggested that Shelley ultimately rejected the idea that a ‘return to nature’ was the solution to economic corruption. He believed that this rejection of commercial society and its impact upon diet could provide short-term solutions to problems like physical disease. Nevertheless, he maintained that these measures could not eradicate man’s natural propensity to be driven by passions as well as reason.

Shelley’s preference for Smith’s view of self-interest over those of the Bracknell circle was heightened by his engagement with Mandeville’s doctrines. By arguing that a vegetable diet was the choice of a self-interested being, Mandeville’s work complicates Ritson’s belief that vegetarianism could remedy the influence of human passions. Shelley not only interpreted Mandeville’s vegetarianism in a very different

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<sup>93</sup> Shelley, ‘England in 1819’, in *Major Works*, p. 446, ll. 13-14.

way to Ritson, but was also receptive to his views that natural diet could complement economic progress. However, I argued that he found Mandeville's justification of human 'vice' problematic. Mandeville presented selfishness and ambition as natural, beneficial, yet ultimately deviant qualities. Shelley may thus be viewed as gravitating more towards Smith's transformation of the latter's principles, than the founding ideas of *The Fable of the Bees*.

Shelley's engagement with Mandeville may be seen to have enhanced his suspicion of the outlooks of the Bracknell circle. However, this chapter also drew attention to aspects of their work that influenced him in *A Vindication of Natural Diet*. Newton's use of the Fall narrative, as well as Ritson's allusions to poetry, may be seen to have appealed to his ideas about the ways in which political economy could be viewed in a literary light. However, Shelley conceived this as being more wide-ranging than Newton's desire to construct a millenarian mythology, or Ritson's alignment of anti-commercial views with revolutionary doctrines. He was convinced, not only that the principles of political economy were crucial to progress, but that the rhetoric employed to express them could also complement social change. Certainly his reading of Mandeville validated this belief, in terms of the latter's experiments with form in order to promote commerce. However, it was not until Shelley re-immersed himself in questions concerning contemporary reform, that this belief in the literary power of political economy became developed.

The later sections of this chapter argued that Shelley's engagement with periodical writing during his association with the Hunt circle may be seen to complicate the divisions between 'liberal' and 'radical' factions. I suggested that he identified the way in which, on the subject of economic reform, the highbrow style of the *Examiner* became intermingled with semi-revolutionary rhetoric. Furthermore, I argued that Shelley was attracted to Hunt's suggestion that drama and verse were as viable modes of expression for economic issues, as public debate or mathematical treatises. Shelley's belief that political economy contained literary qualities contrasted with Hunt's separation of 'politics' and 'poetics'. Nevertheless, Hunt's conviction that metropolitan periodical writing could be aligned with radical opinions on reform may be seen to validate Shelley's ideas in his pamphlets about the way that economic debate could highlight tensions in reform rhetoric.

These views developed further as Shelley began to appreciate the polemical style of Cobbett's *Political Register*. Despite being an advocate for the rights of labourers, Cobbett's identity as a provincial radical becomes complicated by the language he uses

in order to address economic abuses. Shelley admired the way in which Cobbett's hatred of the 'system' compelled him to employ Miltonic imagery in order to promote his vision of an agricultural England. I argued that Cobbett's literary tendencies, as well as the depth of his economic understanding, appealed to Shelley in a way that has been underestimated. Nevertheless, I suggested that he found the *Register's* preoccupation with rewriting political economy problematic. Rather than presenting contemporary political economy as alienating to certain classes, Shelley was convinced that its rhetoric was already uniting reformers. It is this sense of an unacknowledged point of alliance that informs Shelley's pamphlets of 1817.

Shelley may be seen as seeking to extend the stylistic tensions observable in reform writing into a political sphere. This becomes evident in both his *Proposal* and *Address*, as he aligns experiments in metropolitan and provincial language with Smith's moral philosophy. He implies that figures like Hunt and Cobbett must acknowledge that their wide-ranging rhetoric relates to Smith's conviction that individuals can sympathise with others from within their respective class interests. This is most marked in the *Address*, when Shelley employs such stylistic experiments in order to question the notion of 'appropriate' political language. Shelley argues that all reformers are as one in their lament for Liberty. He thus makes a powerful case for translating this sense of literary alliance into a social context, uniting the language of reformers with the power of Smithian sympathy.

Shelley's views on the alignment of the principles of political economy with literary form are expanded in the prose he wrote following his departure to Italy in March 1818, when he began to extend these ideas into a wider historical narrative. This can be observed as early as August 1815, when he remarked to Hogg that he was 'considering the political events of the day' as 'already historical' (*Letters*, I, 430). It is this 'historical' outlook that may be seen to have influenced Shelley's ideas regarding the relationship between political economy and literature in his final major essays.

**Chapter Three: Economic ‘Form’ and the ‘Spirit’ of Poetry in *A Philosophical View of Reform***

**3. 1. ‘Subordinate to Moral and Political Science’?: Poetry and Political Economy**

In Chapter Two, I argued that Shelley not only justified his belief in the progressive potential of economic doctrines, but that he also perceived political economy in a literary and even poetic light. Nevertheless, to describe his view of political economy as ‘poetic’ in terms of the Reform crisis of 1819 requires some explanation. In my discussion of his 1817 pamphlets, I suggested that Shelley recognised the way in which boundaries between metropolitan and provincial reformers became subverted, as a result of their experiments with language and style. This was particularly prevalent in their discourses on economic affairs, with so-called ‘liberal’ writers like Hunt incorporating revolutionary language into their assessment of contemporary corruption. Similarly, ‘radical’ reformers such as Cobbett often included literary allusions in their diatribes against economic abstractions. I argued in Chapter Two that Shelley deployed this rhetoric as a reflection of the important literary influence of political economy upon reformers. Notwithstanding this underlying similarity between liberal and radical responses to the economic crisis, reformers identified themselves with particular political factions. In contrast, Shelley remained drawn to the power of Smith’s moral philosophy in terms of his belief that individuals could identify with others through sympathising with their shared ‘interests’. He believed that this universal awareness of the literary power of political economy foreshadowed an understanding of the way that its principles could unite reformers. It would also awaken a realisation that both the doctrines of political economy and the articulation of them, were integral to successful reform.

Shelley’s refusal to see literature and political economy as exclusive disciplines may be seen to have influenced developments in his use of language during 1819. Whilst in his earlier writing he made sharp distinctions between poetry and prose (such as in the Notes to *Queen Mab*), there is an increasing recurrence of a term that is to be differentiated from the word ‘verse’: ‘Poetry’. It is difficult to be certain about Shelley’s definition of Poetry with a capital ‘P’ in late 1819, as he would only explore it in detail in *A Defence of Poetry*, written over a year later. Bruce Haley suggests that



even the *Defence* compels critics to focus upon its ‘best known statements’, rather than any definite conclusions.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, I argue in this chapter that Shelley’s increased use of the term ‘Poetry’ during 1819 can be seen not only as a development of his ideas on the literary potential of political economy, but also as a crystallization of his belief that both literature and political economy were inspired by the same intellectual process. As a result, I suggest that his interest in the way that political economy combined mathematics, morals and aesthetics, inspired him to construct a term that encompassed all enlightening disciplines. Shelley’s inclusion of political economy within ‘Poetry’ is discussed at length in Chapter Four. This chapter focuses upon the ways in which his economic ideas enabled him to articulate this definition of ‘Poetry’ itself.

In order to justify such a reading, it is important to redress assumptions about Shelley’s outlook after he left England in March 1818. Richard Holmes describes the prose Shelley wrote when initially in Italy as introspective, the product of ‘luxuriating in the remoteness of England’.<sup>2</sup> This is validated by Shelley’s comment to Peacock on 6 April 1818 that disillusioned by increasing political oppression, he had escaped, ‘the tumult of humankind’ (*Letters*, II, 4). In contrast to his engagement with contemporary reform in his 1817 pamphlets, Shelley’s writing during this period may be seen to reflect his immersion in sceptical philosophy. However, his philosophical interests should be viewed less as a diversion from his commitment to reform, than as an enhancement of his views of the enlightening potential within social, political and economic conventions. Following his renewed focus on events in England, notably the Peterloo Massacre of August 1819, Terence Allan Hoagwood suggests that Shelley sought to deploy such philosophy in order to address the contemporary crisis. Shelley recognised the difficulties of applying iconoclastic aspects of the sceptical outlook to social questions. As Hoagwood remarks, this resulted in a desire to construct ‘an epistemological method, which does not undermine positive political statements’.<sup>3</sup> Such a ‘positive’ approach to reform redefines aspects of sceptical philosophy that Shelley would describe as revealing only ‘negative truth’ in his *Speculations on Morals and Metaphysics*.<sup>4</sup> Unlike, for example, Hume’s acceptance of government as a

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<sup>1</sup> Bruce Haley, ‘Shelley, Peacock and the Reading of History’, *Studies in Romanticism*, 29.3 (1990), 439-61 (p. 439).

<sup>2</sup> Holmes, *Shelley: The Pursuit*, p. 429.

<sup>3</sup> Terence Allan Hoagwood, *Skepticism and Ideology: Shelley’s Political Prose and its Philosophical Context from Bacon to Marx* (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1988), p. 168.

<sup>4</sup> *Speculations on Morals and Metaphysics*, a facsimile of Bodleian Shelley MS. d. 1, fol. 114<sup>r</sup> rev; see *BSM* iv, Part I, p. 35. All subsequent citations from this work will be from this edition and will be given in parentheses, abbreviated as *Speculations*, in the text. E. B. Murray explains that the *Speculations* are notoriously difficult to date. He argues that Shelley’s initial observations on the differences between

necessary ‘artifice’, he was convinced that the sceptical method could complement rather than undermine existing institutions (*Treatise*, p. 36). Shelley’s belief that the progressive impulse within social conventions could be revived illuminates his attraction to contemporary political economy.

This chapter, the focus of which is one of the nineteenth century’s most distinctive treatments of political economy, *A Philosophical View of Reform*, presents Shelley as neither an idealist nor a typical radical in economic matters. Instead, I argue that he believed that successful political reform depended upon recognising the beneficial moral, financial and even literary potential within contemporary political economy. Such an argument can be seen to question previous readings of his view of socio-economic reform in 1819. Hoagwood’s emphasis upon the ‘positive’ legislative effects of Shelley’s scepticism assumes that the shortcomings of contemporary political economy must be replaced with the visions of a poet. However, Shelley’s attraction to Smithian free markets and Malthusian ratios does not suggest that through revision, political economy can become a part of Poetry. Instead, he is drawn to these economic theories, believing that social change depends upon engaging with their intrinsically enlightening impulse. As Alex Dick concedes, ‘money, it seems, has the power to inspire poetry and truth’.<sup>5</sup> This is a significant inversion of the tendency, noted above in Hoagwood’s work, to view Shelley’s poetic outlook as transforming economic doctrines.

Some critics identify similarities between ‘poetry’ in its conventional sense and contemporary theories of political economy. For example, Catherine Gallagher draws parallels between the outlook of early nineteenth-century economic thinkers and that of the Romantic poets. She acknowledges that ‘both the political economists and the Romantics aimed to let loose creative energies’.<sup>6</sup> Maureen McLane extends this notion of mutual ‘creativity’ by commenting that Shelley in particular ‘identified a volatile faultline between positive “knowledge” and more elusive “poetry”’.<sup>7</sup> However, I argue that this concept of a dichotomy between two conflicting spheres, especially the idea of

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morals and metaphysics were written in England between ‘September 1814 and March 1818’ (p. xvii), and are compiled by editors in Bodleian MS Shelley adds. c. 4. However, Murray suggests that Shelley continued to think about these themes whilst in Italy, and documents his ideas in Bodleian MS Shelley adds. d. 1. Murray dates these later fragments between 1819 and 1821, although they can be seen as a continuation of his discussion on ethics in c. 4 (p. xix).

<sup>5</sup> Alex Dick, ‘The Ghost of Gold: Forgery Trials and the Standard of Value in Shelley’s *The Mask of Anarchy*’, *European Romantic Review*, 18 (2007), 381-400 (p. 382).

<sup>6</sup> Catherine Gallagher, ‘The Romantics and the Political Economists’, in *The Cambridge History of Romantic Literature*, ed. by James Chandler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 71-101 (p. 71).

<sup>7</sup> McLane, *Romanticism and the Human Sciences*, p. 4.

'poetry' eluding economic thought, is one that Shelley was determined to overcome. This distinguishes my reading from Gallagher and McLane's views that literature and political economy are each 'creative', yet ultimately separate, disciplines. The remainder of this introduction thus examines Shelley's view that Reform was constructed from, rather than opposed to existing economic principles. This may be observed in the letters and prose he wrote between January 1818 and November 1819, the period immediately before he began to draft *A Philosophical View*.

By 5 July 1818, Shelley had read anxious reports in the *Examiner* and the *Political Register* on 'the combustible state of England' (*Letters*, II, 24). Certainly, he found it difficult to gain inspiration from the reactionary financial policies advocated by the Liverpool Administration. A depression had occurred at the end of the Napoleonic Wars as the economy collapsed. Wartime expenditure had spiralled into a National Debt that weighed upon the labouring classes in new taxes on commodities, after the income tax was repealed in 1816.<sup>8</sup> Increasing inflationary measures were endorsed by Vansittart, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who in response to the nation's deviation from the gold standard under Pitt in 1797, supported ever-growing issues of 'paper money'.<sup>9</sup> The result was widespread poverty, high food prices (due to the Corn Laws restricting imports), and ruined agriculture and manufacturing industries. Responses to this socio-economic distress were wide-ranging, from Cobbett's fury that 'all but fundholders have been ruined', to Ricardo's mathematical arguments for reinstating the gold standard.<sup>10</sup> However, on 23-4 January 1819, Shelley wrote a letter to Peacock that outlined his belief that the economic crisis contained within itself the principles that could effect positive change.

The letter opens with a satirical attack upon 'Sexton Castlereagh' for having 'dug the grave' (*Letters*, II, 71) of a nation. In contrast to this oppression, Shelley articulates his ideas on the enlightening impulse within political economy. This may be seen in his fascination with Peacock's 'calculations', and determination to overcome his 'infernal' mathematical abilities (which he undertook to address with Mary in February 1820). Most interesting is the letter's conclusion, which expresses Shelley's belief in political economy as a discipline with literary implications. He comments:

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<sup>8</sup> Cameron, *Shelley: The Golden Years*, p. 137.

<sup>9</sup> Boyd Hilton, *Corn, Cash, Commerce: The Economic Policies of the Tory Governments, 1815-30* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 35.

<sup>10</sup> William Cobbett, *Paper Against Gold, and Glory Against Prosperity*, 2 vols (London: William Cobbett jnr., 1817), I, 7. All subsequent citations from this work will be from this edition and will be given in parentheses, abbreviated as *Paper Against Gold*, in the text.

I consider Poetry very subordinate to moral & political science, and [...] certainly I should aspire to the latter; for I conceive a great work embodying the discoveries of all ages, & harmonising the contending creeds by which mankind has been ruled. Far from me is such an attempt, & I shall be content by exercising my fancy [...] & cast what weight I can into the right scale which the Giant (of Artagall) holds. (*Letters*, II, 71)

This letter is often cited in order to emphasise that Shelley's socio-political interests challenge those who view his aesthetics as an overriding preoccupation. However, he refutes this dichotomy between 'poetry' in its conventional sense, and 'political science', by exercising his 'fancy' as a means of expressing his ideas about economics. Shelley's language in the first half of this quotation complicates the latter half's iconoclastic imagery. Peacock focuses upon the sceptical recasting of Spenser's Giant, whose challenges towards tyrannical 'creeds' led Shelley to declare himself as being of his 'faction' (*Letters*, II, 71).<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, there are suggestions that the inspiration he believes to 'harmonise' financial discord comes from within existing economic theories. Shelley's conviction of the dynamism within political economy derives significantly from 'the discoveries of all ages', implying that he believes such theories have possessed the insights of genius. However, he insists that this inspiration is not confined to specific eras, allowing historical 'discoveries' to develop in accordance with the needs of the contemporary age. Shelley's letter insists that the 'rule' of 'mankind' is to be overthrown not by the mysterious workings of 'Poetry' to render political economy acceptable, but by the recognition that political economy already contains this progressive potential within itself. Such ideas may be seen as culminating in *A Philosophical View of Reform*, specifically the way in which he begins to construct a coherent theory of intellectual progress around his interest in economics. This development can be observed as beginning in the Preface to his drama, *Prometheus Unbound*.

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<sup>11</sup> Jones includes Peacock's note on this letter, which refers to their discussion of Spenser in relation to Shelley's scepticism towards 'power' (*Letters*, II, 71). Quoted from *Memoirs of Shelley*, 2 vols (London: J. M. Dent & Sons; New York: E. P. Dutton, 1933), II, 421.

### **3. 2. Political Economy as Poetry: ‘Form’ and ‘Spirit’ in the Preface to *Prometheus Unbound***

In this section, I argue that the Preface to *Prometheus Unbound* which Shelley began to write in May 1819 can be read as a text that outlines crucial developments in his economic outlook. Such a claim may be regarded as questionable in relation to a lyrical drama that McLane believes to ‘occur at the level of ideas’.<sup>12</sup> Its fusion of the material with the intellectual led even Shelley to suggest, in a letter of 6 March 1820, that the work would not ‘sell beyond twenty copies’ (*Letters*, II, 174). Notwithstanding its abstract qualities, he insists from the outset of the Preface that the ‘poetical’ must be aligned with ‘firm and patient opposition to omnipotent force’.<sup>13</sup> This suggests that his fantasy of a successful, non-violent revolution in *Prometheus Unbound* should be interpreted as harmonious with his socio-economic analysis in *A Philosophical View of Reform*. I pursue this reading in order to emphasise a tenet of Shelley’s aesthetic theory that has rarely been applied to his economic outlook, which is that, as there is no essential conflict between his visionary desires and his engagement with contemporary political economy, the imaginative impulse cannot be applied to one and viewed as incompatible with the other. Dawson interprets Shelley’s criticism of ‘didactic poetry’ as a reflection of his inability ‘to transcend the assumption that morality and poetry are separate’ (Preface, p. 232).<sup>14</sup> Since Shelley condemned those who ‘demand a mathematical or metaphysical reason for a moral action’, such readings are understandable (*Speculations*, p. 35). However, it can be suggested that his criticism relates more to the restrictive ‘mathematical’ methods of his day, than to the aesthetic limitations of political economy.

Shelley observed a duality in political economy, consisting of the ‘moral’ potential recognised by Mandeville and Smith and its capacity to accommodate the more visionary kind of inspiration attributed to ‘poetry’ in its conventional sense. There are indications that he was beginning not only to convey the ‘beautiful idealisms of moral excellence’ that exist only in the enlightened poetic mind, but also to identify such qualities within contemporary political economy (Preface, p. 232). What is generated by such ‘idealisms’ is not yet the utilitarian morality he believed could transform

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<sup>12</sup> McLane, *Romanticism and the Human Sciences*, p. 142.

<sup>13</sup> Preface to *Prometheus Unbound* (1820), in *Major Works*, 239-232 (pp. 229-30). All subsequent citations from this work will be from this edition, and will follow in parentheses, abbreviated as Preface, in the text.

<sup>14</sup> Dawson, *The Unacknowledged Legislator*, p. 216.

contemporary society. Instead, it is a vision of what ‘moral and political science’ should become, through recognising its Poetic potential. Shelley’s description of his work as a ‘Lyrical Drama’, is interpreted by Leader and O’Neill as reflecting its ‘mixture and reworking of genres’.<sup>15</sup> However, it soon becomes clear that such reinvention is not restricted to literary form. Shelley attempts what he regarded as impossible at his time of writing: a reconciliation of ‘metaphysical’ vision with ‘moral’ significance, expressed in the language of Smithian economics. Such a reading may seem questionable. Nevertheless, I argue that, in contemplating the workings of Poetry, Shelley can be seen to draw parallels between the techniques of the Greek dramatists and *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*.

Shelley’s definition of imagination as moral as well as visionary may be viewed as indebted to Smith’s work. There are no direct references to Smith in the Preface. However, Shelley’s remark that Greek writers could ‘awaken the sympathy of their contemporaries’ is suggestive of his continuing admiration for Smithian doctrines (Preface, p. 230). References to ‘sympathy’ in Shelley’s works cannot be confined solely to his awareness of Smith’s doctrines, due to the wider connotations this term has in relation to the eighteenth-century traditions of sensibility and feeling.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, I suggest that Shelley’s remarks in the Preface relating to intellectual development, particularly the role imagination plays in this, contain allusions to Smithian moral philosophy and political economy that have been insufficiently studied. In Chapter One, I argued that both Hogg’s biography and Shelley’s letters state directly that Shelley had read *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, and imply that he was familiar with

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<sup>15</sup> Leader and O’Neill, in *Major Works*, p. 744.

<sup>16</sup> Much work has been done in relation to the ways in which Romantic-era writers reacted to eighteenth-century ideas on sympathy, sensibility and feeling, and the ways in which these can be traced back to the philosophies of the Scottish Enlightenment. Jerome McGann argues that in the eighteenth century, ‘poetic writing’ began to explore the language of the ‘feelings’, and that this was the legacy of, rather than reaction against, the Age of Reason. McGann also focuses upon Shelley’s treatment of sensitivity in his poetry, although the latter’s prose and direct allusions to the term ‘sympathy’ are only treated selectively. McGann provides a useful section on sentimentality as a product of consumption and exchange, although he does not mention Smith or Hume. Janet Todd provides a detailed study of the eighteenth-century man and woman of ‘feeling’, yet her argument is confined to poetry, drama and the novel, and only fleetingly connects Smith’s moral philosophy to his economic ideas. Ildiko Csengei explores the ways in which self-interest can become a part of sensibility and a subject for medical research, although she does not mention Shelley in her study. Adela Pinch contextualises the doctrines of Smith and Hume within the eighteenth-century cult of sensibility, yet only refers to Shelley briefly in an interesting and relevant study of his *Address to the People on the Death of the Princess Charlotte*. By presenting Shelley as making an important contribution to the ways in which Smith’s doctrines of sympathy could be viewed in a literary and wider aesthetic context, this thesis seeks to extend these previous studies. See Jerome J. McGann, *The Poetics of Sensibility: A Revolution in Literary Style* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 133-4; Janet M. Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (London: Methuen, 1986), pp. 27-8; Ildiko Csengei, *Sympathy, Sensibility and the Literature of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Adela Pinch, *Strange Fits of Passion: Epistemologies of Emotion, Hume to Austen* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 216.

Smith's discussion of self-interest in *The Wealth of Nations*.<sup>17</sup> Smith's fusion of political economy with moral philosophy and the questioning of distinctions between genres that this raises, may be seen to inform Shelley's thought in 1819. However, Shelley's inclusion of Smith's principles into his argument derives not so much from the latter's application of imaginative 'sympathy' to economic theories, as from the spirit that inspires this.

Certainly, Smith's employment of the theory of sympathy to redeem concepts of self-interest would have appealed less to Shelley than the process itself. As a result, his language implies that Smith's concept of 'sympathy' as deriving from within self-interest must be regarded as progressive. This is because sympathy for others, which originates in self-interest, can 'awaken' society to further, more altruistic developments in morality. Shelley's recognition of Smith's innovations and the intellectual progress required for them to fulfil their potential leads Jerrold Hogle to comment that he 'proceeds from self-interest, becoming transferred to the level of desiring for all what remains a desire for the self'.<sup>18</sup> This suggests that whilst Shelley engages with Smith's philosophy of the 'self', he also identifies a dynamic quality within such a theory, which makes possible a transferral from private to public benefit.

This interplay between the innovative impulse within contemporary economic theories and the more visionary aspects of Poetry permeates additions Shelley made to his Preface in late 1819.<sup>19</sup> His reaction in a letter of 15 October to the *Quarterly Review*'s 'poisonous' review of *The Revolt of Islam* cannot immediately be regarded in an economic context (*Letters*, II, 126). However, his response to this review proves significant when seen in the context of his allusions to 'sympathy' at the beginning of the Preface, which as I have argued, may be read in a Smithian context. Shelley's fusion of literary and socio-economic themes is mirrored by John Taylor Coleridge's review. In addition to charging Shelley with plagiarising Wordsworth, Coleridge underestimates his economic understanding. Presenting Shelley in a Jacobin light, he inadvertently proves the former's point about contemporary attitudes towards political economy. Coleridge's depiction of Shelley's wish 'to abolish the rights of property' reveals a distrust of economic innovation when it is uncontrolled by reactionary

<sup>17</sup> See Chapter One, pp. 20-1. See also Hogg, *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, II, 420, and *Letters*, II, 50-1.

<sup>18</sup> Hogle, *Shelley's Process*, p. 233.

<sup>19</sup> Shelley completed the Preface in its initial form of four paragraphs by May 1819, and included it in a fair copy of the first three acts by September. However, following his reading of the *Quarterly*'s hostile review of *The Revolt of Islam* in October, he felt compelled to add an extra five paragraphs defending himself against its accusations. These were included in his fair copy by December 1819. See *Poems*, ed. by Matthews and Everest, II, 460.

policies.<sup>20</sup> It can thus be argued that, in responding to accusations of poetic imitation, Shelley was also using his Preface as a means of expressing the socially-beneficial potential within contemporary political economy. In this respect, his remarks on imitation are worth quoting in full:

It is impossible that anyone who inhabits the same age with such writers as those who stand in the foremost ranks of our own, can conscientiously assure himself that his [...] tone of thought may not have been modified by the study of the productions of those extraordinary intellects. It is true that, not the spirit of their genius, but the forms in which it has manifested itself, are due less to the peculiarities of their own minds than to the peculiarity of the moral and intellectual condition of the minds among which they have been produced. Thus a number of writers possess the form, whilst they want the spirit of those whom, it is alleged, they imitate; because the former is the endowment of the age in which they live, and the latter must be the uncommunicated lightning of their own mind. (Preface, pp. 230-1)

Although this statement is responding to the *Quarterly*'s charge of plagiarism, it may also be seen as an indirect comment upon all enlightening disciplines. Shelley suggests that, far from being negative, imitation signifies the importance of the 'age' in which such works are produced. This is not merely because social change impacts upon the productions of such 'intellects', but because it is made possible through the progressive impulse already within them. Shelley defines this perpetuation of enlightened concepts as the historical 'form' of a discipline. This is inspired by genius but is nonetheless permanent in terms of its ability to influence the future. I argue that this concept of 'form' can be applied to Shelley's attitude towards economic precepts, specifically in relation to the way that the latter's allusions to 'sympathy' in the opening sections of the Preface can be read in a Smithian context. Smith, as much as Wordsworth, may be seen to symbolise 'the peculiarity of the moral and intellectual condition' of a specific historical period. It can be argued that this emphasis upon 'morality' follows Shelley's allusions to Smith's philosophy. This implies that he is discussing the issues of imitation and innovation in a way that not only goes beyond the context of poetry, but also questions conventional definitions of this term. Such admiration for present

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<sup>20</sup> John Taylor Coleridge, 'Shelley's *Revolt of Islam*', *The Quarterly Review*, 21 (1819), 460-471 (p. 462).



'forms' undermines claims that Shelley believed that political economy required revision, with poetic inspiration somehow replacing its empirical foundations. However, this appraisal of 'form' is cautionary, as he insists upon its relationship to historical progress.

Shelley suggests that the minds which produced such 'forms' did not do so by imitation alone, but by embodying a foresight that confounds as well as engages with the contemporary age. He defines this non-temporal inspiration as the 'spirit' of genius, which distinguishes itself from the 'form' it inhabits. Shelley remarks in the passage quoted above, 'a number of writers possess the form, whilst they want the spirit of those whom they imitate; the former is the endowment of the age in which they live, and the latter must be the uncommunicated lightning of their own mind'. That these comments may be read in the context of his views on political economy is supported by his observations on contemporary approaches to the discipline in the penultimate paragraph of the Preface. Before turning to these, I will address the economic implications of his remarks on current 'writers'. In admiring both 'form' and 'spirit', Shelley does not condemn contemporary political economists for being Smith's intellectual heirs, nor is he suggesting that their theories are devoid of merit as a result. Instead, he criticises them for undermining Smith's founding ideas by seeking to develop the established 'form' of political economy, rather than the process of its inception. To return to my previous example, this engages with Smith's application of morality to economics, rather than the hitherto 'uncommunicated' inspiration that allowed him to achieve this connection. In contrast, Shelley believed that if contemporary political economy embraced the progressive 'spirit' to complement these 'forms', it could realise its full enlightening potential.

It is important to distinguish Shelley's treatment of this 'spirit' from that of his contemporaries. Whilst William Hazlitt's 'Spirit of the Age' is more akin to Shelley's view of 'form', the genius of a specific time period, Shelley's 'spirit' opposes this by undermining historical boundaries. The Preface's admiration for both 'form' and 'spirit' is confirmed when it describes Poets as 'the companions and forerunners of some unimagined change' (Preface, p. 231). This emphasis upon imagination may reaffirm Shelley's inclusion of Smithian political economy within his definition of Poetry. However, there are important temporal shifts in these remarks, from the 'companions' of contemporary 'change', to the 'forerunners' of 'unimagined' insights. This implies that he regarded political economists as capable of engaging their precepts with a more visionary kind of inspiration. Such an interplay between what may be read

as enlightened conventions and the insights that transcend historical limitations, culminates in the statement that ‘a poet is the combined product of such internal powers as modify the nature of others, and of such external influences as excite these powers; he is not one, but both’. Shelley emphasises then that true Poetry is neither the imitation of established ‘forms’, nor the transcendental ‘spirit’ he later describes as ‘mirroring’ futurity (Preface, p. 231). Instead, it combines the two, with the poet participating in the ‘generic resemblance’ of contemporary theories, and the inspiration which is derived mysteriously from beyond the present (Preface, 232).

When this theory of ‘form’ and ‘spirit’ is applied directly to political economy, it reveals much about Shelley’s view of contemporary economic theories. His identification with the ‘Scotch philosopher’ Robert Forsyth, author of *The Principles of Moral Science* (1805) and a minor economist, and his ‘passion for reforming the world’ has been widely noted. However, it is less usual to notice the second part of this sentence: ‘what passion incited him to write his book, he omits to explain’ (Preface, p. 232). When this query is read alongside Shelley’s belief that political economy is suffering from a restrictive attention to ‘form’, as opposed to the dynamic impulse within its theories of human ‘passion’, his comment upon Forsyth’s economic outlook becomes illuminating. Although progressive in his outlook, it can be argued that even the title of Forsyth’s work reflects his dependence upon economic ‘principles’, rather than the enlightening process through which they were conceived. This reciprocity between ‘form’ and ‘spirit’ culminates in Shelley’s declaration that he ‘had rather be damned with Plato and Lord Bacon, than go to Heaven with Paley and Malthus’ (Preface, p. 232). These remarks could be read as reflecting his sceptical desire for the destruction of contemporary tyranny. However, the more complex definition of Poetry that I have suggested seems to present political economists like Malthus as restricted, rather than unenlightened in their outlook.

Shelley concludes the Preface with a disclaimer concerning his visionary drama. He speculates that in a fully enlightened society, Plato and not Aeschylus would be his ideal model. However, there remains a sense that this acceptance of transcendental inspiration depends upon recognising the power within existing institutions. It is not solely the iconoclastic qualities of Poetry that will enable the mind to, ‘love, admire, hope and endure’, but also ‘the principles of moral conduct [that] would bear the harvest of happiness’ (Preface, p. 232). The utilitarian language cannot be overlooked here, and its presence implies that Shelley had made important progress in his desire to situate his theory of Poetry within contemporary political economy. However, it was in A

*Philosophical View of Reform* that such ideas would be expressed in their most sophisticated incarnation.

I began the introduction to this chapter by questioning assumptions of Shelley's desire to convert the sceptical method into an ameliorative political theory. Hoagwood's assessment of Shelley, that 'acts of ideological reconstruction should be set in motion, not to establish an alternative system, but to develop constructive powers', implies a passivity on the part of existing disciplines.<sup>21</sup> He suggests that it is only through such philosophical 'reconstruction' that present systems can realise their enlightening potential. In contrast, I have pointed to Shelley's appreciation of the transformative capacities within contemporary political economy. This argument has informed my discussion of Shelley's admiration for the interplay between economic doctrines and non-temporal inspiration. I have drawn attention to his novel use of the paired terms 'form' and 'spirit' in that portion of the Preface to *Prometheus Unbound* composed at about the time that *A Philosophical View of Reform* was begun, and suggested that his theory of their relationship was influenced by his study of political economy. This view of social change has important implications for previous interpretations of his theory of Poetry. Rather than defining this term as a mode of inspiration that replaces contemporary abuses with visionary schemes, I suggest that for Shelley, true Poetry involves reciprocity between such non-temporal insights and the progressive impulse within contemporary thought including political economy.

Shelley's belief in the Poetic potential of political economy would be, from this point onwards, depicted within a contemporary framework. Therefore, I will conclude with an example of his preoccupation with the enlightening power of the present. In his fragment *On Life* (1819), Shelley remarked: 'Man is a being of high aspirations [...] existing but in the future and the past, being, not what he is, but what he has been and shall be'.<sup>22</sup> Shelley depicts the dynamic potential of the 'past' and the visionary insights of the 'future' coming together in the troubled 'present' climate. This would become crucial to his discussion of contemporary economic doctrines in the second chapter of *A Philosophical View of Reform*. Shelley's essay is divided into three sections, on the past, present and future. However, rather than undertaking a reading of the themes of the essay in the order in which they appear, the following section of my chapter opens with a discussion of 'the present', specifically Shelley's response to Malthusian principles. Shelley's analysis of the contemporary economic crisis may be

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<sup>21</sup> Hoagwood, *Skepticism and Ideology*, p. 183.

<sup>22</sup> Shelley, *On Life* (1819), in *Major Works*, 633-6 (p. 634).

seen as shaping the entire essay. As a result, the next section explores the ways in which this engagement with Malthusian political economy can be seen as both inspiring and embodying Shelley's theory of Poetry.

### **3. 3. 'A Vision which can never be Realised': Shelley and Malthus**

Malthus is a very clever man, and the world would be a greater gain if it would seriously take his lessons into consideration [...] but what on earth does he mean by some of his inferences! (Percy Bysshe Shelley to Thomas Love Peacock, *Letters*, II, 43)

The date of the above letter, 8 October 1818, coincides with Shelley's detailed study of Malthus' *Essay on the Principle of Population*. His despondency towards the financial crisis in England following the passing of the repressive Six Acts is often aligned with this immersion in Malthusian 'lessons'. John Maynard Keynes sees Malthus, with his emphasis upon inevitable natural law, as 'providing a powerful intellectual foundation to justify the *status quo* and damp enthusiasm'.<sup>23</sup> Shelley's belief in human perfectibility, anger towards the exploitation of labourers, and progressive political outlook found much that was incendiary in such foundations. However, it is rarely acknowledged that his criticism was based upon a sophisticated understanding of Malthusian economics. Hundreds of hostile reactions appeared in articles, reviews and allusions following each successive edition of the *Essay* between 1798 and 1826 and their significant revisions.<sup>24</sup> In contrast to these, I argue that Shelley's criticism was not based upon refuting Malthusian principles. Rather, his scepticism towards the *Essay* operates from within, originating from his frustration that its 'inferences' over-rely upon enlightened yet outmoded economic precepts.

Shelley's attraction to Malthus' *Essay* can be observed throughout his economic preoccupations in Italy. His letters may be seen to engage with the demographic, ratio-orientated and agricultural principles of Malthusian political economy. For example, Shelley's interest in Tuscan farming implies that concepts of subsistence have a greater potential than upholding reactionary values. He comments on 6 November 1818 'I

<sup>23</sup> J. M. Keynes, *Essays in Biography* (1933) in *The Collected Writings*, 30 vols (London: Macmillan 1971-2000), x, 104-5.

<sup>24</sup> Kenneth Smith, ed., *The Malthusian Controversy* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951), p. 49.

should judge the agricultural resources of [Italy] to be immense, since it can wear so flourishing an appearance in spite of discouragements which the tyranny of government inflicts on it' (*Letters*, II, 46). Shelley suggests that approaches to 'resources' are constrained by the age in which they occur. His dichotomy is not between the precepts of political economy and their distortion by tyrannical ideology, but involves the enlightening potential within Malthus' valid concerns. *A Philosophical View of Reform* may thus be regarded as informed by this willingness to consider Malthusian principles. Shelley describes Malthus' theories in his letter as potentially benefiting 'the world', and that he read the *Essay* in its 'French translation' demonstrates its impact beyond Britain (*Letters*, II, 43).<sup>25</sup>

Before Shelley's receptiveness to the *Essay* can be analysed, it is important to explore Malthus' intellectual background. As Keynes notes, Malthus is seen to justify oppressive policies. However, he was educated through Rousseauvian precepts, supported the Whig faction and was fascinated by social progress. It is not always acknowledged that Malthus studied revolutionary theories in detail prior to developing his ideas about political economy. He knew Godwin personally, shared his publisher Joseph Johnson, and had connections with Dissenters from his attendance at their Warrington academy.

Malthus' Dissenting heritage can be observed in the discursive rhetoric he employs in order to verify his arguments. J. Wolff argues that Malthus enjoyed 'demonstrat[ing] his dialectical skills, being an original thinker who made use of paradox'.<sup>26</sup> These philosophical interests align him with Godwin's (and Smith's) emphasis upon intellectual enquiry. At times, McLane argues that Malthus even 'shows himself fluent in another kind of discourse'.<sup>27</sup> She draws attention to his incorporation of literary allusion in the *Essay*, such as his citations of Pope and Defoe (*Essay*, p. 112). Malthus' literary sensibilities would thus have appealed to Shelley's conviction that political economy had rhetorical, as well as social implications. Furthermore, I suggest that Malthus regarded political economy as a complex blend of fact and innovation.

In order to support such a reading, it is necessary to outline the core arguments of the *Essay* and consider why these became so notorious following the revolutionary decade.

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<sup>25</sup> Shelley read the *Essay* in an 1809 translation of its second edition (1803) by Pierre Prévost. That Shelley's observations were based upon this edition is evident in his anger towards Malthus' emphasis upon the 'preventive check' of moral restraint. This element in Malthus' work was not as dominant in the first edition, which was published prior to the former's perusal of the 1801 census records.

<sup>26</sup> J. Wolff, 'The Economic Thought of Thomas Robert Malthus', in *Malthus: Past and Present*, ed. by J. Dupâquier, A. Fauve-Chamoux and E. Grebenik (London: Academic Press, 1983), p. 66.

<sup>27</sup> McLane, *Romanticism and the Human Sciences*, p. 216.

Malthusian political economy derived from the theory that population increases at a more rapid, 'geometric' rate than the resources to sustain such a growth, which only increase at a regular 'arithmetic' rate. Malthus' introduction to his *Essay* confirms that this theory was based upon the insights of his predecessors. He comments that 'the authors from whose writings I deduced the principle [...] were Hume, Wallace, Dr. Adam Smith, and Dr. Price' (*Essay*, p. 7). However, these deductions sought to disprove, rather than complement the progressive aspects of past economic principles. Malthus pursued 'fact' relentlessly in order to support his population theory. He toured Scandinavia in 1799 and France and Switzerland in 1802, compiling records of population and agricultural production. Using many sources in order to investigate historical demographics, Malthus defined the population principle as explaining the 'past', 'present' and 'future of mankind' (*Essay*, p. 2). Shelley respected Malthus' contextualisation of his theory within the vast historical scale in which his own aspirations operated. However, he distrusted the latter's approach to 'past' economic theories and the impact this had upon 'present' and 'future' advances.

In its attention to mathematical evidence as a means to advancing economic thought, Malthusian political economy refuted the scope of the human mind. The latter was celebrated in revolutionary doctrines that were conceived in the same spirit of enquiry as Smith's theories, but had been applied to politics in America and France. Smith's belief in population as 'the necessary effect and cause of public prosperity' had promised unlimited social possibilities (*Wealth of Nations*, I, 99). In contrast, Malthus desired to transform Smith's principles for a new industrial age, in which this faith in human reason had been shattered as a result of revolutionary failure and socio-economic hardship. His response to these foundations was, as Winch suggests, to 'accomplish something Smith had not felt obliged to do; prove that society could provide an optimal solution, preventing population from going beyond what was economically sustainable'.<sup>28</sup> This emphasis upon 'sustainability' earned Malthus' essay its reactionary reputation. However, it is the manner in which Malthus arrived at these conclusions that frustrated Shelley, as he sought to comprehend the way that such an investigative mind could only perpetuate the incomplete ideas of past thinkers.

It was neither Malthus' originality nor his mathematical methods that Shelley criticised. Instead, it was the problems he encountered when he sought to apply such innovations to the contemporary economic crisis. Malthus' scepticism towards revolutionary dialectics can be viewed as the inspiration for the *Essay* in 1798, which

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<sup>28</sup> Winch, in *Essay*, p. xix.

was written as a response to ‘the Speculations of Mr. Godwin’ (*Essay*, p. 2). In *Political Justice*, Godwin had portrayed intellectual development as integral to social progress. In contrast, Malthus argues that the wants of the body provided an impetus for ‘exertions of human genius’ (*Essay*, p. 287). From the outset, we see Malthus as an admirer of economic precepts. This belief that ‘genius’ is the product of selfish desires is akin to Mandeville’s preoccupation with ‘public benefit’. Indeed, Hazlitt criticised the *Essay* for its attempt to ‘revise Mandeville’s paradoxes in new form’.<sup>29</sup> However, it is interesting that Malthus employs his mathematical principles in order to undermine Mandeville’s ‘false [...] system of morals’ (*Essay*, p. 344).

It can be argued that Shelley identified a difference between Malthus and the earlier political economists whom I have presented as influencing his theory of ‘Poetry’. Whilst Malthus questions aspects of economic ‘form’ using the same framework of natural law, Smith realised that the most effectual method of challenging error was to develop such discrepancies from within. Instead of refuting Mandeville with mathematical evidence, Winch describes the way that Smith strove to ‘separate the kernel of truth from what was mere sophistry’.<sup>30</sup> Godwin shared this internalised rather than confrontational approach to economic precepts. It is significant that this comment on *The Fable of the Bees* as ‘worthy of the attention of those who philosophise on human affairs’ comes from *Political Justice*, not the *Essay*.<sup>31</sup> This is not to say that Shelley did not identify flaws in the approaches of Smith and Godwin. He was sceptical about Smith’s definition of self-interest, and he did not share Godwin’s vision of a civilisation that could reject the sexual impulse.<sup>32</sup> However, Shelley believed that Malthus’ deductive approach exemplified his commitment to advancing economic ‘form’ – without its progressive ‘spirit’. This methodology led Malthus to justify various ‘preventive’ and ‘positive’ checks for maintaining an equilibrium between natural law and national affluence.

Malthus believed that Godwin’s error ‘lies in questioning things, instead of endeavouring to account for them as they are’ (*Essay*, p. 350). Nevertheless, there are parallels between Godwinian and Malthusian principles, especially in terms of their views on intellectual progress. Malthus’ second edition of 1803 was informed by his perusal of the 1801 census records. These provided evidence that population had

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<sup>29</sup> Hazlitt, quoted in Winch, *Riches and Poverty*, p. 4.

<sup>30</sup> Winch, *Riches and Poverty*, p. 60.

<sup>31</sup> Godwin, *Political and Philosophical Writings*, IV, 328.

<sup>32</sup> In *Political Justice*, Godwin hypothesises that humanity will reach a perfected state in which population will regulate itself through reason, so that eventually, society will be ‘a people of men’ and not ‘of children’. See *Political and Philosophical Writings*, I, 528.

increased rapidly during the war against France in the 1790s. His educational programme was thus based upon deploying the intellectual potential of labourers for precautionary rather than progressive ends. Godwin had stated in his 'Essay on Beggars' that 'paupers should not be regarded as useless if they are rationally articulate'.<sup>33</sup> Malthus modifies this sentiment by transforming Godwin's 'reason' into a 'preventive check'. He comments: 'The parochial schools would [...] train the lower orders in habits of sobriety [...] approximat[ing] them to the superior middle-classes' (*Essay*, p. 278). A key difference between these two outlooks lies in Malthus' emphasis upon 'parochial' education. As an Anglican clergyman, he presented industriousness and self-sufficiency as qualities bestowed upon humanity by God. It is thus important to explore the way that this harnessing of revolutionary reason in the service of Christian political economy can be interpreted in relation to Shelley's theory of intellectual progress.

Malthus' conclusions were intended to influence history on a greater scale than simply suppressing contemporary unrest. His controversial support for the abolition of the Poor Laws reflected genuine concern for the future. Malthus' argument was that if the poor (who constituted the majority of society) were educated about moral restraint and the benefits of delayed marriages or celibacy, they would no longer require support that was detrimental to national prosperity. As he remarked, 'if the poor-laws had never existed [...] the aggregate mass of happiness would have been greater' (*Essay*, p. 103). Notwithstanding his humanitarian objections, there is evidence to suggest that Shelley engaged with Malthus' concerns for social 'happiness'. It is interesting that in 1817, he included a note to the Preface to *Laon and Cythna* suggesting that Malthus' revisions to the *Essay* marked 'a symptom of the revival of public hope'.<sup>34</sup>

Malthus' response to the Poor Laws derived from contemporary experience of their failure. The primary source of his discontent was the Speenhamland system, which supplemented labourers' wages on a starvation rate based on the price of bread.<sup>35</sup> This cultivated a dependent outlook amongst the poor that even Smith had opposed. In addition, the Poor Laws were inefficient, not having been altered significantly since their establishment in 1601.<sup>36</sup> Malthus described the Poor Laws as a 'great bounty, by

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<sup>33</sup> William Godwin, *The Enquirer, Reflections on Education, Manners and Literature* (London: G. G. and J. Robinson, 1797), pp. 192-3.

<sup>34</sup> Shelley's note to the Preface of *Laon and Cythna*, in *Poems*, II, 30-47 (p. 37).

<sup>35</sup> Foot, *Red Shelley*, p. 28.

<sup>36</sup> Raymond G. Cowherd, *Political Economists and the English Poor Laws: A Historical Study of the Influence of Classical Economics on the Formation of Social Welfare Policy* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1977), p. xvi.



which [...] the independent workman may be undersold, and excluded from the market' (*Essay*, p. 107). This emphasis upon the Poor Laws precluding participation in the 'market' advocated by Smith suggests that Malthus' opposition can be perceived in the more 'hopeful' light Shelley describes. It also highlights a quality in the *Essay* of which Shelley may have been aware: the instances in which Malthus appears to go beyond economic 'form', only to retreat back into the language of inevitability, rather than displaying 'spirit'.

Such idiosyncrasy is marked in Malthus' argument in the later editions, which emphasises the effect of long-term pressures of population on short-term prosperity. Just as Malthus' preference for moral restraint over government charity reflects his preoccupation with progress, his approach to wider economic issues demonstrates an innovative response to industrialisation. Malthus, with his agricultural bias, denied that capital accumulation could generate universal prosperity. He remarks 'advantages which depend exclusively upon capital [...] cannot be permanent' (*Essay*, p. 133). This scepticism towards commercial 'advantages' leads Malthus to formulate a theory of rent that Cowherd describes as original in 'its concentration on inter-sector relations, rather than aggregate properties of the economy'.<sup>37</sup> This emphasis upon human 'relations', rather than economic forces, contributed to Malthus' misgivings about the importation of corn. He believed that 'rent', a payment deriving from surplus agricultural produce was a greater indicator of prosperity than capital (*Essay*, p. 132). This was because it was 'considered a share in the annual income of a nation, paid to the landowners after meeting costs of food production'.<sup>38</sup> As imports reduced high prices, which were connected to rent levels, Malthus was inspired to write two pamphlets upholding the Corn Laws.

Notwithstanding the originality of this response to the dehumanising effects of commerce, the natural law upon which Malthus based his theories centres upon maintaining inequality. This leads him to transform his distrust of capital accumulation into a justification of what he terms 'unproductive' landlords. Malthus argues that profit could only be gained by maintaining a parasitic class, whose pursuit of luxuries could retain the balance between supply and demand. This reliance upon agricultural economic models was recognised by his friend and rival, David Ricardo. Although he acknowledged Malthus' 'intellectual courage' in challenging Smith's principles,

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, p. 69.

<sup>38</sup> Winch, *Riches and Poverty*, p. 351.

Ricardo noted the failure of the *Essay* to achieve original economic insights.<sup>39</sup> Malthus' restricted outlook can be summarised in his comment that Ricardo's 'perfect freedom of trade' is 'a vision which can never be realised' (*Essay*, p. 179). It can thus be argued that there are elements of what Shelley terms the 'spirit' of progress in Malthus' *Essay*. Nevertheless, these never exceed their deductive origins or attain the 'vision' necessary for true innovation.

Malthus was essentially humanitarian, although he often expressed what Winch calls a 'thoroughly mathematical approach to suffering'.<sup>40</sup> This is reflected in the notorious 'nature's feast' analogy of the 1803 edition. Malthus argued that only those who were economically productive should be entitled to national provisions. Shelley referred to this in 1812, describing Malthus' 'fear of overstocking the world' (*Proposals*, p. 52). However, following his detailed study of Malthusian theories, he began to appreciate this practical assessment of hardship. Shelley's description of the 'apostle of the rich' in his letter of 15 February 1821 must thus be regarded as more complex than is suggested by C. E. Pulos' conclusion that he 'hated Malthus as he had eclipsed Godwin' (*Letters*, II, 261).<sup>41</sup> Malthus' questioning of Godwin's principles was not the cause of Shelley's objection. Instead, it was this overbearing emphasis upon 'fact' that convinced him that the originality of the *Essay* need only be released from the limitations of past economic insights. This may be seen to have inspired him to explore Malthus' doctrines within the context of his developing theory of Poetry in *A Philosophical View of Reform*. I suggest that Shelley's essay identifies, rather than creates, the progressive impulse within Malthusian ideology. However, before Shelley's work can be explored in detail, it is important to situate his response to the *Essay* within the 'Malthusian Controversy'.

### **3. 4. 'Advancing Opinion with a Wrong Bias': Reactions to Malthus**

The publication of Malthus' *Essay* led to widespread criticism from reactionary and radical factions alike. Winch comments that Malthus contrasted Rousseau's 'noble savage against the actual state of savage man', posing a threat towards the Romantic

<sup>39</sup> David Ricardo, quoted in *Essay*, p. x.

<sup>40</sup> Winch, *Malthus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 55.

<sup>41</sup> C. E. Pulos, 'Shelley and Malthus', *PMLA*, 67 2 (1952), 113-124 (p. 115).

ideal.<sup>42</sup> However, it is interesting that the Lake Poets exercised caution in criticising the *Essay*. Parallels had been popularly drawn between Malthus' views and Samuel Whitbread's 1807 proposal to abolish Poor Relief. Coleridge thus advised Southey to be 'exceedingly guarded' in reviewing Malthus, due to fears that they may be perceived as reprising their revolutionary outlooks.<sup>43</sup> As sympathisers with Godwin early in their careers and contemporary proponents of the poor, the Lake Poets regarded the rise of 'statistical' study as a 'type of disease'.<sup>44</sup> In 1817 when Southey was contemplating the benefits of abolishing poor relief, he distinguished his assessment of 'redundant' social systems significantly from Malthus' view of natural law.<sup>45</sup> However, these objections were based upon humanitarian rather than theoretical grounds. The Lake Poets preferred Christian concepts of charity to the deductions of political economists. Even though Malthus' doctrines had an Anglican basis, it was his adaptation of economic precepts that interested Shelley. As a result, this section focuses on reformist responses to the *Essay*. Although many of these express suspicion towards political economy, their belief in the connection between economic and political change necessitates a comparison with Shelley's response to 'the present'. Reformist critics of Malthus fall broadly into two categories: those who analyse the *Essay* dialectically, and those who focus upon the social consequences of his principle of population. However, it is in his contextualisation of Malthusian methodology within the crisis of 1819, that Shelley's argument becomes so powerful.

A significant theoretical critique of the *Essay* was Godwin's *Of Population: An Enquiry Concerning the Power of Increase in the Numbers of Mankind* (1820). Godwin had first replied to Malthus in 1801, and, as Kenneth Smith argues 'admired Malthus' foundations, but felt obliged to repel his conclusions'.<sup>46</sup> Godwin admitted: 'We should take into account the discoveries of the mind before we make experiment of a state of equality' (*Thoughts*, p. 67). This praise for Malthus' 'discoveries' in relation to his own egalitarian doctrines can be seen in the way that Godwin accepted the former's demographic evidence. Godwin also appreciated the *Essay*'s sophisticated rhetoric, praising 'the spirit of style in which [it] is written' (*Thoughts*, p. 10). Nevertheless, Godwin questioned Malthus' adherence to natural law, differentiating between his

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<sup>42</sup> Winch, *Malthus*, p. 22.

<sup>43</sup> Coleridge to Southey, 11 January 1804, in *The Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. by Earl Leslie Griggs, 6 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956-71), II, 532.

<sup>44</sup> Robert Southey, 'On the State of the Poor, and the means pursued by Society for bettering their Condition' (1811), in *Essays, Moral and Political*, 2 vols (London: William Clowes, 1832) I, 159-251 (p. 246).

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, I, 211.

<sup>46</sup> Smith, *Malthusian Controversy*, p. 39.

deductive methods and the innovative theories of his predecessors. Godwin remarked: 'A great evil [...] is the imagination that what takes place in the period in which we live, is essential to the general well-being of mankind' (*Thoughts*, p. 62). It is this interpretation of mathematical evidence as a means of upholding economic convention, rather than inspiring its development beyond contemporary periods, which Godwin believes permits such theories to support reactionary institutions. He remarks: 'Establishment advocates could not have found a doctrine more effectual to shut out all improvement forever' (*Thoughts*, p. 63). Nevertheless, it is interesting that Godwin condemns these reactionary 'advocates' rather than the doctrines that prove effective in rejecting 'improvement'.

Godwin developed this theoretical analysis in 1820, responding to modifications Malthus made to the *Essay*. These developed his emphasis upon 'moral restraint' and discussion of the economic crisis during the late 1810s. Godwin was also provoked by Malthus' replacement of the chapter responding to his *Thoughts* with an analysis of Robert Owen's schemes in the 1817 edition. It was as if, in dismissing his engagement with Godwin's doctrines of perfectibility, Malthus hoped finally to extinguish any spark of possibility for 1790s philosophy. In contrast to the outright rejection of Malthusian ideology adopted by many of the *Essay*'s critics, Godwin insists that he is not interested in 'its falsehood [...] but its complexions as a theory'.<sup>47</sup> Godwin's assessment of 'falsehood' reflects his sceptical grounding, evident when he remarks 'Mr. Malthus may affirm that his views differ from those of any philosopher that existed' (*Of Population*, p. 271). However, his essay parallels Shelley's use of this 'philosophy' for progressive, rather than destructive ends. In responding to Malthus' revisions, Godwin uses the same mathematical evidence so venerated by the *Essay*. He comments: 'We have no authentic documents to prove any increase in the numbers of mankind, and the counteracting causes have nothing of an occult nature' (*Of Population*, p. 267). This emphasis upon authenticating facts demonstrates Godwin's belief that the *Essay*'s demographic methods could be deployed in order to subvert Malthus' Anglican arguments.

In exposing the 'infirmity of the first essay', Godwin hoped to 'contribute a leading point [to] political economy' (*Of Population*, p. 269). This reflects his belief that both 'political economy' and Malthus' 'additions' to the science could complement social

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<sup>47</sup> William Godwin, *Of Population* (1820), in *Political and Philosophical Writings*, II, 265-296 (p. 268). All subsequent citations from this work will be from this edition and will be given in parentheses, abbreviated as *Of Population*, in the text.

progress (*Thoughts*, pp. 55-6). Godwin thus concludes that the ‘complexity’ of the *Essay* is undermined by its reliance upon deductive evidence. Although *Of Population* was completed after *A Philosophical View of Reform*, Shelley had remarked that Godwin’s work-in-progress ‘fills my intellect [...] with life and strength’ in a letter of 7 December 1817 (*Letters*, I, 573). Mary records that Godwin and Shelley met throughout 1817, and it is possible that this Malthusian reference was the product of their discussions.<sup>48</sup> However, when Godwin criticises ‘Mr. Malthus’ disciples, [who] never think but of man as he is’, he revealed his own limitation (*Of Population*, p. 276). This relates to the way that his preoccupations with futurity often neglect the contemporary age.

In addition to such a theoretical examination of Malthus’ *Essay*, Shelley was drawn to those who saw Malthus’ arguments as opposed to reform. Notable amongst these was Cobbett, whose ‘veneration for the rural poor’ led him, as Connell suggests, ‘to refute the “great national lie” that population was increasing’.<sup>49</sup> This awareness of a ‘national lie’ reflects Cobbett’s condemnation of the *Essay*, which is more conventionally sceptical than Godwin and Shelley’s admiration for economic theories. In Chapter Two, I argued that Cobbett contemplated in detail, but ultimately rejected the doctrines of classical political economy. Instead, he asserted on 28 March 1817 that he was preoccupied with supporting ‘the working class, who are not amused by a recital of blessings [when] they have not a half to eat’ (*Register*, 32, 10). Shelley identified shortcomings in this outlook. This was not only because of his interest in the *Essay*’s originality, but also because Cobbett’s solutions were derived from economic precepts he refused to ‘recite’. Cobbett’s exposure of the *Essay*’s flaws overlooks how his alternative rural idyll was constructed from Smith’s labour theory of value. Therefore, although Shelley admired the *Register*’s shrewd analysis of the contemporary crisis, he found that Cobbett’s refusal to view economic theory as compatible with his own proposals presented a distorted reading of the *Essay*.

Cobbett had admired Malthus’ support for an agricultural economy in 1798. However, by the 1810s, he had lambasted the *Essay*’s faith in mathematical abstractions. His most furious answer to Malthusian proposals is articulated in his pamphlet, *Paper Against Gold* (1815). This is predominantly a criticism of paper-money, which ironically, Malthus condemned in Cobbett-esque language as a ‘mischief

<sup>48</sup> *The Journals of Mary Shelley: 1814-44*, ed. by Paula R. Feldman and Diana Scott-Kilvert, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), I, 153-197.

<sup>49</sup> Connell, *Romanticism, Economics and the Question of ‘Culture’*, p. 193.

of the system' (*Essay*, p. 96). Cobbett believed that the government should focus upon reviving agriculture instead of seeking to curb population growth. 'Population', he observes, 'is checked by agricultural deficiencies, but agriculture never can be checked by population deficiencies' (*Paper Against Gold*, I, 442). This emphasis upon the 'deficiencies' of classical political economy is expanded in Cobbett's attitude to taxation. He remarks: 'The Bank of England is as mortal as anything, yet its funds have no bodily existence' (*Paper Against Gold*, I, 21). It can be argued that Malthus' preoccupation with the starving 'bodies' of labourers contrasted with the concerns of Ricardo and Mill in relation to depleted 'funds'. Nevertheless, Cobbett's view that the *Essay* overlooked this dubious 'existence' in favour of assessing the crisis in abstract terms was shared by many reformers. As Hunt remarked, 'they put on guineas for spectacles and see nothing else'.<sup>50</sup> However, I argue that their explorations of the *Essay* underestimate the sophistication with which Malthus examines the themes of past, present and future.

In comparing such wide-ranging responses to Malthus, the distinctiveness of Shelley's belief in the interplay between the 'form' of political economy and the 'spirit' of progress becomes clear. Like Godwin, Shelley expressed admiration for the *Essay*'s original approach to past doctrines, and like the reformers he was committed to situating his economic theory within the crisis of 1819. I will conclude this assessment of Shelley's participation in 'the Malthusian Controversy' by drawing attention to remarks that Hazlitt made on the *Essay*. Like Shelley, Hazlitt was an admirer of classical political economy. This can be seen in his *Essay on the Principles of Human Action* (1805), in which he engages with Smith's view that man could extend 'interest out of himself in the happiness of others'.<sup>51</sup> However, Hazlitt's concern with the contemporary crisis prevented him from recognising the beneficial potential of Malthus' *Essay*. He accused Malthus of 'advancing opinion with a wrong bias', arguing that the originality of his principle of population was restricted by his deductive approach.<sup>52</sup> In contrast, Shelley believed that 'opinion' could advance by engaging with inspiration unconfined to the present age. It is this conviction that informs his response to Malthusian doctrines in the second chapter of *A Philosophical View of Reform*.

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<sup>50</sup> 'On the Intellectual Inferiority of Parliament to the Demands of the Age' (1818), in Woodring and Houtchens, eds., *Leigh Hunt's Political and Occasional Essays*, 197-214 (p. 201).

<sup>51</sup> William Hazlitt, *Essay on the Principles of Human Action* (1805) in *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. by P. P. Howe, 21 vols (London: Dent, 1930-4), I, 1-10 (pp. 6-7).

<sup>52</sup> William Hazlitt, *The Spirit of the Age* (1825), in Howe, XI, 189-369 (p. 287). All subsequent citations from this work will be from this edition and be given in parentheses, abbreviated as *Spirit*, in the text.

### **3. 5. 'On the Sentiment of the Necessity for Change': Shelley as a Political Economist**

Shelley opens his discussion of 'the present' by defining the contemporary crisis as a 'contest between men, power and wealth'.<sup>53</sup> This emphasis upon economic affairs has led Donald Reiman to describe *A Philosophical View of Reform* as primarily 'Shelley's treatise on political economy'. However, Reiman's belief that Shelley's economic outlook depended upon insights originating outside the 'narrow sphere' of financial conventions can be viewed as only partially correct. Reiman defines Shelley's acceptance of custom as a stage in his gradualist approach to socio-economic change. However, Shelley's belief that economic progress depended upon the innovative potential within existing institutions challenges Reiman's assertion that he 'seldom mistook the body of his thought for its spirit'.<sup>54</sup> In fact, his reliance upon the precepts of political economy may be seen as asserting that the insights of this visionary 'spirit' must be enacted through the 'body', or 'form', of contemporary principles.

The manuscript of *A Philosophical View of Reform* begins with many cancelled passages on economic affairs. Shelley's opening remarks may be read as returning to his interest in Smithian political economy:

<By the principles of human nature as modified by the existing opinions of society, a man loves himself with an overweening love. The generous emotions [...] to which the human heart is susceptible, are confined within the narrow circle of our kindred> (*Reform*, p. 994)

Shelley's relation of 'human nature' to the preoccupations of 'society' here may be seen as upholding his esteem for Smith's incorporation of imaginative sympathy into his financial views on self-interest. His comments on the possibility of extending 'love' from one's '<narrow circle>' recall the views he expressed in his 1817 pamphlets that

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<sup>53</sup> Shelley, *A Philosophical View of Reform*, in *Shelley and His Circle*, vi, 945-1065 (p. 962). All subsequent citations from this work will be from this edition and be given in parentheses, abbreviated as *Reform*, in the text. This edition refers to the manuscript of the essay now in the Carl Pforzheimer Collection in New York. *A Philosophical View of Reform* was first published in 1920, but no satisfactory complete scholarly edition exists. However, the transcription of the manuscript in *Shelley and his Circle* is diplomatic and informative.

<sup>54</sup> Reiman in *Shelley and His Circle*, vi, 950-1.

the ‘<existing>’ theories of self-interest and sympathy founded by eighteenth-century political economists could inspire social unity. Nevertheless, by 1819 Shelley may be seen as frustrated by the way that these enlightening doctrines were interpreted as upholding inflexible definitions of human nature by contemporary economic thinkers. Certainly, Malthus’ views on the natural selfishness of human beings, and its role in limiting social and moral development, may be viewed as restricting the progressive potential within Smith’s founding principles. Such concerns may be seen as inspiring Shelley’s observation that ‘<there is a class of men, considerable from talents and station, who [...] are enemies to reform>’ (*Reform*, p. 994). This appears to be a direct comment upon figures such as Malthus, whose commitment to advancing the ‘form’ established by economic conventions, rather than engaging with the ‘spirit’ that inspired them, undermines the intrinsic ‘<talent>’ that Shelley observed in publications like the *Essay*.

Shelley contextualises this limitation of the progressive potential intrinsic to existing laws and institutions, within the crisis of 1819. He may be seen as attempting to reconcile his theory of ‘form’ and ‘spirit’ with his belief that a permanent view of self-interest benefits certain classes. He remarks that ‘with some, [reform] assumes the mask of fear, with others that of hope’ (*Reform*, p. 996). The ‘mask’ permeates Shelley’s writing throughout 1819, but it is a complex image. The ‘mask of fear’ may be read as referring to establishment supporters who resist the progressive impulse within the socio-economic ‘forms’ founded by their predecessors. However, the ‘mask of hope’ implies an equally false belief in an enlightened ‘spirit’ destroying old abuses. Shelley’s frustration with contemporaries who either misinterpret socio-economic ‘forms’ as permanent, or purposefully suppress their progressive impulse, leads him to contemplate the reverse: a revolutionary scenario. He comments that ‘the mischiefs of temporary popular violence as compared with [those] of permanent, fraudulent forms of government, is likely to be exaggerated’ (*Reform*, pp. 996-7). This sentence anticipates his comment to Horace Smith of 11 April 1822 that ‘anarchy is better than despotism [...] the former is for a season, and the latter is eternal’ (*Letters*, II, 412). However, Shelley’s attraction to the ‘spirit’ embodied in revolutionary ‘anarchy’ is tempered by his insistence that this should only be a last resort. Instead, he places progress in the hands of contemporary economists and political figures who possess the ability to liberate such ‘forms’ from their ‘fraudulent’ incarnation. Referring to figures like Malthus, he comments ‘if they would, in opposition to their own unjust advantage, take the lead in reform, they might spare the nation from the temporary dominion of the



poor' (*Reform*, p. 997). This suggests that successful reform can only be achieved through reconciling the interests of rich and poor. Shelley's emphasis upon the transient 'spirit' of revolution reflects his developing historical theory: visionary alternatives will always be 'temporary' when they reject the existing state of knowledge.

Having identified a restricted approach to the past in political practice, Shelley then challenges Malthus' *Essay* along historical lines. He is aware that Malthus used historical digressions in order to prove the dangers of increasing population. He thus employs Malthusian ratios in order to argue that the *Essay* suffers from the same stagnation as Parliament's claims to universal representation. Shelley remarks: 'Population increased [...] and the proportion borne by those whose labour produces the materials of subsistence to those who claim for themselves a superfluidity of these materials, began to increase indefinitely' (*Reform*, pp. 998-9). Shelley's awareness of Spence's arguments against landlordism may underpin these ideas on unjust 'claims', yet his concern is with drawing out the positive potential within socio-economic change. Shelley's language of 'proportion' and 'increase' is suggestive of his attraction to Malthus' mathematical methods. He argues that Parliament's inability to cope with this rapid increase is less the result of the principle of population, than its deluded self-image as an egalitarian political 'form'. Shelley comments, 'for want of just regulations in the distribution [...] the elements of prosperity became the sources of despotism and misery' (*Reform*, p. 999). His imitation of Malthus' language of 'vice and misery' here may be seen as a challenge to the latter's misinterpretation of economic 'form'. It was not the process of 'villages' becoming 'great cities' that brought about inequality, but the retention of an outdated electoral system in a changing society (*Reform*, p. 999).

Shelley connects voting rights to economic status:

The proportion [of] English men who possessed faculty of suffrage to those who were excluded [...] at the periods of 1641 and 1688 had changed from 1 to 5 to 1 to 20. The rapid progress by which it changed from 1 to 20 to many hundreds between 1688 and 1819, is a process, to those familiar with the history of political economy, rendered by these principles sufficiently intelligible. (*Reform*, p. 1000)

Shelley's interest in calculation here suggests that he is striving for mathematical accuracy. It is difficult to pinpoint exactly his source for these figures. This reflects, as Reiman argues, that 'most of [Shelley's] information is too general, and could have come from many diverse and perhaps unrecoverable sources'.<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, his earlier remarks on industrial expansion reveal parallels with John Wade's *The Black Book; or, Corruption Unmasked* (1820).<sup>56</sup> Although this work appeared the year after Shelley began *A Philosophical View*, it is probable that he did not complete the draft until May 1820. Wade's emphasis upon calculation could thus be the source for these figures, or could even have influenced Shelley in undertaking his own study. These three dates – 1641, 1688 and 1819 – all symbolise historical choices between tyranny, revolution or reform. However, whilst the Civil War adopted a radical 'spirit' and the Glorious Revolution regressed into parliamentary 'form', Shelley believed that the reformers of 1819 could unite the two, with 'political economy' playing a crucial role in this choice.

Shelley's concern with the present leads him to replace further historical digressions with a heading written in a large, clear hand: 'Of the National Debt' (*Reform*, p. 1004). It is unfortunate that Dawson aligns Shelley's understanding of this issue with Cobbett's diatribes against paper money.<sup>57</sup> Chapter Two argued that Cobbett's assessment of inflationary measures was more sophisticated than is often assumed. Nevertheless, Shelley's engagement with financial issues operates in a different way, contemplating rather than dismissing the principles of classical political economy. Despite his Cobbett-esque condemnation of 'the great speculators', cancellations in Shelley's essay reflect his complex approach to inflation (*Reform*, p. 1012). He discusses issues such as '<debt mass>', '<loans>' and '<bills>'. He even aligns the negative effects of 'paper money' with government agendas, rather than these measures themselves (*Reform*, p. 1013). It is interesting to consider why Shelley substitutes the language of calculation for a censure of 'speculation', when this is not an accurate indication of his economic understanding. One answer is that his siding with the radical reformers reflects his awareness of the power of popular appeal. Nevertheless, his criticism is mapped on to his theory of the 'form' and 'spirit' of Poetry. His next sentence insists that 'the present

<sup>55</sup> Reiman, in *Shelley and His Circle*, vi, 954.

<sup>56</sup> Wade calculated that, of 658 members of the House of Commons, 300 were nominated by peers, 187 by rich commoners or by the government, and only 171 were returned by popular elections. Quoted by Reiman in *Shelley and His Circle*, vi, 999.

<sup>57</sup> Dawson, *The Unacknowledged Legislator*, p. 49. Notwithstanding the *Register's* shortcomings, Shelley recommends Cobbett's *Paper Against Gold* as a comprehensive 'elucidation' of the crisis (*Reform*, p. 1014).

miseries of our country are nothing necessarily inherent of the stage of civilisation at which we have arrived' (*Reform*, p. 1014). This emphasis upon civilised 'stages' reaffirms Shelley's receptiveness to the historical outlook favoured by political economists like Smith. It also indicates that the discipline of political economy contributed to his developing historical theory. 'Present miseries' can only be rectified by engaging the vision attributed usually to the poet, with the Poetic potential existing within contemporary doctrines.

Shelley extends this economic interpretation of 'form' and 'spirit' to its social consequences. This approach may be seen to question Malthus' outmoded faith in the landed classes. 'The hereditary aristocracy', he observes, 'who held the political administration of affairs, took the measures which created the other [investors in the Debt] for purposes peculiarly its own' (*Reform*, p. 1018). Such remarks reflect Shelley's understanding of landowners' and speculators' common 'purposes' at the inception of the National Debt, an alliance he terms 'the double aristocracy'. His suspicion of this veneration for past economic systems is also evident in his reaction to the Poor Laws. Whilst Shelley condemns the abolition of poor relief, there are indications that he understood its inefficiency. His comment that the Poor Laws hindered the poor's capacity for 'moral and intellectual excellence' parallels Smith's views on education (*Reform*, p. 1019). This challenges Reiman's view that Shelley's support for poor relief was due to his status as 'an agriculturist'.<sup>58</sup> Shelley's admiration of both agriculture and commerce meant that he could never assent to one to the exclusion of the other. Indeed, Malthus' physiocratic outlook may be regarded as the catalyst for his criticism of the Poor Laws. I suggest that Shelley questions this logic by arguing that Smith's labour theory of value is not as infallible as it appeared in the late eighteenth century. This is because 'the worth of the labour of twenty hours now, in food and clothing, is equivalent to the work of ten' (*Reform*, p. 1020).

Shelley's refutation of the religious slant given to natural law by Christian political economists aligns his approach to 'form' with the literary qualities he identified in political economy:

God, they argue, rules this world as well as that; and since his nature is immutable and his will unchangeable, he rules them by the same laws. The gleams of hope which speak of Paradise, seem, like the flames in Milton's

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<sup>58</sup> Reiman, in *Shelley and His Circle*, vi, 1019.

hell, only to make darkness visible, and all things take its colour from what surrounds them. (*Reform*, p. 1021)

Shelley may be seen as combining Milton's poetic language here with his conviction that perpetuating economic 'form' has stifled the 'hope' in political economy. As a result, he charges the discipline with a particular kind of energy. This allows the 'Paradise' of financial progress to become 'visible' when, like Lucifer, it is freed from the 'colouring' distortion of restricted ideology. Such imagery implies that Shelley is developing his earlier views on the literary potential of political economy, into a conviction that both 'literature' and political economy are inspired through the same enlightening human powers. This reflects Shelley's subtle enactment of his theory of Poetry; he is not alluding to Milton, but aligning the latter's rhetoric with the economic potential he observed in 1819.

Shelley argues that this distorted view of political economy has wider implications than oppression. Such an outlook makes even the privileged classes 'lose energy', a consequence that is disastrous in terms of his reform proposals (*Reform*, p. 1021). Dawson and others interpret Shelley's proposals as reflecting his gradualist eradication of existing abuses.<sup>59</sup> However, Shelley's conclusion to this chapter of the essay presents tensions between his interest in Malthusian innovations and its socially-corrosive conclusions. He comments: 'A writer of the present day (a priest of course, for his doctrines are those of a eunuch and a tyrant) has stated that the evils of the poor arise from an excess of population' (*Reform*, p. 1024). Although this is a polemic worthy of Cobbett's *Register*, Shelley's attack rests upon Malthus as a writer of 'the present', and his anger is connected to contemporary approaches to the past. This is supported by Shelley's citation of the *Essay* in his final remarks. He praises 'the principle of population [...] outstripping the sustenance produced by the labour of man, operating in a thinly peopled community as in one where the population is enormous'. Whilst he presents 'the principle of population' as undisputable, Shelley laments that its Poetic impulse should be undermined by reactionary agendas, that lack the 'wisdom' to understand its workings (*Reform*, p. 1025).

In this section, I have argued that Shelley contextualises his concepts of 'form' and 'spirit' within the economic crisis of 1819. Drawing attention to his belief that

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<sup>59</sup> Dawson describes custom as a 'dead form' that must be replaced by poetic insights. In contrast, I suggest that Shelley defined 'form' as the dynamic impulse already within established principles. See *The Unacknowledged Legislator*, p. 222.

enlightened insights are generated from within economic conventions, I have questioned earlier readings of his reaction to Malthus' *Essay*. Shelley's opposition derives from his progressive view of economic precepts, rather than a rejection of the *Essay*'s principles. However, his concept of the interplay between existing principles and non-temporal inspiration generates questions about the nature of his definition of 'Poetry'. As his oft-cited distinction between 'tyranny' and 'liberty' are complicated by his economic outlook, there remains a question about what he was really suggesting in his treatment of the past. To answer this question, it is necessary to return to the first chapter of *A Philosophical View of Reform*.

### **3. 6. 'A Crisis in its Destiny': Shelley's Historical Narrative**

According to Donald Reiman, Shelley's first section of *A Philosophical View of Reform* insists that 'a superhuman power of amelioration, a tendency like moral law, was at work in history'.<sup>60</sup> Whilst this 'superhuman power' corresponds with Shelley's visionary insights, its function as a 'moral law' may be traced back to his admiration for Smith's economic philosophy. He describes the way that 'those who imagine that their personal interest is concerned in maintaining the power in which they are clothed by existing institutions, do not acknowledge the necessity of material change' (*Reform*, p. 963). Shelley implies that by 1819, Smith's enlightened concept of imagining has become constrained by perpetuations of its view of 'interest' as economic law. He seems to criticise the inability of 'existing institutions' to maintain the interplay between 'form' and 'spirit' expressed in Smith's theories. Smith's view of imagination is presented as inherently progressive in its assertion that reactionary thinkers only deny 'material change'. Shelley not only suggests that the principles of political economy are connected to the 'necessity' of reform, but also that a more 'perfect understanding' would reveal the social, moral, rhetorical, and even poetic elements of the discipline (*Reform*, p. 963).

Shelley describes his historical overview as the 'Introduction' to the entire essay (*Reform*, p. 963). However, his discussion of past epochs is framed by these opening remarks on political economy, and a conclusion focusing upon the present state of England. Stephen Behrendt suggests that in his longer works, Shelley realised 'he was

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<sup>60</sup> Reiman, in *Shelley and His Circle*, vi, 963.

not composing his essays in a straight line'.<sup>61</sup> This is evident in the contradiction between his linear structure (historical introduction, focus upon the present crisis, plans for reform) and the underlying tensions highlighted by depicting political economy as Poetry. Whilst Hoagwood views Shelley's introduction as 'a rhetorical crescendo' to his contemporary insights, I suggest that the opposite is true.<sup>62</sup> By focusing upon Shelley's historical outlook, I argue that his economic theorising at the beginning of his essay defines his understanding of the past and hopes for the future.

Shelley begins by sourcing tyranny to the degeneration of Hellenic ideals under the Roman Empire. However, this may be seen to question cyclical concepts of progress and decline. To venerate ancient Greece as an enlightened age that ended with the rise of imperial power is to overlook an interesting statement Shelley made in 1812. In a letter to Godwin of 3 June, Shelley remarks that after reading *Political Justice*, 'Athens bore the same relation to perfection that Great Britain did to Athens' (*Letters*, I, 303). Despite the intellectual discoveries of ancient Greece, Shelley identified the paradox of its democracy's dependence upon slavery. This scepticism about the 'perfection' of ancient Athens is complemented by Shelley's mature concept of the 'form' and 'spirit' of Poetry. He remarks: 'From the dissolution of the Roman empire, that scheme for enslaving the most civilised portion of mankind, to the epoch of two recent wars, there succeeded a series of schemes operating to the same effect' (*Reform*, p. 963). Although antagonistic towards Roman imperialism, Shelley's language is subtle. The 'enslavement' he describes is not physical, emphasised in an amendment focussing upon intellectual '<duping>' (*Reform*, p. 963). This confirms Shelley's belief that tyranny is not the extinction of enlightened principles. It is instead the perpetuation of such insights within authoritarian ideology. The vast timescale he depicts between the 'dissolution' of Rome, and the 'recent' American and French Revolutions is deliberately eclectic. He regards the 'series' of eras from antiquity to the present age as marked by the same historical imbalances between 'form' and 'spirit', permeated sporadically by points at which their interplay is recognised.

This theory underpins Shelley's historical narrative. For example, despite the harmonious interplay between 'form' and 'spirit' in the age of 'Shakespeare', Shelley describes its recognition as short-lived (*Reform*, p. 967). He cites the English Civil War in order to illustrate the ways in which this reciprocity again became imbalanced, with the free thought of the mid seventeenth century inspiring hostility towards political

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<sup>61</sup> Behrendt, *Shelley and His Audiences*, p. 118.

<sup>62</sup> Hoagwood, *Skepticism and Ideology*, p. 181.

institutions. This disparity in valuing one aspect of Poetry above the other could only result in a ‘temporary abolition of aristocracy and episcopacy’ (*Reform*, p. 967). The gradual resolution of Shelley’s concept of such conflict may be observed in his discussion of the advances inspired by these transient insights. This becomes evident in his description of the Glorious Revolution, which approached an interplay between ‘form’ and ‘spirit’ in terms of its hopes to redress ‘monarchical’ and ‘aristocratic’ abuses from within (*Reform*, p. 968). However, its contradiction between overthrowing the previous monarch and retaining social hierarchies ensured that its enlightening impulse was limited.

Shelley’s discussion of ‘human nature’ with its ‘forms’ in the philosophy of Mandeville and Smith reiterates the extent to which his study of political economy shaped his view of historical progress (*Reform*, p. 970). He comments, ‘systems of tyranny, by which all except the lowest and largest class were to be gainers in the materials of subsistence [...] were established in the shape of monarchies upon the ruins of the built’ (*Reform*, p. 970). Shelley’s interest in ‘material’ gain recalls his engagement with classical political economy in his early prose. This image of ‘the ruins of the built’ is an interesting paraphrase of Paine, who in *Common Sense* asserted that ‘the palaces of kings are built on the ruins of the bowers of paradise’.<sup>63</sup> By employing Paine’s language to describe seventeenth-century advances, Shelley stresses that the limitation of ‘form’ is incongruous with the nature of socio-economic progress. This is because convention is inspired by insights from beyond a single age. However, Paine is revolutionary in his belief in a ‘paradise’ destroyed by tyrants. In contrast, Shelley emphasises that this ‘paradise’ originates from that which is already ‘built’ within supposedly oppressive institutions.

This concept of history as a struggle towards the recognition of the interplay between ‘form’ and ‘spirit’ is implied further in Shelley’s assessment of the eighteenth century. He comments that during this period, ‘philosophy went forth into the enchanted forest of the daemons of worldly power, as the pioneer of the overgrowth of ages’ (*Reform*, p. 971). Poetry here is not a destroyer of the ‘overgrowth of ages’ but its ‘pioneer’, indicating that an interplay between past and future could re-activate the progressive impulse within contemporary doctrines. Shelley’s description of philosophy interacting with the ‘daemons’ of power is significant. This statement does not correspond with Christian definitions of ‘demons’ as evil entities (which would uphold Shelley’s

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<sup>63</sup> Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*, in Philp, *Rights of Man, Common Sense and other Political Writings*, I, 1-61 (p. 12).

reputation as a despiser of custom), but with the Greek word ‘daemon’, meaning ‘spirit’.<sup>64</sup> Since the Greek definition presents this ‘spirit’ as having the capacity to do good or evil, Shelley’s statement upholds his belief in the progressive potential within existing conventions (literally describing ‘the spirit of worldly power’). This suggests that his literary, political and economic influences merge in shaping his historical theory. Such a reading is supported in his dissection of the mid-eighteenth century.

Shelley believes that this period signified another point at which the progressive impulse within socio-economic conventions was temporarily re-awakened. For example, he defines Hume’s genius as his ability to ‘follow the traces’ of past insights, rather than reiterating such discoveries (*Reform*, p. 971). Additionally, Hume’s reputation as an economic theorist sheds light upon Shelley’s view of political science. This may be observed in the cancellation of ‘<Harrington>’ from his historical narrative (*Reform*, p. 971). Reiman believes that Shelley omitted Harrington because *The Commonwealth of Oceana* belongs to ‘utopian literature as much as to political theorising’.<sup>65</sup> However, I suggest that Harrington’s alignment of aristocratic hierarchies with his visionary agrarian republic would have attracted Shelley. It is possible that Hume’s ability to combine economic theories with philosophical enquiry, represented Shelley’s reciprocity between ‘form’ and ‘spirit’ more successfully than Harrington’s work. Indeed, the latter’s revolutionary actions provide a more likely cause for his omission.

Shelley shifts his eighteenth-century analysis from England to Europe. Describing the way that the physiocrats sought to expand past insights without developing them, he emphasises that approaches to ‘form’ can generate more complex outcomes than tyranny. He remarks, ‘their error consisted from a limitedness of view [...] applying what had already been discovered, than pursuing the abstractions of thought for the sake of future advantage’ (*Reform*, p. 972). Shelley demonstrates his historical theory by contrasting such ‘limited’ insights with Smith’s and Hume’s progressive discoveries. It is interesting that he queries, ‘what would Godwin and Bentham, have been but for [...] great luminaries of the preceding epoch? Something inferior to what they are’ (*Reform*, p. 973). Shelley may be seen to contrast the derivative approach of the physiocrats with Godwin and Bentham’s receptiveness to Smith’s originality, thus summarising the

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<sup>64</sup> Shelley had explored this theme in *Alastor* (1816). This poem questioned whether poetic genius was a curse or blessing, if it inspired only ‘self-centred seclusion’ (*Major Works*, p. 92). Its title, *Ἀλάστωρ*, translates as ‘avenger’, and had been incorporated into Christian views of evil spirits. However, Shelley’s definition of ‘daemons’ here is more ambiguous.

<sup>65</sup> Reiman, in *Shelley and His Circle*, vi, 971.



interplay between past and future active within political economy. He insists that ‘intellectual powers’ can only ‘develop themselves with uncommon energy under forms highly unpropitious’ (*Reform*, p. 973). This implication that ‘energy’ exists ‘under forms’ implies that such conventions require non-temporal insights in order to fulfil their potential.

Shelley’s approach to the contemporary crisis outlines the difficulty of preserving the vitality within intellectual discoveries. This is expanded in his discussion of the ‘successful rebellion of America’ (*Reform*, p. 975). As McLane points out, Shelley deliberately avoids describing the events of 1776 as a ‘revolution’.<sup>66</sup> He admires the way in which America’s ‘rebellion’ rejected stagnated views of the past whilst avoiding the transience of violent revolt. However, what really intrigues him is America’s ability to maintain this reciprocity thus far. Shelley praises America for the mutable impulse within its government. He champions its ‘law by which the Constitution is reserved for revision every ten years’, despite this being a slight misreading on his part (*Reform*, p. 976).<sup>67</sup> Shelley may thus be seen to employ the example of America as a contrast to England’s misguided view of past and future innovation.

Shelley then juxtaposes America’s successful rebellion with the events of the 1790s, when ‘the state of public opinion’ experienced another detrimental imbalance between ‘form’ and ‘spirit’ (*Reform*, p. 978). The ideals of the National Assembly were usurped by Jacobin violence, which in turn promoted popular support for Napoleon’s reactionary view of monarchy (*Reform*, p. 980). Nevertheless, Shelley’s faith in human perfectibility permits him to believe that such responses to the interplay between ‘form’ and ‘spirit’, may aid humanity towards a greater comprehension of its workings. Although the Revolutionists ‘proposed a more glorious object than [their] degraded passions permitted them to attain [...] abuses were abolished which never since have dared to shew their face’ (*Reform*, p. 981). Shelley’s emphasis upon the way that socio-economic conventions are ‘degraded’, rather than a generalized attack on ‘tyranny’, informs the remainder of his historical narrative.

Shelley discusses the contemporary operation of his theory within a vast geographical context (*Reform*, pp. 982-3). Furthermore, his essay experiences many shifts between aesthetic and empirical contexts. This is expressed significantly within the context of social change in Asia. Contrasting the progressive outlook of India with

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<sup>66</sup> McLane, *Romanticism and the Human Sciences*, p. 119.

<sup>67</sup> Reiman identifies Shelley’s misunderstanding that it was America’s House of Representatives, rather than its Constitution, that could be reapportioned decennially. See *Shelley and His Circle*, vi, 976.

the Ottoman Empire, Shelley may be seen as applying his theory of the relationship between past and future to contemporary economic debates. He envisages that ‘the deserts of Asia Minor and of Greece, will be colonised by the overflowing population of countries less enslaved’ (*Reform*, p. 988). Shelley’s imagery of abundant population inspiring a sophisticated understanding of progress is suggestive of both the limitations of imperial rule, and contemporary restrictions of Malthusian principles. I argue that he even presents the physical potential of ‘deserted’ landscape as a metaphor for his concept of the interplay between the ‘form’ and ‘spirit’ of Poetry. He remarks that ‘the scenery which was the birthplace of all that is wise [...] will not remain forever the spoil of unlettered Tartars’ (*Reform*, p. 988). Shelley’s alignment of the socio-economic potential of an unspoiled landscape with a comprehension of ‘letters’ may be seen as reiterating his conviction that developments in political economy had literary significance. His connection of this idea to his belief that ‘wisdom’ can only endure ‘forever’ when it is allowed to develop beyond past insights, suggests also that the discipline would play a crucial role in contemporary reform. This implies that, far from opposing the insights of the poet, political economy underpins Shelley’s concept of what Poetry really is.

Such enigmatic statements lead into his central focus: ‘Meanwhile England, the particular object for the sake of which these general considerations have been stated [...] has arrived at a crisis in its destiny’ (*Reform*, p. 991). This ‘crisis’ view of the present reflects Shelley’s belief that England in 1819 faced a choice between revolution and a more enlightened view of change. By emphasising that this choice is the ‘particular object’ around which his ‘general’ consideration of history is structured, he also clarifies that it is his assessment of the present that has shaped his view of the past, not the other way around. He remarks: ‘The literature of England, an energetic development of which has ever followed or preceded a free development of the national will, has arisen from a new birth’ (*Reform*, p. 991). Few critics have explored the process through which such literary ‘development’ can ‘precede’ national insights. They attribute this to definitions of Shelley’s Poetry as something that conveys future insights mysteriously to the present. However, as I suggest that such readings comprehend the ‘spirit’ of Shelleyan inspiration without identifying the importance of its ‘form’, this account of Poetry requires clarification. Shelley’s emphasis upon Poetry occasioning national development is connected to the progressive impulse of the past. Therefore, when Shelley describes Poetry as inspiring the present, he refers to the innovation within established principles, rather than prophetic vision alone. Similarly,

when he portrays Poetry as following national will, he is not suggesting that either tyranny or liberty can affect the interplay between ‘form’ and ‘spirit’, but that they can alter the way in which it is perceived. Shelley’s emphasis upon ‘a new birth’ illustrates the difficulty in recognising this reciprocity and that a permanent comprehension of it will be the result of many failed attempts. However, this view of Poetry as already within humanity, as well as the non-temporal insights that inspire its development, illuminates Shelley’s understanding of poets as both the ‘creations’ and ‘creators’ of their age.

Shelley’s essay is renowned for exemplifying what he termed the ‘spirit’ of Poetry, but this is only a selective reading. Despite descriptions of this mysterious ‘power’ (*Reform*, p. 993), there are passages that insist upon the reciprocity within Poetry itself. Shelley’s most famous statement in the essay is that ‘Poets and Philosophers are the unacknowledged legislators of the world’ (*Reform*, p. 993). This is crucially distinct from the amended version in *A Defence of Poetry*, which does not distinguish between poets and other kinds of intellectuals. However, it is not often recognised that this description occurs twice in his manuscript. The first occasion is obscured in favour of the second, relating to Shelley’s description of inspiration (*Reform*, p. 993). Nevertheless, this first statement implies that the term ‘unacknowledged legislation’ underpins Shelley’s theory of intellectual progress, and his definitions of ‘form’ and ‘spirit’. Many have admired the egalitarian dimensions of this ‘unacknowledgement’. In presenting Poetry as operating beyond the sphere of contemporary ideologies, Shelley argues that such insights cannot become dictatorial. As Dawson comments, ‘poets do not influence society by imposing their ideas on it; their influence is based on the fact that their creations represent universal hopes’.<sup>68</sup> However, this interpretation limits Shelley’s ideas to what he termed the ‘spirit’ of Poetry, and overlooks his recognition that such inspiration must engage with the ‘form’ of past ‘creations’.

This reciprocity becomes evident in that Shelley does not describe the poet as merely conveying ‘unacknowledged’ insights, but defines him as a ‘legislator’. This implies that the poet cannot convey visionary insights that are ‘unacknowledged’ by the present unless they engage with past innovations, at least not with any permanent outcome. Similarly, the poet cannot ‘legislate’ or articulate contemporary developments, without engaging with the ‘spirit’ of progress: the non-temporal anticipation of futurity. This suggestion that these remarks were inspired by political economy is supported by a cancellation Shelley made prior to his famous axiom. This stated that poets ‘<are

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<sup>68</sup> Dawson, *The Unacknowledged Legislator*, p. 222.

usually men who, having an intense appreciation of other things, have an intense appreciation of their own pleasure, for the sake of which they sell, or waste themselves>' (*Reform*, pp. 992-3). This language of 'pleasure' and self-interest not only depicts economic thinkers as poets, but it also suggests that contemporary restrictions of political economy have 'wasted' its potential.

Shelley comments that 'it is impossible to read the productions of our most celebrated writers, whatever may be their system relating to thought, without being startled by the electric life which there is in their words' (*Reform*, p. 993). Shelley presents existing 'systems' as complementing progress, and this becomes evident in his comment that 'they are themselves the most sincerely astonished, for it is less their own spirit, than the spirit of their age' (*Reform*, p. 993). This astonishment in that part of the poet's nature which reveres existing principles is fundamental to the 'electric life' of his words. Shelley's admiration for 'the spirit of the age' above the poet's 'own spirit' implies that his view of lasting change depends upon an interplay between past and future. These remarks shed light upon the culmination of his historical analysis. He describes poets as 'mirrors of gigantic forms which futurity casts upon the present, which express what they conceive not' (*Reform*, p. 993). Shelley's preference for portraying such inspiration as mirroring 'forms' as opposed to the <shadows> he described originally, emphasises Poetry's dependence upon established principles. Furthermore, this description of future insights manifesting themselves as 'forms' implies that, as inspired innovations become accepted by society, vision itself will ultimately become convention. Shelley's distrust of Poetic 'shadows' is confirmed when he amends his description of England as embodying 'a desire', rather than a '<spirit>' of change' (*Reform*, p. 993). This implies that lasting change cannot be achieved by revolutionary sentiments alone.

Throughout this section, I have emphasised the historical importance of Shelley's concept of the 'form' and 'spirit' of Poetry. I have also suggested that his assessment of the past was influenced by his economic understanding. When liberated from its reactionary reputation, political economy may be viewed as shaping, as well as being shaped by, Shelley's theory of progress. However, in order to comprehend the full extent of this influence, it is important to examine his reform proposals. Shelley ends on a practical note, anticipating 'the probable, possible and desirable mode' of reform (*Reform*, p. 994). By engaging the 'probable' methods advocated by contemporary reformers with the 'possibilities' of a more visionary kind of insight, Shelley hoped to

arrive at socio-economic solutions that were most ‘desirable’ for all.

### **3. 7. The Complexities of ‘Form’ and ‘Spirit’: The Reformers and Shelley’s Dilemma**

I have suggested that Shelley approached history as a gradual recognition of the interplay between the enlightened ‘form’ and non-temporal ‘spirit’ of Poetry. This reciprocity can be seen to question those who regard his reform plans as complementing, rather than enabling, his theory of progress. James Chandler remarks that Shelley’s political proposals ‘measure a human nature itself unchanging, with a spirit of time and change’.<sup>69</sup> However, this dichotomy between contemporary views of humanity as ‘unchanging’ and the insights of this non-temporal ‘spirit’ becomes complicated by his economic understanding. I have explored the progressive outlook advocated by Smith and Hume in terms of their ability to engage contemporary views of human nature with original insights. This harmonious interplay within Enlightenment political economy shaped Shelley’s response to the present, especially his criticism of Malthusian doctrines. However, I suggested that this distinctive outlook was orientated increasingly towards Reform. Shelley’s proposals can thus be viewed as a means of awakening his contemporaries to the true nature of Poetry.

In Chapter Two, I argued that Shelley perceived a growing consensus, not only in the rhetoric of provincial and metropolitan responses to political economy, but also in the way that this inspired an enlightened view of its precepts. This becomes evident in his letter to Hunt of 1 May 1820, which recognises the need to ‘awaken and direct the imagination of the reformers’ (*Letters*, II, 191). Shelley’s conviction that the imaginative impulse within self-interest need only be revived allowed him to remain hopeful when confronting divisions amongst metropolitan and provincial reformers. Whilst he acknowledged that ‘interest’ connoted partiality in 1819, he believed that the reformers could ‘awaken’ to the sympathetic impulse within Smith’s doctrines. His concept of the ‘form’ and ‘spirit’ of Poetry was not merely an explanation for the contemporary crisis. It was also a process that he regarded as active within contemporary circumstances. For example, Shelley believed his theory to be exemplified by Cobbett’s assertion on 4 September 1816 that ‘radical principles must be

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<sup>69</sup> James K. Chandler, *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 193.

adhered to inflexibly' (*Register*, 31, 488). This concept that radicalism should become as inflexible as the tyranny it sought to destroy, suggests that contemporary distinctions between 'form' and 'spirit' were far from clear cut. As well as recognising reactionary venerations of 'form' or revolutionary appeals to the 'spirit' of progress, I argue that Shelley identified variations upon these outlooks that could be observed within the proposals of metropolitan and provincial reformers. These can be seen to complicate his historical theory.

Shelley believed that the outlook of reformers not only anticipated another historical point at which 'form' and 'spirit' were at conflict, but that these components of Poetry risked becoming lost in the confusion of jarring agendas. That Shelley's clarification of his historical theory was prompted by political economy is justifiable, when one considers that a range of economic outlooks were encompassed under the labels of metropolitan and provincial radicalism. There were tensions between Bentham, Mill and Ricardo even though they considered themselves part of the same movement. Similarly, Cobbett's objections to classical political economy was far from indicative of all provincial radicals. As my first chapter argued, Spence respected Smith's concepts of labour and commercial expansion. Even Robert Owen upheld Smith's maxim that 'the rich and poor, governors and governed, have but one interest' in the *Examiner* of 25 April 1819 (2, 259). Hogle addresses this complexity by remarking that, 'genuine transfigurations cannot happen, if an entity changes its form for a time, only to be turned back into a larger amount of what it was'.<sup>70</sup> This emphasis upon changing as opposed to reinforcing socio-economic institutions, is particularly relevant to the reformers of 1819. Notwithstanding the ideological clashes within the Reform Movement, Shelley remained optimistic about the commitment to change expressed across its factions. It was at least a more encouraging alternative to historical generalisations on 'progress' and 'decline'. Shelley's exploration of the role of political economy within the Reform Movement thus allowed him to investigate the ways in which 'form' and 'spirit' could be re-perceived, not only by those with reactionary or revolutionary outlooks, but also by those who sought a viable alternative.

In order to explore this aspect of Shelley's thought, it is important to consider his reform proposals and how these engaged with moral, political and economic conventions, rather than seeking to transform them. Shelley's proposals are summarised as an extension of the franchise based upon property possession, triennial parliaments, the abolition of sinecures and the resolution of the National Debt.

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<sup>70</sup> Hogle, *Shelley's Process*, p. 242.

However, few critics have identified his attraction to these measures in their own rights. Shelley chose the methods he did because he admired either their innovative approach to custom, the dependence of their so-called ‘visionary’ insights upon existing principles, or their recognition of this interplay within Poetry. For example, the stipulation of property possession is attributed to moderate reform, yet this measure was becoming increasingly embraced by the radical cause. Bentham believed that the ‘maximum opulence of the lower classes’ could never be achieved through the ‘mischievous pulling down’ of property rights.<sup>71</sup> Similarly, despite his vitriol towards the distress of labourers, Cobbett advocated greater equality based upon property possession. It is often overlooked that his demand for each worker to have their ‘own little garden’ was connected to extending the franchise.<sup>72</sup> Consequently, Shelley’s defence of property was not a moderate compromise, but an appreciation of its capacity to encompass more egalitarian desires.

It can be argued that the complexity of debating ‘the future’ benefited Shelley’s definition of Poetry. It was only through recognising the ways in which the historical interplay between its ‘form’ and ‘spirit’ was interpreted in 1819, that he was able to construct a viable reform programme. This awareness of a more complex view of change within the reform factions validated his view of the human perfectibility process. However, what most interested him in the final section of *A Philosophical View of Reform* was the outlook of contemporary utilitarianism. Shelley’s political proposals question those who either regard his essay as ‘a quasi-Benthamite pamphlet’ or as anticipating his ‘attack’ on utilitarianism.<sup>73</sup> By recognising the way that he ascribes the flaws in Bentham’s philosophy to its misguided definition of social change, such generalisations become unsatisfactory. Shelley’s reading of Malthus’ *Essay* inspired him to identify historical errors as deriving from imbalanced approaches to progress. However, it is his analysis of Bentham’s *Plan of Parliamentary Reform* (1817) that may have permitted his theory of Poetry to attain its most sophisticated incarnation.

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<sup>71</sup> Jeremy Bentham, *Political Economy – National Prospects or a Picture for Futurity* (1800), in Bentham Papers, University College London MSS, BENTHAM/3a/83. Bentham would later criticise property rights in his Radical Reform Bill of 1819, remarking that they ‘disqualify a majority of people’. However, this development was conditioned by his suspicion of levelling principles. See *Bentham Works*, III, 558.

<sup>72</sup> William Cobbett, quoted in Chase, p. 89.

<sup>73</sup> Iain McCalman, gen. ed., *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age: British Culture, 1776-1832* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 356.

### **3. 8. 'Radicalism Not Dangerous?': Bentham's Alternative View of 'Form' and 'Spirit'**

Before Bentham's reform proposals are addressed, it is necessary to contextualise the *Plan* within his wider intellectual background. Bentham's philosophy was formed as a response to the reactionary view of utility expressed in William Paley's *Moral and Political Philosophy* (1785). His transformation of these precepts into the doctrine of 'utilitarianism' defined morals by estimating the pleasures and pains resulting from actions, rather than along Christian lines. Shelley had admired Bentham's rejection of religious dogma that depicted pleasure as connected to sin. Responding to Paley's doctrines, he remarked: 'Good and evil are words employed to designate that state of our perceptions, resulting from the encounter of any object calculated to produce pleasure or pain'.<sup>74</sup> This emphasis upon 'perception' suggests that Shelley identified the influence of Hume, and that of the Scottish Enlightenment, upon Bentham's ideology. In this respect, Bentham may be seen to occupy an ambiguous place in the history of political economy. He was both a contemporary of Smith (with whom he corresponded) and a radical reformer during the 1810s. Therefore, his attraction to self-interest in moral philosophy and jurisprudence could be viewed less as a perpetuation of the 'form' of political economy, than as a participation within contemporary debates. Nevertheless, as early as 1776 Bentham articulated what Shelley may have regarded as an insidious distortion of his view of Poetry.

Distinguishing between existing laws and the socio-economic potential offered by utilitarianism, he remarked:

The Expositor explains to us what the law is: the Censor observes to us what it ought to be. The former is occupied in stating facts, the latter in discussing reasons. The Expositor is the citizen of a particular country, the Censor is the citizen of the world.<sup>75</sup>

Bentham believed himself to possess a 'censorial' approach to government. As a result, his assertion that utilitarianism was the ultimate legislative solution becomes

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<sup>74</sup> Shelley, *A Refutation of Deism* (1814) in *Prose*, 94-122 (p. 119).

<sup>75</sup> Jeremy Bentham, *A Fragment on Government* (1776), in *Bentham Works*, I, 442-1047 (p. 446).



complicated by its defiance of ‘facts’. His ‘citizen of the world’ may, with its revolutionary rhetoric, be regarded as compatible with Shelley’s ‘unacknowledged legislator’, in that both embrace progressive approaches to established principles. Nevertheless, Bentham collapses his view of legislation into his commitment to future developments, with his Censor observing to humanity. He deploys socio-economic precepts in order to construct a utilitarian outlook that makes the past indistinguishable from the future, in effect, with custom and vision functioning as one. As Frances Ferguson remarks, Bentham ‘replaces the self-expressiveness of Romanticism with an individuality that is not so much expressed as produced’.<sup>76</sup> In contrast, Shelley insists that reviving the progressive impulse within existing ‘productions’ enable such vision to be realised. As a result, he believed that utilitarianism could fulfil its potential only when it recognised this interplay between past and future, rather than blurring boundaries between ‘form’ and ‘spirit’. These similarities and crucial differences underpin Shelley’s attraction to Bentham’s practical measures.

Bentham’s *Plan* may be read as a development of his belief that utilitarianism could guide both contemporary politics and future developments. Bentham believed that man’s desire to satisfy his own wants could be deployed for universal benefit. He argued that governments naturally rejected despotic measures, as these ‘would be incompatible with the interests of their ease’.<sup>77</sup> This conviction that self-interest could become the foundation of an alternative legislative system led him to uphold Smith’s principles. However, Bentham’s belief that self-interest contained the potential for ‘sinister’ corruption, with ‘public men wishing to possess as many good things as possible’, led him to reject Smith’s progressive view of human nature.<sup>78</sup> He sought to systemise these observations by constructing his ‘pannomion’, or lists of the fourteen pleasures and twelve pains that he viewed as governing mankind. Notwithstanding this inflexible view of morals, Bentham believed that employing the principle of utility could reduce the dangers of ‘sinister’ impulses by encouraging ‘indirect’ as well as ‘direct’ legislation. As Stephen Engelmann suggests, ‘direct legislation coordinates the sanctions of law; indirect legislation coordinates those of the economy, culture and public opinion’.<sup>79</sup> This assertion that economic concerns can be aligned with ‘culture’ and ‘opinion’ suggests that for Bentham, as for Shelley, political economy favoured an

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<sup>76</sup> Frances Ferguson, ‘Canons, Poetics and Social Value: Jeremy Bentham and How to Do Things with People’, *Modern Language Notes*, 110 (1995), 1148-64 (p. 1164).

<sup>77</sup> Jeremy Bentham, *Plan of Parliamentary Reform*, Bentham Papers UCL MSS, BENTHAM/129/155.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, BENTHAM/129/155.

<sup>79</sup> Stephen G. Engelmann, *Imagining Interest in Political Thought: Origins of Economic Rationality* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 51.

inductive approach. Nevertheless, Bentham's argument that such insights must be coordinated, however 'indirectly', highlights an important contrast between the two.

Bentham's *Plan* reflects tensions between his scepticism towards political systems and his anxiety that the advantages of such systems should be upheld in order to establish the utilitarian moral code. This may be observed in the *Plan*'s approach to voting rights. Hogle compares Bentham's favourite axiom of this period, 'Radicalism not Dangerous', with its emphasis upon annual parliaments and universal suffrage, to Shelley's objections to these measures.<sup>80</sup> However, the reasoning behind Shelley's criticism of 'Bentham's discourses' in a letter of 5 April 1820 is often overlooked (*Letters*, II, 181). Bentham's hostility towards parliamentary corruption led him to advocate radical measures, such as the exclusion of placemen from voting in the house and insistence upon compulsory attendance for representatives (*Plan*, p. lii). However, his discussion of the franchise suggests that Shelley's objection to universal suffrage was more complex than an expression of anxiety towards revolutionary consequences. Bentham's scepticism about corrupt influences upon the voter led him to advocate 'secrecy of suffrage', which would safeguard the 'genuineness' of their 'self-formed' judgement (*Plan*, pp. lx-lxi). He believed that the electorate's interest could be swayed from its natural tendency to benefit the public good by 'a separate interest prevailing opposite to the voter's regard' (*Plan*, p. xi). In practical terms, Bentham implies intimidation or even monetary bribes. The dangers of bribery also underpin his support for annual parliaments. Whilst he insists upon 'impermanence by the recurrence of the elective process', this mutability is far removed from Shelley's support for such a measure in his 1817 pamphlets (*Plan*, p. lxix).

Shelley had believed that annual parliaments would complement the human perfectibility process in terms of reviving the enlightening impulse within legislative systems. For example, he emphasised in his *Proposal* that annual parliaments 'would enable men to cultivate those energies on which the performance of the political duties [...] depends' (p. 175). Shelley also utilised this idea of cultivating the progressive potential within existing forms of government in order to disagree with those who favoured a secret ballot. Instead, he declared 'let all things be transacted in the face of day' (*Proposal*, p. 173), a conviction that is suggestive of Shelley's reading of Bentham's reform proposals. Although Shelley does not allude to Bentham's *Plan* directly in his 1817 pamphlets, he remarks in his letters that he was reading Dumont's translation of Bentham's works as early as March 1814 (*Letters*, I, 384). It can thus be

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<sup>80</sup> Bentham, *Plan of Parliamentary Reform*, Bentham Papers, UCL MSS, BENTHAM/129/60.

speculated that Shelley was familiar with the *Plan* and its political proposals.

In contrast with Shelley's belief in the progressive potential within legislative systems, Bentham's support for annual parliaments does not share this progressive approach to politics for its own sake. It is significant that his emphasis upon annuality is justified only because corruption is less likely to take effect in a shorter period of time. This confirms that Bentham's inflexible view of interest conditions his political aims. Despite these shortcomings, Shelley may be seen as admiring the *Plan's* free-thinking outlook. He supported Bentham's campaign for female suffrage, even if he distrusted its immediate introduction. It is interesting that Bentham would later retract his feminist outlook. He conceded that imminent female suffrage would lead 'to confusion and ridicule', a statement that perhaps validates Shelley's belief that original insights must engage with progressive potential within socio-economic 'form'.<sup>81</sup> Shelley's so-called 'moderation' may thus be seen as more true to his theory of 'Poetry' than Bentham's radical propagation of a limited moral ideal.

Bentham's emphasis upon the legislative implications of utilitarianism undermined his radical aspirations. Despite his contemporary democratic preoccupations, Bentham had opposed Paine's doctrines during the 1790s. As he remarks in the *Plan*, 'the service of [existing] powers in the cause of freedom, is better than freedom itself'.<sup>82</sup> However, Bentham's objections seemed to derive as much from a permanent approach to self-interest as from the threat of sedition. The same principle that condemned parliamentary corruption and questioned class distinctions also inspired his Panopticon, the prison for dispensing utilitarian justice, as well as his criticism of the Poor Laws. Whilst Bentham believed that the economic crisis was 'remediable', he maintained that providing the poor with financial aid undermined universal happiness.<sup>83</sup> Engelmann argues that Bentham's concept of interest combines the 'economic and monistic spheres', in that his approach to the financial crisis relies upon the moral insights of his predecessors.<sup>84</sup> However, Bentham's views on Poor Law reform reveal that his views on self-interest fall short of Smith's progressive philosophy. It is interesting that Hazlitt compared Bentham to Malthus, remarking that both 'listen to nothing but facts' (*Spirit*, p. 90). Although this is a simplistic alignment, there is truth in Hazlitt's words. It is significant that Malthus supported Bentham's theory (if not his politics), remarking that

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<sup>81</sup> *Rationale on Judicial Evidence* (1825), in *Bentham Works*, vi, 200.

<sup>82</sup> Bentham Papers, UCL MSS, BENTHAM/129/63.

<sup>83</sup> *Political Economy – National Prospects of a Picture for Futurity*, Bentham Papers, UCL MSS, BENTHAM/3/83.

<sup>84</sup> Engelmann, *Imagining Interest*, p. 4.

it is impossible for ‘any person who acknowledges the principle of utility [...] to escape the conclusion that moral restraint is a strict duty’ (*Essay*, p. 225). Consequently, there is an affinity between Bentham’s adherence to an enlightening yet limited view of self-interest, and Malthus’ deployment of self-interest as denying progress altogether.

Bentham was aware of the flaws in his doctrines, as is reflected in his admission that ‘differences between the institutions to which the power of sinister influence is capable of being applied is not considerable’.<sup>85</sup> He overcame this potential for ‘sinister’ impulses by stressing that the pannonion was distinct from law. However, the permanence of utilitarian morality was later criticised by John Stuart Mill, who remarked that ‘utility is only justified when grounded upon the progressive interests of man’.<sup>86</sup> Certainly, Bentham’s insistence that human will is ‘indirectly’ regulated by self-interest is far removed from this ‘progressive’ outlook. Bentham shared Shelley’s anger that free ‘will’ should be restricted. Nevertheless, he maintained that the ‘understanding’ was only viable to be cultivated along utilitarian lines.<sup>87</sup> David Baumgardt identifies parallels between Benthamite free will and Spinoza’s *libera necessitas*, or the principle that all human actions are free or necessary.<sup>88</sup> This reading of Spinoza would have appealed to Shelley’s interest in the latter’s scepticism. However, Bentham deployed Spinoza’s principles characteristically to uphold his view of utilitarianism, rejecting the latter’s metaphysics. It is likely that in reading Dumont’s translation of Bentham’s works in March 1814, Shelley would have absorbed many utilitarian influences like Montesquieu and Helvétius, whom he cites in *A Philosophical View of Reform*. Nevertheless, it is equally characteristic of Shelley that he admired the progressive potential within such innovations, ensuring that his utilitarian outlook was very different to Bentham’s.

Shelley does not criticise Bentham directly in his essay, prompting Connell’s conclusion that ‘Benthamite philosophy was compatible with literary sensibilities’.<sup>89</sup> Nevertheless, Shelley’s view of utilitarianism rested upon accepting the role of imagination within political economy in a way that was far from ‘compatible’ with Bentham’s principles. Bentham’s commitment to practical change espoused a distrust of literature within the Reform Movement. Although utilitarians appreciated

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<sup>85</sup> *Plan of Parliamentary Reform*, Bentham Papers, UCL MSS, BENTHAM/129/66.

<sup>86</sup> John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (1859), in *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, ed. by J. M. Robson, 33 vols (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963-1991), xviii, 230-357 (p. 237).

<sup>87</sup> *Plan of Parliamentary Reform*, Bentham Papers, UCL MSS, BENTHAM/129/96.

<sup>88</sup> David Baumgardt, *Bentham and the Ethics of Today* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), p. 394.

<sup>89</sup> Connell, *Romanticism, Economics and the Question of ‘Culture’*, p. 226.

educational literature, Dawson comments that without this purpose, ‘imaginative works risked becoming immoral’.<sup>90</sup> Shelley understood that such misguided views could have a detrimental effect upon Reform. For example, on 2 January 1820 Hunt commented: ‘Mr. Bentham’s publication is the genius of a legislator. Imagination and Fancy are inconsistent with practical talents’ (*Examiner*, 3, 12). This separation of imagination from ‘practicality’ contradicts Shelley’s belief in this faculty’s possession of moral and legislative, as well as visionary powers.

Bentham did contemplate Smith’s views on imagination, defining its capacity to influence the future interests of the individual as a ‘logical fiction’. He remarks, ‘it is no otherwise than through the medium of the imagination, that pleasure or pain is capable of operating in the character of motive’.<sup>91</sup> However, he incorporates imagination into his lists of ‘pains’ and ‘pleasures’, so that its role in influencing futurity is conditioned by this restrictive view of self-interest. Bentham’s awareness of the shortcomings within utilitarian doctrines generates anxiety towards the capacities of imagination, even in terms of its role in re-configuring ideas. This becomes evident when he criticises the influence of rhetoric upon public ‘belief’. He condemns ‘speeches by which imagination is fascinated’, preferring ‘writing’ which is less subversive (*Plan*, p. cv). This suspicion that political economy had a literary as well as social role emphasises the way in which Shelley’s view of utilitarianism went beyond Bentham’s systematic maxims. As shaping the understanding was the aim of utilitarian morals, Bentham’s attempts to deploy imagination in its service reveal his awareness of its social potential. Engelmann argues that ‘Bentham posits the agency of imagination, even as he denigrates the imaginary in relation to the real’.<sup>92</sup> Shelley regarded this distrust of imagination’s role within the realities of Reform as the epitome of the shortcomings of utilitarian political economy, and would return to this theme in his criticism of utilitarian thinkers for their prejudice ‘against poetry and poets’ in *A Defence of Poetry*.<sup>93</sup>

Bentham’s fusion of the ‘form’ and ‘spirit’ of Poetry may be seen to have inspired Shelley’s most detailed validation of his historical theory. He described his essay on 26 May 1820 as ‘a standard book for the philosophical reformers, like Jeremy Bentham’s

<sup>90</sup> Dawson, *Unacknowledged Legislator*, p. 239.

<sup>91</sup> Jeremy Bentham, *Deontology, together with a Table of the Springs of Action and the Article on Utilitarianism* (1817), ed. by Amnon Goldworth (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), p. 90.

<sup>92</sup> Engelmann, *Imagining Interest*, p. 142.

<sup>93</sup> Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry* (1821) in *Major Works*, 674-701 (p. 699). All subsequent citations from this work will be from this edition and be given in parentheses, abbreviated as *Defence*, in the text. This excludes citations from the *Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts*, which will be given in footnotes.

something, but [...] perhaps more systematic' (*Letters*, II, 201). This reflects his appreciation of the 'standard' set by contemporary utilitarianism, yet also his belief that it required development into a 'system' that acknowledged the moral and literary qualities of political economy, and their role in directing the choice between reform and revolution. This becomes apparent in the final section of *A Philosophical View of Reform*.

### **3. 9. 'What is the Reform that We Desire?': 'Form', 'Spirit', and Shelley's Triumph**

Shelley begins his section on 'the future' by implying that the present crisis has compelled him to re-evaluate and thus strengthen his view of Poetry. His opening question, 'what is the Reform that we desire?' should not be regarded as a compromise of factional agendas (*Reform*, p. 1027). Instead, Shelley's emphasis upon collective 'desire' relates back to Smith's emphasis upon the sympathetic impulse within self-interest. However, its connection to 'reform' acknowledges that his concept of the reciprocity between 'form' and 'spirit' has undergone scrutiny. This may be seen when he remarks: 'Before we aspire after theoretical perfection in the amelioration of our political state, it is necessary that we possess those advantages which [...] the experience of modern times has proved that nations even under the present are susceptible' (*Reform*, p. 1027). Shelley's analysis of 'theoretical perfection' is suggestive of his engagement with Bentham's radical reform proposals. His emphasis upon existing 'advantages' implies that 'perfection' cannot be achieved by replacing corruption with utilitarian absolutes. Nevertheless, he remains optimistic that Bentham's permanent view of self-interest should become 'susceptible' to an awareness of the interplay between past and future within moral, as well as political principles. Shelley's analysis of 'modern times' can thus be viewed as signifying the way in which 'the present' is slowly progressing away from the historical errors of regarding 'form' and 'spirit' as conflicted.

The influence of Shelley's economic understanding upon the validation of his view of Poetry as both a historical process and a basis for reform becomes evident in his practical proposals. He begins an analysis of the National Debt that develops the

arguments of his section on ‘the past’ within the context of contemporary reform. Shelley’s imminent concerns are reflected in queries about whether the Debt ‘is to be paid now, if so what are the funds; or when and how is it to be paid?’ (*Reform*, p. 1029):

The National Debt [...] is only difficult to those who do not see who is the creditor and who the debtor, and who the wretched sufferers from whom they wring the taxes, which under the form of interest, is given by the former and accepted by the latter. (*Reform*, p. 1031)

This intriguing term, ‘the form of interest’ has deeper significance than its allusion to contemporary inflation. Shelley’s suggestion that this ‘form’ is ‘given’ by the alliance between landowners and public creditors in 1819 signifies their restriction of the moral as well as financial connotations of ‘interest’. This becomes evident when he presents the accruing interest on the Debt as oppressing ‘those whose scope in society has a plebeian and intelligible utility’ (*Reform*, p. 1032). His insistence that the labouring classes can be socially useful through inspiring the higher orders to recognise the sympathetic tendency within their own interests questions the arguments of contemporary utilitarianism. Nevertheless, Shelley asserts that the principle of ‘utility’ can complement perpetual social development. By reassessing its inflexible interpretation of moral and monetary interest, it can redefine its approach to progress and its conclusions of class conflict.

Shelley’s conviction of the enlightening potential within self-interest becomes linked to his defence of property, which he defines in intellectual as well as material terms. He implies that the inspiration usually associated with literary works, the non-temporal ‘spirit’ which defines his reputation as a poet, is a capacity of imagination that political economists must acknowledge. As I argued in Chapter One, Smith defined ‘unproductive’ labour as being unrelated to the economic realm. Notably, this included the productions of literary men. In contrast, Shelley remarks ‘if the honourable exertion of [our] imperial faculties had been the criterion of the possession of property [...] Shakespeare or Milton would be the wealthiest proprietors in England’ (*Reform*, p. 1035). Shelley’s alignment of ‘property’ with literary genius suggests that both economic and artistic innovations can be included within his definition of Poetry, as each depends upon the continual interplay between ‘form’ and ‘spirit’. He suggests that Shakespeare and Milton possess a legitimate right to property due to their ability to

combine existing intellectual ‘faculties’ with their own ‘honourable exertion’. Shelley’s citation of ‘Milton’ signifies his recognition that certain predecessors had begun to identify the compatibility between literary and economic thought. Nevertheless, his depiction of such writers as ‘wealthy proprietors’ goes beyond Milton’s economic outlook. Rather than suggesting that political economy and literature could benefit one another, Shelley regarded the two increasingly as different strands of the same enlightening process.

Recognising that this visionary role of imagination within political economy requires further clarification, Shelley abandons this train of thought momentarily. This perhaps reflects that his assessment of the present crisis necessitated a revived understanding of ‘form’ before the full extent of his argument could be understood. Shelley’s aspiration of a union, rather than a reconciliation of interests, may be observed in the rhetorical techniques he adopts in relation to ‘just’ and ‘unjust’ property possession. He begins in the scathing tone of Cobbett’s *Register*, stating that ‘illegitimate’ gain is ‘founded on a violation of all that to which [property] owes its sacredness’ (*Reform*, p. 1036). However, Shelley refers to this corruption as ‘a rallying point to the ministers of tyranny, having the property of a snow ball, gathering as it rolls, and rolling until it bursts’ (*Reform*, p. 1036). Shelley may have encountered this metaphor in Bentham’s discussion of voting corruption, which he described as ‘rolling like an avalanche, overwhelming as it rolls the settled population of electoral districts’ (*Plan*, pp. xcvi-vii). Such similarities reinforce Shelley’s affinity with Bentham’s scepticism towards reactionary views of population. This is evident in his insistence that Malthus’ justification of the *status quo* will inevitably ‘burst’ once the people become aware of its economic potential. However, Shelley’s dissection of ‘tyranny’ as the restriction of ‘form’, distinguishes his metaphor from that of Bentham. Bentham describes an ‘overwhelmed’ society that can only be redeemed by deploying self-interest for utilitarian ends. In contrast, Shelley’s snow ball implodes from within, implying that self-interest already contains a progressive impulse. This imagery illuminates Shelley’s belief that both provincial and metropolitan reformers must go beyond contemporary opinion in order to achieve a higher comprehension of social progress.

Shelley begins a new section entitled ‘what is meant by a Reform of parliament?’ (*Reform*, p. 1038). Situating his historical theory within a practical context, he questions Bentham’s demands for universal suffrage:



If England were a Republic [...] if there were no King who is the rallying point of those whose tendency is to confer power at the expense of the nation, then advocates of universal suffrage have reasoned correctly that no individual can be denied a direct share in government. (*Reform*, p. 1039)

Shelley identifies the irony of Bentham's analysis of political corruption, which is based upon a view of morality that serves to regulate society against the selfish 'tendency'. His recommendation of universal suffrage could only flourish, Shelley suggests, within an ideal society. However, Bentham's fusion of 'form' and 'spirit' could never shape contemporary corruption into such a civilisation. Although Shelley believed that universal suffrage could be possible, he insists that this must be conditioned by the progressive impulse within moral and political precepts.

It can be argued that Shelley's essay confirms his admiration for Bentham's *Plan*. He comments 'a soldier is taught obedience; his will is no longer the most sacred prerogative of man, guided by his own judgement' (*Reform*, p. 1041). This may be read as engaging with Bentham's fury that tyrants should attempt to influence individual will directly. However, despite this admiration for Bentham's 'self-formed will', Shelley could never accept the latter's view that human 'understanding' must be shaped by utilitarian morality.<sup>94</sup> This theme is expanded in his commencement of a section entitled 'probable means' (*Reform*, p. 1042). His discussion of these 'means' is aimed at utilitarianism because he believed it to be the mode of reform that had the greatest chance of success. Shelley insists, 'the grand principle of reform is the natural equality of men with relation to their rights [...] equality in possession is a moral rather than a political truth, and cannot without mischief, inflexibly secure' (*Reform*, p. 1043). This implies that political legislation cannot accommodate 'moral' insights with the immediacy Bentham suggests, because morality is not intrinsically inflexible. As a result, Shelley predicts that Bentham's principles will result only in the 'mischief' associated with a revival of the 'spirit' of Poetry, distorted by utilitarianism. Although he diverges from Bentham's *Plan* by excluding 'women' from the vote, it is significant

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<sup>94</sup> This focus upon will and intellectual progress can be seen as highlighting parallels between Bentham and Godwin. Godwin discussed theories of utility at length in the 1798 edition of *Political Justice*, but distanced himself from Bentham's inflexible view of self-interest. Although they shared many acquaintances, there is little recorded evidence that they ever met or corresponded. F. Rosen has provided an interesting study of the relationship between Godwin and Bentham, 'Utilitarianism and Justice: A Note on Bentham and Godwin', *Enlightenment and Dissent*, 4 (1985), 47-52. Rosen remarks that Godwin sent Bentham a copy of his *Of Population* (1820), and that Bentham mentions Godwin fleetingly in his *Book of Fallacies* (1824).

that he cancels ‘<servants>’ as perhaps misrepresenting his eventual egalitarian aims (*Reform*, pp. 1045-6). Shelley desired a more radical society than one ruled by Bentham’s moral and legislative code. Consequently, he regarded ‘Mr. Bentham’s immature admission of females to the right of suffrage’ as complementary to an alternative system, rather than a measure that would enable existing institutions to inspire progress (*Reform*, p. 1046).

These misgivings about utilitarianism develop as Shelley discusses his objections to Bentham’s secret ballot:

Voting by ballot [...] withdraws the elector from the regard of his neighbours, and permits him to conceal the motives of his vote, which if concealed cannot but be dishonourable, when if he had known that he had to render a public account of his conduct, would never have permitted them to guide him. (*Reform*, p. 1047)

Shelley asserts that the individual, rather than Bentham’s overarching moral code, exercises power over his own ‘motives’. Furthermore, he emphasises that this liberated will is complemented by a ‘public account’, as this allows individuals to identify that the capacity for moral refinement lies within themselves. The catalyst for such development is this collective ‘regard’, which revives the progressive impulse within self-interest by encouraging individuals across all social classes to identify with others. Shelley explains:

The elector and elected ought to meet one another face to face [...] There ought to be the common sympathy of their excitements of a popular assembly [...] the imagination would be strongly excited, and sentiments be awakened, which would give the vitality of that republican boldness of censuring and judging one another. (*Reform*, p. 1047)

This emphasis upon civic unity parallels Smith’s view of the dynamic ‘impulse’ awakened in self-interest by imaginative ‘sympathy’. Nevertheless, Shelley insists that such qualities would also ‘awaken’ other ‘sentiments’, which would ‘excite’ the ‘vitality’ to inspire a more altruistic and egalitarian society. His reference to ‘censuring

and judging' recalls Bentham's valuation of the sceptical 'censor' above the deductive 'expositor'. However, he implies that these qualities belong to all men, as opposed to the latter's utilitarian legislator.

Although the contempt for 'social forms' expressed by many provincial radicals is imperfect, Shelley emphasises that, in contrast to Bentham's doctrines, it acknowledges that vision cannot be regulated:

Two years ago it might still have been possible to have commenced a gradual system. Now [...] the people have become more universally aware of the true sources of their misery. It is possible that the period of conciliation is past, and that passions will be too little under discipline to allow them to wait the gradual and certain operation of reform. (*Reform*, pp. 1048-9)

This emphasis upon 'two years' previously attests to Shelley's re-evaluation of his reform plans. Despite the more radical proposals of his 1817 pamphlets, he recognises that socio-economic distress had not reached the necessary crisis point that would compel society to choose between tyranny, revolution and reform. This is evident when he emphasises a 'more universal' awareness of 'the true sources' of misery by 1819. Such understanding implies that the people recognise that the present crisis is the product of reactionary veneration for custom. Shelley concedes that this 'awareness' could lead to revolutionary consequences. However, rather than fearing such 'passions', Shelley implies that they require merely the 'discipline' to recognise their dependence upon political and moral conventions. This validates his belief that neither 'form' nor 'spirit' can function separately as a viable ideology. The only certainty is this 'gradual' progress towards a universal recognition of their interplay.

Shelley's engagement with a range of reform agendas may be observed in the kind of rebellion he advocates. He advises that 'if tyrants command troops to cut [the people] down, [the reformer] will exhort them to expect, without resistance, the onset of the cavalry' (*Reform*, p. 1054). The allusions to Peterloo are as marked here as they are in *The Mask of Anarchy*. Nevertheless, it can be argued that these prose statements are more reflective of Shelley's theory of Poetry than the prophetic tone of his poem, whose

victorious 'Shape' could be misinterpreted as abstract.<sup>95</sup> His view of 'tyrants' emphasises his idea that violence can only be stopped by re-activating imaginative sympathy within the self-interest of those who supported tyranny. He comments:

Soldiers are men, and it is not to be believed that they would massacre an unresisting multitude bearing [...] a resolution to perish, rather than abandon the assertion of their rights. In the confusion of flight, the soldier is flattered by an apprehension of his magnanimity in incurring [danger]. But this unexpected reception would throw him back upon a recollection of the true nature of the measures of which he was made the instrument. (*Reform*, pp. 1054-5)

Shelley may be seen to engage with Bentham's belief that 'military habits' inspire 'confusion' within the individual, resulting in 'sinister' desires (*Plan*, p. cxvii). However, he insists that, if confronted with passive resistance, the 'true nature' of the soldier's interest would become known to him. Its sympathetic qualities would be revived through a recognition of this impulse within others.

This emphasis upon identification with others permeates Shelley's prose style. Reiman comments that Shelley rarely resorts to personal attacks upon his adversaries, and suggests that the few vitriolic remarks about Malthus would have been cancelled prior to publication.<sup>96</sup> It can even be argued that his interest in Malthusian methodology explains such reticence. Shelley's toleration is implied in his preference for 'active citizenry' over 'passive subjects' (*Reform*, p. 1056). Once again, he fuses revolutionary rhetoric with his view of activity as the recognition that lasting change can only be achieved by engaging with convention. Shelley's discussion of passivity functions similarly, as he reiterates his conviction that the restriction of 'form' is not limited to reactionary outlooks. He describes passivity as something that 'destroy[s] all the differences among men' (*Reform*, p. 1056). Shelley believed that such 'differences' were integral to enabling self-interest to fulfil its moral and visionary potential. These ideas may thus be viewed as a powerful criticism of utilitarianism, whose doctrines transform individuals into 'subjects' who are dictated to, rather than independent thinkers.

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<sup>95</sup> Shelley, *The Mask of Anarchy* (1819), in *Major Works*, 400-411 (p. 403), l. 110.

<sup>96</sup> Reiman, in *Shelley and His Circle*, vi, 1055.

Shelley's admiration of 'popular leaders' and metropolitan campaigners is evident in his engagement with a range of propaganda techniques (*Reform*, p. 1058). For example, he admires the 'petitions' adopted by John Cartwright's Society for Constitutional Information, but insists that this tactic should be extended to encompass universal preoccupations. Contrary to the highbrow rhetoric of metropolitan measures, Shelley insists that such documents should be 'couched in the actual language of the petitioners'. Furthermore, he replaces the description of 'literary men' with a more wide-ranging account of 'poets, philosophers and artists' (*Reform*, p. 1059). This upholds my argument that to define Shelley in restrictive aesthetic terms is to misinterpret his view of Poetry. That specific writers were chosen for their sophisticated understanding of intellectual progress is confirmed when Shelley lists potential authors of 'memorials', including Godwin and Bentham (*Reform*, p. 1060).

Reiman speculates that Shelley does not include Cobbett in his list of petitioners, due to his fear of 'incendiary influences'.<sup>97</sup> However, this becomes complicated when Shelley suggests that such memorials would 'strike, like the meridian sun, all but the eagles who dared to gaze upon its beam' (*Reform*, p. 1060). Indeed, this rhetoric is suggestive of Spence's use of millenarian allegory in his periodical of 1795, *The Meridian Sun of Liberty*. Shelley's attraction to a range of reform writing convinced him that future generations would become awakened to the error of imbalanced approaches to Poetry. Present advances would be 'like a voice from beyond the dead of those who will live in the memories of men when they must be forgotten; it would be Eternity warning Time' (*Reform*, pp. 1061-2). Shelley's emphasis upon that which 'must be forgotten' recalls his treatment of historical occurrences in which past precepts, rather than recognising the enlightening impulse that inspired them, are upheld. Rather than suggesting that history is reflective of an overarching visionary process, Shelley makes the point that, not only does the future depend upon the past, but that this past is testament to earlier engagements with non-temporal insights. Eternity thus 'warns' Time by revealing the power within Time itself.

*A Philosophical View of Reform* was never completed. However at this point in the essay, Shelley begins to incorporate the question of reform within his wider historical theory. He comments, 'when the people have obtained the victory over their oppressors, there will remain the great task of accommodating all that can be preserved of antient forms, with the improvements of a more enlightened age' (*Reform*, pp. 1064-5). This sense of perpetual 'improvement' upholds the interplay within Poetry, with its

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid, vi, 1060.

existing ‘forms’ ‘accommodating’ its ‘more enlightened’ ‘spirit’. Shelley demonstrates the way in which his analysis of contemporary proposals enabled him to develop his convictions about this reciprocal process. He had assessed the moral, financial, and legislative contributions of political economy to the question of reform. He now anticipates the aftermath of such a ‘victory’. The manuscript draft ends with a page of chaotic calculations, as if expressing the notion that political economy had a greater social potential than Bentham’s systemised attitude to progress. However, Shelley concludes by expressing a positive attitude to utilitarianism. He summarises his suspicion of revenge as inspiring its own tyranny in a new heading, ‘On the Punishment of Death’ (*Reform*, p. 1066). There are parallels here with Bentham’s views on execution, which he insisted should never be inflicted ‘for vindictive satisfaction’.<sup>98</sup> It is significant that Shelley wrote a fragment of the same title between winter 1819 and spring 1820.<sup>99</sup> Consequently, I argue that *A Philosophical View* would have concluded with a detailed analysis of contemporary utilitarianism. As it happened, such an undertaking would only become realised over a year later, in *A Defence of Poetry*.

### **3. 10. Shelley and ‘the Existing Forms of Social Order’**

*A Philosophical View of Reform* may be viewed as Shelley’s most sophisticated engagement with contemporary political economy. He had identified its social and stylistic potential in his earliest prose, and became receptive to the idea that its literary power could bring about a united Reform Movement in the essays he wrote during his last years in England. However by 1819, the year in which socio-economic hardship was at its crisis point, he began to formulate a response to political economy that was distinctively his own. The prose and letters Shelley wrote prior to *A Philosophical View of Reform* reflect his increasing understanding of aesthetics and political economy as deriving from the same intellectual process, which he terms ‘Poetry’. I argue that his pairing of the terms ‘form’ and ‘spirit’ in the Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, can be

<sup>98</sup> Introduction to *The Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1789) in *Bentham Works*, I, 693-5 (p. 693).

<sup>99</sup> Carlene Adamson argues that Shelley’s fragment, ‘On the Punishment of Death’, can be seen as ‘the beginning of a Chapter IV for *A Philosophical View of Reform*’. She agrees that the essay would have ended on utilitarian themes, and draws attention to the fragment’s allusions to Beccaria, one of Bentham’s major sources. Adamson views this evidence as contradicting earlier datings of the fragment, which range from 1813-14 (Clark, *Shelley’s Prose*, p. 154) to 1817 (Cameron, *Shelley: The Golden Years*, p. 157). Cameron argues that Shelley copied out this fragment into the notebook of *A Philosophical View of Reform*, but Shelley’s arguments suggest that it was contemporary to the essay. See Carlene A. Adamson, ed., a facsimile of Bodleian Shelley MS e. 8; see *BSM* VI, 1-3.

read as an attempt to define a relationship between convention and vision. Furthermore, I suggest that the interplay between ‘form’ as relating to the past, and ‘spirit’ as relating to the future, can be read as underpinning Shelley’s inclusive definition of Poetry. Finally, his essay *On Life* confirms his conviction that political economy not only parallels free-thinking philosophy, but also embodies this interplay between past and future. The influence of Shelley’s economic outlook may be observed in the essay’s re-interpretation of sceptical methodology as something that acts within, rather than upon custom. This asserts that egalitarian desires can only be realised by reviving the progressive impulse within social, economic and aesthetic conventions.

Shelley’s discussion of the reciprocity between ‘form’ and ‘spirit’ becomes the focus of *A Philosophical View of Reform*. He portrays the Reform Movement as the central point from which his analysis of history and proposals for change derive. Consequently, his historical ‘introduction’ can be more fully appreciated by engaging with his assessment of the reactionary present. Having identified the role of imaginative sympathy within Smith’s principles, Shelley constructs a convincing argument against Malthusian views of human nature. He engages with Malthus’ rhetorical and mathematical techniques with a lateral-mindedness that occasionally approaches admiration. However, Shelley’s contempt for the social consequences brought about by Malthus’ perpetuation of Smith’s doctrines caused frustration that such an intellect could only deny progress. Instead, he believed that the contemporary crisis contained the power to revive the enlightened impulse within the ‘form’ of political economy and engage these insights with the ‘spirit’ of progress.

Shelley transformed his misgivings about this restriction of socio-economic ‘form’ into a sophisticated reading of history. He suggested that ‘tyranny’ and ‘liberty’ should be regarded as periods in which the dynamic impulse within convention is suppressed or custom is abandoned in favour of enacting revolutionary visions. Shelley attributed historical failures to the error of perceiving ‘form’ and ‘spirit’ as conflicted. He refused to dismiss so-called ‘tyrannical’ eras as unenlightened, or uphold periods of radical change as wholly beneficial. Having cultivated this distinctive historical theory, Shelley experienced a crisis in his contemporary outlook. I suggested that the varied responses to the question of Reform amongst metropolitan and provincial factions both complicated and threatened to undermine his desire to heal political divides. Shelley’s despondency is reflected in a letter to Ollier of 15 December 1819. He remarked, ‘now I see the passion of party will postpone the great struggle, I shall not trouble myself to finish [*A Philosophical View of Reform*]’ (*Letters*, II, 164). However, following the

revival of Reform in early 1820, Shelley returned to his essay with a view to publishing it by May.

This rejuvenated enthusiasm may be attributed to Shelley's engagement with various reform factions in his section on 'the future'. His assessment of utilitarianism in particular, allowed him to explore the way that contemporary choices would condition the shape Reform would take. Shelley distrusted Bentham's deployment of 'moral' and 'political' institutions for his own ends. Nevertheless, his study of utilitarianism inspired ideas on self-interest, sympathy, and their roles in the social sphere. These observations allowed him to be hopeful that the wide-ranging outlooks within the Reform Movement could dispel the 'inevitability' of revolution. Shelley's optimism is reflected in comments written to Mary after he had completed drafts of *A Philosophical View of Reform* by July 1820. He remarked: 'I neither believe that, nor do I fear the consequences will be so immediately destructive to the existing forms of social order' (*Letters*, II, 223). This suggests that his conviction of the progressive impulse within such 'forms' was both validated and developed by his analysis of contemporary political economy. It is probable that Shelley interpreted news from England that the revolutionary threat had abated, as a vindication of his belief in the dynamic potential of 'the present'. He aspired to develop these views on intellectual progress, beginning *A Defence of Poetry* in February 1821. In the final chapter, I present the *Defence* as his most detailed exploration of utilitarianism. Shelley was inspired by, and suspicious of Bentham's approach to the present. He now turns his attention to the younger utilitarians, James Mill and David Ricardo, in order to assess their role in constructing the future.



## **Chapter Four: Shelley and Utilitarianism in *A Defence of Poetry***

### **4. 1. Shelley, Utilitarianism and Looking Beyond *A Philosophical View of Reform***

Before Shelley's response to utilitarianism in *A Defence of Poetry* (1821) can be explored, it is important to summarise the developments in his economic outlook that I have outlined in the previous chapter. Only by doing so can the significance of utilitarian doctrines to Shelley's inclusive definition of 'Poetry' and his need to 'defend' such an outlook, be understood. I have argued that Shelley's attraction to Smith's alignment of political economy with moral philosophy can be seen to have shaped his views on the literary and social qualities of political economy, and their potential to bring about a united Reform Movement. However, his optimistic approach to the discipline was challenged by the ways in which Smith's principles were interpreted in 1819. Shelley was interested in why the dynamic, sympathetic qualities of Smithian doctrines were appropriated by oppressive government policies. In the Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, I proposed Shelley differentiated between the enlightening impulse within past innovations and the way in which this was misinterpreted as a justification of social, literary and economic laws. In contrast with such permanency, he termed these established doctrines the historical 'form' of a discipline. Shelley emphasised that although past insights were products of a specific time period, they contained an intrinsically progressive quality that defied intellectual stagnation. However, I drew attention to the way that Shelley portrays this dynamic quality within existing institutions in the Preface as also subject to a different kind of inspiration.

He suggests that intellectuals convey insights that build upon established principles, but are derived from beyond contemporary understanding. Shelley terms this inspiration the 'spirit' of Poetry, and distinguishes it from the 'form' of past innovations by emphasising that it is not restricted to historical periods. This description of the interplay between 'form' and 'spirit' within 'Poetry' may be seen to underpin Shelley's analysis of socio-economic corruption in *A Philosophical View of Reform*. For example, I have argued that he was frustrated by Malthus's belief that Smith's view of self-interest justified a pessimistic view of natural law. This can be seen from a Shelleyan perspective as seeking to advance the 'form' of Smithian political economy whilst failing to identify its capacity to engage with further original insights.

Nevertheless, I suggested that during 1819 Shelley began to understand that the agendas of reformers were more complex than his view of history as a series of episodes that either perpetuated past innovations or discarded them in favour of enacting visionary designs.

Central to this realisation is his interest in contemporary utilitarianism. Although these doctrines were committed to economic and political reform, they reflected an approach to Smith's precepts that was every bit as inflexible as Malthusian natural law. I have argued that the final section of *A Philosophical View* explores Shelley's reaction to Bentham's 'pannomion', a moral code that acted to uphold a universal system of legislation. This innovation rejected the imaginative, sympathetic impulse within Smithian self-interest. Shelley may be read as recognising the irony in Bentham's dismissal of imagination in light of the latter's idolisation of Smith's doctrines. However, what may have unnerved him most was Bentham's deployment of Smith's doctrines in order to justify his original, yet inflexible theory of morals. I have suggested that Shelley perceived Bentham's doctrines as distorting his theory of Poetry. These principles may be seen to fuse the 'form' established by Smith's economic doctrines with the 'spirit' of Bentham's innovations. What resulted was not the interplay between past and future that Shelley envisaged as crucial to Reform, but an unsettling tension between progress and oppression.

It was this contradiction in Bentham's proposals that, I argue, led Shelley to comment upon the flaws of utilitarian political economy. Nevertheless, his attraction to Bentham's doctrines ensured that *A Philosophical View* was only the beginning of his analysis of contemporary utilitarianism. This chapter thus explores the ways in which Shelley sought to develop his response to Bentham's doctrines into a detailed assessment of the wide-ranging viewpoints that contributed to utilitarian economics. Beginning with an overview of Shelley's inspiration for *A Defence of Poetry*, I suggest that this essay can be read as his most sustained commentary upon contemporary utilitarianism. By 1821, Shelley began to reassess his view of Bentham's doctrines in relation to his theory of Poetry. Rather than condemning the latter's innovations, he believed increasingly that a more refined approach to utilitarianism could extend the ways in which Poetry itself could be defined.

#### **4. 2. 'Reason gains the Ascendancy over Imagination': Shelley, Peacock and Constructing the *Defence***

As the revolutionary threat abated in England following the failure of the Cato Street Conspiracy in February 1820, reformers began cautiously to revive their campaigns.<sup>1</sup> James Chandler suggests that Shelley grew despondent about the ever-deepening divisions between metropolitan and provincial factions, as well as the dominant outlook of utilitarian radicals. As a result, he suggests that Shelley abandoned his commitment to contemporary Reform in favour of embarking upon an aesthetic treatise that condemned utilitarianism and its 'analyses of probable conduct in systematically arrayed circumstances'.<sup>2</sup> Chandler presents Shelley as a figure defeated by Bentham's 'systematic' principles. However in this section, I argue that he drew significantly upon utilitarian doctrines in his desire to justify the inclusive definition of 'Poetry' he was reaching towards in his final major essays. This outlook should not be seen as separate from what Chandler calls Shelley's 'aesthetic' concerns. Instead, it emphasises that what may be read as the interplay between past principles and original insights in Shelley's work is as integral to economic innovations as it is to literary ones.

In order to justify this reading, it is important to explore the way that Shelley's attitude towards utilitarianism evolved between his completion of drafts of *A Philosophical View of Reform*, which may tentatively be dated to May 1820, and his beginning of the *Defence* probably in late January 1821. *A Philosophical View* may be regarded as an early model for the *Defence*. This can be observed in Shelley's repetition of phrases and whole paragraphs from this essay. However, while *A Philosophical View* is, in its own right, Shelley's most sustained response to past approaches to political economy, it may also be read as an introduction to his thoughts on contemporary utilitarianism. In Chapter Three, I argued that the manuscript of *A Philosophical View* concluded with fragmentary observations on mathematics and jurisprudence. This implies that Shelley intended to extend his observations on Bentham's principles into a sophisticated analysis of utilitarian doctrines. However, I suggested that the essay's focus upon the specific context of 1819 convinced him that a

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<sup>1</sup> On 23 February 1820, government officials uncovered an attempt to assassinate the Prime Minister and British cabinet ministers. This had been led by members of the Spencean Philanthropists, the successors of Thomas Spence who can be seen as distorting the latter's economic principles for seditious purposes. They were apprehended at Cato Street in London, hence the name of the plot.

<sup>2</sup> Chandler, *England in 1819*, pp. 232-3.

detailed study of utilitarianism required a more methodical format. It is thus important to outline briefly the process Shelley adopted when drafting the *Defence*. This illuminates not only the compositional history of the essay, but also the pivotal role Shelley's attraction to utilitarian doctrines played in it.

The extant manuscript witnesses suggest three stages in the composition of the *Defence*. The first comprises Shelley's rough draft in Bodleian MS. Shelley d. 1, which E. B. Murray regards as his 'first fully articulated, if still rough-hewn, attempt at responding to the utilitarian criticism of poets and poetry'. Following this early 'attempt' comes Shelley's intermediate draft in Bodleian MS. Shelley adds. e. 20 and Bodleian MS. Shelley adds. c. 4, which Murray describes as 'based upon' the d. 1 draft.<sup>3</sup> Thirdly, the press copy by Mary Shelley made from adds. e. 20 and c. 4 is to be found in Bodleian MS. Shelley e. 6 and MS. Shelley adds. d. 8, the first of which contains corrections by Shelley. It was this press copy that Shelley sent to Ollier for publication. However, the *Defence* remained unpublished until Mary Shelley's 1840 edition of Shelley's poetry. My close reading of the *Defence* in this chapter is based primarily upon the 2003 edition of the *Defence* edited by Zachary Leader and Michael O' Neill, which takes as its copy-text Bodleian MS. Shelley e. 6, but also makes reference to his two earlier drafts. I also refer to the facsimile editions of the manuscripts in the *Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts* series, and to the manuscript of Bodleian MS. Shelley adds. e. 20 and c. 4. I argue that these different stages of Shelley's drafting of the *Defence* imply his receptiveness to utilitarian thought.

After Shelley had finished all the drafting of the *Defence*, he began a formal introduction to the essay. He included this in a letter of early March 1821 to Ollier, in the latter's role as the editor of the *Literary Miscellany*. Shelley intended the introduction to summarise his plans for the themes and structure of the essay, which he envisaged being comprised of three 'parts' (*Letters*, II, 275). The first would be a defence of the function of imaginative literature in society, and the second and third discussions of contemporary poetry. However, only the first part was written and only the first two parts, on the 'elements and principles' of Poetry and 'application of these principles to the present', were mentioned in Shelley's essay (*Defence*, p. 700). He only completed three short drafts of this introduction, on the subjects of historical 'stages' and the relationship between 'reason' and 'imagination' (*Letters*, II, 272-3). This fragmentary approach implies Shelley's awareness that these ideas required more detailed exposition. Abandoning the introduction, he sent his press-copy of the *Defence*

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<sup>3</sup> E. B. Murray, ed., a facsimile of Bodleian Shelley MS. d. 1; see *BSM* IV, Part I, p. xx.

to Ollier on 20 March 1821.

Having outlined Shelley's approach to the drafting of the *Defence*, it is necessary to consider why he was inspired to extend the response to utilitarian theories he had begun in *A Philosophical View*. I have argued that the influence of economic doctrines upon Shelley's theory of 'Poetry' raises questions about Chandler's reading of the *Defence* as an anti-utilitarian polemic. Nevertheless, it is important to establish why such interpretations of Shelley's hostility towards utilitarianism exist. The answer to this question lies in the latter's understanding of the influence of Bentham's doctrines in England. This awareness became heightened when Shelley received the latest satirical essay written by his friend Thomas Love Peacock – *The Four Ages of Poetry* (1820). Shelley first read Peacock's essay in late January 1821 in his publisher's new periodical, *Ollier's Literary Miscellany in Prose and Verse*. In a letter of 20 January, he described *The Four Ages* to Ollier as 'very clever' but 'very false' (*Letters*, II, 258). These remarks imply that Shelley's amusement at Peacock's wit was tempered by a determination to respond to the latter's statements on the relationship between poetry and utility. It is unclear when exactly he began to draft the *Defence*. Murray draws attention to a letter Shelley wrote on the same day to Vincent Novello, in which he remarks that illness has rendered him 'inadequate to the fatigue of writing' (*Letters*, II, 259). Murray thus concludes that it is likely he did not begin work on the *Defence* until a few days later.<sup>4</sup> However, as I suggested in Chapter Three, the debate between Shelley and Peacock on the relationship between poetry and 'political science' had been developing for many years (*Letters*, II, 71). It is thus necessary to outline briefly Peacock's achievements as both a poet and utilitarian in order to understand why Shelley regarded his essay to be both inspired and flawed.

By 1821 an employee at the East India Company under its Assistant Examiner James Mill, Peacock was receptive to utilitarian arguments against the social 'usefulness' of non-didactic literature. As a result, he was soon introduced to Bentham's Westminster circle and socialised frequently with its members, including David Ricardo and later, John Stuart Mill.<sup>5</sup> However, Peacock's skills as a classicist and prolific writer of novels and verse, render his opinions on literature complex. David Bromwich summarises Peacock's outlook:

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<sup>4</sup> E. B. Murray, ed., a facsimile of Bodleian Shelley MS. d. 1. See *BSM* IV, Part I, p. xxi.

<sup>5</sup> Nicholas A. Joukovsky, 'Peacock, Thomas Love (1785–1866)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/21681>> [accessed 16 May 2012].

Peacock's sympathies are so generous that one suspects him of having been a member of every group he satirized. It would, in fact, be fair to call him, as it would be fair to call no other writer of the period, at once a romantic and a utilitarian.<sup>6</sup>

These observations suggest that Peacock contemplated the relation of poetry to utility from the standpoint of someone who was receptive to both. Bromwich's reading is perceptive when one considers that Peacock combines ridicule towards what he viewed as the stagnation of contemporary literature with the implication that a utilitarian outlook could improve its shortcomings. The suggestion that Peacock mobilised utility as a weapon against poetry can therefore be seen as overly simplistic, in terms of his convictions about the possibilities of poetry itself.

This 'sympathetic' approach to poetry explains Bromwich's reading, which suggests that for Peacock, artificiality and retrogression were 'the vices of poetry and not its necessary attributes'.<sup>7</sup> Such a belief that poetry could attain more worthy 'attributes' than contemporary attitudes towards it allowed reveals tension between Peacock's identity as a writer of literature and as an admirer of utilitarian ideology. This led him to express these ideas in a satirical tone that contained an underlying seriousness. However, Bromwich's belief that 'no other writer' of this period shared this attraction to both poetry and utilitarian ideology is one that this chapter seeks to question. I suggest that it was in a similar vein that Shelley responded to Peacock's opinions about the utility of contemporary literature in his *Defence*. Shelley's essay certainly acknowledges the light-hearted aspects of Peacock's work. Nevertheless, I argue that reading *The Four Ages* compelled him both to justify and extend his definition of 'Poetry' and the role of utilitarian thinking within it. In a letter of 15 February 1821 Shelley describes the 'sacred rage' that inspired him to respond to Peacock's belief that in the progress of society, 'reason gains the ascendancy over imagination' (*Letters*, II, 261).<sup>8</sup> However, the following section argues that the difference between Shelley 'the poet' and Peacock 'the utilitarian' was not their respective celebration and dismissal of

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<sup>6</sup> David Bromwich, ed., *Romantic Critical Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 184.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 187.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Love Peacock, *The Four Ages of Poetry* (1821), in *The Halliford Edition of the Works of Thomas Love Peacock*, ed. by H. F. B. Brett-Smith and C. E. Jones, 10 vols (London: Constable and Co., 1924-34), VIII, 3-25 (p. 11). All subsequent citations from this work will be from this edition and will be given in parentheses, abbreviated as *Four Ages*, in the text.

poetry, but their belief in what could be defined as poetry itself.

### **4. 3. Having ‘attained the Point which it cannot Pass’: Shelley and *The Four Ages of Poetry***

As was mentioned earlier, Peacock was distinctive amongst his utilitarian peers for his attempts to forge a career as a poet. His first volume, *Palmyra, and other Poems* had been published in 1806 followed by some ventures into Arthurian romance and Greek verse. However, following his introduction to Shelley in 1812 by Thomas Hookham, he soon became the latter’s confidant. The pair encouraged and commented on each other’s work in a way that, according to Nicholas Joukovsky, ‘mutually benefited both’. Under Shelley’s influence, Peacock became interested in poetry as a political medium, and Shelley read with interest the two cantos Peacock had drafted of a planned twelve-book epic named *Ahrimanes* when writing *Laon and Cythna* (1817).<sup>9</sup> Peacock’s work as a satirist is better known and Shelley responded enthusiastically to his novels, noting that he was re-reading *Headlong Hall* and *Melincourt* in July 1820 (*Letters*, II, 214). He enjoyed especially *Nightmare Abbey* (1818), in which the character of Scythrop, based upon himself, was mercilessly mocked.<sup>10</sup> Shelley can thus be viewed as absorbing Peacock’s writing throughout his time in Italy. However, its influence would become particularly marked in the period prior to the composition of his *Defence*.

As well as original poetry and prose, Peacock had written critical essays. These related to poetry’s capacity to enable intellectual receptiveness to what he viewed as more ‘useful’ knowledge. He comments in his ‘Essay on Fashionable Literature’ that ‘poetry precedes philosophy, but true poetry prepares its path’.<sup>11</sup> This remark on ‘true poetry’ implies that Peacock believed literature to be potentially compatible with utilitarian insights. However, he maintained that the only way for this to happen was to acknowledge that, as poetry inspired ‘useful’ advances, it became increasingly less relevant in society. Before this aspect of Peacock’s *Four Ages* can be explored, it is necessary to mention a work that was an important influence upon his essay. Like Shelley in the Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, Peacock noted his admiration of Robert

<sup>9</sup> Nicholas A. Joukovsky, ‘Peacock, Thomas Love, (1785-1886)’, *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/21681>> [accessed 13 May 2012].

<sup>10</sup> Peacock commented that Shelley ‘took to himself the character of Scythrop’. See *The Halliford Edition*, VIII, 497.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Love Peacock, ‘Essay On Fashionable Literature’ (1818), in the *Halliford Edition*, VIII, 127-133 (p. 129).

Forsyth's *The Principles of Moral Science*. This work had identified the purpose of the 'fine arts' as the inspiration of 'the pursuit of knowledge', without which 'they are of little real value'.<sup>12</sup> Such a debt can be observed when Peacock's observations on poetry and philosophy are followed by the recommendation, 'See Forsyth' ('On Fashionable Literature', p. 129).

Peacock's conviction that poetry played an important, but limited role in enabling social developments, satirized Romantic ideas about the inspirational power of literature. However, it may also be seen as revealing misgivings about Benthamite doctrines. His emphasis upon 'philosophy' reflects classical ideals of the philosopher as the most fitting agent of intellectual discovery. Indeed, James Mulvihill suggests that Peacock's *Four Ages* combines his 'utilitarian bias' with 'a Hesiodic scheme of ages'.<sup>13</sup> This tension between Peacock's interest in historical 'ages' and Bentham's hostility towards a philosophy of history may be seen to contribute to Shelley's description of the *Four Ages* as a 'hobby of paradox' (*Letters*, II, 273). Such a 'paradox' can be interpreted as Shelley's recognition that the decline of poetry is connected to its role in inspiring 'useful' knowledge in Peacock's essay. However, it is the historical method adopted by Peacock in the *Four Ages* that validates such a reading.

In Chapter One, I argued that this interest in historical 'stages' underpinned the methodology of eighteenth-century political economists. I drew attention to the way that Smith, Malthus and others conceived of socio-economic development as a gradual movement from hunter-gatherer societies to an agricultural era, and finally to a growth in industry. Peacock shared this outlook and the *Four Ages* distinguishes between different points of economic progress. However, rather than differentiating between his 'ages' in terms of a move from agriculture to commerce, Peacock divides them into elemental metals. This, as Mulvihill suggests, emulates Hesiod's discussion of the rise of economic and political systems. It is significant that in his *Works and Days*, Hesiod presents a view of history that begins with the 'golden age' of society and charts its gradual deterioration into the age of 'iron'.<sup>14</sup> However, he maintains that even in its most degraded state, society may have 'good mixed with ill' (*Works and Days*, p. 42). This suggestion that decline could be redeemable is significant when exploring Hesiod's influence upon *The Four Ages of Poetry*.

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<sup>12</sup> Robert Forsyth, *The Principles of Moral Science* (Edinburgh: Bell and Brafute, 1805), pp. 160-1.

<sup>13</sup> James D. Mulvihill, 'The Four Ages of Poetry: Peacock and the Historical Method', *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 33 (1984), 130-145 (p. 130).

<sup>14</sup> Hesiod, *Theogony and Works and Days*, trans. by M. L. West (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. xiv.



Notwithstanding his arguments against the utility of poetry, Peacock was receptive to Hesiod's depiction of social progress in the medium of poetry itself. It could be argued that Peacock valued Hesiod's classical insights above what he regarded as the superficiality of contemporary poetry. However, it is interesting that Hesiod combined aesthetic and economic concerns in way that is comparable with Shelley's view that political economy possessed literary qualities. In Chapter Two, I argued that Shelley admired the way in which Ritson and Newton combined agricultural ideas with mythology and poetic allusion. These techniques may be seen as indebted to Hesiod's alignment of his account of creation with developments in farming, social co-operation and even the suggestion that the Prometheus myth introduces a meat diet. Such themes can be seen to appeal more to Shelley's view of political economy than Peacock's. Nevertheless, having suggested that Peacock's views on poetry and utility were not clear-cut, it can be argued that he was as interested in exploring the way that literary concerns related to economic development, as he was in denouncing the relevance of poetry in the early nineteenth century.

In his essay, Peacock inverts Hesiod's historical narrative. He opens with a discussion of the 'iron age' in which society begins as a primitive barbarian state, rather than being inhabited by 'carefree' beings created by classical gods (*Works and Days*, p. 40). This is connected to his determination to present poetry as original, and thus 'useful', only in early society. In his introduction, Peacock remarks: 'Poetry, like the world, may be said to have four ages, but in a different order: the first age of poetry being the age of iron; the second, of gold; the third, of silver, and the fourth, of brass' (*Four Ages*, p. 3). Peacock was convinced that this declining tendency of poetry related to the rising industrial innovations of 'the world'. This explains his portrayal of the rise of poetry and the process of economic development as subject to 'a different order'. He presents the 'iron age' as an energetic, yet barbaric state during which language and poetry first came into being. Significantly, Peacock connects the origins of language with self-interest:

The successful warrior becomes a chief; the successful chief becomes a king: his next want is an organ to disseminate the fame of his achievements and the extent of his possessions; and [for] this organ he finds the bard [...] This is the origin of poetry, which, like all other trades, takes its rise in the demand for the commodity, and flourishes in proportion to the extent of the

market. (*Four Ages*, p. 4)

This portrayal of language originating from a desire to pursue self-interest represents a major difference between Shelley and Peacock. The descriptions of ‘poetry’ as subject to ‘demand’ and market forces indicate that Peacock regarded imaginative pursuits as subordinate to economic development. Mulvihill remarks that this relationship between poetry and self-interest in the iron age parallels Smith’s ‘invisible hand’ in *The Wealth of Nations*. This relates to the way in which the poet enables economic expansion through his words, thus establishing a relationship between imagination and economics that was developed in Smith’s view of universal prosperity. In this respect, poetry may be seen as ‘sparking intellectual enquiry’ that is fundamental to political economy.<sup>15</sup> However, Peacock fails to acknowledge Smith’s belief that economic progress depends upon, rather than negates this imaginative and crucially sympathetic impulse within human desire.

Peacock argues that this function of poetry in the barbarian epoch becomes accepted as a feature of cultural progress with the rise of its ‘golden age’. He upholds Hesiod’s view of this stage as the point at which humanity attains its splendour. However, he insinuates that social greatness arises at the expense of poetic originality. It is significant he comments that it was during this golden age that poetry acquired ‘stability and form’ (*Four Ages*, p. 7). Peacock’s equation of ‘form’ with ‘stability’ reflects his perception of poetry as inspiring social institutions that are restricted to the historical point at which they arise. He clarifies that ‘the golden age of poetry finds its materials in the age of iron’ (*Four Ages*, p. 6). This appears similar to Shelley’s concept of the ways in which the progressive impulse within socio-economic doctrines can traverse historical periods. However, although Peacock’s ‘golden age’ of poetry ‘finds its materials’ in a chaotic, self-interested epoch, this does not reflect his concept of a dynamic quality within past doctrines. Instead, Mulvihill remarks that ‘for Peacock, poetry is inseparable from the social and economic context of an age, [yet] to be useful, critical opinion must be historically confined’.<sup>16</sup> This reading reflects tension between Peacock’s belief that poetry inspires socio-economic development, and his view that such usefulness is ‘confined’ to a process in which poetry becomes outmoded. However his conviction that utility is borne out of poetry becomes the greatest weapon with which to attack poetry in his essay.

<sup>15</sup> Mulvihill, ‘*The Four Ages of Poetry: Peacock and the Historical Method*’, p. 141.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, p, 137.

Peacock develops these ideas when he summarises the other two ‘ages’ in his historical narrative. For example, he describes the way that in the ‘age of silver’, poetry, having ‘attained the point which it cannot pass [...] seeks new forms for the treatment of the same subjects’ (*Four Ages*, p. 9). Peacock here presents poetry as unable to surpass the ‘point’ at which social institutions are first established. Political and economic innovations thrive in this process of regulation, whilst poetic genius becomes derivative. Furthermore, he maintains that poetry’s ‘golden age’ is itself founded upon a lie. As Bromwich summarises:

Poetry [...] is only useful in this primitive stage of its development, which Peacock calls its iron age. By contrast, the golden age of poetry “finds its materials in the age of iron”, so that at the very height of its achievement, poetry is already retrospective and already useless.<sup>17</sup>

For Peacock, such ‘uselessness’ is perpetuated in the poetry of the age of silver, which at this point is irreconcilably divorced from socio-economic developments. This becomes evident in his assertion that during this period, ‘feeling and passion are best painted in, and roused by, ornamental and figurative language’ (*Four Ages*, p. 11). Such a statement may be seen to uphold Bentham’s separation of imaginative literature from social reform. However, it may also be viewed as rejecting Smith’s conviction that ‘feeling and passion’ were integral to the ‘language’ of political economy. I argue that Shelley perceived this aspect of Peacock’s essay to be one of its most serious shortcomings, especially in relation to the latter’s assessment of poetry in 1821.

The *Four Ages* culminates in Peacock’s criticism of contemporary literature, which he describes as an ‘age of brass’. The targets of this attack are the Lake Poets, who Peacock condemns as ‘desperate imitators’ (*Four Ages*, p. 18). Peacock’s criticism of imitation here is very different to Shelley’s view of restricting the progressive impulse within literary principles. Instead, he implies that what is imitated is the revival of primitive poetic ideals in the 1820s. Cameron draws attention to the shortcomings in Peacock’s historical method, asking ‘why would poetry mechanically parade through these set stages, not once, but twice?’<sup>18</sup> This comment relates to Peacock’s conviction that these ‘stages’ occurred in both the ancient and modern worlds. It can be argued

<sup>17</sup> Bromwich, *Romantic Critical Essays*, p. 186.

<sup>18</sup> Cameron, *Shelley: The Golden Years*, p. 197.

that Shelley's suspicion of historical generalisations would never have allowed such an inflexible methodology. As Marilyn Butler summarises, 'if poetry is the voice of culture at a certain stage of evolution, it emerges in spite of the characteristics, or opinions, of single writers'.<sup>19</sup> It is this view of poetry as eluding, as well as engaging with what characterises a historical 'stage' that may have influenced Shelley's all-encompassing definition of 'Poetry' in the *Defence*. However, such a term can also be viewed as reflecting his optimistic view of utilitarianism.

In *The Four Ages of Poetry*, Peacock employs utilitarian thinking provocatively to attack poetry for comical ends. Notwithstanding his admiration for the cleverness of such an approach, I suggest that Shelley found something seriously useful in utilitarianism for his defence of poetry. He commented significantly in a letter of 21 March 1821 that his contemporaries should 'inwardly digest' Peacock's criticism of contemporary literature. Nevertheless, he remained sceptical towards the latter's 'undiscriminating censure' of what he considered to be a very narrow definition of poetry (*Letters*, II, 276). As a result, Shelley can be viewed as engaging with Peacock's weapon and re-orientating it, rather than rejecting it altogether. Bromwich believes that the 'virtue of [Peacock's] attack was that it returned Shelley to his first premises'.<sup>20</sup> Certainly, the *Four Ages* was the first of many utilitarian perspectives that compelled him to both justify and reassess the economic outlook he had expressed in 1819. Michael Scrivener recognises the complexity of Shelley's response to Peacock's satire on 'poetry' in its conventional sense. He remarks that Shelley 'redefines poetry in such a way that utilitarian science is subsumed within and becomes inferior to Poetry'.<sup>21</sup> However, I argue that this redefinition of utilitarian principles in the *Defence* seeks neither to dismiss nor to eradicate slowly Bentham's precepts. Instead, Shelley presents this mode of political economy as containing within itself the potential to become an effective and powerful embodiment of this inclusive definition of 'Poetry'. It is thus important to explore the way that Shelley's response to the wide-ranging outlooks of utilitarian thinkers inspired him to both justify and develop his view of Poetry still further. By 1821, his attraction to Peacock's theory of the relationship between poetry and political economy may be seen to have inspired an even greater determination to define what 'Poetry' really was. This interest in the way that utilitarian doctrines could spark enquiries into the origins and future of Poetry in society, informs my study of

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<sup>19</sup> Marilyn Butler, *Peacock Displayed: A Satirist in his Context* (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1979), p. 292.

<sup>20</sup> Bromwich, *Romantic Critical Essays*, p. 187.

<sup>21</sup> Scrivener, *Radical Shelley*, p. 250.

Shelley's receptiveness to contemporary political economy. I will begin by exploring the ways in which his attraction to the thought and writings of James Mill, compelled him to re-evaluate his approach to socio-economic reform.

#### **4. 4. Bringing 'Individual Knowledge' to a 'Common Treasury': Shelley and James Mill**

In responding to Peacock's *Four Ages* it can be argued that Shelley not only questioned utilitarian doctrines, but was also interested in the various approaches to utilitarianism popular during the early nineteenth century. James Mill and David Ricardo are often portrayed as Bentham's disciples. However, I suggest in this chapter that these figures expressed arguments regarding social, economic and political reform that frequently diverged from Bentham's legislative approach. Shelley certainly found much in this originality that could be called into question. Nevertheless, I argue that he was attracted to the slow development of such doctrines beyond Bentham's limitations. Before I provide an overview of these 'philosophical radicals' – the name Elie Halèvy gives to Bentham's younger followers – it is thus important to explore Shelley's awareness of their doctrines.

Shelley's interest in utilitarian objectives may be observed in his letters. In late 1820, he was reunited with his cousin Thomas Medwin. Medwin had been stationed in India as a lieutenant, and regaled Shelley with accounts of a country undergoing development. Shelley had been convinced of the intellectual potential of Indian society in *A Philosophical View*, when he had encouraged its writers to establish their own 'system of arts and literature' (*Reform*, p. 988). However, civic development in India was also a prominent utilitarian goal. Bentham was interested in constructing an Indian legal system, and was encouraged by Mill in his role at the East India Company. This enthusiasm can be observed in Bentham's boast that 'Mill will be the living executive – I shall be the dead legislative of British India'.<sup>22</sup> Such a description juxtaposes the vitality within Mill's intellect with Bentham's inflexible approach to legislation. This implies that Bentham was himself aware of the differences in their outlooks, and that Mill would play a vital role in expanding his founding principles. However, Shelley's belief that the development of utilitarian doctrines in India would depend upon an acceptance of the 'literary' and even 'artistic' capacity of political economy, suggests

<sup>22</sup> Letter (1820), in *Bentham Works*, x, 490.

that these progressive aspects of Mill's theories required deeper analysis.

Shelley's receptiveness to utilitarian preoccupations may be observed in the 'interest' in Hindu and Muslim culture he describes in a letter of 29 October 1821 (*Letters*, II, 242). This may be read as sharing similarities with one work in particular: Mill's *The History of British India*. On 11 October 1821, Shelley asked Ollier to send him 'Mill's India' (*Letters*, II, 357). Although this request was made eight months after the *Defence* was drafted, I argue that parallels between Shelley's essay and Mill's doctrines suggest that he was already familiar with the latter's ideas. In order to support such a claim, this section explores Mill's concept of utilitarianism, focusing upon the ways in which his approaches to history, philosophy and language impacted upon his economic outlook. Beginning with a study of Mill's volumes on Indian society, I argue that his work reflects the way that the philosophical radicals both propagated and revised Bentham's doctrines.

A skilled classicist with an interest in Enlightenment philosophy, Mill cultivated a historical outlook that not only acknowledged the progressive impulse within existing theories, but also contemplated the role of imagination in utilitarian thought. Mill was tutored by Dugald Stewart at Edinburgh University, a figure who rejected the popular view that the arts became outmoded as society progressed.<sup>23</sup> Stewart was adamant that statesmen should 'search for the rules of their conduct in the circumstances of their own times, and in an enlightened anticipation of the future history of mankind'.<sup>24</sup> This emphasis upon the 'enlightenment' within social 'rules' draws close to his friend Smith's belief in the dynamic potential within economic, philosophical and literary precepts. Stewart distinguished between 'intellectual habits that are formed by the pursuit of literature' and those of 'the active engagements of business'.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, he was convinced that these different 'habits' could develop harmoniously alongside each other. Connell has explored this aspect of Stewart's thought and its impact upon Mill. He remarks that for Stewart, 'the primary vehicle for [imagination's] exertions in the cause of good government was [not] to be found in heroic literature [...] but rather in

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<sup>23</sup> Such an outlook was endorsed by Adam Ferguson, whose *Essay on the History of Civil Society* praised 'the exertions of imagination and sentiment' as being amongst 'a forward and inspiring people'. However, Ferguson maintained that these 'exertions' declined as society develops, and 'subdivides the arts, professions and ranks'. These ideas influenced Peacock's arguments in *The Four Ages of Poetry*. See Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (Edinburgh: Printed for A. Millar and T. Cadell and A. Kincaid and J. Bell, 1767), pp. 272-3.

<sup>24</sup> Dugald Stewart, *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind*, 3 vols (Edinburgh and London: Printed for A. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1792-1827), I, 238.

<sup>25</sup> Dugald Stewart, 'Lectures on Political Economy' in *The Collected Works of Dugald Stewart*, ed. by William Hamilton, 11 vols (Edinburgh: Thomas Constable and Co., 1854-60), VIII, 165-206 (p. 179).

the science of political economy'.<sup>26</sup> It is this belief that imagination could be viewed as a 'vehicle' for legislation whilst maintaining its separateness from questions of 'literature', that I argue both attracted Shelley to Mill's works, and provoked his frustration with them.

The influence of Mill's education is notable in his writings on India. These were connected to the Charter Act of 1813, which compelled the East India Company to allow missionaries to promote their religious principles. Although a staunch atheist, Mill supported educational methods in India as an opportunity to enact his theory of national progress. Mill's attitude towards the existing state of knowledge differed from Bentham's belief in an enlightening, yet inflexible system of utilitarian law. As I argued in Chapter Three, Bentham rejected historical study due to his belief in the uniformity of human actions across the centuries. In contrast, Mill was convinced that at each stage of history, societies were capable of improvement. He was drawn to Hartley's doctrine on the 'associative' capacities of imagination, or the way that the mind related ideas to each other as a result of new experiences. These philosophical interests can be seen as influential upon the connection Mill makes between language and the origins of commercial society.

Mill argued that it was only through 'associating' economic insights with names and definitions that progress could be made. He believed that once constructed, such institutions would constitute 'universal conditions' inherent in all minds. As a result, Mill portrays this association of ideas that underpins the construction of language as the earliest instance of order being established to complement social progress. This becomes clear in his account of Indian society. Despite his regard for Islamic legislative advances over Hindu poetry, he maintains that 'Hindoo and Mahomedan prejudices would need to be consulted, while everything which was useful in [their] literature, it would be proper to maintain'.<sup>27</sup> Mill's belief that there was value in analysing cultural 'prejudice' reflects his view that all past ideas could benefit progress. This was because even primitive social laws were products of this dynamic associative process. Javed Majeed argues that Mill supported vernacular translation in the Indian legal system, thus questioning the view that he attempted to replace native customs with English utilitarianism.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, his description of 'literature' as 'useful' indicates

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<sup>26</sup> Connell, *Romanticism, Economics and the Question of 'Culture'*, p. 74.

<sup>27</sup> James Mill, Dispatch of the East India Company (18 February 1824), quoted in Eric Stokes, *The English Utilitarians in India* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), p. 324.

<sup>28</sup> Javed Majeed, *Ungoverned Imaginings: James Mill's The History of British India and Orientalism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 140-1.

that the associative process within language was integral to Reform.

Bruce Mazlish observes that Mill ‘used India in reference to early nineteenth-century England’.<sup>29</sup> This suggests that Mill aspired to a universal theory of progress that was not dissimilar to Shelley’s aims in *A Philosophical View*. A key difference however, is that whilst Mill situated his global observations in an English context, Shelley perceived the present crisis as reflective of a historical process that transcended time and nation. Mazlish criticises Mill for neither visiting India nor being familiar with its languages. He comments that for Mill, ‘induction from the “facts” was more important than firsthand observation’.<sup>30</sup> Such a reading could be viewed as reflecting the narrowness of Mill’s study. Nevertheless, Mill’s emphasis upon ‘induction’ exemplifies his distinctive approach to Indian society. It is significant that his criticism of Hindu culture related not only to its poetry, but also to its rejection of the intellectual process that produced artistic works. Rather than recognising that language inspires the construction of durable laws, Hindu culture became outmoded. Connell describes Mill’s belief that

beyond narrative poetry, the Hindus had nothing even approximating to a reliable historiographic practice. Because they had been unable to utilise the development of letters and the accretion of knowledge in ‘the form of permanent signs’, they had failed to progress beyond a bardic culture.<sup>31</sup>

This emphasis upon ‘bardic culture’ inspiring ‘forms’ may be seen as anticipating Shelley’s exploration of the origins of Poetry in the *Defence*. The concept of such ‘forms’ as ‘permanent’ may be regarded as conflicting with Shelley’s progressive view of socio-economic doctrines.<sup>32</sup> However, it is interesting that Mill connected such ‘permanence’ with his interest in imagination.

Mill would develop these ideas in his *Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind* (1829). This philosophical work argued that ‘permanent’ signs could ‘function as vehicles for the progressive formation of useful knowledge [...] facilitating the inculcation of ever more reliable ideational trains in the mind’.<sup>33</sup> This concept of

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<sup>29</sup> Bruce Mazlish, *James and John Stuart Mill: Father and Son in the Nineteenth Century* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Inc., 1988), p. 121.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, p. 117.

<sup>31</sup> Connell, *Romanticism, Economics and the Question of ‘Culture’*, p. 81.

<sup>32</sup> James Mill, *The History of British India*, 2 vols (London: Baldwin, Cradock and Joy, 1818) I, 364.

<sup>33</sup> James Mill, *Analysis of the Phenomena of the Human Mind* (1829). Cited in Connell, p. 81.



‘progressive formation’, with its impetus to perfect insights, draws close to Shelley’s and even Godwin’s belief in intellectual perfectibility. Furthermore, the notion that the establishment of ‘permanency’ would enable new ‘ideas’ to be recognised can, I argue, be compared with the relationship between custom and innovation that may be seen as informing Shelley’s definition of the ‘form’ and ‘spirit’ of Poetry. Nevertheless, in contrast to Shelley’s view of this interplay as a continuous historical process, Mill’s aim was, as he put it, to ‘bring individual knowledge to a common treasury’.<sup>34</sup> Mill’s essay upheld Bentham’s distrust of the moral capacity of imagination. This becomes evident in his rejection of what Leslie Stephen called ‘an intrinsic development’ in morals.<sup>35</sup> Such dismissal may be seen to relate to Smith’s belief that human beings could identify with others through an ‘intrinsically’ sympathetic self-interest.

It is significant that the *Analysis* describes this associative principle as ‘ideation’ rather than ‘imagination’. This term implies that Mill’s systematic approach to ideas stops short of exploring the progressive impulse within ideas themselves. Notwithstanding these shortcomings, it can be argued that Mill’s attention to historical and philosophical detail constructed a utilitarian outlook that went beyond Bentham’s universal view of progress. Indeed, Mill’s concept of the imaginative ‘association’ of ideas draws closer to Shelley’s outlook in the *Defence* than Bentham’s writings on jurisprudence. Although he was attracted to the latter’s view of progress, Shelley’s receptiveness to Mill’s *History* can be viewed as conflicted. Despite the suspicion he may have felt of Mill’s circumscribed view of imagination, he remained optimistic that the latter’s ‘common treasury’ of knowledge could be extended, as can be seen in the enthusiasm for the projects of the East India Company he expresses in his letters.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> James Mill, ‘Liberty of the Press’ in *Essays*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (1828) (London: Baldwin, Cradock and Joy, 1823), 3-290 (p. 28).

<sup>35</sup> Leslie Stephen, *The English Utilitarians*, 3 vols (New York: A. M. Kelley, 1968, first published 1900), II, 336.

<sup>36</sup> Shelley wrote three fragments prior to beginning the *Defence*. The first and second discuss the function of poetry in society, but by far the most interesting is the third, which anticipates his questioning approach to the differences between reason and imagination in the *Defence*. In many respects, this fragment may be seen as outlining the shortcomings and progressive potential within contemporary utilitarianism. For example, Shelley comments on imagination: ‘It has been termed the power of association, and, on an accurate anatomy of the functions of the mind, it would be difficult to assign any other origin to the mass of what we perceive [*sic*] & know than this power’. This emphasis upon an ‘anatomy’ of ‘mind’, may be seen as alluding to Mill’s view of the ‘power’ behind the perpetual succession of ideas. However, although these remarks recall Mill’s philosophical theories, Shelley asserts that ‘association is however rather the law according to which this power is exerted, than the power itself’. Referring back to his arguments in *A Philosophical View*, this outlines the capacity of imagination to contribute to the establishment of socio-economic ‘laws’, and then inspire them to develop even further. This relates to Shelley’s belief that this faculty had a non-temporal and visionary, as well as moral ‘power’. Shelley’s fragment may thus be read as admiring Mill’s innovations in relation to ‘ideas’, but as rejecting his permanent definition of the institutions such association establishes. See Bodleian MS. Shelley d. 1; *BSM* IV, Part II, p. 239.

Before I turn to an exploration of Shelley's interest in Mill's views in 1821, it remains to mention other aspects of Mill's achievements that may have interested Shelley.

By 1808, Mill had established a reputation as a political economist following the publication of his *Commerce Defended* (1808), an essay condemning wartime taxation. He would continue to develop his economic views throughout his career in a way that incorporated his philosophical interests. For example, in his *Elements of Political Economy* (1821), Mill remarked that if economists 'proceed to a subsequent proposition before they are sufficiently imbued with the first, they will [...] experience a difficulty because they have not present to their memory the truth which is calculated to remove it'.<sup>37</sup> This emphasis upon 'first principles' containing 'truth' may be read as criticising Bentham's dismissal of distinctions between past and present. It also anticipates the 'difficulties' to be encountered by the latter's moral and political codes. Mill's connection between his dynamic view of history and 'calculation' can be observed in his economic achievements. He was the driving force behind the politicisation of utilitarian doctrines, forming an alliance with Bentham in 1808 and introducing him to Ricardo's theories. It is notable that his founding of the Political Economy Club and the publication of the *Elements* coincided with Shelley's drafting of the *Defence* in 1821. Shelley's egalitarian and altruistic approach to socio-economic reform far exceeded the narrow outlook of utilitarian morality. However, Mill's theory of social progress may be seen to have heightened his awareness that Bentham's doctrines did not encompass the full extent to which utilitarianism could be understood.

Mill's preoccupation with the relationship between past and future not only influenced Shelley's developing ideas about 'Poetry', but also inspired a practical commitment to utilitarian ideas. It is significant that at the same time that he requested Mill's work, Shelley wrote to Peacock expressing a desire to seek employment with the East India Company. He described this wish to Hogg in a letter of 22 October 1821, remarking that 'if I could get a respectable appointment, of going to India [...] I might be compelled to active exertion, & at the same time enter into an entirely new sphere of action' (*Letters*, II, 361). Shelley's determination to participate 'actively' within the 'new sphere' of political economy implies his belief in the validity of utilitarian ideas. This can be observed in his final words to Peacock about this plan on 11 January 1822. Shelley laments: 'I wish I had something better to do than furnish this jingling food for the hunger of oblivion called verse: but I have not, & since you give me no

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<sup>37</sup> James Mill, *Elements of Political Economy*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn. (1821) (London: Baldwin, Cradock and Joy, 1826), pp. iii-iv.

encouragement about India, I cannot hope to have' (*Letters*, II, 374). These despondent remarks do not mean that Shelley rejected the value of poetry in its conventional sense. They mean, rather, that his concept of poetry encompasses something more than versifying. Consequently, I argue that Shelley regarded utilitarian ideas relating to 'India' and elsewhere as validations of his conviction that 'Poetry' included all enlightening disciplines.

So far, I have explored Shelley's awareness of contemporary departures from Bentham's founding principles. These encompassed Peacock's approach to historical study and his view of the relationship between poetry and utility. They also included tensions in Mill's thought between 'permanent' laws and the imaginative process that creates them. However, there remains one utilitarian thinker who had interested Shelley in *A Philosophical View of Reform*, and became an important object of study in the *Defence*. The mathematical doctrines of David Ricardo are rarely regarded as compatible with the Romantic outlook. However, I argue that Shelley regarded Ricardo's work as an example of the ways in which utilitarianism could recognise the interplay between past and future active within his inclusive definition of 'Poetry'.

#### **4. 5. 'Beyond the Power of Imagination to Conceive': Shelley and David Ricardo**

Presenting Shelley as receptive to Ricardo's work appears at first more problematic than exploring his interest in Bentham, Peacock or Mill's approaches to utilitarianism. This is because in contrast to the wide-ranging interests of these figures, Ricardo conceived himself primarily as an economist. Furthermore, he was an economist who sought to systemise political economy in a way that diverted it from its eighteenth-century foundations. Ricardo's definition of economics as relevant to productivity rather than human relationships is still relevant today. As Bronk argues, 'we should acknowledge how far utilitarian metaphors bias the way economists see the world'.<sup>38</sup> However, this 'bias' in Ricardo's work can be seen to encompass a complex methodology. I argue that, rather than seeking to replace Enlightenment theories of political economy with inflexible laws, Ricardo's creation of his own 'metaphors' implies a more dynamic approach to the past.

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<sup>38</sup> Bronk, *The Romantic Economist*, p. 2.

This section suggests that there is a vibrancy within Ricardo's mathematical mind, which parallels Shelley's progressive approach to political economy. So far, this chapter has argued that socio-economic development was interpreted in various ways by utilitarian thinkers. Whilst Bentham identified the social benefits of Smith's doctrines, he failed to acknowledge that self-interest could evolve. In contrast, I suggested that Mill admired the inductive qualities within moral, political and economic institutions, even if his support for Bentham's principles led him to uphold permanent systems of legislation. This section argues that Shelley identified in Ricardo's major work, *On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* (1817), a more developed understanding of the interplay between what he termed the historical 'form' and non-temporal 'spirit' of 'Poetry'. This relates to Ricardo's comprehension of the progressive quality within Smith's precepts.

In order to justify this reading of Ricardo's theories, it is necessary first to examine Shelley's awareness of his work. There is little direct evidence that Shelley read Ricardo's writings. Nevertheless, the fact that he corresponded regularly with Peacock, who knew Bentham and Mill, Ricardo's closest friend, implies that he would have been knowledgeable about the impact of the *Principles*. Furthermore, there are cancellations in the draft of *A Philosophical View* that are suggestive of Ricardian economics. For example, Shelley's emphasis upon '<real>' and '<nominal>' value contains something of Ricardo's determination to combat contemporary inflation (*Reform*, p. 1095, p. 1099). Perhaps the most significant parallel between Shelley and Ricardo's thought was their shared belief that the National Debt could be repaid by those wealthy classes who had created it. For example, in *A Philosophical View* Shelley comments:

If the principal of this debt were paid, after such due reductions had been made so as to make an equal value taking corn for the standard as was received, it would be the rich who alone could pay it. (*Reform*, p. 1030)

As I will argue, Ricardo had been the first to advocate a gradual repayment of 'the principal' of the Debt by taxing the capital gains of the wealthy. In this respect, Shelley's emphasis upon the 'rich' repaying the Debt, as well as his support for a just 'standard' in denoting price, implies that he was more receptive to Ricardian doctrines than is usually supposed. Most of these remarks were cancelled, perhaps because of Shelley's awareness of the forbidding nature of Ricardian mathematics. This is

unfortunate, not only because they reflect the depth of his economic understanding, but also because they indicate an awareness of Ricardo's *Principles*. Bieri remarks that 'Shelley advocated abolishing the national debt with the excess wealth of the monied classes, not knowing David Ricardo was making the same recommendation'.<sup>39</sup> However, I suggest that these comments in *A Philosophical View* reflect more than conclusions Shelley had reached himself, and that he not only knew about Ricardo's *Principles* but sought also to develop them.

Having argued that Shelley was receptive to Ricardian doctrines, it is important to explore the latter's career as a political economist. Ricardo was inspired by *The Wealth of Nations* in 1797, yet from the outset regarded Smith's principles with a critical eye. As he explained to Malthus on 2 December 1816 'in reading Adam Smith, I discovered many opinions to question, all founded on his error respecting value'.<sup>40</sup> Ricardo was attracted to Smith's suggestion that the 'value' of commodities was defined by human labour. Nevertheless, he regarded this as problematic in relation to the industrial society Smith never lived to see. The complexity of Smith's economic views is often underplayed by literary critics, but is crucial in understanding Ricardo's originality. Smith's labour theory of value incorporated two systems:- labour-cost value, defined by how much time labour has cost the worker, and labour-command value, in which value is determined by what labour will be exchanged for, usually in a monetary sense.

Smith conceived of labour-command value as evolving from its labour-cost predecessor. Although he did not elaborate on this theory he anticipated its economic potential, remarking that 'it is the gradual consequence of a propensity [...] to truck, barter and exchange one thing for another' (*Wealth of Nations*, I, 25). Smith recognised that this 'gradual' process of 'exchange' would separate men into rent collectors, wage earners and profit seekers. However, he maintained that a harmony of interests remained possible. In contrast, Ricardo's career was inspired by his misgivings about this development. He wrote admiringly of Smith's views on the social benefits of self-interest in a letter published in the *Morning Chronicle* in 1810. This condemned debasement of the currency as 'a pernicious subversion of private fortunes'.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, Ricardo's belief that individuals should be free to accumulate 'private' wealth emphasises his perception of Smith's principles in a commercial sense. He was concerned with resolving financial problems, rather than, like Smith, emphasizing 'a

<sup>39</sup> Bieri, *Percy Bysshe Shelley: A Biography*, p. 511.

<sup>40</sup> Ricardo to Malthus, *Works and Correspondence*, VII, 100.

<sup>41</sup> David Ricardo, *Works and Correspondence*, III, 96.

common humanity' (*Wealth of Nations*, I, 86). As a result, Ricardo formulated an approach to economics that eliminated Smith's moral concerns.

Ricardo's *Principles* is notable for the emphasis it places upon deductive axioms. Its methodology reflects what Mark Blaug describes as Ricardo's 'fatal attraction to the clear-cut result'.<sup>42</sup> This aspect of Ricardo's work is often contrasted negatively with the importance Smith and Malthus placed upon exceptions to economic rules. Such an outlook is expressed in the historical, social and rhetorical digressions that inform their writings. Ricardo supported the arts and was a friend of literary figures including Maria Edgeworth but, unlike Bentham and Mill, he found articulating his theories difficult. However, I argue that Ricardo's view of economics depends upon a relationship between past principles and original insights. This approach may be seen as appealing more to Shelley's dynamic view of political economy than the methodologies of these other utilitarians. In order to support this reading, it is important to explore Ricardo's most notable economic achievements.

The *Principles* reflect Ricardo's systemisation of Smith's views on labour into an invariable measure of value: the gold standard. His criticism of the Bank of England for suspending cash payments was something Smith never envisaged, namely the way that 'specie could not be demanded in exchange for notes'.<sup>43</sup> As a result, he sought to formulate a standard of value that would both develop Smith's insights and combat the inflationary side-effects of government economic policy. However, what is interesting about Ricardo's desire for an 'invariable' gold standard is its encouragement of economic growth from within this permanent system of currency:

There is a difference between the value of money and the standard by which it is regulated [...] to this standard we must conform till some commodity is discovered, by the use of which we shall obtain a more perfect standard.<sup>44</sup>

Ricardo acknowledges that the need for a regulative 'law' to uphold the gold standard is a symbol of a 'more perfect standard' to be discovered. Paul Hamilton describes

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<sup>42</sup> Mark Blaug, *Ricardian Economics: A Historical Study* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958), p. 25.

<sup>43</sup> David Ricardo, *The High Price of Bullion* (1810) in *The Works of David Ricardo*, ed. by John Ramsey McCulloch (London: John Murray, 1886), p. 277.

<sup>44</sup> David Ricardo, *On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* (1817), in *Works and Correspondence*, I, 9-358 (p. 121). All subsequent citations from this work will be from this edition and be given in parentheses, abbreviated as *Principles*, in the text.

Ricardo in this respect as ‘a genius of this Romanticism of capital’, because he recognised that ‘ever newer forms must be found to describe value’s continuing power to elude measurement’.<sup>45</sup> Hamilton’s language here is suggestive in relation to Shelley’s theory of ‘Poetry’, which I outlined in Chapter Three. This argues that institutional ‘forms’ contain an intrinsic impulse to engage with new insights that ‘elude’ the understanding of a specific historical period. Nevertheless, parallels between Shelley and Ricardo have rarely been explored in detail.

This relationship between economic precepts and original insights in Ricardo’s work may be observed in the way in which the *Principles* sought to apply its theories to the contemporary financial crisis. One of its most innovative concepts was Ricardo’s development of Smith’s treatment of rent, wages and profits. This led him to consider not only the economic doctrines established by *The Wealth of Nations*, but also Malthusian theories of natural law. Between 1814 and 1816, Ricardo became involved in debates over the Corn Laws, which restricted imports during a time of national shortages. These were upheld by Malthus as vindicating the social relevance of his *Essay*, namely that low prices would lead to famine in accordance with the inability of food supply to support a rapid population increase. In contrast, the *Principles* challenged what Ricardo perceived as Malthus’s outmoded dependence upon an agricultural economy. Jacob Hollander describes Ricardo’s analysis of rising commercial society as ‘marking [his] passing from an expositor of Adam Smith, to the author of an independent system of economic relations’.<sup>46</sup> It was this relationship between the exposition of past precepts and ‘independent’ thinking, that, I argue, appealed to Shelley in the *Defence*.

Ricardo upholds Smith’s belief that ‘rent is that which is paid to the landlord for the use of the indestructible powers of the soil’ (*Principles*, I, 77). However, alluding to Malthus, he adds, ‘it is only because in the progress of population, land of an inferior quality is called into cultivation that rent is paid for the use of it’ (*Principles*, I, 78). Ricardo can thus be viewed as developing the laws of political economy established by Smith and Malthus by concluding from their doctrines that protectionism benefitted only the landlord. Malthus had conceived a theory that he termed the law of ‘diminishing returns’, which suggested that as increasingly infertile land was brought

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<sup>45</sup> Paul Hamilton, ‘Romantic Economies and the Sublimation of Money’, *Wordsworth Circle*, 25 (1994), 79-81 (p. 80).

<sup>46</sup> Jacob H. Hollander, *David Ricardo: A Centenary Estimate* (1910) (New York: A. M. Kelley, 1968), p. 77.

into production, food supply could never keep pace with population.<sup>47</sup> Although Ricardo agrees with this proposition, he incorporates it into his defence of free trade, remarking that the landlord ‘is never so prosperous as where food is dear, whereas all others are benefited by procuring [it] cheap’.<sup>48</sup> I suggest that Shelley would have been receptive to the way in which Ricardo admired this Malthusian innovation and reworked it for socially liberal ends.

Ricardo’s belief that it was the capitalist, rather than the landlord who shared his interests with those of society inspired a long period of mathematical research. The product of this was his seminal theory of the inverse relationship between wages, rents and profits. Ricardo concluded that the high price of corn always lowered profits, remarking that ‘profits would be high or low in proportion as wages were low or high’ (*Principles*, I, 99). Although this implies that the capitalist profits from the poverty of the labourer, Ricardo identified the universal benefits of commerce in a way that may be seen to parallel Shelley’s belief that the self-interest of different classes was socially useful. Ricardo’s commercial outlook was driven by the interdependence between capitalists and labourers, and he described the latter as ‘the most important class in society’. However, whilst he believed that the landlord’s rent should be redistributed in wages, he insisted that the capitalist had a legitimate right to profit (*Principles*, I, 100). Ricardo believed that the universal benefits of high profits and low rents and wages reflected the way that different classes depended upon one another. This can be viewed as advancing Smith’s view of the ‘harmony of interests’ for a commercial society. However, it can also be regarded as demonstrating an interplay between economic customs and original insights in his writing, which I argue, appealed to Shelley’s inclusion of contemporary utilitarianism within his definition of ‘Poetry’. In order to support this reading, it is necessary to explore the more visionary aspects of Ricardian economics.

Perhaps Ricardo’s greatest innovation was his prediction of a ‘stationary state’, or a point at which prices and wages increase until profits cease altogether. Although, in these circumstances, the worker would experience a rise in wages, Ricardo believed this would not be enough to offset increases in the costs of necessities. This view underpinned his opposition to the Corn Laws, the abolition of which he insisted was the only way that prices would be kept low and profits high enough to prevent economic

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<sup>47</sup> Ricardo to Malthus, 15 August 1823, in ‘The Letters of David Ricardo, 1816-1823’. British Library Add. MSS 34545, fol. 106.

<sup>48</sup> David Ricardo, ‘An Essay on the Influence of a Low Price of Corn on the Profits of Stock: Showing the Inexpediency of Restrictions on Importation’ (1815), in *Works and Correspondence*, IV, 6-27 (p. 15).



disaster.<sup>49</sup> Ellen Frankel Paul interprets Ricardo's stationary state as casting 'a gloomy light upon the free-market system'.<sup>50</sup> However, Ricardo emphasised that the form the stationary state would take, rested upon contemporary decisions. It is surprising that Ricardo depicts progression towards this event in rather Godwinian language:

Man from youth grows to manhood, then decays, then dies; but this is not the progress of nations. When arrived to a state of the greatest vigour, their further advance may indeed be arrested, but their natural tendency is to continue for ages, to sustain undiminished their wealth and population (*Principles*, I, 182).

Ricardo may be seen as sharing Godwin's concept of continual development, and there are parallels with the view of an ideal state in *Political Justice*. As I argued in Chapter Three, Godwin predicted that humanity would reach a point at which population would govern itself, so that a rational society would be 'a people of men' and not 'of children'. However, Ricardo may be seen as going beyond Godwin's emphasis upon regulation, in his insistence upon 'sustaining' rather than preventing excess population.

Ricardo's emphasis upon the advance of 'ages' implies that commerce is intrinsically progressive. However, it can even be seen as anticipating a post-capitalistic society, whose emphasis upon monetary gain would eventually arrest and become something even more perfect. It is at this point that Shelley may be seen as taking up these arguments in his own writing. In both *A Philosophical View* and the *Defence* he asserts that commerce could not only benefit the present, but also advance towards a more egalitarian, altruistic, and crucially more imaginative future. At certain points in the *Principles*, Ricardo contemplates the benefits of a society no longer preoccupied with capital gain. He remarks that 'further savings will cease, but there will be no stagnation – all that is produced will be at its fair price and freely exchanged'.<sup>51</sup> This contemplation of 'fairness' and 'freedom' suggests that he was attracted to greater socio-economic possibilities than those expressed in his essay.

Ricardo's stationary state was connected to his dream of a world market and a just standard of value. Nevertheless, his failure even to contemplate the role of imagination

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<sup>49</sup> David Ricardo, *Works and Correspondence*, VIII, 358.

<sup>50</sup> Ellen Frankel Paul, *Moral Revolution and Economic Science : The Demise of Laissez-Faire in Nineteenth-Century British Political Economy* (Westport, CONN: Greenwood Press, 1979), p. 101.

<sup>51</sup> David Ricardo, *Works and Correspondence*, IX, 25.

in formulating a science of economics ensured that the *Principles* never attained Shelley's wide-ranging view of political economy. In fact, Samuel Hollander describes 'the lack of imagination which [Ricardo's] vision reveals'.<sup>52</sup> However, I argue that it is not so much that Ricardo's insights are unimaginative, but rather that his work embodies what Shelley in the *Defence* would call the 'divesting' of imagination (p. 685). This relates not to the destruction of the imaginative faculty, but the restriction and even transformation of its capabilities. Notwithstanding these shortcomings, there are points at which the *Principles* adopt a rather Shelleyan style. Ricardo contemplates economic problems by visualising mathematical scenarios, as can be seen in his emphasis upon ratios regarding wages and profits. Shelley's intellect operates in a similar way as he considers the role of 'signs', 'cause' and 'effect' in the *Defence* (pp. 676-8). Ricardo described his method as 'imagining strong cases'.<sup>53</sup> However, this reveals tension in his thought between his attraction to deductive laws and recognition that economic 'cases', like his gold standard, depend upon a surrender to the unquantifiable. This idiosyncrasy had an important impact upon his practical proposals.

By the time the *Defence* was written in 1821, political economy had become inseparable from questions of Reform. Ricardo was actively involved in these debates, and when he addressed Parliament in February 1819 he was described as a 'phenomenon'.<sup>54</sup> Like Shelley he considered a range of factional viewpoints in his reform proposals, and was a particularly avid reader of Cobbett's *Political Register*.<sup>55</sup> However, it was in the economic sphere that Ricardo's contributions were most extensive. He was influential in passing the Cash Payments Act, which explained the way that gold payments could be resumed without exacerbating inflation. As a result of this campaign, the gold standard was reintroduced on 25 May 1819. Boyd Hilton summarises Ricardo's aims thus: 'the anticipated advantage of a reign of gold over the paper interregnum was that it would [...] cut down on fictitious capitals'.<sup>56</sup> There is much in these goals that parallel Shelley's approval of the gold standard, especially regarding the awakening of society to economic fictions. Nevertheless, despite his support for abolishing the Debt, Ricardo believed it had contributed to prosperity due to the incentive it gave to business. As a result, his measures (if not the tensions in his

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<sup>52</sup> Samuel Hollander, *The Economics of David Ricardo* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), p. 571.

<sup>53</sup> David Ricardo, *Letters to Malthus*, ed. by James Bonar (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1887), p. 167.

<sup>54</sup> David Ricardo, *Works and Correspondence*, v, 17.

<sup>55</sup> Ricardo admired Cobbett's economic views, and incorporated them into his chapter, 'On Machinery', in the 1821 edition of the *Principles*. See David Ricardo, *Works and Correspondence*, v, 303.

<sup>56</sup> Hilton, *Corn, Cash, Commerce*, p. 59.

methodology) were related less to the progressive impulse Shelley identified in economic systems and more to a validation of commerce.

This conflict between Ricardo's determination to establish economic laws and his belief that these could become subject to further innovations may be seen as contributing to the problems his theories later encountered. Ricardo's plans for reintroducing cash payments proved more problematic than he expected. His fundamental objectives – the abolition of the Corn Laws and the promotion of international free trade – were never achieved in his lifetime. However, the slow triumph of Ricardo's ideas may be seen to affirm a Shelleyan view, that, as with 'Poetry', economic writing of genuine originality would come to be respected. Nevertheless, I argue that Shelley was frustrated by Ricardo's obliviousness to the imaginative process that underpinned his achievements. When Ricardo addressed Parliament in 1819, he observed that 'this would be the happiest country in the world, and its progress in prosperity would be beyond the power of imagination to conceive, if we got rid of the National Debt and the Corn Laws'.<sup>57</sup> Here lies the difference between Ricardo and Shelley: for Shelley, conceiving this prosperous society was indeed within the 'power of imagination' and such a faculty could also liberate what he termed the 'Poetic' potential in Ricardian doctrines.

Peacock, Mill and Ricardo can all be seen as expanding Bentham's founding doctrines in individual ways. However, it is necessary to explore the way that Shelley's receptiveness to these writers influenced him to justify his inclusive definition of 'Poetry' in 1821. I will thus begin with a study of the ways in which his interest in contemporary utilitarianism inspired him to reconsider his ideas regarding what 'Poetry' really was. The following section focuses upon the way that Shelley's study of the eighteenth-century origins of utilitarian doctrines may be seen as his starting point in the *Defence*.

#### **4. 6. 'Inspired Moments' and 'Artificial Connections': Shelley's Revisiting of Enlightenment Political Economy**

In the previous section, I argued that Shelley's study of contemporary utilitarianism inspired him to reassess the economic outlook he had constructed in *A Philosophical*

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<sup>57</sup> David Ricardo, *Works and Correspondence*, v, 55.

*View of Reform*. However, before such developments can be analysed, it is important to explore the way that this receptiveness to utilitarian doctrines compelled him to revisit the enlightening process he had identified within their founding principles. In Chapter Three, I suggested that the doctrines of Smith and Hume were influential upon Shelley's concept of 'Poetry' as an interplay between established theories and more original insights. However, following his study of utilitarian doctrines, he realised that contemporary interpretations of these precepts were both complex and problematic. In this section, I argue that Shelley thus felt compelled to re-examine this reciprocity between past and future within the Enlightenment origins of utilitarianism.

Furthermore, he began to explore the way that eighteenth-century attitudes towards moral philosophy, economic expansion and intellectual progress came into being. This section thus acts as a precursor to Shelley's arguments about contemporary economic progress. It also offers an explanation for his belief that political economy reflected this interplay between past and future, by exploring the origins of Poetry itself.

Haley observes that Shelley's opening paragraphs of the *Defence* are expressed in a 'deliberately analytical' way.<sup>58</sup> Such a technique can be seen as engaging with the systematic approaches of contemporary utilitarianism. Shelley adopts this 'analytical' methodology in order to explore more deeply what it was he admired in eighteenth-century political economy. However, there is also a sense that he recognised wide-ranging qualities within the utilitarian outlook itself. Haley describes the utilitarian belief that only the rational mind was capable of 'perception, appreciation and making or remaking'.<sup>59</sup> In contrast, I argue that Shelley regarded this 'rational' outlook to play a more complex role in 'remaking' theories of social, moral and economic progress. This is implied in his discussion of the faculties that preoccupied economic thinkers like Hume and Smith. In scrutinising his conceptions about Enlightenment political economy, Shelley begins the *Defence* with an exploration of 'Reason' and 'Imagination'. He remarks that reason 'may be considered as mind contemplating the relations borne by one thought to another'. In contrast, he describes imagination 'as mind, acting upon those thoughts so as to colour them with its own light, and composing from them, as from elements, other thoughts' (*Defence*, p. 674).

Although these allusions recall Hume's view of imagination 'acting upon' sense impressions, Shelley extends the former's philosophy. In his first draft of the *Defence*,

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<sup>58</sup> Haley, 'Shelley, Peacock and the Reading of History', p. 443.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, p. 442.

he had remarked that reason is ‘mind employed upon’ the relations between thoughts.<sup>60</sup> This image of reason being ‘employed upon’ thought suggests that reason lacks any independent power, emphasising the idea that it is merely receptive to existing ‘relations’. However, by amending this to ‘contemplating’, Shelley suggests that reason is both active and discerning. Although it cannot attain imagination’s power to ‘colour’ thoughts with original insights, he implies that reason contains its own progressive quality. By ascribing these attributes to reason, Shelley suggests that presenting imagination as a faculty that transforms rational insights is an insufficient explanation for intellectual progress. This becomes evident when he remarks that imagination both ‘composes’ from existing thoughts and creates ‘other thoughts’ that are original. Although he acknowledges the respective functions of reason and imagination, Shelley argues that their relationship is more complex than the dichotomy presented by eighteenth-century philosophers. Nevertheless, his interest in the ways in which such faculties were perceived by Enlightenment political economists may be seen to suggest that utilitarianism could develop beyond Bentham’s narrow view of eighteenth-century precepts.

At this point in the essay, Shelley begins to align these ideas with his theory of ‘Poetry’. This embodies his belief that all enlightened doctrines, including those of political economy, are subject to a constant interplay between established principles (what he calls the historical ‘form’ of a discipline) and more visionary inspiration (its non-temporal ‘spirit’). Such a reading is supported by Shelley’s refusal to align reason with his concept of ‘form’, in terms of its progressive approach to sense impressions, or imagination with his view of ‘spirit’, in relation to its capacity to convey original insights. Instead, he remarks that: ‘Reason is to Imagination [...] as the body to the spirit, as the shadow to the substance’ (*Defence*, p. 675). The distinction, not between reason and imagination, but between the ‘form’ and ‘spirit’ that interact within these two faculties, is evident in Shelley’s emphasis upon reason as both a ‘body’ and a ‘shadow’, and imagination as both a ‘spirit’ and a ‘substance’. By describing reason as a ‘shadow’, his usual metaphor for non-temporal inspiration, Shelley suggests that this faculty is more complex than is acknowledged in Enlightenment thought. Similarly, although he describes imagination as a ‘spirit’, he makes it clear that this faculty depends also upon the ‘substance’ of contemporary principles. He summarises this in the remark that Poetry is both ‘the expression of the Imagination’ and ‘connate with the origin of man’ (*Defence*, p. 675). By suggesting that social development depends upon

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<sup>60</sup> Bodleian MS Shelley d. 1, fol. 86<sup>v</sup>rev.; see *BSM* IV, Part II, p. 93.

the imaginative faculty, Shelley's exploration of the origins of Poetry may be regarded as indebted to the theories of eighteenth-century political economy.

So far, Shelley had implied that the utilitarian outlook restricted theories of the human mind favoured by Enlightenment thinkers. However, his belief that eighteenth-century philosophies could themselves be extended led him to explore alternative accounts of intellectual progress. This involved revisiting his ideas relating to the social, moral and even literary qualities of political economy. It is significant that Shelley begins by citing a traditionally poetic metaphor for inspiration. He portrays the human mind as an 'instrument over which a series of external and internal impressions are driven, like [...] wind over an Aeolian lyre; which move it, by their motion, to ever-changing melody' (*Defence*, p. 675). Shelley's remarks have similarities with Coleridge's imagery in 'The Eolian Harp' of the mind as subject to insights conveyed by imagination. Coleridge presents this faculty as able to 'move' and create 'motion', independent of the mind's contributions. It can be argued that this metaphor parallels Shelley's concept of the visionary 'spirit' of Poetry.<sup>61</sup> However, in *On Life*, Shelley had contemplated the effects of 'motion' upon mind with regard to Hume's view of the way that ideas can be synthesised. This had convinced him of the moral and philosophical qualities of imagination, as well as its visionary attributes.

Shelley argues that however lovely the 'melody' produced by this non-temporal inspiration, its insights would be ineffectual without engaging with the active powers of the mind. He comments: 'There is a principle within the human being [...] which acts otherwise than in the lyre, and produces not melody alone, but harmony' (*Defence*, p. 675). Shelley insists here that the origins of the human intellect depend not only upon Coleridge's visionary 'melody', but also on the progressive impulse already 'within the human being'. Such a harmonious interplay between concepts already established in the mind and their receptiveness to transcendental inspiration, validates Shelley's refusal to distinguish between reason and imagination. However, this conviction should

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<sup>61</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'The Eolian Harp' (1796), in *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: The Major Works*, ed. by H. J. Jackson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 27-9 (p. 28), ll. 26-7. In Chapter XIV of *Biographia Literaria* (1817), Coleridge discussed the creation of poetry in a way that parallels Shelley's thought. Coleridge described conventions of metre as the 'superficial form' of poetry. However, Shelley not only perceived 'form' as relevant to all enlightening disciplines, he also believed it to contain an intrinsically progressive impulse. Coleridge portrays poets as going beyond such superficiality by 'diffus[ing] a tone and a spirit of unity' in their works. However, I suggest that Shelley extends this idea in the *Defence* by asserting that 'form' and 'spirit' interact with each other in a harmonious, rather than divisive way. It is interesting that Coleridge discusses utilitarian concepts of 'pleasure' in this chapter, arguing that true poetry communicates pleasure as an 'ultimate end', rather than short-term gratification. These are ideas that Shelley can also be seen to address in the *Defence*. See *Biographia Literaria*, in Jackson, *The Major Works*, 157-482 (p. 317; p. 319).

be read less as a reflection of Shelley's desire to impose a literary perspective upon economic methodology, than as evidence of his belief that such doctrines already contained this impulse.

Shelley's interest in aligning his theory of Poetry with the origins of the human intellect may be seen in his discussion of the way that the mind develops. However, this is situated firmly within the view of history as a series of 'stages'. That this approach was favoured by political economists suggests that Shelley related his views on progress to socio-economic expansion. He remarks:

A child at play by itself will express its delight by its voice and motions; and every [...] gesture will bear exact relation to a corresponding antitype in the pleasurable impressions which awakened it; it will be the reflected image of that impression. (*Defence*, p. 675)

Shelley's description of the way that the 'child' acquires knowledge may be seen to parallel the outlook of primitive man. Furthermore, this account of learned behaviour may be read as extending the ideas about imitation that he expressed in the Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*. Shelley suggests that language and gesture are 'reflective' of the mind's receptiveness to original insights. This leads him to explain why his view of established principles is so dynamic. Conventions in language originated from early man's attempts to articulate the mind's receptiveness to the visionary aspects of 'Poetry'. This theory has important implications for his view of contemporary utilitarianism. Shelley's emphasis upon 'pleasurable impressions' here imitates Bentham's language. However, this may be viewed as a criticism of the latter's rejection of the progressive impulse within concepts of 'pleasure' themselves. Furthermore, his conviction of the visionary origins of social institutions may be seen to question Mill's strictly 'associative' view of imagination, or Ricardo's pursuit of deductive laws.

Shelley's belief that the human intellect originated from this desire to express original insights may thus be seen as closely related to his interest in Enlightenment doctrines. In particular, I argue that parallels can be drawn with Smith's connection of advances in language to economic growth. Ellen Frankel Paul suggests that Smith attributed the rise of an exchange economy to the 'faculties of reason and speech'. He believed that the

process of ‘bartering’ through language, brought about ‘extensive economic utility’.<sup>62</sup> However, I argue that Shelley’s discussion of human interaction can be interpreted as an expansion of Smith’s theory of economic relations in a way that is even more ‘extensive’. Smithian undertones may be observed in the *Defence*:

The social sympathies, or those laws from which as from its elements society results, begin to develop themselves from the moment that two human beings co-exist; the future is contained within the present as the plant within the seed; and equality, diversity, unity, contrast, mutual dependence become the principles alone capable of affording the motives according to which the will of a social being is determined to action (pp. 675-6).

Shelley’s alignment of ‘sympathies’ with the origins of society is suggestive of Smith’s belief that social ‘laws’ develop through a recognition of the imaginative impulse within human nature. This reading is supported by Shelley’s allusion to ‘sentiment’ in the first draft of his essay.<sup>63</sup> This admiration of Smith’s principles could thus have contributed to his favourite metaphor of ‘the plant within the seed’ for ‘the future within the present’. It can also be used to illuminate his criticism of contemporary utilitarian doctrines.

Shelley’s definition of the ‘motives’ behind free will may be read as challenging Bentham’s theory of morals. Bentham had insisted that both ‘motives’ and ‘will’ were dictated by a self-interested society. In contrast, Shelley states that social ‘equality’ and ‘unity’ depend upon recognising the progressive impulse within concepts of ‘diversity’ and ‘contrast’. This recalls Smith’s belief that the individual’s self-interest inspires sympathy towards others of different socio-economic standing. However, Shelley questions Smith’s insistence that self-interest is a fixed aspect of human nature. The ‘dependence’ Shelley describes is not restricted to Smith’s view of self-interest, but relates to the ‘mutual’ interplay between such a principle and insights that are more visionary. This implies that self-interest itself contributes to the realisation of an ‘equal’, ‘unified’ and altruistic society.

Following this discussion of the origins of conventions in language, morals and economics, Shelley outlines the recognition of the progressive quality within such

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<sup>62</sup> Frankel Paul, *Moral Revolution and Economic Science*, p. 19.

<sup>63</sup> Bodleian MS. Shelley d. 1, fol. 83<sup>r</sup> rev; see *BSM* IV, Part II, p. 107.



principles by later generations. Moving his discussion from the ‘infancy’ to the ‘youth of the world’, he describes the way that men ‘dance and sing and imitate natural objects’. Nevertheless, he emphasises that this ‘imitation’ derives from an awareness of ‘a certain rhythm or order’ (*Defence*, p. 676). These comments on ‘order’ suggest that even the most primitive institutions understood by early man contained a dynamic impulse that attracted the active powers of the mind. I argue that such observations are relevant to Shelley’s study of Enlightenment political economy. Chapter One explored the possibility that Shelley was attracted to such theories for their experimentation with language and rhetoric, as well as their moral and social implications. This aspect of his economic outlook may be seen as enduring in the *Defence*, in which he connects these ideas about a progressive sense of ‘order’ to Smithian views on metaphor.

Although I have argued that Smith viewed imagination from a moral and economic perspective, he can also be seen as situating this faculty within a literary context. For example, Smith justifies his view of the ‘invisible hand’ in economics by describing society’s attraction to the loveliness that this metaphor exerts upon imagination. He remarks that ‘you will be more likely to persuade’ individuals if you appeal to ‘their love of beautiful and smoothly functioning political schemes [and] love of contrivance’ (*Theory of Moral Sentiments*, pp. 186-7). Smith suggests that the ‘invisible hand’ appeals to men because they observe within it the familiar, ‘smoothly functioning’ operations of self-interest. The metaphor also implies that the potential of mind to contrive innovations, is reflected in this sympathetic impulse within self-interest. Emma Rothschild remarks that the invisible hand inspires ‘self-recognition’ in the ‘philosopher, entranced by a beautiful and imaginary order’.<sup>64</sup> However, it can be argued that the beauty of Smith’s concept of ‘order’ relates only to the progressiveness of established concepts, rather than, as Shelley believed, their receptiveness to more original insights.

It is significant that these observations culminate in Shelley’s assessment of the relationship between eighteenth-century economics and poetry. He explains that it is

an error to assert that the finest passages of poetry are produced by labour and study. The toil and the delay recommended by critics can be justly interpreted to mean no more than a careful observation of the inspired moments, and an artificial connection of the spaces between their

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<sup>64</sup> Emma Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments: Adam Smith, Condorcet and the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), p. 117.

suggestions by the intertexture of conventional expressions; a necessity only imposed by a limitedness of the poetical faculty itself. (*Defence*, p. 697)

Shelley may be seen here to question the belief that the value of poetry is defined by the 'toil' involved in its creation. This proposition may refer to Smith's view of literary writers as 'unproductive' in *The Wealth of Nations*. However, it is interesting that Shelley aligns himself with Smith's separation of 'poetry' from economic advances, rather than with contemporary literary 'critics'. This suggests that Smith comprehended the artificiality of the simple application of economic doctrines, like the labour theory of value, to literary matters. Instead, it might be suggested that Shelley admires Smith's understanding of the progressive impulse active within both spheres. He extends Smith's arguments by suggesting that this quality can be 'observed' interacting with more original insights. This in turn produces 'inspired' innovations that do not require attempts to impose economic methodology upon literary affairs, or vice versa. Shelley's concept of such errors being 'suggested' by 'conventional expressions' upholds his belief that contemporary understanding of Poetry is always limited by its historical shortcomings. This leads into his exploration of the ways in which utilitarians separated literature from 'useful' knowledge.

Shelley's pursuit of 'inspired moments', rather than 'artificial' approaches to the past, may explain his attraction to Enlightenment political economy. He maintained that the precepts established by Hume and Smith were capable of further developments. Nevertheless, his frustration towards the way that these doctrines were misinterpreted by contemporary utilitarianism led him to address the social, moral and even literary possibilities of political economy in the *Defence*. Shelley's response to utilitarian doctrines may be seen as operating in a coherent historical framework. As a result, I am going to explore the *Defence* from a chronological perspective, beginning with Shelley's response to utilitarian interpretations of history. I will then investigate his receptiveness to utilitarian ideas about contemporary economic change. I will conclude by considering the way that utilitarian theories both impacted upon and could be developed by Shelley's most sophisticated definition of 'Poetry'. Chapter Three followed a similar structure, arguing that *A Philosophical View of Reform* was centred around the historical point of 1819. In contrast, I suggest that, by 1821, Shelley felt able to offer lasting solutions to the problems both addressed in, and exacerbated by, the

utilitarian outlook. In order to explore this relationship between utilitarian doctrines and 'Poetry', it is important to begin with Shelley's response to their concepts of history.

#### **4. 7. 'Incorporating into Itself a Portion of That which it Supersedes': Shelley and the Utilitarian Historical Narrative**

I have suggested that Shelley regarded the doctrines of Enlightenment political economy as examples of a progressive tendency within past innovations which could be developed in the contemporary age. This implies that eighteenth-century political economists identified a relationship between past, present and future that contradicted the utilitarian concept of historical 'stages'. Earlier in this chapter, I explored Peacock's separation of what he described as the 'four ages' of the world into distinct periods. This suggested that any interplay between these stages would involve charting the rise of 'useful' forms of knowledge to the detriment of poetry in its conventional sense. As a result, any use poetry fulfils in primitive society is soon replaced with the insights of more analytical disciplines. Such an outlook may be seen to transform Bentham's distrust of non-didactic literature into a coherent historical narrative.

Haley remarks that 'for Peacock, the impotence of poets is not only their lack of influence on the future, but their totally passive relation to the past'.<sup>65</sup> I argued in the introduction to this chapter that this utilitarian view of poetic 'impotence' is one that Shelley sought to challenge. However, Haley's suggestion that Peacock believed that 'useful' forms of knowledge reflected a relationship between 'past' and 'future' highlights tensions in the latter's view of the linear development of commercial society. Although Peacock portrayed each 'age' as replacing its predecessor, his belief that it is possible to adopt an 'active' approach to the past raises possibilities for a more dynamic view of history. Such ideas are not elaborated in Peacock's *Four Ages*. This can perhaps be explained by his commitment to the construction of a historical theory that is independent of the kind of thinking he presents as inimical to socio-economic development. However, I suggest that Shelley was attracted to the way that this aspect of Peacock's outlook validated his belief that utilitarianism could attain a more all-encompassing theory of progress.

In order to justify such an approach to the utilitarian historical narrative, it is

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<sup>65</sup> Haley, 'Shelley, Peacock and the Reading of History', p. 451.

important to consider the ways in which Shelley's theory of 'Poetry' enabled him to present a very different view of history to Peacock, Bentham or even Smith. Shelley suggested that lasting progress depended upon a continual interplay between past precepts, which he termed the historical 'form' of a discipline, and more non-temporal inspiration, which he described as its visionary 'spirit'. In his overview of Enlightenment political economy, he had suggested that Smith and Hume comprehended this concept of progressive 'form', but failed to identify the way that these principles were receptive to further original insights. Now, Shelley turns his attention to the ways in which such an interplay could extend utilitarian concepts of 'useful' disciplines. In order to question these limited approaches to history, I suggest that Shelley realised that he must begin this section of the *Defence* with a clear definition of 'Poetry'.

Shelley's remarks in the first draft of his essay are illuminating. Asserting his belief in the universality of all knowledge, he comments in a draft passage that the 'unity in all thoughts and objects of thought, the perception of which is poetry, the expression of which is art, & the application of which to knowledge & use is invention has become recognized'.<sup>66</sup> By suggesting that Poetry perceives the 'unity' in all thoughts, Shelley implies that progressive disciplines are united by the interplay between custom and innovation active within their principles. As a result, they are also bonded by a tendency to destabilise boundaries between different modes of knowledge. Shelley's account of the 'application' of Poetry as 'invention' and his concept of the 'science of beauty' are suggestive of this inclusive definition. His alignment of 'use' with 'poetry' undermines Peacock's dichotomy between art and utility. However, rather than valuing Poetry above utilitarian ideas, Shelley stresses that the Poetry within such doctrines must 'become recognized'.

These arguments culminate in a reading of history that not only questions the utilitarian outlook but also remains optimistic about it. Shelley's essay moves from primitive man to the rise of ancient civilisations in a way that can be seen to mirror Peacock's historical 'stages'. However, he questions the latter's suggestion that the 'golden age' of poetry succeeds its barbarian iron age by emphasising the dynamic process that occurs between historical eras. He remarks that 'the poems of Homer and his contemporaries were the delight of infant Greece', being the 'elements of that social system which is the column upon which all succeeding civilization has reposed' (*Defence*, p. 680). This reiterates the belief that Shelley had expressed in A

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<sup>66</sup> Bodleian Shelley MS. d. 1, fol. 77<sup>r</sup> rev; see *BSM* IV, Part II, pp. 130-1.

*Philosophical View* that Poetry comprises the ‘elements’ of social change. What is more interesting is that Shelley’s description of ‘infant Greece’ amends the language of his first draft. He had described early Greek civilisation as ‘fierce’, ‘rude’, ‘unlettered’ and ‘savage’, in an imitation of Peacock’s view of the role of poetry in primitive society.<sup>67</sup> However, his comments about Homer’s continuing influence upon his successors calls into question Peacock’s view that poetry inspired ‘infant’ societies to develop more ‘useful’ knowledge.

Questioning Peacock’s belief that poetry declines as society becomes more sophisticated, Shelley emphasises that ‘Poetry’ can be restricted, but never extinguished. This depends upon how well its interplay between past and future (or ‘form’ and ‘spirit’) is understood by contemporaries. These ideas can be seen in his representations of the deterioration of the Greek comprehension of Poetry in the Roman period. However, just as in *A Philosophical View*, Shelley maintains that this era should not be generalised as the distortion of Greek ideals. Indeed, he criticises the ‘melodious’ verse of pastoral poets like Theocritus, which sought to imitate Homer without recognising the latter’s original approach to literary convention (*Defence*, p. 686). This suggests that the decline of Greek genius began prior to the dominance of Roman culture, rather than as a result of it. Although Shelley states that Roman literature can be seen as less innovative than its Greek predecessor, he contextualises the epoch as a whole within his all-encompassing definition of ‘Poetry’. This suggests that although there was less originality in Roman poetry, there were other achievements in this period that were just as ‘Poetic’. Shelley’s tendency to relate historical events to contemporary questions is evident in his discussion of Roman history. In *A Philosophical View*, I have argued, such allusions to the past are informed by Shelley’s attitude to the Reform crisis in 1819. In contrast, the *Defence* describes the way that contemporary outlooks fitted into a wider historical narrative.

Analysing the Poetry of the Roman era in a socio-economic context, Shelley remarks upon the heroism of Camillus, the self-sacrifice of Regulus, and the ‘expectation of senators in their godlike state of the victorious Gauls’ (*Defence*, p. 688). This last example refers to the fact that Roman senators faced their massacre by the Gallic tribes with stoic bravery. Such an allusion is similar to his discussion of the Peterloo Massacre in *A Philosophical View*. In Chapter Three, I argued that Shelley implies that passive resistance encourages the imaginative tendency within the oppressors’s self-interest to sympathise with, and ultimately join those they subjugate. Such classical

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<sup>67</sup> Bodleian MS. Shelley d. 1, fol. 69<sup>r</sup> rev.; see *BSM* IV, Part II, pp. 168-9.

examples draw attention to the shortcomings of utilitarian reformers, who rejected this sympathetic impulse in Smith's doctrines. Shelley suggests that these ancient acts of selflessness, 'were not the consequences of a refined calculation of the probable personal advantage to result from such a rhythm and order in the shows of life' (*Defence*, p. 688). This criticism of calculating 'personal advantage' parallels Bentham's insistence upon self-interest as the inflexible motivator behind human nature. However, it is significant that Shelley connects 'calculation' with his concept of 'order' as a reflection of the mind's attempts to articulate original insights. This indicates that he believed that such methodology could be redeemed, if only utilitarians would recognise that historical development is a dynamic, rather than linear process.

Shelley's belief that utilitarian concepts of 'usefulness' could be extended may be seen in his comments on Peacock's concept of the 'four ages' of poetry and society. He begins by engaging with Peacock's view that the vibrancy of poetry's primitive 'iron age' inspires, but is then succeeded by, its more sophisticated 'age of gold'. However, unlike Peacock, Shelley does not perceive this interaction between past and present as superficial. He shares Peacock's view that medieval period reflects this 'golden' point in the modern era. This is apparent when he describes 'Christian and Chivalric systems' as creating 'forms of opinion and action never before conceived; which [are] copied into the imaginations of men' (*Defence*, p. 688). However, differences lie in Shelley's insistence that these regulative systems are copied into the 'imaginations of men'. By suggesting that the creation of social 'forms' depends upon, rather than destroys imagination, Shelley hints that Peacock's arguments refute themselves. These remarks may thus be seen as validating Shelley's belief in the co-dependency of Poetry's historical 'form' and its non-temporal 'spirit'.

At this point in the essay, Shelley momentarily disrupts the linear structure he had adopted from the *Four Ages* in order to explore the classical origins of utilitarianism. This digression is deliberate, as he needs to explain that Peacock and Bentham have adopted a flawed approach to their first principles:

The principle of equality had been discovered [...] by Plato in his *Republic*, as the theoretical rule of the mode in which the materials of pleasure and of power produced by the common skill and labour of human beings ought to be distributed among them. (*Defence*, pp. 689-90)

Shelley interprets Plato's view of 'the materials of pleasure' as a 'theoretical rule'. This suggests that legislative measures based upon the greatest happiness principle must recognise that such laws should be as progressive as the impulse within concepts of 'skill' or 'labour'. Such a reading not only refutes Bentham's concept of a moral and political code, but also suggests that the latter has overlooked the relationship between Smith's views on 'equality' and their ancient counterpart. Exploring Plato's approach to social 'happiness', Shelley remarks: 'The limitations of this rule were asserted by [Plato] to be determined only by the sensibility of each, or the utility to result to all' (*Defence*, p. 690). Smith never accepted the visionary elements of Plato's philosophy. However, this allusion to 'sensibility' is suggestive of parallels between Platonic and Smithian approaches to utility.

It is significant that Shelley goes on to align the classical origins of utility with mathematical innovations. He comments: 'Plato, following the doctrines of Timaeus and Pythagoras, taught also a moral and intellectual system of doctrine comprehending at once the past, the present and the future condition of man' (*Defence*, p. 690). Shelley here suggests that Plato's moral philosophy can be defined as Poetry. This is because it comprehends the way that the 'present' unites 'past' innovations with insights that anticipate futurity. However, he extends this reading by citing Plato's receptiveness to Pythagoras, a philosopher who identified this dynamic process in mathematics. This interest in the inclusion of traditionally non-literary disciplines within his definition of 'Poetry' is reflected when Shelley describes Pythagoras in a cancelled portion of the first draft as being a '<most poetical>' thinker.<sup>68</sup> Such observations reflect his belief that utilitarian thought reflected a dynamic view of progress that could be traced back to antiquity.

From Plato and Pythagoras's all-encompassing views of genre to Hume and Smith's progressive approach to the mind and human nature, Shelley suggests that contemporary definitions of 'usefulness' become challenged by their founding precepts. This mobilisation of the past against the limitations of the present is extended as he explores the ways in which ancient views of utility developed during the rise of Christianity:

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<sup>68</sup> Bodleian MS. Shelley d. 1, fol. 53<sup>r</sup>; see *BSM* IV, Part II, pp. 226-7.

The incorporation of the Celtic nations with the exhausted population of the South, impressed upon it the figure of the poetry existing in their mythology and institutions. The result was a sum of the action and reaction of all the causes included in it; for [...] no nation or religion can supersede any other without incorporating into itself a portion of that which it supersedes.

(*Defence*, p. 690)

This notion of early Christian societies ‘incorporating’ the Poetry of the defeated Mediterranean empires validates Shelley’s belief that Poetry cannot be destroyed by political or social change. Such a theory can be seen to question Peacock’s view of the incompatibility of poetry with socio-economic development, especially in terms of Shelley’s belief that Poetry becomes aligned with, rather than ‘superseded’ by such advances. However, what is most interesting about these remarks is Shelley’s portrayal of ‘poetry’ as not only compatible with economic ‘institutions’, but as inherent within these principles themselves. This has important consequences for his situation of contemporary utilitarianism within a historical framework.

For example, Shelley’s suggestion that vibrant nations should merge with ‘exhausted populations’ undermines Malthus’s protectionist outlook, whilst his emphasis upon the ‘incorporation’ of different nations implies a receptiveness to Ricardo’s support for international trade. Certainly, his alignment of the ‘sum’ of ‘action’ and ‘reaction’ with his theory of Poetry is suggestive of his attraction to Ricardian mathematics. Shelley may thus be seen to draw attention to the potential for a more dynamic impulse within contemporary utilitarianism, rather than berating its shortcomings. He emphasises that the progressive tendency that characterised earlier views of utility has been suppressed, rather than destroyed in its present incarnation. I have argued that Shelley viewed Ricardian theories as far from perfect. However, he perceived their more accommodating approach to past, present and future as an indication that contemporary utilitarianism was already advancing beyond Bentham’s permanent doctrines.

Notwithstanding Shelley’s scepticism about Bentham’s concept of a universal legislation, in Chapter Three I argued that he sought to develop the beneficial aspects of Bentham’s Reform proposals. I suggest that this wish intensifies in the *Defence* as a result of Shelley’s situation of utility within a historical context. Such a reading is supported by his discussion of the social and moral advances that accompanied the rise of Christian teachings. I argue that Shelley’s allusion to the ‘emancipation of women’



in the ancient world relates directly to Bentham's radical proposals (*Defence*, p. 690). Although he draws parallels between the equality stressed in Christian teachings and Bentham's desire for female suffrage, Shelley emphasises that the latter does not attain a progressive understanding of human nature. He comments, 'the abolition of personal slavery is the basis of the highest political hope that it can enter into the mind of man to conceive. The freedom of women produced the poetry of sexual love' (*Defence*, p. 690). By aligning 'the highest political hope', with 'love', I suggest that Shelley turns Bentham's rhetoric against him. Shelley implies that the greatest social aspirations are fulfilled not by depicting self-interest as the basis for Reform, but by reviving human sympathy. Consequently, he makes it clear that socio-economic advances are not achieved by seeking to systemise past achievements, but by identifying that the present must acknowledge their intrinsically progressive impulse. Shelley's prediction of the emancipation of 'love' may thus be read as a suggestion that this sympathetic view of human nature will render Bentham's moral calculus obsolete. Nevertheless, Shelley remained optimistic that deeper studies into the origins of utility would call into question contemporary assessments of social happiness.

I began this section by arguing that Shelley sought to construct a historical narrative that questioned utilitarian concepts of a linear history. I drew attention to Peacock's portrayal of this process as progressive in terms of socio-economic development, but regressive in relation to conventional definitions of 'poetry'. In contrast, Shelley believed that all enlightening disciplines were subject to a continual interplay between established precepts (what he terms the historical 'form') and more original insights (what he describes as a more visionary 'spirit'). As a result, he can be understood to arrive at a definition of poetry that encompasses rather than excludes utilitarian preoccupations. Shelley's historical arguments can be read as a suggestion that shortcomings in utilitarian approaches to the past exerted a detrimental impact upon their view of the present. However, the following section argues that he identified a spark of possibility in utilitarian approaches to socio-economic reform, which could be re-ignited in the contemporary age.

#### **4. 8. ‘The Poetry in these Systems of Thought’: Utilitarianism and Contemporary Economic Reform**

So far, I have argued that Shelley’s receptiveness to utilitarian doctrines inspired him to embark upon a deeper analysis of the definition of ‘Poetry’ than the one he had outlined in *A Philosophical View*. This led him to consider not only the ways in which the interplay between established principles and original insights began, but also the way that this process could be identified within the founding doctrines of political economy. In the previous section, I argued that Shelley contrasted the progressive approach to the mind and human nature advocated by Hume and Smith with the calculative methods favoured by contemporary utilitarians. However, I also suggested that he sought to remedy such limited approaches to the past by developing, rather than rejecting the utilitarian outlook. It is thus important to explore the way that this belief in the ‘Poetic’ potential within utilitarianism impacted upon his assessment of contemporary economic reform. In order to support this reading, I will begin by briefly revisiting Shelley’s ideas regarding the origins of ‘Poetry’.

Summarising his views on the origins of all social, economic and literary conventions, Shelley comments: ‘Language is arbitrarily produced by the Imagination and has relation to thoughts alone; but all other materials, instruments and conditions of art have relations among each other, which limit and interpose between conception and expression’ (*Defence*, p. 678). These remarks may be read as reflecting Shelley’s portrayal of language as humanity’s earliest attempt to express the mind’s receptiveness to the original insights conveyed to ‘imagination’. Here, he suggests that language generates ‘thoughts’ that derive directly from this inspiration. However, he argues that as ‘other materials, instruments and conditions’ were created in the course of social development, such innovations lost sight of the dynamic process active within them. A perfect example of the way in which this progressive impulse within social institutions endures, but is understood increasingly less as time goes on, may be seen in Shelley’s receptiveness to utilitarian political economy. The economic connotations of his remarks are not immediately apparent, and Shelley discusses Poetry and its workings within the context of ‘art’. However, I suggest that his views on the misinterpretation of the relationship between custom and originality evoke parallels with his frustration towards utilitarian methodology. Earlier in this chapter, I argued that figures like Mill believed that political economy could be defined by systematic rules. This draws close

to Shelley's concept here of the 'relations' between ideas, which are 'expressed' in laws that ultimately 'limit' the power of their 'conceptions'. Nevertheless, the suggestion that he believed utilitarian doctrines capable of recognising this interplay between what he describes as the established 'form' and visionary 'spirit' of Poetry is supported by his next remarks.

Shelley employs language that is suggestive of his study of Ricardian doctrines. I have argued that he was drawn to Ricardo's use of 'images' when contemplating economic problems. This interest is hinted at in Shelley's praise for enlightened individuals whose 'plan [...] restrained them from developing this [poetic] faculty in its highest degree'. He suggests that such writers 'make copious and ample amends for their subjection, by filling all the interstices of their subject with living images' (*Defence*, p. 680). These remarks imply that Ricardo's 'plan', with its obliviousness to the imaginative faculty, 'restrains' his Poetic potential. However, Shelley's reference to 'living images' can be regarded as a recognition of the interplay between economic conventions and original insights in Ricardian methodology. In the first draft of the *Defence*, it is significant that Shelley suggested that the creations of such 'individuals' were made of 'diamonds and gold'.<sup>69</sup> These remarks can be viewed as compelling evidence for his optimism towards Ricardo's economic proposals at this point in the essay.

Shelley remains hopeful about utilitarian doctrines. He remarks that 'Poetry ever addresses itself to those faculties which are the last to be destroyed', as by communicating 'all the pleasure which men are capable of receiving: it is ever still the [...] source of whatever beautiful, or generous, or true can have place in an evil time' (*Defence*, p. 687). Shelley's emphasis upon the numerous 'faculties' that are capable of expressing 'Poetry' affirms his rejection of distinctions between reason, imagination and the disciplines they inspire. Furthermore, his suggestion that such faculties can only be 'destroyed' once the Poetry within them is extinguished reasserts that the progressive tendency within their insights can never be eradicated. This belief may have been influenced by Shelley's receptiveness to the theories of Bentham's successors. For example, his conviction of 'pleasure' within 'evil times' contains something of Ricardo's belief in the benefits of his stationary state. Certainly, Ricardo's view that this 'state' suspends economic growth whilst encouraging intellectual reflection can be viewed as significant to Shelley's view of social progress, with its suspicion of generalisations of 'liberty' or 'tyranny'.

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<sup>69</sup> Bodleian MS. Shelley d. 1, fol. 69<sup>r</sup> rev, see *BSM* IV, Part II, p. 163.

These observations culminate in Shelley's narrative of the constraints placed on the advances made by contemporary utilitarians by their limited approach to progress. He opens with remarks that recall Peacock's views on social utility in the *Four Ages of Poetry*: 'Poets have been challenged to resign the civic crown to reasoners and mechanists [...] it is admitted that the exercise of the imagination is more delightful, but it is alleged that that of reason is more useful' (*Defence*, p. 693). However, I argue that these observations question utilitarian distinctions between poetic and 'civic' advances by revealing the 'imaginative' impulse within their concepts of usefulness. The emphasis Shelley places upon the 'universal' and 'permanent' potential of utility is revealing. He comments that 'utility may either express the means of producing the former, or the latter. In the former sense, whatever strengthens and purifies the affections enlarges the imagination, and adds a spirit to sense, is useful' (*Defence*, pp. 693-4). Shelley believed that 'durable' utility must recognise that sympathy is an intrinsic part of self-interest, which extends to others and 'enlarges' the 'affections'. This may be read as an explanation of his suspicion of the sidelining of the imaginative faculty in contemporary utilitarianism. However, Shelley's insistence that imagination becomes 'enlarged' by such a process indicates his rejection of Smith's insistence that self-interest could never be surpassed. This illuminates the description of 'adding spirit to sense', especially in relation to his theory of 'Poetry'. He suggests that this dynamic potential within self-interest must also engage with the capability of imagination to convey insights from beyond the present age – termed by Shelley the 'spirit' of Poetry. Such an interplay may be seen to complicate the divides he presents between 'universal' and 'particular' modes of utility.

Shelley does not portray such a dichotomy in order to condemn contemporary utilitarianism. In fact, he stresses that its 'particular' emphasis upon the self is beneficial. However, he insists that this must acknowledge the role of imagination, which is not to uphold Smithian morality, but to aspire to this sense of 'universality'. He saw this as the realisation of an altruistic society. Shelley concedes:

The promoters of utility in this limited sense have their appointed office in society. They follow the footsteps of poets, and copy the sketches of their creations into the book of common life [...] their exertions are of the highest value, so long as they confine their administration of the concerns of the

inferior powers of our own nature within the limits of what is due to the superior ones. (*Defence*, p. 694)

It is significant that Shelley describes utilitarians as following ‘the footsteps of poets’. The depiction of these figures in close proximity to ‘Poetry’ emphasises his conviction that, should they acknowledge the dynamic impulse within their socio-economic precepts, utilitarianism would achieve its full potential. Shelley’s assertion that utilitarians produce ‘creations’ rather than being ‘creators’, due to the confinement of their insights to a specific historical age, is significant. As a result, what is ‘inferior’ is not the principle of self-interest, but the restriction of human ‘nature’ in denying its sympathetic impulse. I argue that Shelley’s imagery of ‘the book of common life’ is a direct comment on Bentham’s achievements here. It is perhaps no coincidence that between 1774 and 1775, Bentham’s ‘Commonplace Book’, which contained his views on morals and jurisprudence, became renowned as a founding text of utilitarianism.

That Shelley’s comments are directed at Bentham and his circle becomes evident when he appeals to utilitarians to ‘spare to deface, as some of the French writers have defaced, the eternal truths charactered upon the imagination’ (*Defence*, p. 694). Despite the advances made by utilitarian principles, their dismissal of imagination has ‘defaced’ the ‘truths’ which are generated by this faculty. Leader and O’Neill suggest that Shelley’s allusion to ‘French writers’ refers to the calculative approach to morals adopted by Helvétius, who was Bentham’s idol.<sup>70</sup> However, there are also indications that Shelley’s remarks relate to contemporary utilitarian principles. This is implied in his incorporation of economic theories into his discussion of morals:

Whilst the mechanist abridges, and the political economist combines labour, let them be aware that their speculations, for want of a correspondence with those first principles which belong to the imagination, do not tend, as they have in modern England, to exasperate [...] the extremes of luxury and want. (*Defence*, p. 694)

This emphasis upon ‘combining’ or organising labour parallels Ricardo’s preoccupation with the role of different social classes in generating prosperity. Such observations

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<sup>70</sup> Leader and O’Neill, in *Major Works*, p. 834.

reiterate Shelley's frustration that Ricardo's principles slowly eradicated the moral foundations of political economy made clear in *The Wealth of Nations*. Nevertheless, he did not believe Ricardo's mathematical innovations were doomed to 'exasperate' inequality.

Shelley accepts the role of 'political economists' in society, describing their methodology rather than implying that they should halt their commercial activities. However, he advocates a greater 'awareness' of the scope of such 'speculations', so that their dependence upon the 'first principles' of imagination might be revealed. This is implied when Shelley comments: 'The production and assurance of pleasure in the highest sense is true utility. Those who produce and preserve this pleasure are poets or poetical philosophers' (*Defence*, p. 695). As well as emphasising the role of Smithian sympathy in assuring the realisation of an ideal society, Shelley insists that further advances must be produced. Consequently, he may be seen to emphasise the 'poetic' process that inspired Ricardo's theories of commercial production – even if this was not acknowledged by Ricardo himself.

By describing utilitarians as 'poetical philosophers', Shelley implies that their systematic theories contain an imaginative impulse. This becomes evident in remarks that recall Bentham's criticism of religious dogma. Discussing the 'exertions' of prominent sceptical thinkers, such as Locke, Hume, Gibbon, Voltaire, and Rousseau, Shelley comments:

It is easy to calculate the degree of moral and intellectual improvement which the world would have exhibited, had they never lived. A little more nonsense would have been talked for a century or two; and perhaps a few more men, women and children burnt as heretics. (*Defence*, p. 695)

Although Shelley's praise is for religious sceptics, it is significant that he describes their suspicion towards Christian revelation as closely related to calculation. I argue that this suggests that he is considering more specifically the sceptical opinions of political economists, a reading that is supported by these subtle parallels with Bentham's thought and Shelley's direct reference to Hume. However, having praised the mathematical methods favoured by both eighteenth-century political economists and utilitarian thinkers in the first sentence, he draws attention to their failure to contribute to lasting 'moral' and 'intellectual' advances. Shelley's language is satirical, yet he is serious in

his conviction of the interplay between past and future within Poetry. He contemplates a scenario in which those writers who understood its true nature had ‘never existed’ (*Defence*, p. 695). However, in the midst of a discussion of great literary figures in his first draft, it is significant that Shelley remarks, ‘let us add Adam Smith and Turgot’.<sup>71</sup> This appraisal for Smith’s emphasis upon sympathy and Turgot’s calculative approaches to commerce reflect Shelley’s belief that political economy could be defined as Poetry.

Shelley summarises: ‘We have more moral, political and historical wisdom than we know how to reduce into practice: we have more scientific and economical knowledge than can be accommodated to the just distribution of the produce which it multiplies’ (*Defence*, p. 695). This idea of reducing wisdom reflects Shelley’s perception of utilitarianism as a distortion of the enlightened precepts of political economy, whilst his references to multiplication and ‘distribution’ may be viewed as Ricardian preoccupations. Such allusions lead into Shelley’s most succinct comment on utilitarianism: that ‘the poetry in these systems of thought, is concealed by the accumulation of facts and calculating processes’ (*Defence*, p. 695). This encompasses his attitude towards utilitarian principles, namely that their Poetic potential is obscured not by ‘facts’ or calculation, but by incomplete approaches to these methods. The verb ‘to accumulate’ is employed intelligently here. Although Shelley presents it as a gathering together of facts, it also connotes a similar process to ‘calculating’ – acting upon information to achieve new findings. Even though ‘facts’ and ‘calculation’ are passive objects in Shelley’s sentence, these methods of political economy are also designated an activity, which indicates that they can go beyond the limitations of contemporary utilitarianism. As a result, he implies that utilitarians must recognise that imagination is not a faculty to be ‘concealed’ from economic development, but one that must be revealed within the ‘systems’ they have created.

Shelley’s remarks illuminate his belief that, far from opposing Poetry, utilitarian doctrines embodied the most effective mode of Poetry in the present age. I have argued that such theories compelled Shelley to investigate the origins of Poetry, and to situate utilitarianism itself within a wide-ranging historical narrative. This enabled him both to sharpen his views on limitations in the utilitarian outlook, and to strengthen his belief that these could be overcome. However, it remains to investigate what questions such a connection between utilitarianism and Poetry raised, in relation to Shelley’s view of the

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<sup>71</sup> Bodleian MS. Shelley d. 1, fol. 46<sup>r</sup> rev; see *BSM* IV, Part II, p. 253.

future.

#### **4. 9. 'Poetry in an Universal Sense': Utilitarianism and the Future**

In his conclusion to the *Defence*, Shelley not only presents utilitarian doctrines as compatible with his theory of 'Poetry', but also perceives the 'Poetic' process as one that is active within contemporary utilitarianism. In order to support such an interpretation, it is necessary to revisit his views on the workings of Poetry itself. I suggested earlier that Shelley believed such a process to be embodied by Enlightenment concepts of utility. However, he perceived the dynamic approach adopted by Hume and Smith towards the mind and human nature as exemplifying only one half of his theory of Poetry. This related to the capacity of existing socio-economic principles (what he called their historical 'form') to develop themselves from within. It can thus be suggested that much of this chapter has focused upon the way that contemporary utilitarianism restricted this progressive tendency within its eighteenth-century precepts. In contrast, this section concentrates upon the second component of Shelley's Poetry – what he called its non-temporal 'spirit'. Shelley explains this term by suggesting that this dynamic impulse within existing 'forms' of knowledge could engage with a more visionary mode of insight. By focusing upon this aspect of Poetry, which Shelley viewed as an embodiment of his vision of 'future', I suggest that he concludes the *Defence* with optimism towards contemporary utilitarianism.

Shelley's receptiveness to utilitarianism and its precepts may be seen in his descriptions of these more visionary workings of Poetry. He comments:

Poetry is not like reasoning, a power to be exerted according to the determination of the will. A man cannot say, 'I will compose poetry'. The greatest poet even cannot say it: for the mind in creation is as a fading coal which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness. (*Defence*, pp. 696-7)

Shelley emphasises the involuntary inspiration that such 'power' conveys to poet figures. This may be seen to define imagination in a way that surpasses anything



recognised by either Enlightenment or utilitarian political economy. Nevertheless, I suggest that his economic understanding influenced his representations of such ‘future’ insights manifesting themselves within the present. Shelley’s separation of Poetry from ‘reasoning’ here is revealing, in that it is the verb he isolates, not the noun. In other words, ‘reason’ is not described as unrelated to Poetry, but contemporary attitudes towards what ‘reasoning’ should be. This revives his scepticism concerning the dichotomy between reason and imagination expressed by eighteenth-century thinkers. However, his contemplation of ‘will’ implies that utilitarian ideas have impacted upon his concept of Poetry’s process. In Chapter Three, I argued that Bentham underplayed the relevance of free will to his ‘universal’ moral and political code. In contrast, Shelley’s Humean concept that will is shaped by the strength of the mind’s receptiveness to impressions emphasises his belief that social progress is dependent upon individuality. His view of the poet as unable to control his receptiveness to vision corresponds with his belief in such figures as agents of what he calls Poetry’s non-temporal ‘spirit’. Nevertheless, he insists that such insights depend upon the dynamic impulse within existing theories of the mind and human nature.

Shelley relates the prophetic yet ‘inconstant wind’ that acts upon the human mind to his view of Poetry’s ‘form’, rather than its ‘spirit’. His concept of the ‘mind in creation’ refers to his belief that poets are the ‘creations’ as well as ‘creators’ of their age, in that their works are shaped by their receptiveness to past insights. Consequently, when Shelley describes the ‘mind in creation’, he is not contemplating the visionary power of Poetry to transform society. Instead, he emphasises that such inspiration needs to engage with contemporary ideas in order to be understood. It is significant that he presents the mind’s receptiveness to established principles as a ‘fading coal’. This implies that the innovative tendency within present ‘forms’ is not as great as that of Poetry’s ‘spirit’, but that it can be reignited. The ‘invisible influence’ which ‘awakens’ the progressive impulse within past achievements, is perhaps Shelley’s most intriguing allusion to Smith’s metaphors. I argue that he aligns this vibrant power within the mind’s ‘creation’ with Smith’s view that a self-interest that was sympathetic to others – the ‘invisible hand’ – could inspire moral and economic development. In this context, Shelley implies that both the deterministic approaches to the past favoured by utilitarians, and the ‘inconstant’ glimpses of the future that they regarded with suspicion, could be re-evaluated.

Such optimism about utilitarian doctrines may be seen when Shelley relates these visionary aspects of ‘Poetry’ to ideas about the ways in which the future should be

made. When discussing present attitudes towards Poetry, it is significant that Shelley refers to the distrust utilitarians expressed towards imaginative literature:

Observe in what a ludicrous chaos the imputations of real and of fictitious crime have been confused in the contemporary calumnies against poetry and poets; consider how little is as it appears, or appears as it is; look to your own motives, and judge not, lest ye be judged. (*Defence*, p. 699)

This discussion of prejudice ‘against poetry and poets’ may be read as a criticism of Bentham’s view that non-didactic works were immoral. However, Shelley’s reference to fiction is also suggestive of Bentham’s recognition that imagination was useful. I have explored Bentham’s belief that imagination generated ‘logical fictions’, through which the mind could anticipate the pleasurable or painful outcome of its actions. On the one hand, Shelley may be seen to question the limitations of Bentham’s ‘moral calculus’, the code through which human ‘motives’ could be ‘judged’. However, on the other, he suggests that the latter’s discussion of imagination implies an underlying awareness of its dynamic qualities.

Shelley’s preoccupation with the development of Bentham’s reform proposals is suggested in his next remarks. He comments: ‘There is nothing evil in this error [of ‘neglecting’ negative aspects of contemporary theories], and thus cruelty, envy, revenge, avarice [...] have never formed any portion of the popular imputations on the lives of poets’ (*Defence*, p. 700). Shelley links the poet’s ‘error’ here to ‘popular imputations’. This may suggest that scepticism about utilitarian doctrines was perceived as a weakness in 1821. However, he implies that this will be vindicated as Bentham’s emphasis upon the dangers of self-interest is revealed as enabling, rather than preventing, ‘cruelty’, ‘revenge’ and ‘avarice’. In Chapter Three, I argued that Shelley perceived Bentham’s desire to reduce the likelihood of ‘sinister’ impulses through a secret ballot as a means of inhibiting the sympathetic tendencies of the electorate. However, the *Defence* may be viewed as an extension of these observations, in that it comments on the way that the utilitarians’ response to imagination impacted upon their view of the future. In his first draft, Shelley commented that, ‘financiers, political economists & writers on government [...] & international law have interspersed

the mist of thier [*sic*] micrology'.<sup>72</sup> This emphasis upon clouded judgement within political economy summarises Shelley's outlook on a range of utilitarian viewpoints. His imagery encompasses Bentham's misguided 'interspersion' of past economic principles with his distinctive view of 'law'. It may also be read in relation to Mill's dynamic yet inflexible view of 'government', or Ricardo's obliviousness to the imaginative impulse within financial innovations. Shelley's description of utilitarian 'micrology' (or its emphasis upon calculation, systemisation and reductive laws) as a 'mist', is significant. I argue that this reflects his conviction that its inherently Poetic potential could become visible.

Having summarised his approach to the past, present and future of utilitarianism, Shelley concludes what he envisaged as Part I of the essay:

I have thought it most favourable to the cause of truth to set down these remarks according to the order in which they were suggested to my mind by a consideration of the subject itself, instead of following that of the treatise which excited me to make them public. (*Defence*, p. 700)

By referring to the 'treatise' that inspired the *Defence*, Shelley emphasises that he has contrasted the historical outlook of Peacock's *Four Ages* with his own concept of past, present and future. However, his discussion of the 'order' that utilitarian thought has 'suggested' to him, implies that there is a progressive impulse within its doctrines. These ideas culminate in a succinct definition of Shelley's theory of Poetry:

What is called poetry in a restricted sense has a common source with all other forms of order and of beauty according to which the materials of human life are susceptible of being arranged; and which is Poetry in an universal sense. (*Defence*, p. 700)

These sentences reflect Shelley's determination to separate the restriction of poetry to verse and metre favoured by utilitarians from the more 'universal' qualities of what he

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<sup>72</sup> Bodleian MS. Shelley d. 1, fol. 35<sup>r</sup> rev; see *BSM* IV, Part II, pp. 298-9.

calls 'Poetry'.<sup>73</sup> However, he also emphasises that all the 'materials' of knowledge are subject to a common process, which depends upon established 'forms' as well as the 'beauty' of original insights. As a result, I suggest, Shelley's theory of 'Poetry' does not oppose 'restricted' utilitarian attitudes towards literature, but attempts to inspire them to develop beyond such limitations.

It is at this point that Shelley reprises material that he had incorporated into *A Philosophical View of Reform*. However, as a result of having refined his theory of Poetry into an essay that explores its components and workings, these observations acquire new meaning. Shelley reiterates that 'the literature of England, an energetic development of which has ever preceded or accompanied a great and free development of the national will, has arisen [...] from a new birth' (*Defence*, p. 700). Nevertheless, it must be remembered that he is no longer addressing the revolutionary threat of 1819. Shelley asserts that the 'form' established by past insights precedes contemporary 'developments', yet also accompanies them in terms of the extent to which their dynamic impulse is understood. However, he now addresses those who were already involved in an enlightening, yet restrictive mode of Reform. Shelley's conviction that utilitarian proposals could be developed is implied in his belief in a 'new birth'. It is significant that his praise for living writers omits the restrictive naming of literary figures that characterised *A Philosophical View*. This suggests that Shelley's praise for Bentham in 1819 are now extended to Mill's theories of historical and economic progress and Ricardo's mathematical methodology.

That Shelley's study of political economy has shaped as well as been shaped by his theory of Poetry is implied in his famous conclusion:

Poets are the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration, the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present, the words which express what they understand not, the trumpets which sing to battle and feel not what they inspire [...] Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the World. (*Defence*, p. 701)

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<sup>73</sup> In Shelley's intermediate draft, there are instances in which he draws attention to his distinction of the capitalised word 'Poets' from this 'restricted' view of 'poets' in a literary sense. For example, his capital 'P' is written in a larger and bolder script than the rest of his prose, suggesting that he wished to add emphasis to this definition of 'Poetry'. See University of Oxford, Bodleian Library MSS, Bodleian Shelley MS. adds. c. 4, fol. 214<sup>r</sup>.

In Chapter Three, I argued that Shelley's emphasis upon 'legislation' suggests that he believed the insights of Poetry to manifest themselves within contemporary ideas. This relates to his view of the historical 'form' of a discipline, which plays a crucial role in both expressing and understanding the 'unacknowledged' insights of Poetry's 'spirit'. As a result, I suggested that this concept of 'unacknowledged legislation' emphasises the dependence of Poetry upon this interplay between established theories and visionary insights.

Shelley's reprisal of these ideas in the *Defence* validates this reading, in that he insists that these 'shadows' of the future can only be perceived as Poetry when they are communicated to the present. However, what is most interesting here is his relation of Poetry to the failure of contemporary utilitarians to either identify or interact with the dynamic impulse within their founding precepts. This is evident when Shelley presents poets as, 'feeling not what they inspire'. His allusion to feeling may be indebted to Smith's view of an imaginative self-interest. However, it appears also to emphasise Smith's failure to recognise that this innovation could be receptive to more visionary 'inspiration'. Smith's inability to 'feel' what he inspires may be viewed as a more direct comment upon the way in which the latter's precepts could be developed by the present generation. This confirms that Poetry is not the opponent of self-interest, free trade or a gold standard, but is intrinsic to these components of contemporary political economy. As a result, I argue that the *Defence* does not condemn utilitarian misinterpretations of the past, or their limited approaches to the present. Instead, Shelley maintains that contemporary political economists could not only become receptive to a more extensive definition of 'Poetry', but could also identify its workings within their own theories. He thus remained hopeful that utilitarians would redefine their approaches to past and present, in order to bring about a more egalitarian, altruistic and 'Poetic' future.

#### **4. 10. Political Economists as Poets**

I began this chapter by arguing that Shelley not only contextualised political economy in 1819 within his overarching theory of Poetry, but that his receptiveness to the discipline also inspired him to respond to contemporaries who had very different ideas about socio-economic progress. Shelley's view of history as a series of periods that

either perpetuated past innovations or adopted an iconoclastic approach to them was complicated by his receptiveness to utilitarian doctrines. Although committed to socio-economic reform, I drew attention to the way in which Bentham's concept of a universal mode of legislation deployed Smithian precepts, rather than identifying the progressive impulse within them. Nevertheless, Shelley's attraction to Bentham's thought in *A Philosophical View* may be seen as sparking the more detailed analysis of utilitarian doctrines that manifested itself in *A Defence of Poetry*.

Shelley's reading of Peacock's *The Four Ages of Poetry* can be regarded as the catalyst for his essay. However, his interest in utilitarian ideas and the way that they impacted upon his theory of Poetry was already advanced by 1821. I argued that Shelley's response to the *Four Ages* should not be understood as a reflection only of his satirical yet 'sacred rage' towards Peacock's devaluation of poetry. Instead, the *Defence* may be read as seeking to extend this restrictive approach into a more all-encompassing idea of what 'Poetry' really was. Certainly, Shelley took issue with Peacock's idea of an inverse relationship between poetic and economic growth, and his concept of separate historical eras that succeed each other in a linear way. However, he maintained that there was a progressive potential within the utilitarian outlook that could not only develop alongside poetry, but could also be included within his definition of 'Poetry' itself. I argue that it was this commitment to advancing utilitarian ideology that inspired Shelley to absorb its wide-ranging doctrines. Notwithstanding the shortcomings of the *Four Ages*, Shelley identifies the way in which Peacock's interest in historical study distinguishes his ideas from Bentham's view of 'universal' laws. As a result, he became drawn to other figures who implied that utilitarianism was open to interpretation.

By exploring Shelley's interest in Mill and Ricardo, I have argued that he began to realise that utilitarianism was already progressing beyond Bentham's founding doctrines. Although Mill's concept of socio-economic laws can be seen as upholding Benthamite ideology, I suggested that Shelley was drawn to his view of imagination as an 'associative' faculty. Certainly Mill's belief that language reflected the power of the mind to express its ideas in a comprehensible order may be seen as influencing Shelley's study into the origins of custom in the *Defence*. Nevertheless, Mill's emphasis upon permanent institutions that are created but never developed by these active mental powers falls short of Shelley's belief in a never-ending interplay between convention and originality. In contrast, I have argued that Shelley identified in Ricardian economics an understanding of such a process. Ricardo's *Principles* both

identified the dynamic impulse within Smith's precepts, and engaged these with original developments that resulted in his ideas regarding gold currency, economic relations and international trade. In this respect, Ricardo may be seen to vindicate Shelley's belief that utilitarianism could be included within his definition of 'Poetry'. However, I have argued that Shelley was frustrated by the obliviousness in Ricardian political economy to the imaginative process that he saw as underpinning its achievements.

Having explored the way that Bentham's successors drew closer to, yet still evaded this dynamic approach to political economy, I then suggested that Shelley conceived the *Defence* as an extension of his ideas relating to past, present and future. He began by contrasting the narrow view adopted by utilitarians towards social progress with the preoccupations of Enlightenment political economists. Revisiting his interest in Hume's theories of the human mind and Smith's progressive view of self-interest, I suggested that Shelley presents the utilitarian rejection of imagination as flawed at its inception. However, what is most significant is his relation of Enlightenment ideas about intellectual progress to the origins of what he defines as 'Poetry'. Shelley believed that all established laws derived from the mind's attempts to express visionary insights in a tangible 'order'. He thus relates these ideas to the utilitarians' failure to recognise the progressive impulse within their founding principles. Shelley compares utilitarian accounts of 'primitive' societies with more aesthetic descriptions, such as Coleridge's 'lyre' metaphor for the mind. However, he maintained that economic doctrines could include, rather than oppose these alternative approaches.

Shelley develops these themes by engaging with utilitarian theories of history. Responding to Peacock's view of the 'four ages' of poetry and society, he not only questions the notion of a linear process that favours economic progress at the expense of poetry, but also extends the idea of 'useful' knowledge. By outlining an alternative reading of history, Shelley represents economic growth as something that encompasses political, philosophical and even literary advances. Such ideas develop when he discusses utilitarian doctrines within a contemporary context. By engaging with Bentham's reform proposals, Mill's theories of the human mind and Ricardo's economic innovations, Shelley implies that such theories can be seen in an optimistic light. The *Defence* does not thus present a 'Poetic' reading of history so much as a solution to limitations in the utilitarian outlook. Instead, Shelley implies that the process through which such theories were created has ensured that they contain a dynamic impulse that can itself be defined as Poetry.

I have suggested that Shelley concluded his drafting of the *Defence* with his most

sophisticated ideas regarding the ‘future’ of socio-economic Reform. He emphasises that perhaps the most abstract aspect of his theory of Poetry – that of its visionary ‘spirit’ – can be seen as integral to the development of utilitarian economics. He implies that contemporary utilitarians must decide whether the future is to be made by maintaining their ‘restricted’ separation of poetry and economic progress, or by contemplating a more ‘universal’ sense of inspiration. However, Shelley insists that this choice is only a small indication of what political economy could become, should it accept that its doctrines are subject to a continual interplay between past innovations and an inspiration that foreshadows the future. It is unfortunate that Parts II and III of the *Defence* were never written, as the received text implies that Shelley would have extended his analysis of utilitarianism still further. However, having argued that utilitarian thinkers were slowly comprehending the power within their doctrines, I suggest that Shelley believed that political economists could become the most enlightened ‘poets’ of the early nineteenth century.



### **Conclusion: Political Economy and its ‘concealed’ Poetry**

By the time Shelley died in July 1822, political economy had already begun the transformation that would divest the discipline of its foundations in moral philosophy and its preoccupation with cultural concerns. However, this thesis has argued that in Shelley’s work, both the principles of contemporary political economy and the way in which these theories related to their Enlightenment precepts contain an infinite social, philosophical and even literary potential. Central to this belief is Shelley’s definition of ‘Poetry’, which can be seen to develop throughout his prose oeuvre. I began this thesis by drawing attention to the tendency amongst present-day critics to present political economy as separate from, and even detrimental to poetic concerns. In contrast, I have argued that Shelley defines ‘Poetry’ as something that not only includes all progressive disciplines, but also as reflects the idea that socio-economic innovations can be seen to derive from the same enlightening process as aesthetic modes of thought. Rather than suggesting that shortcomings in contemporary political economy can be redeemed by the insights of the poet, Shelley’s prose implies that political economy has influenced, as well as been influenced by the aesthetic ideas for which he is better known.

It is important to summarise the way that I have both explored and justified this reading of Shelley’s attitude towards economic doctrines. In Chapter One, I argued that his interest in political economy may be observed in his earliest writing, particularly his receptiveness to its eighteenth-century foundations in moral philosophy and Enlightenment thought. This chapter explored the idea that Shelley’s early attraction to revolutionary doctrines was underpinned by his commitment to socio-economic change. I argued that the themes of both his Irish pamphlets and the Notes to *Queen Mab* can be sourced as much to Smith’s views on sympathy, self-interest and national prosperity, as to Godwin’s theories on intellectual development. Furthermore, I suggested that Shelley’s economic interests not only encompassed classical political economy, but also reflected his attraction to the agrarian ideas expressed in provincial periodicals. This can be observed in reflection in Shelley’s Notes of ideas that are suggestive of Spence’s ‘Land Plan’, specifically the latter’s campaign to abolish private landownership. Such wide-ranging economic interests are worthy of study in their own right, yet this chapter also argued that Shelley was not only interested in economic theories, but also in the ways in which these were articulated. By exploring Shelley’s attraction to Spence’s incorporation of verse, myth and prophecy into his economic arguments, I argued that

he began to perceive political economy as containing literary potential. This conviction can be supported by the ways in which the Notes may be read as emulating Darwin's experimentation with poetry and prose in his approach to agriculture and industrialisation. Shelley's admiration not only for the theories of political economy, but also for the ways in which its discourses subverted conventional notions of genre and form, may be viewed as underpinning his development as a prose writer.

Chapter Two explored Shelley's interest in the social and literary potential of political economy and its impact on the essays and pamphlets he wrote between 1813 and 1817. I began by arguing that Shelley's detailed understanding of classical political economy led him to be sceptical about the idea that a 'return to nature' could redress socio-economic abuses. The first part of this chapter compared the hostility towards industrialisation expressed by Newton and Ritson to Shelley's belief that commerce could complement intellectual and moral development. I argued that Shelley's enduring admiration for Smith's views on the social benefits of self-interest, led him to explore the origins of such arguments in Mandeville's work. In suggesting that 'passions' such as selfishness were intrinsic to humanity, rather than the consequences of a corrupt economic society, Shelley can be seen as attaining a more sophisticated view of contemporary hardship than the opinions expressed by the Bracknell circle. Shelley rejected Mandeville's view that passions were synonymous with vice. Nevertheless, I argued that he was interested in the way in which these debates on human nature reflected the potential of political economy to encompass imaginative approaches to social improvement.

Chapter Two considered not only the way that Shelley's attitude towards economic theories developed, but also the ways in which his writing expanded his ideas about the literary qualities of political economy. Focusing upon the political pamphlets he wrote in response to the Reform crisis of the late 1810s, I suggested that Shelley's engagement with the responses of both metropolitan and provincial reformers to economic hardship calls into question generalised uses of the terms 'liberal' and 'radical'. For example, whilst Hunt is often portrayed as the embodiment of liberal values, his essays on socio-economic affairs engage with the preoccupations and language of the provincial periodical writers. Similarly, although Cobbett is notable for his matter-of-fact polemics against economic abstractions, his work reflects a detailed understanding of both the doctrines of classical political economy and the educated rhetoric that he is frequently viewed as rejecting. This chapter concluded by suggesting that Shelley identified parallels between metropolitan and provincial responses to economic turmoil.

These can be seen as a validation of his belief in the literary power of political economy. Furthermore, I argued that he believed this universal appreciation for the rhetoric of political economy to foreshadow an understanding of the ways in which Smithian concepts of sympathy could unite the Reform movement.

Shelley's belief that political economy contained literary as well as social potential can be viewed as undergoing significant developments during 1819, the year in which the Reform movement reached its crisis point. In Chapter Three, I argued that he had been determined to redress what he viewed as a false dichotomy between 'poetry' and 'political science' as early as January 1819. However, it was not until October that year, in his additions to the Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, that he began to develop these ideas into a distinctive theory of 'Poetry'. I have argued that this was Shelley's term for all enlightening disciplines. However, in the Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, he outlines particular terms for the process active within Poetry, which can be seen as indebted to his interest in political economy. For example, Shelley's admiration of existing economic principles may have been influenced by his attraction to Smith's portrayal of self-interest as socially useful. However, it is Smith's belief that self-interest can inspire sympathy for others that may be seen as impacting upon Shelley's concept of the 'form' of Poetry. For Shelley, all political, economic and literary conventions must be viewed as both the products of a specific time period, and as vessels containing a progressive impulse that can be developed by subsequent generations. In this respect, his definition of 'form' emphasises the dynamic potential that is intrinsic to all existing disciplines.

This interpretation of Poetry questions Haley's view that Shelley 'struggle[d] to define the proper relation between tradition and originality'.<sup>1</sup> Shelley's account of the way that such a relationship can be sustained may have been inspired by his belief that Smith's progressive approach to self-interest could be developed further. He was convinced that this dependency upon the 'self' could eventually be transformed into a mode of political economy that was both egalitarian and altruistic at its heart. I argued that this assessment of Smithian principles influenced Shelley's ideas about the ways in which society could engage with literary and economic conventions whilst seeking to go beyond them. Shelley's response to the question of how such progress might be achieved lies in his definition of 'originality'. In the Preface, I suggested that he presents the dynamic impulse intrinsic to these historical 'forms' as capable of engaging with a more non-temporal mode of inspiration. Shelley termed this the 'spirit' of

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<sup>1</sup> Haley, 'Shelley, Peacock and the Reading of History', p. 451.

Poetry, and argued that it was both unrestricted to the past and reflective of future ideas. It is this interplay between the progressive ‘form’ and visionary ‘spirit’ within all disciplines that can be seen to underpin his definition of ‘Poetry’. That this theory was indebted to Enlightenment political economy is supported by Shelley’s assessment of the way that such precepts were interpreted in 1819.

Beginning by exploring Shelley’s attitude towards contemporary political economy in *A Philosophical View of Reform*, I argued that his response to Malthusian doctrines was more complex than is often assumed. Rather than condemning the arguments of Malthus’s *Essay*, I suggested that Shelley was frustrated that their original uses of rhetoric and mathematics were constrained by an inflexible approach to Smith’s precepts. In contrast to Shelley’s belief that Smith’s view of self-interest contained the capacity for further development, Malthus upheld this principle in order to justify arguments about inequality and population control. These can be viewed as perpetuating the ‘form’ established by Smithian political economy without acknowledging the way that this could engage with a more visionary kind of inspiration – the ‘spirit’ of Poetry. Such a reading of contemporary political economy as misguided in its attitude towards the past informed my exploration of Shelley’s treatment of history in *A Philosophical View*. By drawing attention to his scepticism about generalised definitions of ‘tyranny’ and ‘liberty’, I argued that he believed that even the most oppressive epochs were capable of reviving the progressive impulse within their institutions. Similarly, he treated eras of revolutionary change with caution, due to his belief that the enactment of solely visionary insights could never achieve lasting progress. Shelley depicts the past as a series of episodes in which the ‘form’ of existing institutions is upheld at the expense of embracing the ‘spirit’ of further innovations, or vice versa. However, it was in Shelley’s assessment of the future of reform that he was confronted with a political economist whose ideas complicated such a reading of history, Jeremy Bentham.

I argued that *A Philosophical View* can be seen as Shelley’s first detailed response to utilitarian doctrines. Rather than upholding Smith’s precepts to reject notions of social improvement, Bentham regarded the former’s view of a self-interested humanity to be central to his reform proposals. I suggested that Bentham’s studies into the uniformity of human experience appealed to Shelley in terms of their rejection of religious superstition and justification for universal suffrage and female emancipation. However, Bentham’s suspicion of imagination led him to reject Smith’s belief that self-interest could inspire individuals to sympathise with others. As a result, his political and

economic proposals were based upon a permanent view of human nature that sought to systemise morals into a utilitarian code. I argued that Shelley regarded such an outlook to reflect an insidious distortion of his theory of 'Poetry'. Rather than valuing the 'form' established by Smith's principles over the 'spirit' of progress, Bentham's work may be seen as fusing both custom and innovation in order to propagate 'the greatest happiness' principle.

Notwithstanding his scepticism about Bentham's methodology, I argued that Shelley identified social, economic and even literary potential in utilitarian principles. It is for this reason that he can be seen as embarking upon a detailed study of contemporary utilitarianism in *A Defence of Poetry*. Although inspired by Peacock's satirical arguments that rendered poetry irrelevant in a sophisticated economic society, Chapter Four argued that Shelley observed in utilitarian doctrines qualities that deviated from the inflexibility of Bentham's precepts. He also observed parallels in such theories with his view of the 'form' and 'spirit' of Poetry. For example, I explored the way that Mill's interest in human morals and psychology recognised that past principles were intrinsically progressive. I also argued that Shelley's attraction to Ricardo's doctrines can be attributed to Ricardo's determination to engage the dynamic impulse within Smithian self-interest with his own vision of a restored gold standard, international trade and commercial expansion.

Although Shelley was drawn to these progressive aspects of contemporary utilitarianism, I argued that he remained frustrated by utilitarian attitudes towards imagination. Whilst Mill perceived imagination in relation to eighteenth-century theories of associationism, Ricardo was oblivious to the relevance of the faculty to political economy. Shelley regarded these shortcomings as ironic, considering the innovative approaches these figures adopted towards established economic doctrines and their own originality. Consequently, I argued that he was inspired to outline an alternative reading of utilitarianism that redefined its assessments of past, present and future. Shelley begins by contrasting utilitarian definitions of economic progress with the Enlightenment precepts that underpinned them. By reiterating his belief that eighteenth-century political economy places emphasis upon intellectual progress and its connection to imagination, he presents contemporary utilitarianism as a misinterpretation of its founding doctrines.

What is most interesting is the way in which Shelley connects these progressive Enlightenment doctrines to the inception of what he terms 'Poetry'. He suggests that the dynamic impulse within the doctrines of Smith and Hume originated in the mind's

most primitive attempts to express visionary insights in a comprehensible 'order'. He thus maintains that the utilitarian emphasis upon permanent moral, economic and political laws overlooks the fact that such laws are dynamic at their heart. This detailed study into the origins of both the 'form' and 'spirit' of Poetry can thus be seen as informing as well as being informed by utilitarian interpretations of history. Whilst Shelley criticised Peacock's linear account of economic development, he maintained that utilitarian doctrines could encompass both the progressive impulse within its founding principles, and a more visionary way of thinking. These arguments lead into his final observations on the future of political economy and Poetry itself. Shelley emphasises that his contemporaries must choose between their narrow attitudes towards socio-economic progress, and a more universal understanding of inspiration. He thereby implies that the Poetry within political economy may be 'concealed' in the early nineteenth century, but that it will inevitably be 'revealed' to later generations (*Defence*, p. 695). It is this sophisticated understanding of economic doctrines, the belief that they contained literary implications, and the conviction that socio-economic and aesthetic modes of thought derived from the same enlightening process that suggest that Shelley may have been one of the most innovative political economists of the early nineteenth century.

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