

**ON SOME ASPECTS OF SHELLEY'S
POETIC IMAGERY**

BY

ANTS ORAS

TARTU 1938

Printed by K. Mattiesen Ltd., Tartu, 1938.

CONTENTS.

Introductory	5
1. Tissues, Tangles and Involutions	7
2. Ramified Structures	24
3. Contact	34
4. Circular Movement	40
5. The Multitudinous Orb	54
6. Conclusion	64

INTRODUCTORY.

“Poetic imagery” is a term that can be interpreted in various ways. In her remarkable book on “Shakespeare’s Imagery and What It Tells Us”, Professor Caroline F. E. Spurgeon confines herself to “images” that are not used in their literal sense but stand for something else, illustrating and illuminating it indirectly. It is her aim to eliminate everything that might be due to the mere plot or situation; her author is to be caught “giving himself away” at his less conscious moments, in the heat of his feeling. “Simile and metaphor in their widest sense” constitute her conception of an image.

In the case of Shakespeare such an approach is perfectly justified from more than one point of view. He was a dramatist — a very “objective” one, intent on representing life in all its variety, as it is, not as a mere impressionist does, putting down his own reactions to things and thus practically expressing himself; moreover, he was a writer whose situations and plots were often borrowed, in some cases apparently not because he liked them but because they happened to be popular and because his theatre desired him to supply what the audience wanted. On such occasions it was mainly in his subsidiary matter, his poetical “ornament” that his own personal preferences manifested themselves.

However, the term “image” may also be given a somewhat different meaning. “Images” may occur even in direct description or narrative. A writer’s way of apprehending the world, his preferences and idiosyncrasies need not be confined to his metaphors and similes. The fight between an eagle and a snake that is first referred to by Shelley in a simile found in his “Alastor”, is later on described at greater length as part of the narrative in “The Revolt of Islam”. There is no reason to assume that he might not have found something else in the latter case, had he not been fascinated by the particular vision that he chose to depict.

Struggles between serpents and other animals are dealt with by him again and again, now as elements of the story, as in "A Vision of the Sea", and now as illustrative matter. The fact that he introduces such scenes remains characteristic, whatever his pretexts for employing them may be.

Shelley is generally acknowledged to have been a writer whose inner life welled forth into his verse with especial spontaneity. He was essentially a lyrical poet, whose literary output served first and foremost as an outlet for his subjective emotions and imaginings. Even in "The Cenci", whose subject is historical or at least based on documents that were regarded as authentic, he drew largely on his own passions, fears and hopes: not to mention "Alastor", which throughout is an extended simile or symbolic vision. In the work of such a writer, where practically everything is subordinate to the aim of self-expression in its more literal sense, the reflection of his personal impulses and preferences is more immediate and more complete than in that of a dramatist, capable and desirous of identifying himself with, even of losing himself in, the characters of his plays, and sometimes for extraneous reasons borrowing matter foreign to his genius.

It is the aim of the present study to examine in some detail certain types of Shelley's "imagery" in the wider sense which illustrate his manner of perceiving form and movement. But since the apprehension of form and movement is closely connected with a number of other psychological phenomena, some digressions from the principal theme proved unavoidable. It is hoped that the results will justify the method. The aspects of Shelley's vision — though not exclusively his visual vision — here selected for discussion struck the present writer as vital characteristics of his work, so frequent, so haunting, and mostly presented in such an individual manner, that a closer study of them promised to throw some light on the total effect of his poetry.

The edition used for quotation is that of Thomas Hutchinson (Oxford University Press, 1932).

1. TISSUES, TANGLES AND INVOLUTIONS.

Many critics of the poets of the Romantic Revival have observed the important part played in the work of some of them, notably that of Wordsworth and Shelley, by the ideas of penetration and fusion, of the complete mingling of different substances, of the Many uniting into One or of the One permeating the Many. Both in the form of philosophic problems and as a feature of imagery this group of notions is constantly found to be present in their poetry. The conception of an all-pervading cosmic Spirit as well as the longing for a union with the Absolute is connected with these ideas. In an acute analysis of certain aspects of Shelley's poetry ¹⁾, Professor O. W. Firkins has shown how these notions are reflected in his frequent references to hazy, vague substances and in his tendency to resolve everything solid into a state of gaseous indefiniteness. Shifting hues, light mingling with vapour, an uncertain veil spread over a landscape, clouds parting, moving, uniting again and the rising or setting sun sending its beams through them are typical of the atmosphere of his verse. And yet this is only one aspect of his vision. If this were the whole truth about his manner of seeing the world, he would be a vague poet indeed. A closer examination of his work, even if confined to his treatment of atmospherical phenomena, shows, however, that he was very keenly aware of the existence of lines and pattern, and frequently even that he saw subtle and definite pattern where it would have been much more normal to perceive a mere haze. It is not the aim of the present paper to deal with this subject in its entirety, but Shelley's perception of intricacy, of complex configurations of lines and movement will occupy us almost at every step.

As far as his vision of the atmosphere is concerned, this realization of pattern often manifests itself in a tendency to see

¹⁾ Power and Elusiveness in Shelley, The University of Minnesota Press, 1937.

everything as a tissue of fibres and filaments. In itself this was not a novel feature. Occasional examples of it may be found in earlier writers. In the second stanza of Collins's "Ode to Evening" the delicately shaded tints of the atmosphere appear as products of an unearthly loom:

O *Nymph* reserv'd, while now the bright-hair'd Sun
Sits in yon western Tent, whose cloudy Skirts,
With Brede ethereal wove,
O'erhang his wavy Bed.

Coleridge views mist in very similar fashion:

O'er the sheep-track's maze
The viewless snow-mist weaves a glist'ning haze²⁾.

Other examples might be easily found. Nevertheless, they remain isolated instances. As far as the present writer is aware, no English poet approaches Shelley in the frequency and interest of his imagery of this kind. Every now and again he conceives the atmosphere as a texture of threads, and this tendency is often shown in his treatment of other intangible matters as well.

Certain changes made when Shelley revised the earlier sections of "Queen Mab", giving them the form found in "The Dæmon of the World", may serve as illustrations of this trend. Among the pictures of sunset scenery in "Queen Mab" there is a description of

the lines
Of purple gold, that motionless .
Hung o'er the sinking sphere³⁾.

This vivid and adequate rendering of a picturesque sight does not seem to have satisfied the author, for in the final text we read:

Thou must have marked the braided webs of gold
That without motion hang
Over the sinking sphere⁴⁾.

²⁾ "Constancy to an Ideal Object". ³⁾ II. 6—8. ⁴⁾ I. 194.

Mere lines have become "braided webs". It is possible that Shelley may have been guided here by the passage just quoted from Collins's ode, which the new reading closely resembles both in its imagery and its rhythm. Nevertheless, the change seems also to suggest a personal idiosyncrasy, especially in view of the fact that it is merely one of several alterations of the same kind. Thus, a passage not found in "Queen Mab" refers to the "wings of braided air" of the four spirits accompanying the Dæmon ⁵⁾. Light and air are conceived as interlaced and woven, the intricacy of lines of light that formerly were barely mentioned is explicitly described, and the whole effect is that of a tissue. There are many analogous images in Shelley. "Complicating lines" of tremulous mist steep the sun in shadow ⁶⁾. "Fibrous" clouds occur in independent passages of "Queen Mab" ⁷⁾ and "The Dæmon of the World" ⁸⁾. The "cold pale limbs and pulseless arteries" of Ahasuerus in "Hellas" are "like the fibres of a cloud instinct With light" ⁹⁾. In the same work the Chorus compares itself to a "winged cloud" that

would leave
The spirits of eve
A shroud for the corpse of the Day to weave
From other threads than mine ¹⁰⁾.

Here the idea of threads is arrived at in a very indirect way. In "Prometheus Unbound" the "burning threads Of woven cloud unravel in pale air" ¹¹⁾.

This was mostly clouds and mist — only a few specimens of a large category of imagery. It is the same with light, shade and colour. Dim shades that come and go like ghosts "complicate strange webs of melancholy mirth" ¹²⁾. Twilight is woven by boughs and leaves and weaves serene wreaths ¹³⁾. "Inwoven darkness" mingles with the beams of the vanishing moon ¹⁴⁾. The roof of a great hall is a "dome of woven light" ¹⁵⁾. The sun weaves rainbows over a mountain river ¹⁶⁾ and the "sphere-fire" weaves its soft colours in the sky ¹⁷⁾; dim beams amid the rivers weave

⁵⁾ I. 67. ⁶⁾ Rev. Isl. I, st. 2. ⁷⁾ I. 94. ⁸⁾ I. 62. ⁹⁾ II. 143—144.
¹⁰⁾ II. 653—656. ¹¹⁾ II. 1. 22—23. ¹²⁾ Stanzas. — April, 1814. ¹³⁾ Alastor, 427; Rev. Isl. VI, st. 17. ¹⁴⁾ Alastor, 648. ¹⁵⁾ Rev. Isl. I, st. 55.
¹⁶⁾ Hymn to Intell. Beauty, 19. ¹⁷⁾ The Cloud, 71—72.

“a network of coloured light“¹⁸⁾. On a sunny day the bright air weaves intenser hues over every shape¹⁹⁾. Pines weave a shade under the star-light²⁰⁾.

This manner of viewing light and the atmosphere, which might be illustrated almost indefinitely, is perhaps best exemplified by a few passages from “The Witch of Atlas”. An elaborate account is given of the way in which the Fairy Lady spins threads for the “subtle veil” that is to serve as a “shadow for the splendour of her love”:

She took her spindle
And twined three threads of fleecy mist, and three
Long lines of light, such as the dawn may kindle
The clouds and waves and mountains with; and she
As many star-beams, ere their lamps would dwindle
In the belated moon, wound skilfully;
And with these threads a subtle veil she wove —²¹⁾

As we see, it is the airiest materials that are used for this veil. When the Fairy’s ministering spirits are called to build her a tent, they arrive out of the hollow turrets of their clouds, pitching “many a proud pavilion Of the intertexture of the atmosphere”²²⁾. The tent of their mistress is framed

Of woven exhalations, underlaid
With lambent lightning-fire, as may be seen
A dome of thin and open ivory inlaid
With crimson silk²³⁾.

Here not only the material but the pattern is described. On the water of the mere which is the Lady’s residence,

A tapestry of fleece-like mist was strewn,
Dyed in the beams of the ascending moon²⁴⁾.

What has hitherto been examined was almost exclusively Shelley’s treatment of the visible aspects of “the intertexture of

¹⁸⁾ Arethusa, 63. ¹⁹⁾ Rev. Isl. III. st. 3. ²⁰⁾ *ibid.* III, st. 34.
²¹⁾ Stanza 13. ²²⁾ Stanza 52. ²³⁾ Stanza 53. ²⁴⁾ Stanza 54.

the atmosphere". But also the invisible ones are often apprehended by him as tissue or threads. The "wings of braided air" of the spirits in "The Dæmon of the World" have already been mentioned. Similarly, a "sinuous veil Of woven wind" is the garment covering the "glowing limbs" of the visionary maiden in "Alastor" ²⁵). In the imaginary paradise of Cythna's heart "sweet streams of sunny thought" — apparently conceived as currents of warm summer air — and fresh-blown flowers "weave their sounds and odours into one" ²⁶), and in "Rosalind and Helen", "through the intricate wild wood, A maze of life and light and motion" is woven by the "fitful wind" ²⁷).

In our second-last example one of the intangible things "woven into one" was sound. This case is not isolated. In "The Dæmon of the World" ²⁸) "woods and streams with soft and pausing winds A lulling murmur weave". The proem to "Alastor" mentions the "woven hymns Of night and day, and the deep heart of man" ²⁹). The voice of the veiled maiden already referred to is like a variegated net holding the listener's soul in its tangles:

Its music long,
Like woven sounds of streams and breezes, held
His inmost sense suspended in its web
Of many-coloured woof and shifting hues ³⁰).

The intensity with which the idea of texture here occupied the poet's mind is indicated by the use of *three* words suggesting this notion: "woven", "web", and "woof". Elsewhere we find the air weaving music among the leaves ³¹) and a soul weaving hymns to freedom ³²). Wordsworth's voice "did weave Songs consecrate to truth and liberty" ³³). In "The Triumph of Life" "magic sounds" are "woven into one Oblivious melody, confusing sense" ³⁴). The webs of the Witch of Atlas's music are so subtle as to enmesh "Spirits And Gods, entangling them in their sweet ditties" ³⁵).

Some of the above uses must have had a familiar ring long before Shelley's time. It is already in Spenser that a "rustick

²⁵) ll. 176—177. ²⁶) Rev. Isl. IX, st. 26. ²⁷) ll. 128—130. ²⁸) I. 27—30. ²⁹) ll. 48—49. ³⁰) Alastor, 154—157. ³¹) Ros. & Hel. 588—589. ³²) Rev. Isl. II, st. 28. ³³) To Wordsworth. ³⁴) ll. 340—341. ³⁵) Stanza 78.

Muse . . . weaves rudè rhymes" ³⁶). A cognate conception, that of speech as a woof or thread, also favoured by Shelley, is probably even older. "Spinning a yarn" is a popular activity. In Spenser we read, e. g., about the weaving of "false tales and leasings bad" ³⁷). But the vitality of these ideas in Shelley is shown both by the frequency of their occurrence and by the varied use made of them. It is manifestly the delicate dexterity shown in the process of weaving that is hinted at in his references to a "tale woven by some subtle bard" ³⁸) and to "the soothing words" that the Hermit in "The Revolt of Islam" knows how "to weave with skill" ³⁹). The lulling monotonousness of the same activity is suggested by Lionel's "weaving his idle words" in "The Boat on the Serchio" ⁴⁰). On the other hand, the speed and eagerness that may follow such a lull appear in Laon and Cythna's "weaving swift language from impassioned themes" ⁴¹). Even the pauses in a speech are represented as parts of the pattern of a tissue in Laon's "passionate speech With wild and thrilling pauses woven among" ⁴²).

Abstract concepts are not infrequently seen as webs of tangled fibres. In the souls of children sweetness and sadness are "interwoven" ⁴³). Shame is a fabric into which hopes may be woven ⁴⁴). Bright threads of dreams are woven into robes for children ⁴⁵). The night weaves dreams ⁴⁶). Wisdom weaves a mail of tried affection ⁴⁷). Evil and Good are mailed "in woven passions" ⁴⁸). Love is woven into the web of being ⁴⁹). In her sleep "woofs of thought" are wrought by Cythna ⁵⁰); she makes signs on the sand "to range These woofs, as they were woven, of my thought" ⁵¹). The benevolent old man who is Laon's protector is skilled in dyeing "the woof of wisdom . . . in hues of language" ⁵²). The "brightest woof of genius" is "braided" for Laon's beloved ⁵³). "Limbs, and breath, and being" may be "intertwined" ⁵⁴). Dim forebodings "entwine" in the human heart hopes of some place of bliss where there is no parting ⁵⁵).

³⁶) Dedic. Sonnets prefixed to the F. Q., III. 11. ³⁷) F. Q. V. XII. 36. 8. ³⁸) The Sunset, 35. ³⁹) IV, st. 6. ⁴⁰) l. 69. ⁴¹) Rev. Isl. VI, st. 1. ⁴²) *ibid.* V, st. 52. ⁴³) To the Lord Chancellor, 31. ⁴⁴) On the Death of Napoleon, 40. ⁴⁵) Prom. Unb. IV. 414. ⁴⁶) To Night, 5. ⁴⁷) Rev. Isl. IX, st. 7. ⁴⁸) *ibid.* V, st. 2. ⁴⁹) Adonais, st. 54. ⁵⁰) Rev. Isl. II, st. 34. ⁵¹) *ibid.* VII, st. 32. ⁵²) *ibid.* IV, st. 17. ⁵³) *ibid.* IV, st. 30. ⁵⁴) Alastor, 208. ⁵⁵) Q. Mab, IX. 13—16.

"Imposture's impious toils" are intertwined "round each discordant shrine" ⁵⁶). Evils "entangle" the world, life "entangles" the soul's wings in its chains ⁵⁷). Beatrice Cenci unravels her "entangled will" through prayer and talk with her own heart ⁵⁸).

A sight bearing an obvious resemblance to threads is that of hair. It is difficult to imagine a writer avoiding all references to it, but Shelley is especially fond of the notion. The word "hair" is used by him 125 times, whereas Wordsworth has only 54 instances in his considerably larger output, and even in the collected poetical and dramatic works of Tennyson it is found less frequently than in Shelley — 95 times. What appears mainly to attract Shelley is the curves and undulations of loose, flowing hair, hair in a state of motion, tangled or disentangled by the wind. It seems often to become part of the atmosphere, and not seldom the atmosphere is likened to it — another variant of an expanse composed of airy threads. Shadowy hair streaming on the gale ⁵⁹); a shadowy stream of loose hair ⁶⁰); shadowy strings of dark hair "dispread Like the pine's locks upon the lingering blast" ⁶¹); trailing hair erasing its vestige from the grass with shadowy sweep like a sunny storm on dark water ⁶²); scattered hair singing dirges in the wind ⁶³); long black hair whistling like the gale itself ⁶⁴); hair "disentwined" by the air of speed ⁶⁵) or streaming to and fro with the impetus of rapid progress ⁶⁶), floating on the breath of night ⁶⁷), streaming "like a comet's flashing hair" ⁶⁸) — all these are variants of the same vision. All refer to actual hair but sometimes it seems to be mingling with the wind, whose singing and whistling is ascribed to it. The epithet "shadowy" shows how intimately it is associated with the atmosphere and with illumination. At times it is like light or flames scattered or quivering in strings — an almost incorporeal substance ⁶⁹).

Conversely, light, shade, air, clouds, fire are often described as hair. This similarity had been discovered already at the time of the Homeric Hymns. The adjective "fair-haired" as applied to the moon in Shelley's translation of Homer's "Hymn to the Sun"

⁵⁶) Rev. Isl. II, st. 8. ⁵⁷) *ibid.* III, st. 23; II, st. 33. ⁵⁸) The Cenci, III, 1. 220. ⁵⁹) Rev. Isl. I, st. 18. ⁶⁰) *ibid.* II, st. 29. ⁶¹) *ibid.* VI, st. 21. ⁶²) The Sens. Plant, II, 26—28. ⁶³) Alastor, 248—250. ⁶⁴) The Boat on the Serchio, 58. ⁶⁵) Epipsychidion, 106—108. ⁶⁶) Witch of Atlas, st. 46. ⁶⁷) Alastor, 178. ⁶⁸) Prom. Unb. II, 4. 138. ⁶⁹) Rev. Isl. XI, 3; Prom. Unb. IV, 224—225.

is no innovation but a rather faithful rendering of the epithet *εὐπλόκαμος*. In the "Faerie Queene" Phoebus, the sun, comes "dauncing forth, shaking his deawie hayre" ⁷⁰). Collins's reference to the sun as "bright-haired" has already been quoted. But though there is no lack of precedents that may have suggested the idea to Shelley, his readiness to use it and the poetical ingenuity shown in his manner of employing it are indicative of his response to the conception. He sees the moon as spreading "the locks of her bright gray hair" over the ocean ⁷¹). Heaven sinks on the earth and the sea, "unbinding its star-braided hair" ⁷²). The fire of "earthquake-rifted mountains" shakes "its portentous hair" ⁷³). "Swift stars with flashing tresses" shoot through space ⁷⁴). The blue hair of a meteor bends quivering in the blast ⁷⁵). The whole expanse of the stormy skies is like "the bright hair of some fierce Maenad", spread from the horizon to the zenith as "the locks of the approaching storm" ⁷⁶).

An idea especially attractive to Shelley is that of hair, particularly a woman's hair, binding, wrapping, entwining one and frequently steeping one in forgetfulness and languor. Intimate, often amorous closeness and fettering coils are among the associations that suggest themselves in connection with this image. The shadowy strings of Cythna's hair fitfully spread over the eyes of Laon ⁷⁷); Cythna's "streaming hair" falling over a child and wrapping from sight the "fond and long embrace" uniting the two ⁷⁸); Helen's tresses, which Lionel binds round his neck, inducing her "to mingle In the sweet depth of woven caresses" ⁷⁹); the two lovers that the Fairy finds linked in their loose locks ⁸⁰), are some of the cases belonging here. Among the changes that the imagery of Goethe's "Faust" underwent in passing from the German into Shelley's English there is one that is of interest in the present connection. In the original "Adam's first wife" catches young men with her fair hair and does not set them free again:

Wenn sie damit den jungen Mann erlangt,
So lässt sie ihn sobald nicht wieder fahren.

⁷⁰) I. V. 2. 4. ⁷¹) Fragment: O that a Chariot, 4—5. ⁷²) Vision of the Sea, 66—68. ⁷³) Prom. Unb. I. 166—168. ⁷⁴) Ode to Heaven, 15. ⁷⁵) Rev. Isl. VI, st. 32. ⁷⁶) Ode to the West Wind, 18—23. ⁷⁷) Rev. Isl. VI, st. 21. ⁷⁸) *ibid.* XII, st. 23. ⁷⁹) Ros. & Hel. 1027—1032. ⁸⁰) Witch of Atlas, st. 61.

In the translation the process of Lilith's ensnaring men with her locks is described in a more graphic manner:

And when she winds them round a young man's neck,
She will not ever set them free again ^{s1}).

This favourite Shelleyan conception is applied to the atmosphere in a series of memorable passages that describe Evening overpowering Day with the braids of its hair:

And pallid Evening twines its beaming hair
In duskier braids around the languid eyes of Day ^{s2}).

Twilight, ascending slowly from the east,
Entwined in duskier wreaths her braided locks
O'er the fair front and radiant eyes of Day ^{s3}).

An echo of this, less detailed but similar in all essentials, occurs in the much later poem "To Night":

Blind with thine hair the eyes of Day;
Kiss her until she be wearied out ^{s4}).

In these instances light, shade and air are viewed as tangles of twining threads.

A department where Shelley's fondness for involved structure and intricate design finds much opportunity for imaginative exercise is the description of plants. The ideas of woven fabric and tangled hair are not infrequently introduced into such descriptions. We find woven leaves ^{s5}), woven boughs ^{s6}), woofs of branches ^{s7}), interwoven bowers ^{s8}); the "tangled hair" of cedars, yews, and pines ^{s9}); a "pine's locks" spread on the blast ^{s0}); the "tangled locks of the nightshade's hair" ^{s1}), etc. As in the last instances plants are identified with hair, thus in several others

^{s1}) II. 320—321. ^{s2}) A Summer Evening Churchyard, 3—4. ^{s3}) Alastor, 337—339. ^{s4}) II. 10—11. ^{s5}) Alastor 445; Prom. Unb. II. 2. 76. ^{s6}) Alastor, 459; Rev. Isl. VI, st. 41. ^{s7}) Rev. Isl. VI, st. 27; translation of Dante's description of "Matilda Gathering Flowers", l. 2 — unwarranted by the original. ^{s8}) Prom. Unb. II. 2. 6. ^{s9}) The Cenci, III. 1. 263. ^{s0}) Rev. Isl. VI. st. 21. ^{s1}) Ros. & Hel. 207—208.

hair is compared to twining plants. Note, e. g., the comparison of "tangled locks" to "weeds on a wrecked palace growing"⁹²⁾ and the reference to the "long weedy locks" of Oreads and Naiads⁹³⁾. Such images, though not really new⁹⁴⁾, are more frequent and elaborate in Shelley than in any other author known to the present writer, and correspond with the nature of the imagery already discussed. But intertwined plants also occur very often without being expressly associated with woof or hair; in most cases it was clearly for its own sake that Shelley appreciated their sight. He mentions, for instance, boughs twined with nightshade⁹⁵⁾, plants that "entwine . . . a natural bower"⁹⁶⁾, bowers of "interlaced branches"⁹⁷⁾, "meeting boughs and implicated leaves"⁹⁸⁾. We are shown the "musk-rose, twined with jasmine in a wood"⁹⁹⁾; a bank "o'ertwined with strange and star-bright flowers"¹⁰⁰⁾; a Roman cave where "wild weeds twine and clamber"¹⁰¹⁾; hillocks, "matted with thistles and amphibious weeds"¹⁰²⁾; "the twine of direst weeds" hanging garlanded on the walls of a city¹⁰³⁾; broken stalks of weeds "bent and tangled across the walks"¹⁰⁴⁾.

In most of the above instances, as generally in Shelley, tangles of plants are viewed with delight and represent a type of beauty that he loved. In comparatively few cases only are they accompanied by unpleasant associations. The prevalence of pleasurable impressions is even more manifest in the case of climbing plants, to which the poet seems to have taken a special fancy. "The serpent vine, And the dark linkèd ivy tangling wild"¹⁰⁵⁾ trail their attractive spires through many a Shelleyan passage. They have all the flexibility and complexity that he likes, forming interknit patterns and ending in dainty tendrils. Even the ivy, despite its sombre graveyard associations, is for him a symbol of life and beauty rather than death. Now and then there is an atmosphere of mourning about it, as, e. g., in that passage in

⁹²⁾ Jul. & Mad. 224. ⁹³⁾ Witch of Atlas, st. 22. ⁹⁴⁾ Cf. the Latin identification of *comae* with leaves, Milton's "Bush with frizl'd hair impicit" (P. L. VII. 323), Wordsworth's "golden locks of birch" (The River Duddon, XXI); the latter's wall "woven" of "long grass and willows" (Evening Walk, 240), etc. ⁹⁵⁾ Prom. Unb. III. 4. 79. ⁹⁶⁾ Alastor, 146—147. ⁹⁷⁾ Rev. Isl., Dedic. st. 2. ⁹⁸⁾ Alastor, 426. ⁹⁹⁾ Alastor, 452. ¹⁰⁰⁾ Rev. Isl. XII, st. 18. ¹⁰¹⁾ Fragment: A Roman's Chamber, 8. ¹⁰²⁾ Jul. & Mad. 5. ¹⁰³⁾ Maranghi, st. 9. ¹⁰⁴⁾ Sensitive Plant, III. 46—47. ¹⁰⁵⁾ Prom. Unb. III. 3. 135—136.

"Adonais" where the poet himself appears bearing a spear "topped with a cypress cone" round whose shaft "dark ivy-tresses" grow ¹⁰⁶), or on two occasions where "a disconsolate singing bird" and "a widowed bird" are described as sitting in bowers of ivy ¹⁰⁷). As a rule, however, the ivy evokes pleasure. "The green ivy and the red wall-flower" are contrasted with the gloom of a dungeon, and "gay chaplets" are made of them ¹⁰⁸). Its "leaves for ever green and berries dark" relieve the harshness of fissured rocks clasped by its "entwining arms" ¹⁰⁹). "Fair clinging weeds and ivy pale" seem to typify life and growth on the shattered ruin that is to become Laon and Cythna's bridal bower; "clasping its gray rents" they provide it "with a verdurous woof, a hanging dome of leaves" ¹¹⁰). "Ivy-bowers" are a favourite resort of nightingales ¹¹¹) and ring-doves ¹¹²). The ideal house that is to unite the two lovers in "Epipsychidion" is decorated not with its former "antique and learned imagery", already erased, but with "the ivy and the wild-vine" that "interknit The volumes of their many-twining stems" ¹¹³). "Ivy serpentine, With its dark buds and leaves" forms part of the vegetation of the dream-meadow of plants, "fairer than any wakened eyes behold", that is pictured in "The Question".

It is the same with other creepers. The vine — or wild-vine — occurred in several of the instances alluded to. It figures among the most effective ornaments of Italian scenery in the "Lines written among the Euganean Hills", where "trellised lines" of vines, red and golden, enliven the "rough, dark-skirted wilderness" ¹¹⁴); the same "trellised lines" of southern vines contribute to the luxuriant effect of the rich, lulling summer scenery in the "Letter to Maria Gisborne" ¹¹⁵). In "The Zucca" some of Shelley's best description is devoted to a climbing plant with "strong leaves and tendrils" and flowers "full as a cup with the vine's burning dew", overflowing with "golden colours". The most minute, and perhaps also in some ways the most exquisite, description of a creeper found in Shelley appears in the "Fragments of an Unfinished Drama". The sinuous stem and tendrils, the quaint, trailing

¹⁰⁶) Stanza, 23. ¹⁰⁷) To Mary; Unfinished Drama, 72—76. ¹⁰⁸) Dæmon of the World, II. 196. ¹⁰⁹) Alastor, 578—582. ¹¹⁰) Rev. Isl. VI, st. 27. ¹¹¹) *ibid.* X, st. 2; Prom. Unb. II. 2. 27—29; Epipsych. 441—442. ¹¹²) Epipsych. 529. ¹¹³) *ibid.* 500—501. ¹¹⁴) l. 300. ¹¹⁵) ll. 120—121.

spires of a mysterious gourd-like plant are depicted with an impressive abundance of vivid detail.

It is an interesting fact that the word "parasite" in the sense of "creeper", which is used by Shelley in quite a number of instances, never shows the least trace of the disparaging associations that would seem to suggest themselves. He appears to be so impressed with the sight the term represents that the expression itself changes its nature, coming to stand for delicacy and beauty. Parasites "twine their tendrils" round grey trunks like the eyes of children that "fold their beams round the hearts of those that love" ¹¹⁶). Golden tresses on "a bosom's stainless pride" twine "like tendrils of the parasite Around a marble column" ¹¹⁷). "Parasite flowers" and "flowering parasites" enhance the luxuriance of nuptial bowers ¹¹⁸).

Nothing can be more closely associated than serpents and serpentine shape and movement. The idea of a snake suggests that of involution, and a liking for sinuosity may result in a fondness for snakes. Such a predilection is found in Shelley. As a rule he shares the accepted view on these reptiles as embodiments of evil and cunning, but there are moments, not very rare, when he seems in love with their liveness and grace. In this he does not stand alone. In one of his favourite poems, Coleridge's "Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner", the turning-point in the Mariner's destiny is reached when he falls under the spell of the beauty of sea-snakes. Keats's *Lamia* is another famous serpent whose chief characteristic is loveliness. But elsewhere such instances are comparatively isolated, whereas in Shelley we find a whole series of descriptions of beautiful and, to judge from the context, innocent serpents. Sir Archibald Strong, who deals with the problem in his "Three Studies in Shelley", regards the fact as an instance of Shelley's transvaluation of the customary ethical values, ascribing it partly to "that sympathy with the outcast which was always strong in him", and partly to "his fierce dislike of all stereotyped forms and images of morality", which was reinforced by his belief that evil might easily be converted into good and ugliness into beauty, "were the heart of

¹¹⁶) *Alastor*, 443. ¹¹⁷) *Dæmon of the World*, I. 46. ¹¹⁸) *Epipsych*. 502; *Rev. Isl.* VI, st. 28.

man once turned to the task" ¹¹⁹). One may acknowledge the truth of this remark and yet consider that Shelley, fascinated with a sight presenting a type of form and movement that strongly appealed to his sensibility, on some occasions simply forgot the traditional view. We have just seen the same happen to him with regard to the word "parasite". Both ideas — that of snakes and that of "parasites" — are coupled in that passage in "Alastor" where flowering parasites remind him of "restless serpents, clothed In rainbow and in fire"¹²⁰); the context plainly suggests the delight with which he views them, and one of the features of the serpents singled out for admiring mention is their movements. In "Rosalind and Helen" there is a snake of a similar many-coloured, airy beauty, reflecting the splendour of the skies and floating in a fountain "in the light of his own loveliness" ¹²¹). His winding movements are, as it were, imitated by the birds who "with fearless fellowship Above and *around* him *wheel* and hover"¹²²). Another picture of the graceful movements of a snake viewed as part of the peaceful charm of natural scenery occurs in the fragment "Wake the Serpent not":

Wake the serpent not — lest he
Should not know the way to go, —
.
.
.
.
.
.
.
Not a may-fly shall awaken
From its cradling blue-bell shaken,
Not the starlight as he's sliding
Through the grass with silent gliding.

In "The Witch of Atlas" there is again a snake representing nothing but splendid suppleness and radiance, "in the golden flame Of his own volumes intervolved"¹²³). A snake described in very similar language becomes one of the symbols of spring in "Adonais" ¹²⁴):

And the green lizard, and the golden snake,
Like unimprisoned flames, out of their trance awake.

¹¹⁹) p. 80. ¹²⁰) ll. 438—439. ¹²¹) l. 119. ¹²²) ll. 121—122. ¹²³) Stanza 6. ¹²⁴) Stanza 18.

In the description of the delicately variegated beauty of a climbing plant in the final fragment of the "Unfinished Drama" its stem and tendrils are said to resemble

emerald snakes mottled and diamonded
 With azure mail and streaks of woven silver;
 And all the sheaths that folded the dark buds
 Rose like the crest of cobra-di-capel.

The cobra-di-capel happens to be a particularly venomous species. Nevertheless, it is only the beauty of its shape and colouring that the poet seems to have been thinking of.

In these examples his attitude towards snakes is hardly distinguishable from that towards his favourite, the lizard, which he loves for its delicacy and suppleness. However, the possibility remains that in some at least of these cases associations of a more customary kind may have been lurking at the back of Shelley's mind. It is conceivable that now and then, even where this is not clearly perceptible, the contrast between the beauty depicted and the malignity traditionally ascribed to the bearer of that beauty may, if only subconsciously, have stimulated the flight of his fancy. The sinister, as Sir Archibald Strong suggests in his book, is never far to seek in Shelley; often it adds zest and intensity to his treatment of the beautiful. This is seen very distinctly in a poem referred to by that critic, the lines on Leonardo's Medusa, where the tension between those two opposed elements happens to be connected with the image here discussed, i. e. snakes. Here the attraction exercised on Shelley by winding, tangled, shifting movement finds very graphic expression; the delight he takes in the vision is profound but tinged with the struggle of the two extremes, beauty and horror, that seem to meet in the very process of their conflict:

And from its head as from one body grow
 As grass out of a watery rock
 Hairs which are vipers, and they curl and flow
 And their long tangles in each other lock,
 And with unending involutions show
 Their mailed radiance

'Tis the tempestuous loveliness of terror;
 For from the serpents gleams a brazen glare
 Kindled by that inextricable error,
 Which makes a thrilling vapour of the air
 Become a ¹²⁵⁾ and ever-shifting mirror
 Of all the beauty and the terror there.

The phrase "the tempestuous loveliness of terror" well summarizes the "ambivalence" of such impressions with Shelley.

Serpents, dragons, snakes as instruments of evil and destruction figure very early as a staple of Shelley's imagery. A crude example is found already in "The Spectral Horseman". It deals with the mythical serpent that repeatedly occurs elsewhere in Shelley as the formidable Guardian of Eternity or as Doom:

Then does the dragon, who, chained in the caverns
 To eternity, curses the champion of Erin,
 Moan and yell loud at the lone hour of midnight,
 And twine his vast wreaths round the forms of the dæmons.

The same or a very similar serpent has found its way into a simile in "The Revolt of Islam" where sleep is said to be "as many-coloured as the snake that girds eternity"¹²⁶⁾. It also appears in "Prometheus Unbound"¹²⁷⁾:

And if, with infirm hand, Eternity,
 Mother of many acts and hours, should free
 The serpent that would clasp her with its length.

A variant of it in the same work is "the snake-like Doom" coiled underneath the throne of the Eternal who unlooses it through the portal of Life¹²⁸⁾.

A snake holding an animal in its coils is one of Shelley's stock images. In "The Dæmon of the World" a serpent, milder in all its savagery than the "savage conqueror stained in kindred blood", is shown as "crushing the bones of some frail antelope" in its "brazen folds"¹²⁹⁾. An eagle grasped in the folds of a "green serpent" and feeling "her breast Burn with the poison"

¹²⁵⁾ The blanks are in Shelley's own text. ¹²⁶⁾ IV, st. 4. ¹²⁷⁾ IV. 565—567. ¹²⁸⁾ II. III. 95—98. ¹²⁹⁾ II. 86.

is mentioned in "Alastor"¹³⁰). In the same poem the situation is inverted, the necks of waves writhing beneath the scourge of the tempest being likened to "serpents struggling in a vulture's grasp"¹³¹). All the power of which Shelley was capable at the time is lavished in Canto I of "The Revolt of Islam" on the presentation of the struggle between the symbolic Serpent and Eagle. Through a series of brilliant stanzas the involutions of the serpent are made to appear distinctly to the eye: its "suffocating grasp", its "wild writhings" scourging the wind, its folds twined within the bird's plumes, the neck "receding lithe, and thin", the "adamantine coil" locked in stiff rings round the enemy's neck. Jupiter threatens to drag Demogorgon down into "the wide waves of ruin" in a fall resembling that of an outspent vulture and snake that "drop, twisted in inextricable fight, Into a shoreless sea"¹³²). The grief that almost crushes Prince Athanase is like

a snake which fold by fold
 Pressed out the life of life, a clinging fiend
 Which clenched him if he stirred with deadlier hold¹³³).

In the course of nine lines two variants of this image are introduced in "The Revolt of Islam": Hate entwines the heart in its "snaky folds" and, having gorged "such bitter rage", turns "with ninefold rage" on "all beside"; then, as if this were not enough, it is compared to Amphisbæna, which, when it has tied a bird in its twine, "threats on every side" over the putrid mass¹³⁴). The horror of a tiger's struggle with a sea-snake is brought home with considerable force but also with unexpected crudity in "A Vision of the Sea". The rattle of the animal's bones, "crushed by the infinite stress Of the snake's adamantine voluminousness", the "hum of the hot blood that spouts and rains" when the tiger has wounded the veins "swollen with rage, strength, and effort", show a ruthless energy of description but lack the subtlety of touch with which Shelley usually succeeds in mitigating his effects of terror. A much higher poetic plane is reached in the image of the "bony chains" of dead serpents twisted round the rocks or

¹³⁰) ll. 227—229. ¹³¹) ll. 323—325. ¹³²) Prom. Unb. III. 1. 71—74. ¹³³) Prince Athanase, 121—123. ¹³⁴) VIII, st. 21.

within heaps of dust
To which the tortuous strength of their last pangs
Had crushed the iron crags ¹³⁵).

The pattern, movement and power of the coils of snakes are conveyed in the above instances with an intensity and distinctness that sometimes recall an hallucination.

A peculiar echo of such imagery occurs in the third section of "The Sensitive Plant". We are told how the air itself is stifled by "long and hollow" weeds until the dead wind "stinks" ¹³⁶). Only a few stanzas later the roots of "flags huge as stakes" are actually likened to knotted water-snakes; their function is similar to that of the weeds, for together with spawn, scum and filth they reduce the "running rivulet" to a state resembling putrefaction by making it "thick and dumb".

The knotted snakes of this passage are a further characteristic item in Shelley's series of serpent images. We find them twice in "The Revolt of Islam". Fear and lust are said to be tied through mutual hate,

Like two dark serpents tangled in the dust,
Which on the paths of men their mingling poison
[thrust ¹³⁷).

Hate and guile lie in the heart, intertwined like "two serpents in one deep and winding nest" ¹³⁸). A late echo of this occurs unexpectedly in the quiet and harmonious "To Jane: The Recollection", where pines are shown to be

Tortured by storms to shapes so rude
As serpents interlaced.

Here the image appears as a reminder of moods and thoughts that otherwise have passed into the background in this record of a brief truce with Fate.

¹³⁵) Prom. Unb. IV. 305—308. ¹³⁶) III. 56—57. ¹³⁷) II, st. 4. ¹³⁸) *ibid.* X, st. 32.

2. RAMIFIED STRUCTURES.

The imagery to be dealt with in the present chapter is in many cases extremely closely associated with some of that already discussed. Sometimes it is indeed difficult to draw the line between the former and the latter. We have often had to refer to boughs and branches. We have not, however, done this with special reference to their peculiar structure — to their issuing from a stem and forming further branches. This spreading from one parent stem in a multiplicity of ramifications is a phenomenon of which Shelley seems to have been very fond. It is sometimes explicitly described. While showing all the complexity of woven fabric, it has the advantage of being more intimately associated with the idea of organic growth, of the free functioning of nature, which Shelley loved.

Under the present heading we shall also consider some significant associations connected with certain phenomena characterized by ramification, especially with veins and nerves. It will be found that Shelley was very conscious of their structure and that he constantly thought of them as branching webs of fibres; this idea is often present while he is describing their functions and the sensations connected with these functions.

An exceptionally vivid rendering of the effect of ramification is found in Shelley's description of wood-nymphs assuming the shape of branching leaves in "The Woodman and the Nightingale". His further likening of the impression thus created to that of ramified traceries in ancient churches reinforces the effectiveness of the leading motive with conspicuous success:

Around the cradles of the birds aloft

They spread themselves into the loveliness
Of fan-like leaves, and over pallid flowers
Hang like moist clouds: — or, where high branches kiss,

Make a green space among the silent bowers,
 Like a vast fane in a metropolis,
 Surrounded by the columns and the towers

All over-wrought with branch-like traceries
 In which there is religion —

The "fan-like leaves" of this passage appear also as the principal element of the modest beauty of Shelley's Sensitive Plant, manifestly a favourite of his. The architectural effect is found again in "The Temple of Famine" with its "marble-ribbed roofs".

The poet's delight in the subtlety of the bough pattern is clearly expressed in the way he pictures "weeds, like branching chrysolite, Woven in devices fine and quaint" in "Rosalind and Helen" (1082—1083). A more unexpected image of strange beauty, whose effect depends largely on the introduction of the pattern in question, is that of the two sleeping lovers in "The Witch of Atlas" who were

linked innocently
 In their loose locks which over both did creep
 Like ivy from one stem¹).

Some of the most detailed descriptions of ramification in Shelley occur in passages depicting the texture of the rind and leaves of plants. Thus, the plant with "the long and gourd-like fruit" grown by the Fairy Lady of Atlas has a rind which is described with great precision:

Woven tracery ran
 Of light firm texture, ribbed and branching, o'er
 The solid rind like a leaf's veined fan²).

Here we find the leaf reminding us of a fan, the branches, the ribs, the tracery of our earlier examples, combining with a pattern of veins into one very definite picture of complex ramification. An equally minute description of a similar kind is that of another marvellous plant (also likened to a gourd, cf. l. 161) in

¹) Stanza 61. ²) Stanza 33.

the "Fragments of an Unfinished Drama" ³). Its stem and tendrils are "mottled and diamonded with azure mail and streaks of woven silver", the "golden eye" of its blossom having "veinèd lids" and its leaves being "delicate, you almost saw the pulses With which the purple velvet flower was fed To overflow".

The veined texture of certain minerals and similar substances is repeatedly described. Asia is represented as standing in a "veinèd shell", floating on the floor of the crystal sea ⁴). The cave in which Prometheus and Asia intend to celebrate their reunion is "paved with veinèd emerald" ⁵). Branching layers of mineral deposits are referred to in the Spirit's first speech in the "Unfinished Drama", where "veins Of gold and stone and adamantine iron" are mentioned ⁶), and perhaps also in the allusion to the "veins" of Parian stone by which "Art's deathless dreams" are said to be veiled in the "Ode to Liberty" (st. 4), though in the latter case the reference may equally well be to the texture of marble. Quicksilver, "veinèd and thin", lying in a bowl, is depicted in the "Letter to Maria Gisborne" ⁷).

But the principal object providing Shelley with instances of branching network is the blood-vessels of the human body. There is remarkable subtlety in the way he describes them. Often his vision of them is associated with delicacy of shape, mind, and health. A tender, transparent skin through which the pulsations of blood are seen goes repeatedly with this conception.

It is especially the hands whose tracery of veins Shelley describes, mostly, though not always, with an implication of fragility and spirituality. The phantom of beauty that the hero of "Alastor" sees in his nightly dream has hands in whose "branching veins The eloquent blood told an ineffable tale" ⁸). In "The Sunset", the hands of the widowed lady show a diaphanous, almost disembodied delicacy, and the structure of her veins is alluded to:

Her hands were thin, and through their wandering veins
And weak articulations might be seen
Day's ruddy light.

³) ll. 160—175. ⁴) Prom. Unb. II. 5. 23—24. ⁵) *ibid.* III. 3. 13.
⁶) ll. 22—23. ⁷) l. 67. ⁸) ll. 167—168.

The fragile charm of the Princess in the "Scene from Tasso" is impressively suggested by her hands, which are "clasped, veined, and pale as snow, And quivering". Count Cenci's "veinèd hands, crossed on his heaving breast" are among the few redeeming features in that human monster's appearance, and it is partly owing to them that Olimpio dare not kill him⁹): they seem to indicate a nobility and delicacy of which his character shows no traces. Even the "veinèd hand" of Jupiter¹⁰), who is the supreme embodiment of despotism, appears in a context where he is not conceived as entirely destitute of noble traits but as a figure of almost exquisite if cruel beauty. Once even a marble image is made to appear sensitive and spiritually alert by the same device: we are shown the nerves quivering beneath the skin (sic) of its hands¹¹).

In "Rosalind and Helen" the subtlety of the consumptive Lionel's mind is symbolized by his "translucent veins" in which the blood beats but "not like animal life"¹²). The unearthliness of the figure of Ahasuerus in "Hellas" is brought home by the description of the arteries clearly distinguishable in his transparent body¹³). The passage in question has already been quoted on p. 9.

Beauty is repeatedly suggested by "veined" or "veiny" eyelids¹⁴). The noble and sensitive Marengi's feet, licked by tame marsh-meteors, are likewise "veined"¹⁵). It is the "line through line inwoven" of Panthea's eyes that adds the last touch of subtlety to the description of these latter by Asia¹⁶).

Along with the pattern of the blood-vessels, the circulation of blood through their mazes has left notable traces in Shelley's work. He is keenly aware of the complex but intense currents streaming through the channels of veins and arteries, and the sensations caused by this incessant flow are every now and then effectively conveyed in his verse. Some examples may be adduced:

The beating of our veins one interval
Made still; and then I felt the blood that burned

⁹) Cenci, IV. 3. 11. ¹⁰) Prom. Unb. I. 237. ¹¹) Ros. & Hel. 1062—1063. ¹²) Il. 824—825. ¹³) Il. 142—144. ¹⁴) Q. Mab, IX. 234; Dæmon, II. 326; Mar. Dream, II. 3; Fragments of Unf. Dr. 169. ¹⁵) Marengi, XX. 2. ¹⁶) Prom. Unb. II. 1. 117.

Within her frame, mingle with mine, and fall
Around my heart like fire ¹⁷).

Alas! the unquiet life did tingle
From mine own heart through every vein,
Like a captive in dreams of liberty,
Who beats the walls of his own cell ¹⁸).

To thirst and find no fill — to wail and wander
With short unsteady steps — to pause and ponder —
To feel the blood run through the veins and tingle
Where busy thought and blind sensations mingle ¹⁹).

My blood is running up and down my veins;
A fearful pleasure makes it prick and tingle:
I feel a giddy sickness of strange awe;
My heart is beating with an expectation
Of horrid joy ²⁰).

A thrilling peal of such sweet merriment
As made the blood tingle in my warm feet ²¹).

The intensity of such sensations in Shelley is suggested with almost abnormal force by that startling passage where the Lady in "Marianne's Dream", hearing "the sound as of a dim low clanging", is uncertain whether it is "aught else, or but the flow Of the blood in her own veins, to and fro", but where it actually turns out to be the rumble of an incipient earthquake.

That experiences so keenly felt should have been made use of in a variety of ways — that indeed nearly every strong emotional influence should tend to be likened to blood racing through the labyrinth of veins — is consequently a fact that need cause no surprise. In "Rosalind and Helen" there are some characteristic examples of emotions thus represented:

A thought
Of liquid love, that spread and wrought

¹⁷) Rev. Isl. VI, st. 34. ¹⁸) Ros. & Hel. 1033—1044. ¹⁹) Fr. Igniculus Desiderii, 1—4. ²⁰) Cenci, IV. 2. 163—167. ²¹) Fr. of Unf. Drama, 139—140.

Under my bosom and in my brain,
And crept with the blood through every vein ²²).

“Swift emotions” are pictured as coming and going “through the veins of each united frame” ²³). In the “Revolt of Islam” stirring thought is born in the veins:

When first the living blood in all these veins
Kindled a thought in sense ²⁴).

Shame is felt to pass through the veins ²⁵). Music — always so abundant a source of excitement and ecstasy to Shelley — passes “through every vein” into his “heart and brain” ²⁶). Thirst, pain, disease, baleful spiritual influences flow through the blood-vessels of real beings and abstractions alike and are often explicitly likened to poison:

 Their influence darts
Like subtle poison through the bloodless veins
Of desolate society ²⁷).

 Thither still the myriads came,
Seeking to quench the agony of the flame,
Which raged like poison through their bursting veins ²⁸).

That we will be dread thought beneath thy brain
And foul desire round thy astonished heart,
And blood within thy labyrinthine veins
Crawling like agony ²⁹).

Compare also “The Dæmon of the World”, II. 156, “Ode to Naples”, 111.

One of the most astonishing images coming under this head — though not referring to emotion — is that of suns and spheres flowing like drops of blood through the heart of Nature ³⁰):

What are suns and spheres which flee
With the instinct of that Spirit

²²) ll. 352—355. ²³) *ibid.* ll. 942—943. ²⁴) I, st. 39. ²⁵) *ibid.* VI, st. 8. ²⁶) Music, 11—12. ²⁷) Q. Mab, IV. 106. ²⁸) Rev. Isl. X, st. 21. ²⁹) Prom. Unb. I. 488—491. ³⁰) Ode to Heaven, 41—44.

Of which ye are but a part?
 Drops which Nature's mighty heart
 Drives through thinnest veins? Depart!

Here the whole universe is seen as an organism with its system of blood-vessels. The Earth is often looked upon in a similar way, especially in "Prometheus Unbound", where she has veins, pores, fibres and nerves conceived as channels of life and passion. Joy runs through her "stony veins To the last fibres of the loftiest tree" ³¹), "as blood within a living frame"; "the warmth of an immortal youth" shoots circling through her frame at the touch of Prometheus, which runs along her "marble nerves" "even to the adamantine central gloom" ³²); love "interpenetrates her granite mass", passing through tangled roots and clay into her utmost leaves and flowers ³³). In the song of the Earth, from which the last instance is taken, the idea of penetration through narrow, mazy passages finds further development: we are told how man "follows a sick beast through a warm cleft Of rocks, through which the might of healing springs is poured" ³⁴), and again, how his dreams pass through "the cold mass of marble and of colour", not as an all-pervading fluid but as "bright threads whence mothers weave the robes their children wear" ³⁵).

"Prometheus Unbound" is especially rich in intricate channels penetrated by something of a lighter, less tangible nature. The echoes ask Asia, that almost incorporeal presence, to follow them through the hollow caverns, the many-folded mountains, the rents, gulfs and chasms of the Earth ³⁶). The breath of the Earth passes through the "serpent vine", the "dark linkèd ivy trembling wild", and the "veinèd leaves and amber stems" of flowers ³⁷). Sunlight itself is porous, and into its pores darkness is gathered up "like eclipse" ³⁸). This last example shows how Shelley's predilection for the idea here examined brings him into conflict with another tendency of his, namely the inclination to dematerialize the most solid things. Something very similar has already been observed in his conception of air and light as a tissue of filaments.

Images like those just discussed are not infrequently found

³¹) I. 153 ff. ³²) III. 3. 85. ³³) IV. 370—372. ³⁴) IV. 389—390.
³⁵) IV. 412—414. ³⁶) II. 1. 197—203. ³⁷) III. 3. 135 ff. ³⁸) IV. 510—514.

also outside "Prometheus Unbound". The sap of decaying plants "shrinks to the root through every pore" as blood does to the hearts of the dead ³⁹). The moisture of clouds passes "through the pores of the ocean and shores" ⁴⁰). The revived plant in "The Zucca" has a heart whose every impulse sends its "unbeheld pulsations" to every part, like blood through veins ⁴¹). A portion, presumably of the spirit of the poet's buried son, passes through the seeds of flowers and sunny grass into their hues and scents ⁴²).

The illustrations adduced show how Shelley's interest in a particular pattern combined with his susceptibility to certain physical sensations so as to intensify his fondness for a definite type of imagery. That the complexity of the passage of blood through veins is constantly being realized by him is indicated by direct references to it as well as by the frequency of such expressions as "every vein", "every pore", i. e. he was aware not of a mere flow but a flow through a multiplicity of passages. His preoccupation with this phenomenon illustrates both a predilection for a certain visual image and an extreme physical sensitivity. Both of these characteristics are reflected to an equal or greater degree in his references to the very organs of sensitivity, viz. nerves. We have already had to allude to some of these references, e. g. to his description of the quivering nerves of a marble statue (p. 27). Sometimes he appears to view the human organism as a mere network of nerves, as in Count Cenci's testimony to the force of his daughter's

awe-inspiring gaze,
Whose beams anatomize me nerve by nerve
And lay me bare ⁴³).

A similar dissection of the whole nervous system is hinted at by the First Fury in Act I of "Prometheus Unbound" as a possible torture for the Titan:

Thou thinkest we will rend thee bone from bone,
And nerve from nerve, working like fire within ⁴⁴)?

³⁹) The Sensitive Plant, III. 84—85. ⁴⁰) The Cloud, 75. ⁴¹) ll. 65—66.
⁴²) To William Shelley, 15—18. ⁴³) Cenci, I. 2. 84—86. ⁴⁴) I. 475—476.

This passage suggests both an awareness of the structure of the nervous system and a realization of it as a source of intolerable pain — a sensation not unfamiliar to Shelley and plainly one of the reasons why the idea of nerves so manifestly stirred his imagination. The tearing out of nerves is further described in “Julian and Maddalo”:

I had torn out
The nerves of manhood by their bleeding root
With mine own quivering fingers ⁴⁵).

In the same poem even these pictures of pain are surpassed by the visualization of a human being as *one* nerve along which anguish makes its steady progress:

Me — who am as a nerve o’er which do creep
The else unfelt oppressions of this earth ⁴⁶).

The desolation of the grave is conveyed by an image of desiccated veins and nerves, compared in characteristic fashion to leaves on boughs:

Bloodless are the veins and chill
Which the pulse of pain did fill;
Every little living nerve
That from bitter words did swerve
Round the tortured lips and brow,
Are like sapless leaflets now
Frozen upon December’s bough ⁴⁷).

Life, one infers, is the quivering of nerves and the torturing pulsation of veins. Even at his cheerful moments Shelley is apt to think of nerves as rebellious organs that may have to be subdued — their tangles on one occasion suggesting to him other tangles, curiously enough of geometrical figures, with which they will have to be stifled:

⁴⁵) ll. 424—426. ⁴⁶) ll. 449—450. ⁴⁷) Lines written am. the Eug. Hills, 38—44.

As to nerves —
 With cones and parallelograms and curves
 I've sworn to strangle them if once they dare
 To bother me — when you are with me there ⁴⁸).

Other involved, fibrous structures belonging to the human organism — the folds and fibres of the brain and heart as well as of the sinews — are occasionally perceived by Shelley with a similar distinctness and an equal awareness of the pain that they may cause:

Draw him away to torments; let them be
 Subtle and long drawn out, to tear the folds
 Of the heart's inmost cell ⁴⁹).

They say that sleep, that healing dew of Heaven,
 Steeps not in balm the foldings of the brain
 Which thinks thee an impostor ⁵⁰).

It glues
 My fingers and my limbs to one another,
 And eats into my sinews ⁵¹).

The evidence presented suggests to what an extent Shelley had mentally anatomized his own organism and how he felt it to be a system of channels for pleasure and pain, constantly electrified by involved currents of racing emotion. We have seen how this conception is transferred to plants, to the earth, and even to the universe itself. Hypersensibility and an abnormal capacity for perceiving intricacy of structure have been clearly exemplified in this study of ramifications in Shelley.

⁴⁸) Letter to Maria Gisborne, 312—315. ⁴⁹) Cenci, V. 2. 160—163.
⁵⁰) *ibid.* IV. 1. 178—180. ⁵¹) *ibid.* III. 19—22.

3. CONTACT.

One of the principal elements in the complexes of imagery examined is the notion of contact or proximity. Intertwined, intertangled, interwoven things are things so close to one another that they are difficult to unravel. Ramified patterns consist of elements that are intimately connected, no matter how far apart their last branches may spread. Veins and nerves in particular are so closely united that a pulsation in any part of them immediately affects all the rest of the system. It has been shown that these aspects of the matter often presented themselves to Shelley.

In many of the images discussed the idea of contact can be seen to be very strongly stressed. Sometimes it is delightful contact, the contact of affection and love, but often it is the painful grapple of mortal fight. The former is illustrated by the image of Night twining her hair round the eyes of Day, the latter by the idea of the snake strangling and crushing its victim. The difference between the two is not really so great as it seems. Shelley vacillated between pain and pleasure, and we know that an excess of voluptuous pleasure is pain. Shelley's ecstasies are often described in terms of death, e. g. in the last line of "Epi-psychidion":

I pant, I sink, I tremble, I expire!

Or in the "Indian Serenade":

I die! I faint! I fail!

He was conscious of the possibility of "agonizing pleasure"¹⁾, and it has been seen how indefinite the boundary was that divided his delights from his terrors. The whole poem on Leonardo's Medusa shows this with singular convincingness.

¹⁾ The Triumph of Life, 143.

There is an unmistakable erotic note in many of Shelley's pictures of contact. He was by no means averse from describing the physical union of love. Compare, for instance, "The Revolt of Islam", Canto VI, stanza 36; "Rosalind and Helen", ll. 1032, 1125; "Prometheus Unbound", Act I, l. 148. Such Greek expressions as *ἐν φιλότῳτι μιγεῖσα* or *συνέμυξε* are rendered by him in a much more graphic fashion ²⁾. The interweaving of bodies is a favourite idea of his. Kindred though less emphatic are the descriptions of more "innocent" embraces and contacts, such as that of the swan's mate that "will twine her downy neck" with his ³⁾, or the not very common notion of intertwined fingers as expressions of a union of souls — an image found twice in "Rosalind and Helen" ⁴⁾. In "The Revolt of Islam" the wind itself has "intertwining fingers" that caress its nurslings, the "flowering parasites" ⁵⁾. Another idea of a similar kind, frequently accompanied by distinctly amorous associations but very often so spiritualized that all non-Platonic elements seem to have faded away, is the idea of interpenetration, of the complete absorption in another being or substance, i. e. of contact in its fullest form. "Epi-psychidion" and the "Ode to the West Wind" are among the most powerful expressions of this conception — the one a case of the spiritual coalescence of two souls, where, however, the physical element still seems to form a point of departure for flights towards more ideal heights, the other an example of the desire for a dissolution in the forces of nature, for an abandonment of the ego and for its mingling with a greater, impersonal life. As the latter poem shows, Shelley's longing for contact is closely connected with his pantheism. Here the exaltation of complete union finds its fullest poetic realization ⁶⁾.

Shelley's imagery of contact is far too extensive a subject to be dealt with at all exhaustively here. An attempt to do this would lead us too far afield. However, a few more remarks concerning this matter seem necessary to enable us to realize how persistently it occupied and how effectively it stimulated his imagination. Contact in all its forms, from the gentlest touch to the

²⁾ Translations of the "Hymn to Mercury", I. 4, and of the "Hymn to Venus", l. 38. ³⁾ Alastor, 282—283. ⁴⁾ Cf. ll. 940—941, 1244. ⁵⁾ VI, st. 28. ⁶⁾ This subject has been competently dealt with by the late Prof. O. W. Firkins, op. cit., pp. 145—155.

most torturing corrosion, is described by him with such singular vividness as to lead us to the conclusion that his descriptions were derived from a stock of intense personal experience. Only a few aspects of the matter shall be pointed out here.

Certain uses of the verbs "to fold" and "to enfold" afford excellent illustrations of Shelley's treatment of intimate, gentle contact. These verbs are most frequently found to be associated with repose and sleep, especially with protected sleep, with a restful clinging to, or being enveloped by, something providing sleep, warmth and security. Some of his daintiest imagery is connected with these words. Thus, the conception of a folded flower serving as a dwelling-place or a place of rest is found more than once or twice. Spirits live "in folded violets deep" ⁷⁾; "legioned hopes" sleep "within folded Elysian flowers" ⁸⁾; glow-worms dwell "in folded lilies" ⁹⁾. A cognate though more abstract conception is that of "Thoughts and joys which sleep, but cannot die, Folded within their own eternity" ¹⁰⁾. A notable application of the same basic idea occurs in the description of sounds folded in cells of silence:

The deep recesses of her odorous dwelling
 Were stored with magic treasures — sounds of air,
 Which had the power all spirits of compelling,
 Folded in cells of crystal silence there ¹¹⁾.

In "The Cyclops", l. 595, a man who in the original "abandons himself to sleep" (*τῷ δ' ὕπνῳ παρείμενος*), is "folded up in sleep". The Witch of Atlas rests "enfolden In the warm shadow of her loveliness" ¹²⁾. And a grey mist is shown as "enfolding" a mountain, "When the sunset sleeps Upon its snow" ¹³⁾.

Ample use of a similar kind is made of the verb "to cradle", which figures among Shelley's favourites. Yet instead of dwelling upon it or on other expressions of kindred import we shall pass on to certain noteworthy uses of another, especially characteristic word, the verb "to cling". Shelley must have been very susceptible to the kind of contact it represents for it occurs in some

⁷⁾ Prom. Unb. II. 2. 85. ⁸⁾ *ibid.* II. 4. 60. ⁹⁾ Witch of Atlas, st. 39. ¹⁰⁾ Epips. 523-524. ¹¹⁾ Witch of Atlas, st. 14. ¹²⁾ *ibid.* st. 2. ¹³⁾ Prom. Unb. IV. 488-492.

rather striking contexts. Music clings to boughs and is shaken from them by the wind ¹⁴); tears and even laughter cling to hoary hair ¹⁵); the death-fire of the earth-star clings to hair like mist to pines ¹⁶). While in the Greek "Hymn to Aphrodite", ascribed to Homer, the bewitchment of love "awfully grips" the goddess's heart (*ἐκπάγλως δὲ κατὰ φρένας ἕμερος εἶλεν*), Shelley's rendering describes how "the love clung Like wasting fire her senses wild among" ¹⁷). Attention should be called to the association of the word with the brain, apparently indicating the same preoccupation with nervous sensations that has already been noted. Helen speaks of Lionel's voice that "clung like music in my brain" ¹⁸). Rosalind dreams of a form which, she says, "to my brain was ever clinging" ¹⁹). In "Julian and Maddalo", the poem where the hero was found to compare himself to a nerve along which the "oppressions of the earth" crept, we read how a letter, an "unfeeling leaf", "burns the brain And eats into it". Jupiter's omnipotence is "a crown of pain, To cling like burning gold round thy dissolving brain" ²⁰).

Our last quotations illustrate a trait showing with special distinctness Shelley's keen perception of tactile sensations — his frequent description of painful contact. His imagination reacted vividly and sometimes even very violently to this idea. Heat and cold "clinging" to the body or "eating into" it are experiences often referred to in his verse, both in direct description and in figurative contexts. In "The Revolt of Islam" baffled hopes cling to one "like ice" ²¹); a hard, cold creed sears the seams of the rent heart "like blistering ice" ²²). In "Prometheus Unbound" the subject-matter — the Titan exposed to the fury of the elements on a lonely mountain top — readily associates itself with such imagery. Accordingly, the latter occurs with special frequency in connection with the sufferings of Prometheus, but it is found also in different contexts. Prometheus says:

The crawling glaciers pierce me with the spears
Of their most freezing crystals, the bright chains
Eat with their burning cold into my bones ²³).

¹⁴) *ibid.* II. 1. 157. ¹⁵) *Rev. Isl.* IX, st. 16. ¹⁶) *Rev. Isl.* XI, st. 12.
¹⁷) *ll.* 57—58. ¹⁸) *Ros. & Hel.* 891. ¹⁹) *ibid.* 278. ²⁰) *Prom. Unb.* I.
290—291. ²¹) II, st. 21. ²²) *ibid.* XII, st. 10. ²³) I. 31—33.

“Alternate frost and fire eat into” the Titan ²⁴). The sun “splits his parched skin” and “the crystal-winged snow clings” round his hair ²⁵). Jupiters description of the effect of his wrath and curses on the soul of man is similar:

And though my curses through the pendulous air,
Like snow on herbless peaks, fall flake by flake,
And cling to it; though under my wrath’s night
It climbs the crags of life, step after step,
Which wound it, as ice wounds unsandalled feet ²⁶).

The fate of the eagle caught in a whirlwind is sealed when “his struggling form”

sinks at length
Prone, and the aëreal ice clings over it ²⁷).

A different, at least equally distasteful, kind of contact is viscous adhesion, the clinging of gluey substances to the body. Some of Shelley’s most notable descriptions of horror refer to it, for instance that desperate soliloquy of Beatrice Cenci when after the violation of her bodily integrity by her father a thick mist devouring her vitals seems to envelop the world. It must be quoted from again though some lines of the following extract have already been cited in another connection:

There creeps
A clinging, black, contaminating mist
About me . . . ’tis substantial, heavy, thick,
I cannot pluck it from me, for it glues
My fingers and my limbs to one another,
And eats into my sinews, and dissolves
My flesh to a pollution, poisoning
This subtle, pure, and inmost spirit of life! ²⁸)

The terror of this is matched by the slimy decay that overtakes the garden of the Sensitive Plant. Rotting glue supplants beauty and subtlety. The “winged seeds” of ugly plants cling round the

²⁴) I. 268—269. ²⁵) I. 384—385. ²⁶) III. 1. 11—15. ²⁷) III. 2. 16—17. ²⁸) The Cenci, III. 1. 16—23.

stems of flowers until they putrefy. A "monstrous undergrowth", livid, blistering, pulpous, "starred with a lurid dew"; agarics, fungi, mildew and mould, "pale-fleshy" like carcasses; spawn, filth, a "leprous scum" congesting the rivulet; "unctuous meteors"; the "blight of a frozen glue" into which the tears within the folded leaves — the lids — of the Sensitive Plant are turned — all this conveys the same sensation of nauseating viscosity. In "A Vision of the Sea", composed about the same time, viz. early in 1820, the hulk of a ship is compared to "a corpse on the clay which is hungering to fold Its corruption around it". The descriptions of clinging, sucking leeches in "Swellfoot the Tyrant" and the "Sonnet: England in 1819", both written in one and the same year, deal with impressions of a somewhat similar though not identical nature.

These may perhaps be called extreme cases. But Shelley was constantly tending towards extremes, and the evidence adduced doubtless proves that the type of experience exemplified must have exercised a strong attraction on his mind. More moderate varieties of the same kind of sensation frequently leave their impress on his imagery even in contexts of a more abstract nature. Thus, remorse, self-contempt, scorn, crime, rancour, plague, moral stains "cling" to those afflicted with them ²⁹). These usages are not in themselves exceptional but their frequency is unusual. More remarkable still is the frequent description of curses as "clinging" ³⁰). The idea of adhesion with sinister associations is a frequent element in Shelley's poetry.

We have found him almost morbidly sensitive to the notion of contact, whether delightful to the point of ecstasy or distasteful to the point of extreme nausea and pain. This seemed to account at least in part for certain aspects of his attitude to life and his philosophy, such as his pantheism. It may similarly serve as a partial explanation of his interest in the types of imagery examined earlier in this paper.

²⁹) Adonais, st. 37; Ros. & Hel. 257—260; Prom. Unb. I. 452—454; Fragment: "A gentle story", 3—4; Rev. Isl. VIII, st. 8. ³⁰) Rev. Isl. II, st. 30; The Fugitives, 56—57; Peter Bell the Third, VII. 10; Prom. Unb. III. 1. 11—13, etc.

4. CIRCULAR MOVEMENT.

The idea of a circle or of movement describing a circle would appear to have little in common with the tangles and involutions hitherto dealt with. In itself it is, on the contrary, one of the simplest and least intricate notions that can be imagined. But when combined with the idea of onward progress, of a succession of whirling circles that are not regular and not concentric, or of a spiral, it presents a different aspect and its connection with the imagery of entanglement is obvious at once. Now in Shelley it is exactly such irregular whirls, such complex and tempestuous chains and mazes of vortexes, whether of air or water or something else, that figure with especial frequency. Not orderly revolution but eddy upon eddy in a rushing river is the kind of gyration that he loves. Circular motion is often associated by him with confusion or intricacy or both. It will be seen that even the most regular of all circular movements, those of the heavenly bodies, tend to lose their regularity in his poetry.

We have mentioned the image of eddies in a stream. It appears in a long series of striking passages and is associated with some of Shelley's most impressive symbolic imagery. In "Alastor" it plays an important part. The hero, seeking death in his frail pinnace, is propelled by "blast on blast descending, and black flood on whirlpool driven" ¹⁾. After his arrival at the "caverned base" of Caucasus, which is encircled by whirlpools and waves "bursting and eddying irresistibly" ²⁾, and his subsequent passage through a subterranean cavern, he reaches a space among the mountains where "the flood's enormous volume", before falling "even to the base of Caucasus",

Filled with one whirlpool all that ample chasm;
Stair above stair the eddying waters rose,
Circling immeasurably fast ³⁾.

¹⁾ ll. 326—329. ²⁾ ll. 356—357. ³⁾ ll. 374—381.

In the centre of this mighty whirl is left "a pool of treacherous and tremendous calm", described as "reflecting, yet distorting every cloud". The rapidity of the eddying water is brought out with particular vividness by this contrast, which is repeated once more in the subsequent picture of the boat's sudden pausing after being tossed about in the vortex:

Seized by the sway of the ascending stream,
With dizzy swiftness, round, and round, and round,
Ridge after ridge the straining boat arose,
Till on the verge of the extremest curve,
Where, through an opening of the rocky bank,
The waters overflow, and a smooth spot
Of glassy quiet 'mid those battling tides
Is left, the boat paused shuddering — 4)

We are struck, on the one hand, by the force with which the spiral movement of the whirlpool is conveyed and, on the other, by the precision with which it is described almost curve by curve. After this ordeal the boat glides down into a beautiful landscape.

In "Marianne's Dream", written about two years later than "Alastor", there is a surprisingly similar description. A "raging flood" descends and winds through a quiet valley, bearing the Lady of the dream away on a little plank amid the whirlpools. Again the vortexes rise and fill the valley. The plank whereon the Lady sits is "driven through the chasms, about and about"; but after the eddies have "whirled her round and round", the scenery becomes idyllic precisely as in "Alastor", for the flood grows "tranquil as a woodland river Winding through hills in solitude".

"The Revolt of Islam", composed in the same year as "Marianne's Dream", presents the cavern and whirlpool imagery of "Alastor" in a stanza where the symbolic meaning is clearly pointed out:

We know not where we go, or what sweet dream
May pilot us through caverns strange and fair
Of far and pathless passion, while the stream

4) ll. 387—394.

Of life, our bark doth on its whirlpools bear,
 Spreading swift wings as sails to the dim air;
 Nor should we seek to know, so the devotion
 Of love and gentle thoughts be heard still there
 Louder and louder from the utmost Ocean
 Of universal life, attuning its commotion⁵⁾.

The chain of whirlpools here is that of the vicissitudes of life through which the bark of the individual soul is driven. Such is also the meaning of these symbols in "Alastor"⁶⁾.

In "Prince Athanase", a product of the year 1817 like "Marianne's Dream" and "The Revolt of Islam", the stream with its whirlpools is found again; here again it is coupled with the image of the cavern though there is no boat. The meaning of the symbols is similar but not the same as in "Alastor" and the passage from "The Revolt of Islam". The mysterious grief that has fallen on the hero's soul is compared to

the shadow of a dream
 Which the veiled eye of Memory never saw,
 But through the soul's abyss, like some dark stream
 Through shattered mines and caverns underground
 Rolls, shaking its foundations; and no beam
 Of joy may rise, but it is quenched and drowned
 In the dim whirlpools of this dream obscure;
 Soon its exhausted waters will have found
 A lair of rest beneath thy spirit pure,
 O Athanase! —⁷⁾

The whirlpools here appear to symbolize mental turbulence; the close connection of the simile with our earlier instances is shown by the fact that here, too, the tumult is followed at least by the prospect of the peace actually reached in "Alastor" and "Marianne's Dream". It may be observed in passing that the gradual penetration of this complex of imagery into the deeper layers of Shelley's mind is indicated by its transference from direct description to simile and metaphor.

⁵⁾ VI, st. 29. ⁶⁾ Cf. Sir A. T. Strong. "Three Studies in Shelley", p. 92 et seq. ⁷⁾ ll. 98—107.

Some twelve or thirteen months later, towards the end of 1818, Asia's famous song in "Prometheus Unbound", II. 5, beginning "My soul is an enchanted boat", employs some of the same symbols. The boat, representing the soul, floats on rivers and seas typifying both music and life. There is nothing stormy about the progress of the vessel but its movement is that of a bark driven about on eddies:

Borne to the ocean, I float down, around,
Into a sea profound, of ever-spreading sound.

Some of the imagery of this passage, including eddies, boat and river, appears also in the description of the song of the nightingales in Act II, scene II (ll. 41 ff.).

These last examples differ from most of those discussed. In the eddies described there is nothing sinister; they, too, suggest profoundly stirred emotion but it is the emotion of joyous ecstasy rather than that of terror or threatening gloom. It is an intoxication like that felt by Laon, Cythna and the child that guides them on their posthumous voyage in a boat flying like wind-driven gossamer along winding waterways and across whirlpools filled with the gold of sunrise. Sometimes Shelley even associates the spectacle of vortexes with an atmosphere of dreamy content, as in Canto VII of the "Revolt of Islam", where a nautilus, a "lovely thing, Oaring with rosy feet its silver boat" and "spreading his azure sail where breath of Heaven Descended not", is presented as playing on a fountain, "among the waves and whirlpools driven" ⁸). The image seems to have attracted the poet to such an extent as to haunt him even outside its usual sphere of turbulence and violent excitement.

However, such instances are rare. On the whole, Shelley's whirlpools represent overpowering force. Such is their import in two similes illustrating the moral genius of Laon and Cythna respectively. "As whirlpools draw All wrecks of Ocean to their chasm", thus Laon's strong mind compels all spirits to obey him ⁹). And Cythna's words are like whirlwinds carrying away

All who approached their sphere, — like some calm wave
Vexed into whirlpools by the chasm beneath ¹⁰).

⁸) Stanzas 26 and 27. ⁹) Rev. Isl. IV, st. 15. ¹⁰) *ibid.* VII, st. 7.

Shelley's whirlpool imagery is, as we have seen, especially vivid and appears in certain ever repeated contexts during a comparatively brief period, from 1815 to 1818. After that there are occasional traces of it but it seems to have lost much of its vitality. A far more persistent idea is that of the whirlwind. In itself less peculiar, it is yet so frequent and appears in such a variety of contexts that it seems to constitute a special Shelleyan feature. Ellis's Concordance has 52 instances of the noun "whirlwind" and one of "whirl-blast". What this means may become clear if we mention that Wordsworth, whose output was much larger, has altogether 17 cases of "whirlwind" and 2 of "whirl-blast" and that in Keats there are only 2 examples of "whirlwind". Commotions of the atmosphere abound in Shelley and his imagery seems always liable to be set in a whirl — much oftener even than the number of actual mentions of whirlwinds suggests, for the identical thing appears in all sorts of verbal disguises. An exhaustive account of his treatment of this image will not be attempted here.

The idea of a whirlwind as a succession of formidable eddies of air recommended itself very early to Shelley as an image after his own heart. In his juvenilia it is presented with crude force, especially in the poem "On the Dark Heights of Jura" in "St. Irvyne":

Ghosts of the dead! have I not heard your yelling
 Rise on the night-rolling breath of the blast,
 When o'er the dark aether the tempest is swelling
 And on eddying whirlwinds the thunder-peal passed?

"Rolling", "eddying", "whirlwinds" are all used to emphasize the same impression. In the identical poem we read further how "the tide of the night-storm is rolling" and ghosts ride "on the wing of the whirlwind which roars o'er the mountain" ¹¹). There is nothing new in this but the insistence on circular movement is remarkable.

¹¹) Quite a number of things "roll" in Shelley's early verse. "Rolling eyes" or "eyeballs" seem to have taken his fancy (cf. "Ghastly", l. 162, "Sister Rosa", l. 26, "The Spectral Horseman", l. 51), griefs "roll" round Ravallac's fate ("Epithal. of F. Rav.", l. 59), etc.

In Shelley's later work eddying and whirling currents of air are often described with force and originality. Sometimes it is the pattern rather than the violence of the whirl that is dwelt upon. "The charmed eddies of autumnal winds" that build a pyramid of leaves on the tomb of the poet in "Alastor" are elegiac rather than powerful ¹²⁾. There is vigour in the passage representing an eagle's "thunder-baffled wings" as "entangled in the whirlwind" ¹³⁾ but the intricacy of the wind is more prominent here than its power. Both the familiar vision of an inextricable tangle and the intensity of description strike us, e. g., in the first canto of "The Revolt of Islam", where we are shown

One mighty stream, whirlwind and waves upthrown,
Lightning, and hail, and darkness eddying by ¹⁴⁾.

Very often Shelley's fancy introduces whirls of air with an individual touch impressing them on one's memory. Thus, the plank whereon the Lady in "Marianne's Dream" is driven "about and about" is likened to "the thistle-beard" that "on the whirlwind sails". In "An Allegory" the mysterious cavern is surrounded by an "unceasing strife of shadows" that are

like the restless clouds that haunt
The gap of some cleft mountain, lifted high
Into the whirlwinds of the upper sky.

These winds, the "streams of upper air" by which the Earth is supposed to be whirled round, make a fanciful appearance in "The Witch of Atlas". The Lady-Witch of this poem uses them as a playground to which she often ascends to join in the chorus of the spirits residing there ¹⁵⁾. This is dance on a cosmic scale — an idea of which Shelley is particularly fond, and continually associated by him with dizzying speed and intricacy of whirling movement.

In the "Ode to the West Wind" the uproar of the elements is indirectly likened to the madness of a bacchantic dance by the magnificent comparison of the flying clouds covering the skies to the hair of a maenad. One of the leading motives in "Prometheus

¹²⁾ Cf. l. 52. ¹³⁾ Prom. Unb. III. 2. 11. ¹⁴⁾ Stanza 3. ¹⁵⁾ Stanza 56.

Unbound" is the circling dance of heavenly bodies and spirits, especially in Act IV. The Song of the Moon in this act is that of a whirling bacchante ¹⁶⁾). The impression created by these "mystic measures" ¹⁷⁾ is one of tangled, sometimes almost maddened, gyration. This subject will have to be dealt with later in this chapter in a different context ¹⁸⁾).

The same motive is conspicuous in Shelley's last, unfinished longer poem, "The Triumph of Life". The insane billowing of

¹⁶⁾ ll. 450—492. ¹⁷⁾ Cf. ll. 77 et seq., ll. 129 et seq. and passim.

¹⁸⁾ How the idea of a confused whirl appealed to Shelley is also shown by certain passages in his translations where the imagery of the originals has been changed. In "The Cyclops", ll. 586—587, "The heavens and earth appear to whirl about Confusedly". Euripides says: "And the heavens appear to me to move, mingled with the earth". In "Faust", II. 286—288, we read:

And yet we now
Will seize, whilst all things are whirled round and round,
A spoke of Fortune's wheel, and keep our ground.

Here the whirl — though not cosmic — is likewise an invention of Shelley's, this time probably based on a misinterpretation of the original, where there is no hint at either wheel or whirl but a reference to the turning upside-down of things:

Doch jetzo kehrt sich alles um und um,
Und eben da wirs fest erhalten wollten.

A remarkable description of intricate wheeling, especially apposite here because it combines several of the images dealt with, presenting them all in one breath, is found in Shelley's prose fragment on the Minerva in the Florence gallery. While depicting the figures of maenads sculptured on the pedestal of the statue, he says:

"The tremendous spirit of superstition, aided by drunkenness, producing something beyond insanity, seems to have caught them in its whirlwinds, and to bear them over the earth, as the rapid volutions of a tempest have the ever-changing trunk of a waterspout, or as the torrent of a mountain river whirls the autumnal leaves resistlessly along in its full eddies. The hair, loose and floating, seems caught in the tempest of their own tumultuous motion; their heads are thrown back, leaning with a strange delirium upon their necks, and looking up to heaven whilst they totter and stumble even in the energy of their tempestuous dance" (Shelley's Prose Works, ed. R. H. Shepherd, London 1912, vol. I, p. 406).

In this connection cf. the description of "the black trunks of waterspouts" spinning and bending, "as if Heaven was ruining in", in "A Vision of the Sea", ll. 4—11.

mankind round the advancing Chariot of Life is a vast maenadic dance, a whirlwind assuming almost cosmic proportions:

The wild dance maddens in the van, and those
Who lead it — fleet as shadows on the green,

Outspeed the chariot, and without repose
Mix with each other in tempestuous measure
To savage music, wilder as it grows,

They, tortured by their agonizing pleasure,
Convulsed and on the rapid whirlwind spun
Of that fierce Spirit, whose unholy leisure

Was soothed by mischief since the world begun,
Throw back their heads and loose their streaming hair;
And in their dance round her who dims the sun,

Maidens and youths fling their wild arms in air
As their feet twinkle; they recede; and now
Bending within each other's atmosphere,

Kindle invisibly — 19)

This vertiginous, circling but chaotic movement, the "mixing with each other" of the dancers, the streaming hair, the flying arms, the twinkling feet, all carried away by the "rapid whirlwind" of an unholy Spirit, show the height of deliriously spinning confusion. Later in the poem the subject is resumed. The dance is now compared to bubbles on the eddies of a stream and to clouds chased round and round — both images that have already been instanced and both intensifying the general effect of irregular gyration. The chariot is rapidly advancing; some stand gazing, others outspeed it, others are described as making

Circles around it, like the clouds that swim
Round the high moon in a bright sea of air;
And more did follow, with exulting hymn,

¹⁹⁾ ll. 138—152.

The chariot and the captives fettered there: —
 But all like bubbles on an eddying flood
 Fell into the same track at last, and were

Borne onward ²⁰).

Not the same image but the same kind of movement is depicted with equal power in one of the most memorable passages of "The Revolt of Islam" — the struggle of the serpent with the eagle in Canto I. Various elements combine to enhance the impression of intricate spinning and involution. The bird and the snake are "wreathed in fight", "feather and scale inextricably blended"; the serpent has twined its coils within the eagle's plumes "by many a swollen and knotted fold". The eagle's movements are uncertain, "hovering, wheeled to left and right". After this preliminary description of manifold writhings and speedy but wavering circlings in mid air, the following lines with their emphatic picture of circular flight in shifting directions strike home with forcible effect:

Around, around, in ceaseless circles wheeling,
 With clang of wings and scream, the Eagle sailed
 Incessantly — sometimes on high concealing
 Its lessening orbs, sometimes as if it failed,
 Drooped through the air ²¹).

Circular movement is sometimes perceived on unlikely occasions. Gentle breezes are seen as moving in a circle, e. g. in "Rosalind and Helen", where Lionel's movements are said to be free as the winds "Which bend the bright grass gracefully, Then fade away in circlets faint" ²²). A kindred image but much vaster is that of the world of sleep spreading "far around and inaccessibly Its circles" ²³). Here, as perhaps also in the previous example, the circles seem to be conceived as concentric. This may also be the case with the music that rises "in circling flight" under Mercury's hand — an image of Shelley's own invention used in his translation of Homer's "Hymn to Mer-

²⁰) ll. 453—460. ²¹) Stanza 10. ²²) ll. 796—798. ²³) Mont Blanc, ll. 55—57.

cury" 24). It is possible that the analogy in these cases is with circles of water — an idyllic conception devoid of the restlessness of the imagery previously discussed. Nevertheless, the orderliness of this very image is, on at least one occasion, converted by Shelley into a vision of surprising complexity. In "The Witch of Atlas" the simple geometrical figure in question is multiplied deftly and most effectively; the result is a shifting maze. The Lady-Witch's tears drop into her magic well —

And every little circlet where they fell
 Flung to the cavern-roof inconstant spheres
 And intertangled lines of light 25).

A series of circles of sound forming a spiral and a shower of interwoven airy rings of music enmeshing the hearer in their coils are other Shelleyan images showing the same love of intricacy. Both occur in "Rosalind and Helen":

And soon her strain
 The nightingale began; now loud,
 Climbing in circles the windless sky,
 Now dying music 26).

And from the twinkling wires among
 My languid fingers drew and flung
 Circles of life-dissolving sound,
 Yet faint; in aëry rings they bound
 My Lionel 27).

In the last example the complexity of the image corresponds with the suggestion of the experience of dizzy fainting, so naturally associated with circling motion. And indeed, Shelley's fondness for imagery of the kind described goes together with an almost inordinate fondness for the notion of dizziness. It would hardly be easy to find another English poet describing, or referring to, the sensation of vertigo quite as often as Shelley does 28). It seems with exceptional frequency to accompany his moments of

²⁴⁾ Stanza 71. ²⁵⁾ Stanza 25. ²⁶⁾ ll. 1104—1107. ²⁷⁾ ll. 1164—1168.

²⁸⁾ *Dizzy, giddy* and their cognates occur 37 times in Shelley, 26 times in Wordsworth, 10 times in Keats, and 10 times in Tennyson.

excitement. The effect of Asia's beauty, leaving the beholder "dizzy, lost, yet unbewailing" ²⁹⁾, and the feelings of the Spirit of the Hour floating in space "dizzy as with delight" ³⁰⁾ are typical instances. Not infrequently giddiness is vividly described in terms of circular movement, sometimes with great impressiveness. After the intemperate tyrant's orgies in "Queen Mab" "his fevered brain Reels dizzily awhile" ³¹⁾. The loveliness of the Witch of Atlas makes "the dim brain whirl dizzy with delight" ³²⁾. In "The Cenci" the sensation of the brain "swimming round" is referred to repeatedly ³³⁾, but the most effective description of vertigo occurs in Beatrice's speech after her father's incestuous deed. Her brain "is hurt", she "sees but indistinctly", "the walls spin round"; she observes a woman standing calm and motionless, whilst she herself "slides giddily as the world reels" ³⁴⁾.

The above idiosyncrasies of Shelley are reflected in his treatment of a category of phenomena that occupies an important place in his poetry — the movements of the heavenly bodies. In the extraordinary interest he takes in them, as in so many other respects, he shows a close kinship with Wordsworth. But whereas the idea of an infinity of revolving worlds as well as of the participation of the earth in the cosmic system impressed the elder poet mainly with its quiet grandeur and order, the younger one's much more exuberant fancy perpetually tends to conceive those revolutions as an immeasurable whirl. The calm majesty of Wordsworth's conception is seen, e. g., in the conclusion to "Lucy":

No motion has she now, no force;
 She neither hears nor sees;
 Rolled round in earth's diurnal course
 With rocks, and stones, and trees.

In "A Night-piece" the progress of the multitudes of stars

that, small
 And sharp, and bright, along the dark abyss
 Drive,

²⁹⁾ Prom. Unb. II. 5. 71. ³⁰⁾ *ibid.* III. 4. 106. ³¹⁾ III. 58—59.
³²⁾ Stanza 5. ³³⁾ Cf. I. 3. 164, V. 2. 88. ³⁴⁾ III. 1. 1—12.

is orderly and quiet, fast but regular. The mind following it is "not undisturbed by the delight it feels", and this delight "slowly settles into peaceful calm", into a musing on "the solemn scene". The skater in Book I of "The Prelude", speeding along the silent lake and suddenly stopping, continues to see the banks wheeling past,

even as if the earth had rolled
With visible motion her diurnal round ³⁵).

This is a sudden realization of cosmic movement, but though the experience is overwhelmingly sublime it is deep rather than violent. These are characteristic cases, well exemplifying Wordsworth's habitual attitude. With Shelley it is all much more dynamic and complex. "The implicated orbits woven Of the wide-wandering stars" ³⁶) are time and again viewed by him literally through the haze of dizzy excitement, not "small and sharp, and bright" but rather "reeling through the storm", as in "Prince Athanase" ³⁷). In "The Cloud" the stars "reel and swim, When the whirlwinds my banner unfurl" ³⁸). In the "Ode to Liberty", "the Spirit's whirlwind" carries the poet's soul along so impetuously that

the ray
Of the remotest sphere of living flame
Which paves the void was from behind it flung,
As foam from a ship's swiftiness ³⁹).

We are shown how

The Sun and the serenest Moon sprang forth:
The burning stars of the abyss were hurled
Into the depths of Heaven ⁴⁰).

This is far removed from the immense calmness of Wordsworth's vision. The impetus of the poet's exaltation throws the constellations out of their orbits like spray, so that all suggestion of regular revolution or even of any kind of more or less circular movement in this case disappears.

³⁵) ll. 459—460. ³⁶) Prom. Unb. II. 4. 86—87. ³⁷) ll. 192—193.
³⁸) ll. 61—62. ³⁹) ll. 11—14. ⁴⁰) ll. 16—18.

Circles, but irregularly woven circles, are suggested by the description of the sight presenting itself to the Witch of Atlas when

Through the green splendour of the water deep
She saw the constellations reel and dance
Like fire-flies ⁴¹⁾.

The image of the confusing flight of swarming insects is again applied to the stars in "The Cloud" ⁴²⁾. In the "Letter to Maria Gisborne" the two notions are coupled once more. Fire-flies are compared to stars in this case, and not *vice versa*; they are pictured as weaving their "ever-changing dance" in quaint circles, each insect being likened to

a little sun,
A meteor tamed; a fixed star gone astray
From the silver regions of the milky way ⁴³⁾.

These are playful visions of a joyously dancing universe of "implicated orbits". The joy turns to boundless exultation and the swarming of insects to a universal tempest of circling dance in "Prometheus Unbound". In the main the order of celestial revolutions remains as it is, the earth "spinning" beneath its "pyramid of night" ⁴⁴⁾ and "speeding round the sun" ⁴⁵⁾, while the Moon, the Earth's "crystal paramour" ⁴⁶⁾, describes her circles round it. These movements are not irregular, but an atmosphere of dizzying confusion is created by the fervour with which the poet describes the passionate impulsiveness of the heavenly bodies. The song of the Moon ⁴⁷⁾ is the height of an emotion that has burst all bounds. "Maniac-like", "an insatiate bride", she moves round the Earth, her "weak brain" "overladen with the passion of her love". She "must hurry, whirl and follow" through the heavens, and in a passage, cancelled perhaps because it would have introduced too much involution into the imagery, she likens herself to "a strain of sweetest sound" that

⁴¹⁾ Stanza 28. ⁴²⁾ ll. 53—54. ⁴³⁾ ll. 283—285. ⁴⁴⁾ IV. 521—522.
⁴⁵⁾ IV. 457. ⁴⁶⁾ IV. 463. ⁴⁷⁾ IV. 463 et seq.

Wraps itself the wind around
Until the voiceless wind be music too.

Though there is no real indication of the Moon being here conceived as leaving her orbit, the general impression, as has been pointed out, is that of the dance of a bacchante, unbridled, chaotically whirling, vertiginous. However, this confusion does not seem to have satisfied the author, for he introduces additional dancers, not bound to a prescribed course — the Hours and "Spirits of might and pleasure" whose mystic, luminous measures mingle with the gyrations of the heavenly bodies.

Yet however impressive or even overpowering these images may be, there is another one in "Prometheus Unbound" that in the present writer's opinion surpasses them all as far as the effect of intricately circling speed and inextricable complexity of moving, fused splendour is concerned. Nearly all the tendencies described in the present chapter and many of those dealt with in earlier parts of this essay converge in the image of the chariot, shaped like a "multitudinous orb", in which the Spirit of the Earth arrives on the scene in Act IV. This vision of "ten thousand orbs involving and involved", though not literally a description of planets and stars, is manifestly suggested by the idea of the starry firmament. Its precedents in Shelley's poetry are of considerable interest, showing as they do the gradual evolution of a conception of powerful and spontaneous effect. They also illustrate the way in which Shelley's imagination seized on familiar phenomena, elaborating and transmuting them step by step, until a stage was reached when familiarity and strangeness combined into a whole of singular power.

5. THE MULTITUDINOUS ORB.

What has just been dealt with is Shelley's tendency to conceive the movements of cosmic bodies as an ethereal but exultant dance, a magnificent, gyrating chaos of involved stellar courses. In Shelley's early vision the orderly nature of these phenomena is more apparent. In "Queen Mab" as well as in the final version of its earlier sections, "The Dæmon of the World", much of the best description deals with the sight of the starry skies. We are shown, on the one hand, perfect mechanic order, and on the other, a complexity so great that the swimming brain perceives it as disarray. "Heaven's dark-blue vault" ¹⁾ is an "immense concave" filled with an "interminable wilderness Of worlds, at whose involved immensity Even soaring fancy staggers" ²⁾. In "the black concave of heaven" the earth is shown as "a vast and shadowy sphere" and the sun as "a cloudless orb" ³⁾. "Innumerable systems" roll round the voyagers through space; "countless spheres" diffuse an "ever-varying glory" ⁴⁾; the expanse is "radiant with million constellations, tinged With shades of infinite colour" ⁵⁾.

As we see, there is little confusion in this bird's-eye view. Geometry and, on the whole, also cosmography are held in considerable respect. The geometrical term "concave", which occurs nowhere else in Shelley, is used twice with reference to the firmament. This, though not in keeping with scientific knowledge, is an attempt to give definite shape to the vision. Within that vast spherical body there are innumerable smaller ones, whose shape is likewise carefully defined. The word "system", also occurring repeatedly here though rare in Shelley's later work, shows the influence of science on the poet's mind. At the same time these sharp outlines are softened by the impressionist description of illumination, and the bewildering effect of the whole

¹⁾ Dæmon, 120. ²⁾ *ibid.* 176—178. ³⁾ *ibid.* 151, 153. ⁴⁾ *ibid.* 163—165. ⁵⁾ *ibid.* 144—145.

is suggested. The total impression is summed up with admirable precision in the following lines:

Thus, far as the remotest line
That limits swift imagination's flight,
Unending orbs mingled in mazy motion,
Immutably fulfilling
Eternal Nature's law.
The circling systems formed
A wilderness of harmony.
Each with undeviating aim
In eloquent silence through the depths of space
Pursued its wondrous way⁶⁾.

"Eternal Nature's law", that Necessity which Shelley in this very work proclaimed as the basis of all existence and philosophy, forms one aspect of the vision; its other aspect is the bewilderment already referred to, but perhaps it is also the typically Shelleyan delight in inextricable complexity, in the mingling of the celestial orbs in "mazy motion". The two conflicting tendencies are compressed into the oxymoron "a wilderness of harmony".

The spheres enclosed in a greater sphere, the fusion and the tangle reappear later on in combinations that grow bolder and bolder. A case in point is the description of the splendid hall in Canto I of "The Revolt of Islam". Here Shelley's mind, which in the meantime had acquired much more of "ever-varying glory" than it possessed when creating its first remarkable poem, mixes and develops the old elements with great ingenuity. The hall is like a firmament that has undergone a sea-change. It is a concave dome ("a dome of woven light") with a roof of diamond screened by clouds through which are seen orbs, starry shapes, meteors, moons:

We came to a vast hall, whose glorious roof
Was diamond, which had drank the lightning's sheen
In darkness, and now poured it through the woof
Of spell-inwoven clouds hung there to screen
Its blinding splendour — through such veil was seen

⁶⁾ *ibid.* 242—252.

That work of subtlest power, divine and rare;
 Orb above orb, with starry shapes between,
 And horned moons, and meteors, strange and fair,
 On night-black columns poised — one hollow hemisphere! ⁷⁾

This is cosmic architecture but there is no classical austerity in the picture: clouds, "spell-inwoven", dim all contours inside the "hollow hemisphere". It is all a fantastic transformation of stellar beauty.

There is no movement so far. But we are to have it too:

Then first, two glittering lights were seen to glide
 In circles on the amethystine floor,
 Small serpent eyes trailing from side to side,
 Like meteors on a river's grassy shore,
 They round each other rolled, dilating more
 And more — then rose, commingling into one,
 One clear and mighty planet hanging o'er
 A cloud of deepest shadow, which was thrown
 Athwart the glowing steps and the crystalline throne ⁸⁾.

Being pure fantasy, this description is perhaps all the more characteristic of Shelley's leanings. Freed from the prescriptions of astronomy and cosmography, he follows the drift of his own imagination. The elements are recognizable. We are told of "serpent eyes" but they are likened to "meteors" (as Shelley characteristically calls them, though he seems to be thinking of *ignes fatui*). Their motion is circular, they move round each other, somewhat like heavenly bodies but more fancifully. When they mingle they compose a planet, two orbs forming one, both contained in it and fused with it. The process of fusion, hinted at metaphorically in "The Dæmon of the World" ("mingled in mazy motion"), is here described as a reality. It forms one of the principal motives associated with the orb of the Spirit of the Earth in "Prometheus Unbound".

This gigantic orb, which is seen and described by Panthea, consists almost entirely of revolving, transparent spheres moving in complete order but so rapidly and inextricably that they appear

⁷⁾ Stanza 52. ⁸⁾ Stanza 56.

as one ethereal mass. The impression of an indivisible whole is further strengthened by their transparency and permeability. This is really the same "wilderness of harmony" as in "Queen Mab" and "The Dæmon of the World" but the wilderness is presented as, if possible, even more complex; dynamic and tangled, and the harmony as even more sublime and complete. We are confronted with a maze of geometrical figures that have lost the last trace of rigidity and afford a perfect example of unity in infinite variety. Panthea says:

And from the other opening in the wood
 Rushes, with loud and whirlwind harmony,
 A sphere, which is as many thousand spheres,
 Solid as crystal, yet through all its mass
 Flow, as through empty space, music and light:
 Ten thousand orbs involving and involved,
 Purple and azure, white, and green, and golden,
 Sphere within sphere; and every space between
 Peopled with unimagined shapes,
 Such as ghosts dream dwell in the lampless deep,
 Yet each inter-transparent, and they whirl
 Over each other with a thousand motions,
 Upon a thousand sightless axles spinning,
 And with the force of self-destroying swiftness,
 Intensely, slowly, solemnly roll on,
 Kindling with mingled sounds, and many tones,
 Intelligible words and music wild.
 With mighty whirl the multitudinous orb
 Grinds the bright brook into an azure mist
 Of elemental subtlety, like light;
 And the wild odour of the forest flowers,
 The music of the living grass and air,
 The emerald light of leaf-entangled beams
 Round its intense yet self-conflicting speed,
 Seem kneaded into one aëreal mass
 Which drowns the sense. Within the orb itself,

 The Spirit of the Earth is laid asleep ⁹⁾).

⁹⁾ IV. 236—265.

This is literally a hurricane of interwoven orbs and orbits, of manifold circular motion, as complicated as that of the heavenly bodies and as orderly, but more tempestuous and at the same time more ethereal. Each of these revolving spheres, though "solid as crystal", is yet "inter-transpicuous", affording a glimpse of all the rest, like one of Leibniz's monads. Each — like a monad or a star — is an individual body but participates in the general "whirlwind harmony". Colour, rushing music and the odours and lights of living nature flow through them, creating the impression of one dizzying but perfectly organized whole, so keenly and confusingly alive that it "drowns the sense". And all this spinning and mingling tempestuousness has a definite centre in which "the Spirit of the Earth is laid asleep". There is peace and poise at the heart of this whirl.

Shelley takes special care to underline both the unity and the multiplicity, the tumult and the harmony, the solidity and the airiness of his conception. He points out more than once that it is one sphere, one "multitudinous orb", one "aëreal mass", while likewise emphasizing its being "as many thousand spheres", "ten thousand orbs", "sphere within sphere". Its multiple gyrations are similarly conveyed with special emphasis by a number of expressions, such as "whirl Over each other with a thousand motions", "whirlwind harmony", "involving and involved", "spinning", "mighty whirl", "the force of self-destroying swiftness", "intense yet self-conflicting speed" (i. e. apparently speed striving to destroy its own results since revolving motion implies a constant return to the same spot). But all this variety and speed are kept together by an imagination organizing them with all but mathematical exactitude. Here, at the height of his powers, Shelley gives the lie to those who accuse him of immature disorder. Impetuous force, airy grace and subtlety and a perfect control over one's imagery could hardly enter into a more intimate and more satisfying union.

The passage is also of particular interest as welding into one many of the traits discussed in this paper while presenting them with maximum intensity. Involution, close contact amounting to interpenetration, furious wheeling speed, tangles of circles are all shown in one image. Compared with the two other descriptions analysed in the present chapter, this picture shows a far more organic combination of the same basic images. The

cosmos that Shelley in "Queen Mab" and "The Dæmon of the World" merely copied, as it were, whereas in "The Revolt of Islam" it was disintegrated into a succession of beautiful and vivid but somewhat loosely connected dream-images, has here been transformed into a highly original vision, as suggestive and iridescent as it is compact.

This compactness, this power of condensation are exhibited to an even greater degree and combine with extraordinary freshness and fragility in another image manifestly springing from the same seed. In the "Ode to Heaven", composed in December, 1819, about the same time as the last act of "Prometheus Unbound", where the "multitudinous orb" occurs, and published in the same volume, there is a strangely original passage that has caused much comment. Here we are concerned with the visual image it presents rather than with its symbolic meaning. In the last stanza of that poem, Heaven, instead of being viewed as the immeasurable expanse of "Queen Mab" and "The Dæmon of the World", becomes a mere particle of something infinitely larger, a "globe of dew" filling some "eyed flower whose young leaves waken On an unimagined world". But even in its minuteness this globe encloses all the interminable variety that we have seen:

Constellated worlds unshaken,
Orbits measureless, are furled
In that frail and fading sphere,
With ten millions gathered there,
To tremble, gleam, and disappear.

Here we actually have a universe in a dew-drop — an extreme instance of the Shelleyan combination of exceptional delicacy with vastness of outlook — but although the colours are deliberately dimmed and the outlines blurred, the mazes of circling worlds, of spheres within a sphere, are indicated with definiteness and precision. The image of the dew-drop itself sufficiently suggests the idea of mingling, of many orbs uniting into one, which, as has been shown, was so fertile a stimulant to Shelley's imagination. The distance covered by the poet in his transition from the somewhat mechanic vision of the firmament in "The Dæmon of the World" to this highly organic growth of his genius is truly remarkable.

This increase in originality and organic wholeness of conception seems to correspond to a change in feeling and philosophical attitude. "Eternal Nature's law", rigid geometry, mechanic Necessity appear in our first example; the mingling mazes, the "ever-varying glory" there described are mere impressionist terms. But the rigidity disappears — at first so completely that even order is destroyed. Intimate contact, dreamy fusion, wandering movement characterize the spheres in the extracts from "The Revolt of Islam". In "Prometheus Unbound" we are again shown a dream but one clearly symbolizing the universe — this time a universe where the Many have really become one without losing their individuality. All are instinct with the same spirit, which is not that of mechanic law but of living, ecstatic but harmonious union. In our last quotation this union in the live dew-drop that is Heaven is, if possible, even more intimate and certainly more delicate.

That throughout this series of varying conceptions the same figures and movements should appear, shows how deep they had penetrated into Shelley's consciousness from the start and how completely they harmonized with his type of sensibility.

Two further, somewhat different but interesting examples of orbs contained in a larger orb also require brief mention. In both the immensity of heaven is condensed into something infinitely smaller, as in the image of the dew-drop. I am referring to the descriptions of Cythna's eyes in Canto XI, st. 5 of "The Revolt of Islam", and of those of Panthea in Act II, scene I, ll. 114—117 of "Prometheus Unbound". The word "orb" for "eye" is frequent in Shelley, but in the two cases concerned the association with the orbs of the firmament is highly probable. In any case, the eyes are conceived in these passages as representing the whole vault of heaven; the complexity of their texture, which is emphasized, seems to be associated with the stellar orbits. The notion of "orb within orb" is apparently introduced in allusion to the actual structure of the eye, with its three concentric circles, marking the eyeball, the iris and the pupils. The similarity of the two descriptions is striking. We read of Cythna that

her dark and intricate eyes,
Orb within orb, deeper than sleep or death,
Absorbed the glories of the burning skies.

Asia describes Panthea's eyes as follows:

Thine eyes are like the deep, blue, boundless heaven
 Contracted to two circles underneath
 Their long, fine lashes; dark, far, measureless,
 Orb within orb, and line through line inwoven.

What is absent here is, naturally, the element of movement, though a suggestion of this may have been intended by the participle "inwoven" in the second extract. The aptness with which Shelley's favourite idea of "orb within orb" is here applied to a phenomenon so different from those discussed earlier in this chapter and the felicity with which the old associations are brought to bear upon a new subject are noteworthy. As in a musical symphony, the same leading motives keep appearing in all sorts of variations and disguises.

* *
 *

Enough has probably been said to make one realize how spontaneously and how completely in accordance with Shelley's temperament and sensibility the group of images here dealt with blossomed into a variety of remarkable visions. This does not mean that no external influences were at work. It can be shown, I believe, that certain Miltonic reminiscences are traceable in his imagery. But if he made use of them this was only because these seeds had fallen on a fertile soil. What eventually grew out of them was pure Shelley and would scarcely have differed in its general character had he never remembered Milton.

In the sixth book of "Paradise Lost" there is a description of the chariot of God:

Forth rush'd with whirl-wind sound
 The Chariot of Paternal Deitie,
 Flashing thick flames, Wheele within Wheele undrawn,
 It self instinct with Spirit, but convoyd
 By four Cherubic shapes, four Faces each
 Had wondrous, as with Starrs thir bodies all
 And Wings were set with Eyes, with Eyes the Wheels

Of Berils, and careering Fires between;
 Over thir heads a chrystal Firmament,
 Whereon a Saphir Throne, inlaid with pure
 Amber, and colours of the showrie Arch ¹⁰).

There is an unmistakable echo of part of this in "Queen Mab":

The restless wheels of being on their way,
 Whose flashing spokes, instinct with infinite life,
 Bicker and burn to gain their destined goal ¹¹).

It should be remarked that only a few lines after the extract quoted from "Paradise Lost", "bickering flame, and sparkles dire" roll from the chariot of Milton's Jehovah.

The descriptions of heaven in "Queen Mab" and "The Dæmon of the World" hardly show any influence of the Miltonic passage, although the above evidence makes it fairly plain that at the time of Shelley's writing these poems the impression of Milton's lines must have been fresh in his mind. But later on, when the ideas of spheres and orbs that really were stars, and of the patterns formed by them and their movements, had already been occupying him for some time, the earlier poet's word-painting seems to have been remembered by him again. Its "Whee within Whee", corresponding to the "orb within orb" and "sphere within sphere" here examined (and showing the kind of movement that Shelley loved), as well as its innumerable stars and eyes — even on the chariot wheels —, appear to have risen to the surface out of the recesses of his memory, though considerably changed. They may have stimulated the growth of the "multitudinous orb" and its "ten thousand spheres involving and involved" — a line not unlike Milton's "Attended with ten thousand Saints" found immediately after the description of the chariot. Shelley's pattern of spherical bodies is rather similar but more airy and more whirling in its motion. What is more, his vast orb seems also to be a chariot — like that other, cloudy one, described by him a few lines earlier, whose wheels

roll

And move and grow as with an inward wind ¹²)

¹⁰) ll. 749—759. ¹¹) IX. 152—154. ¹²) Prom. Unb. IV. 217—218.

as Jehovah's chariot moves "instinct with (which in Milton means 'propelled by') Spirit". The "whirl-wind sound" with which Milton's vehicle rushes forth is like the "loud and whirlwind harmony" of Shelley's advancing orb. Every space between the former's wheels and the latter's spheres is filled — in the one case with "careering Fires", in the other with "unimaginable shapes". Milton's "Wheels of Berils" and "colours of the showrie Arch" correspond to the "Purple and azure, white, and green, and golden" colouring of Shelley's wheeling spheres.

It seems improbable that this cluster of correspondences could have been a chain of mere coincidences. But the differences are perhaps more significant than the similarities. All the biblical imagery of Milton has disappeared in Shelley. There is little that is tangible in his description except a pattern — and this pattern, both of shape and of movement, is brought out with all the power and splendour at his disposal. Shelley's consistency in emphasizing this aspect of his vision is amazing and on this occasion at least links him with those tendencies in modern art that cultivate abstract form, even though the origin of each element of his picture may be clearly traceable¹³). Compared with him Milton is almost a realist here but without surpassing him in pictorial force and expressiveness.

¹³) In "Science and the Modern World", chapter V, A. N. Whitehead notes Shelley's writing many of his descriptions "with a definite geometrical diagram before his inward eye". This is found to occur with especial frequency in the last act of "Prometheus Unbound". Professor Whitehead attributes this fact to Shelley's absorption in the ideas of science. While admitting that even the image of the Multitudinous Orb may owe much to science, we have yet to bear in mind the poet's preoccupation with form as such, quite apart from his interest in scientific matters. However, it might be worth while to consider the possible connection between science and the absence of realistic detail in the image under examination.

6. CONCLUSION.

In the previous chapters a number of cognate groups of images was analysed in some detail. However, an exhaustive analysis has not been attempted. We have only been able to deal with some of the more salient features of the matter. To make the picture more complete, a study of undulation and curves in Shelley might have had to be undertaken¹⁾; an examination of his peculiar fondness for the image of clothes clinging to the body would have been necessary; his numerous winding caves would have had to be investigated. Yet even this enumeration is by no means exhaustive. The visual and motory patterns underlying the imagery examined are so ubiquitous in his work that only a voluminous book might be able to do full justice to the subject. Moreover, despite the considerable amount of illustrations adduced, no adequate idea could be given of the frequency of instances of this sort or of the way one category of images enhances the effect of other, kindred ones. Only in a few special cases, e. g. in that of the "multitudinous orb", the interaction of cognate factors could be shown with some distinctness. Actually it is exactly such an interplay of different but related elements that constantly strikes one in reading Shelley.

A short fragment, "The Birth of Pleasure", written in 1819 and first published by Dr. Garnett in his "Relics of Shelley", may serve to suggest the manner in which the poet sometimes attained a cumulative effect of sinuosity, involution and clinging contact, as well as to what lengths he occasionally went in his pursuit of such an effect:

¹⁾ Even the curves of the human body are occasionally described by Shelley in a manner suggesting the idea of an endless tangle. Note, e. g., the following passage from his notice on the statue of "the Venus called Anadyomene" in Florence: "She seems all soft and mild enjoyment, and the curved lines of her fine limbs flow into each other with a never-ending sinuosity of sweetness" (R. H. Shepherd's ed. of Shelley's Prose Works, vol. I, p. 407).

At the creation of the Earth
 Pleasure, that divinest birth,
 From the soil of Heaven did rise,
 Wrapped in sweet wild melodies —
 Like an exhalation wreathing
 To the sound of air low-breathing
 Through Aeolian pines, which make
 A shade and shelter of the lake
 Whence it rises soft and slow;
 Her life-breathing [limbs] did flow
 In the harmony divine
 Of an ever-lengthening line
 Which enwrapped her perfect form
 With a beauty clear and warm.

It may well be that this fragment was abandoned because of certain contradictory elements contained in it. The limbs of Pleasure are shown as a wreathing exhalation, a flowing, ever-lengthening line that yet enwraps "her perfect form", i. e. itself, those very limbs that *are* the flowing line. Shelley's tendency to trace involved lines had here got him into a vicious circle. This neglect of elementary logic for the sake of a pattern shows, of course, how that pattern had endeared itself to the author and how instinctively his imagination took every chance of bringing it in. The effect of a curling line wrapping itself round itself (though this self is unfortunately identified with limbs, which cannot be visualized as a mere line) is further complicated by its being enwrapped by music — a bewildering vision indeed, marred by an oversight of a kind that fortunately is not common in Shelley ²⁾).

A number of longer passages would have to be analysed to make one realize with sufficient clarity the frequency and interest of such cumulative effects. Another interesting and relevant problem is that of the relative density and vividness of such imagery at different periods and in different types of works. A really adequate account could hardly be given in view of the

²⁾ This is another example of "abstract form". Shelley's favourite pattern comes, characteristically enough, to symbolize Pleasure. Difficulties arise as soon as he deviates from the abstract pattern, adding realistic detail incompatible with it. This fragment seems to illustrate the occasional priority of pure visual form in Shelley.

elusiveness of many of these images, but in collecting his illustrations for the present study the writer found that from the middle of 1821 the evidence became sparse and seldom showed any new departures. This coincides with a certain calming down of Shelley's imagination, with a scarcity of dizzy flights like those in "Prometheus Unbound", a work which proved one of the most abundant sources of illustration. However, in Shelley's last longer poem, "The Triumph on Life", where his imagination again grows stormy, tangles, whirls and the like abound once more. "Adonais", which is written with a classic control over the vagaries of fancy, yields little material. The same is, on the whole, true of "Julian and Maddalo" and "The Cenci", which show a similar tendency towards restraint in mood and style. On the other hand, "Alastor", "The Revolt of Islam", "Rosalind and Helen", "The Witch of Atlas", "Epipsychidion" — each in its own way figuring among the poet's most subjective and exuberant works — often positively swarm with mazes, twines and spirals. Hence one feels justified in risking the tentative conclusion, consonant with the associations connected with these images, that these latter tended to appear under strong emotional stress when the spontaneity of Shelley's imagination was at its height.

Although only certain aspects of Shelley's vision of the world of sensible things have been investigated, it emerged with some distinctness from these inquiries that, far from perpetually revealing in a mere haze, however glowing and delicate, he was susceptible to a striking degree to configurations of lines, competing with the engraver's art in the precision with which he often perceived and rendered design, even where it occurred in the most fleeting and delicate impressions. Critics have, on the whole, emphasized the shifting, unstable character of his vision rather than his capacity for distinct visualization. Actually it seems to be the interplay of both these faculties that largely determines the total effect of his descriptions³⁾. We have seen how the tears

³⁾ In his "Studien zu Shelley's Lyrik" (1919) Prof. H. Huscher, studying Shelley on a statistical basis but with a careful examination of the content and atmosphere of his work, arrives at the conclusion that his vision of the world was chiefly one of movement, but of movement perceived through visual phenomena, and that his visual sense was keen (cf. p. 156). The results of R. von Freydorf's "Die bildhafte Sprache in Shelley's Lyrik" (1935) are similar.

of the Witch of Atlas, falling into a well, formed circles in its water that, being reflected, were multiplied into a maze of "inconstant spheres And intertangled lines of light". Here a pattern of an extremely evanescent nature is nevertheless observed and rendered in a flash. It dissolves but is reproduced before its dissolution. An impressive assembly of such flash-light photographs might be collected — photographs in their minuteness and precision though unlike photographs in their being always on the point of fading into new images. It is seldom that Shelley seems to appreciate permanence in a vision. Sometimes indeed he hints at the power of imagination or thought to perpetuate the least durable things, as in the following reference to an ideal, indestructible Athens:

Within the surface of Time's fleeting river
 Its wrinkled image lies, as then it lay,
 Immovably unquiet, and for ever
 It trembles, but it cannot pass away! 4)

These lines — repeated with a few slight changes in "Evening: Ponte al Mare, Pisa" — serve, on the other hand, as an illustration of the fragility of the sights that Shelley wishes to be preserved. It is more than once that he shows an exceptional skill in making one visualize ripples on the surface of water as distinct but complex patterns. Compare, for instance, the following passage:

As in a brook, fretted with little waves
 By the light air of spring — each riplet makes
 A many-sided mirror of the sun,
 While it flows musically through green banks 5).

Similarly, he makes us see "the delicate brief touch" of the hoarfrost in early spring as it "in silver weaves The likeness of the wood's remembered leaves" 6). He loves the short-lived beauty of "all the forms Of the radiant frost", especially of snow-flakes, which not infrequently occur in metaphorical contexts. One should consult the entries under "flake" in Ellis's Concordance to realize how this image sometimes seems to appear not because

4) Ode to Liberty, VI. 1—4. 5) Orpheus, 59—63. 6) Marenghi, st. 21.

but in spite of the context. Gossamer, the beard of the dandelion attract him. The thistle-beard that "on a whirlwind sails", already mentioned in another connection, may serve as a symbol of his tendency to combine fragile complexity of structure with impetuous, destructive motion.

We have again had to use the term "complexity", already employed so many times before. An all too obvious answer to the question why Shelley valued this quality so much, is: because of the subtlety of his mind. But it might be possible to find some more precise definition for part of the reasons for this predilection. One of them may lie in the kinetic effect of intricacy. A simple pattern is taken in by the eye at once whereas a complex one takes some moving from point to point, some re-tracing of its tracery by the sight before it is fully apprehended. This introduces an impression of movement even into the contemplation of the most immovable patterns. An examination of the wording in Shelley's descriptions of such images would seem to indicate his instinctive awareness of this fact. His frequent use in such connections of "to weave", "to entwine" and verbs of similar meaning may have something to do with their suggestion of movement. "Immovably unquiet", to use a phrase just quoted, is an apt definition of the effect they help to create. The same effect is still further intensified when the pattern is not merely complex but irregular, for irregularity of design causes a feeling of restlessness. A typical example of a picture of involution perceived as nervous motion though actually static appears in the following lines from "Alastor":

Like restless serpents, clothed
In rainbow and in fire, the parasites,
Starred with ten thousand blossoms, flow around
The grey trunks, and, as gamesome infants' eyes,
With gentle meanings and most innocent wiles,
Fold their beams round the hearts of those that love,
These twine their tendrils with the wedded boughs,
Uniting their close union ⁷).

We have seen Shelley's fondness for hair as moving tangles; for veins as ramifications pulsing with flowing blood — even in

⁷) Alastor, 438—445.

leaves; for nerves as quivering — even in statues; for the firmament as an expanse of whirling intricacy. Even the mineral deposits of the earth were found to be represented as channels of passionate life. In fact, Shelley's vision of complexity, however keen and detailed, is essentially kinetic — only it should not be forgotten that it is often extremely sharp and minute as well.

In an earlier chapter the vital importance that sensations of contact had for Shelley was pointed out. It was suggested that his unusual interest in them seems to have formed an essential element in his liking for intricacy, exactly as it played a significant part in the pleasure he took in mingling and indefiniteness. It was apparently one of the basic elements of his psycho-physical life, and without its being taken into account no explanation of his imagery can be entirely satisfactory. If we take this into consideration and relate it to the remarks just made, we may restate and supplement our conclusions as follows:

Shelley's extraordinarily acute sensitiveness is shown alike in his treatment of vague, shifting tints and fused shades and of lines and linear patterns. The interplay of these two aspects is of fundamental importance in the impression his descriptions make on the reader. The subtlety of this interaction is increased by the complexity of Shelley's patterns, which, despite his frequent precision of description, introduces an element of restlessness into his vision. This restlessness is partly reflected and partly enhanced by his use of words and subsidiary images suggesting movement, as well as by his tendency to employ the imagery of entanglement — a type of linear configuration difficult to be apprehended by the eye and often suggestive of irregular mingling. One of the notions naturally associated with it — that of close contact — connects it intimately with the imagery of fusion, which similarly represents contact, only in a more complete form. The closeness of the interrelations between these various elements is exemplified by their simultaneous occurrence in certain images, especially in the image of the "multitudinous orb", where entanglement, a precise apprehension of ordered complexity, contact to the point of fusion, and restless though completely poised movement are combined into one harmonious whole.

Such characteristics as Shelley's observation of delicate lines, the kinetic character of his perceptions and his preoccupation with contact are probably fundamental traits that it seems diffi-

cult to reduce to still more fundamental principles. In any case to do this would appear to be a task for professional psychology rather than for literary criticism. These features seem connected with the character of Shelley's physical constitution. His sensitiveness to contact is, as it seems, of so basic a nature that it influences, or perhaps determines, certain essential aspects of his art, his attitude to life and his philosophy. It appears questionable whether the erotic associations often found in his imagery of contact and involution had a greater influence on his selection of images belonging to these categories than the fact that he was capable of deriving exceptional pleasure from the idea of contact, whether erotic or not. This, however, is a matter for psychological experts to decide.

Shelley's impatient longing for contact, as expressed, e. g., in the "Ode to the West Wind", corresponds with the nature of his pantheism, as has been suggested before. He wants to get in touch with, even to lose his selfhood in, the vast forces of the elements, to become one with the Spirit of the Universe. This desire is very often expressed as an impulse to meet these forces and presences, to approach them actively. In this respect he differs radically from Wordsworth, whose attitude towards Nature is one of passive expectancy, of a quiet communion with its life and of a patient preparedness for the moment of illumination. "Tintern Abbey" is the classic expression of such an attitude. A gradual, complete saturation with the healing and ennobling influence of Nature is his method of getting in touch with her. This is in keeping with the character of his imagery. This latter shows few of Shelley's heated visions of contact, especially of an active reaching after it. Nothing seems farther removed from Wordsworth's manner than, e. g., the idea of a maenadic, maniac-like yearning for union, like that expressed in Shelley's song of the Moon whirling round the Earth.

A customary method in the study of poetic imagery is the determination of the meaning of symbols, the word "meaning" tending in such cases to signify "abstract meaning". How is a symbol connected with an author's philosophy of life? is a question that is often asked. Sir A. T. Strong's analysis of Shelley's serpent imagery is an admirable example of this method, but, as has been suggested, it seems to suffer from his comparative neglect of the purely "physical" cha-

racteristics of the symbol of the serpent and of Shelley's way of reacting to these characteristics apart from the particular image that is being studied. A poet's interpretation of one and the same image may vary, and yet he may constantly feel attracted by that image, introducing it not so much for the sake of any abstract symbolic import it may have as because it appeals to his physical senses, or perhaps to his whole psycho-physical constitution. Shelley's serpents are sometimes associated with beauty and peace and sometimes with horror and cruelty, and now and then both with loveliness and with terror, but what all instances have in common is a special kind of shape and movement that happens to fascinate him. His whirlpools are generally suggestive of destructive force and turbulence or of an all but delirious, dizzying ecstasy, but they occur also in contexts of a manifestly idyllic character where the only probable reason for their appearance is his partiality for their special type of movement. If all the imagery of Shelley were studied with a careful consideration of its physical characteristics, we might be better able to understand certain apparent inconsistencies in his symbolism. This is not to say that other methods are less justified but to suggest that their results might be supplemented and verified by such an investigation. Much close co-operation in many directions is needed to unravel the meanings that through Shelley's

deep and labyrinthine soul,
Like echoes through long caverns, wind and roll ^s).

^s) Prom. Unb. I. 805—806.

Erratum.

Page 17, n. 106. For "Stanza, 23" read "Stanza, 33".