

# “The past is Death's, the future is thine own”: Shelley's Ideas of Revolutionary Poets in *Alastor* and *The Revolt of Islam*

(Received November 30, 2001)

Kyushu Institute of Technology Kei NIJIBAYASHI

## 1) The East for Shelley

As Edward Said's *Orientalism* shows, Romantic poets were interested in the Orient or the East in their poetry and they contributed to forming ideas about it from the Western point of view.<sup>1)</sup> For them, the Eastern world represented the antithesis of the Western values. Their writings, therefore, always contained political and moral polemics against the European or the English societies. While Hellenism anti-chronologically symbolized a spiritual millennium for Romantic inspiration, orientalism could geographically either epitomize the ethical and political dangers after the tumult of the French Revolution or reflect revolutionary values totally neglected and repressed in the culturally strange world. Byron's oriental poems, for example, present pessimistic heroes who fight against the Turkish tyranny without futuristic perspectives. The East in these poems represents physical and geographical indifference to their insatiable passion. The Giaour, who attacks and kills Hassan for his rancour and hatred, lives a solitary life under torment of repressed passion, and his deed remains socially and politically unrewarded. Conrad and Lara are the same in their commitment to the regional societies.

Shelley also used the Orient as a literary device and always associated it with travel, as seen in *Alastor*, *The Revolt of Islam*, *Prometheus Unbound* and *The Witch of Atlas*. None of his fictional characters stays in the Orient, but they travel either from or to it. Shelley emphasizes the interaction between the East and the West, both physically and psychologically. In other words, he understands the East as a place whence responses to western values are possibly gained, and this can clearly be seen in his narrative poems: *Alastor* and *The Revolt of Islam*.<sup>2)</sup> The Poet in *Alastor* (hereafter called the Alastor poet) is clearly a traveller from Europe to India,<sup>3)</sup> and Laon and Cythna go to liberate the people under tyranny from Argolis in Greece to the Golden City. The Eastern world, therefore, gives various impressions to them, and they, in turn, affect it through their presence, language and

actions. This, of course, suggests that Shelley created rather than depicted the East through the protagonists' eyes.

Describing repugnance or acceptance of the protagonists' views in the East, Shelley proposes his own revolutionary ideas and also reflects the political situation in contemporary English society. In the poems, the people in the East interpret the words and deeds of the protagonists without prejudices. Shelley seems to have used the Eastern setting in order to remove the reader's biases against his poetic and political principles, which were supposed to be dangerous and harmful for English society by many contemporary critics. This can be considered as a challenge against the contemporary readership, which tended to be involved in political and religious discussions on literary magazines. Of course, his use of the fashionable East setting also implies that he attempts to attract public attention to his own poetry and to gain some popularity.

Politically, *Alastor* and *The Revolt of Islam* seem to have one consistent thematic message. The prefaces of the poems obliquely criticize the pessimism and cynicism of the contemporary literature, emphasizing fraternal sympathy for realizing a perfectly peaceful and equal world. In the preface to *Alastor*, Shelley denounces those who would be absorbed in their own passion and selfish judgement and would care neither about themselves nor about their neighbours. This virtually denies the desperate heroes in Byron's oriental poems.

They who, deluded by no generous error, instigated by no sacred thirst of doubtful knowledge, duped by no illustrious superstition, loving nothing on this earth, and cherishing no hopes beyond, yet keep aloof from sympathies with their kind, rejoicing neither in human joy nor mourning with human grief; these, and such as they, have their apportioned curse. They languish, because none feel with them their common nature. They are morally dead. They are neither friends, nor lovers, nor fathers, nor citizens of the world, nor benefactors of their country. (*SPP* 69-70)

On the contrary, Shelley presents the *Alastor* poet as pure, innocent, ardent, sympathetic, imaginative both in knowledge, understanding, feelings and morality, though solitary and unsocial. His failure to establish himself as a poet does not derive from his characters, but from his social relationship: "The Poet's self-centred seclusion was avenged by the furies of an irresistible passion pursuing him to speedy ruin" (*SPP* 69). "He drinks deep of the fountains of knowledge, and is still insatiate" (*SPP* 69), and travels towards the East, seeking for the unattainable ideal. His knowledge and wisdom, therefore, are wasted in search of his own ontological mystery in vain. His sincerity and zeal ironically lead to self-

destruction. But it is important that they do not corrupt others as Byronic heroes do.<sup>4)</sup> The *Alastor* poet just believes the East to be a place for esoteric transcendentalism.

Against such a fantastic, visionary picture, *The Revolt of Islam* provides a much more realistic and materialistic world of tyranny and fighting. Its poetic genre and its fictional stage are quite different from those of *Alastor*. *The Revolt of Islam* epically narrates objective stories about the revolt held by people in the Golden City and about the heroic leaders, Laon and Cythna. Though the poem depicts the reality of the war and the people, it keeps mystifying the protagonists. Though it concludes with futility of personal idealism against massive physical violence, it never ceases praising the beautiful idealism and love of Laon and Cythna. This shows that the fundamental messages in *Alastor* and in *The Revolt of Islam* are basically the same; they display social functions of poets or poetic figures towards the world. Shelley declares the purpose of *The Revolt of Islam* in the preface:

I would only awaken the feelings, so that the reader should see the beauty of true virtue, and be incited to those inquiries which have led to my moral and political creed, and that of some of the sublimest intellects in the world. The Poem therefore . . . is narrative, not didactic. (SPW 32)

Describing "the beauty of true virtue" and requesting the reader's understanding and sympathy, he implies that tensions between democracy and tyranny exist in Europe and England as well as in the fictional East, and that public understanding of, and sympathy with, his poetics are necessary for a possible revolt in reality. Shelley insists that the political creeds of intellectuals including himself contribute to solving such oppositions and realizing a peaceful society. "The Poem therefore is narrative, not didactic" because he wants to gain agreement to his idea rather than to teach the reader his principles. In *The Revolt of Islam*, the East is used as a canvas for simulating a revolutionary vision in Europe and, therefore, as a place of expecting activities and historical changes. Here, it is important for us to notice that he intends both to supplement the personal narrative, *Alastor*, with a social dimension, and to attract public attention through the fashionable genre for popularity, the lack of which determined the *Alastor* poet's doom in his lonely annihilation. This sequence between the *Alastor* poet's tragic death and Shelley's appeal for popularity in the preface to *The Revolt of Islam* is not a coincidence. It hints at a dark background for contemporary poets.

The image of the solitary, unsocial, neglected *Alastor* poet reminds us of Thomas Chatterton, who was a symbolic figure of the Romantic fear about unpopularity and termination of career. Not only Coleridge and Wordsworth wrote about him in their

poems, but also Shelley refers to him when he discusses popularity as a reward for poets in *Adonais*.<sup>5)</sup> In the preface to *The Revolt of Islam*, half revealing his own fear about popularity, Shelley claims that he has written without care of contemporary criticisms and with his own artistic standard for idealistic composition. He borrows authorities for his writing principle from Homer, Shakespeare and Milton, suggesting that his poem should be read as aimed at becoming a masterpiece.

It is the misfortune of this age that its Writers, too thoughtless of immortality, are exquisitely sensible to temporary praise or blame. They write with the fear of Reviews before their eyes. . . . I have sought therefore to write, as I believe that Homer, Shakespeare, and Milton, wrote, with an utter disregard of anonymous censure. . . . Should the Public judge that my composition is worthless, I shall indeed bow before the tribunal from which Milton received his crown of immortality. . . . (SPW 35-6)

Shelley defines a possible contemporary revolution as a supreme theme for epic writing. In spite of the failure and catastrophe of Laon and Cythna, he proposes the East in the poem as a place in which leadership of poets and poetic talents can be evaluated and effective in revolution and reformation. He prepares the poem's ending as hopeful and prophetic of the better future. Against the pessimistic political vision after the French Revolution and Byron's misanthropy, Shelley offers a positive, optimistic epitome of the East.<sup>6)</sup>

It is an experiment on the temper of the public mind, as to how far a thirst for a happier condition of moral and political society survives, among the enlightened and refined, the tempests which have shaken the age in which we live. . . . Hence gloom and misanthropy have become the characteristics of the age in which we live, the solace of a disappointment that unconsciously finds relief only in the wilful exaggeration of its own despair. This influence has tainted the literature of the age with the hopelessness of the minds from which it flows. . . . Our works of fiction and poetry have been overshadowed by the same infectious gloom. But mankind appear to me to be emerging from their trance. I am aware, methinks, of a slow, gradual, silent change. In this belief I have composed the following Poem. (SPW 32-4)

*The Revolt of Islam*, in this way, seems to have answered questions raised by the Alastor poet. His death remains unknown and ineffectual and can never decipher the absolute ontological enigma, which never allows him to leap over the boundary of death into a transcendental world. His infinite search for his ultimate

identification is unanswerable, but his philosophical question is transmuted into a political and social one in the epic poem. Through fraternal feelings and mutual sympathy, moral idealism can be transmitted over generations. Dimensions of achievement are different, but Shelley seems to be successful in translating the Eastern setting in his own style and rendering it in his poetics.

## 2) Wanderlust: *Alastor*

The motives of the *Alastor* poet to start his journey to the East come from two different circumstances. The first one is his temperament or disposition urging him towards the ideal being. As "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" clearly displays, Shelley's persona poets imaginatively aspire toward the ideal. Such momentum appears not only in the imaginative vision but also in the actual geographical journey of the *Alastor* poet. A willful journey in search for the ideal being is a universal theme, and it is remarkably noticed in Romantic writings like Novalis's *Heinrich Von Ofterdingen* (1802). Heinrich wanders to search for "the blue flower," which is his own ideal image, and he inquires about art and self-understanding. Like Novalis's novel, one of the themes in *Alastor* is to study the workings of a poet's mind in a half real and half unreal journey.<sup>7)</sup> Shelley says in the preface:

The poem entitled "ALASTOR," may be considered as allegorical of one of the most interesting situations of the human mind. It represents a youth of uncorrupted feelings and adventurous genius led forth by an imagination inflamed and purified through familiarity with all that is excellent and majestic, to the contemplation of the universe. He drinks deep of the fountains of knowledge, and is still insatiate. The magnificence and beauty of the external world sinks profoundly into the frame of his conceptions, and affords to their modifications a variety not to be exhausted. (SPP 69)

The *Alastor* poet is defined as a youth not only with goodness but also with aspiring imagination, and this combination of a pure soul and of a desire for the mystery of the universe produces a unique exemplum of a human mind troubled and wandered between this world and the world beyond.<sup>8)</sup> Shelley offers the poem as a case to be studied by the reader, who must be informed with idiosyncrasies of poets' nature and must be questioned about public neglect and harshness against poets, as already discussed. This is, in fact, deeply related to the second motive of the *Alastor* poet's trip.

The narrator briefly mentions the other reason for the *Alastor* poet's self-exile from his native land, pointing the difficulties of his ideas accepted in society and of

his finding psychologically restful place there. Insinuating his own biographical conflict with his father and the consequent exile both from his homeland and later his nation,<sup>9)</sup> Shelley creates an archetype of a doomed, dreamy poet, typically shown in his lyrics and other works like *Prince Athanase*, *Julian and Maddalo* and *Epipsychidion*.<sup>10)</sup>

When early youth had past, he left  
His cold fireside and alienated home  
To seek strange truths in undiscovered lands. (*SPP* 72)

This background of "alienated home" overshadows the whole poem. The difficult relationship between an aspiring poet and the public appears here. His first failure in his native land anticipates a second. In the Eastern setting too, he loses even narrowly remained social relationship. He even refuses friendship with an actual "Arab maiden" (*SPP* 73) and seeks a more esoteric relationship with "a single image" (*SPP* 69) of the ideal maiden.<sup>11)</sup> He finally lapses into a solipsistic hermitage, engorged by his own imaginative visions and insatiable passions "pursuing him to speedy ruin" (*SPP* 69)

As Byronic pessimistic heroes, whose principles are self-love and self-righteous mystification, are considered to be socially dangerous, the Alastor poet might be seen as dangerous and poisonous for society as well as heroic. Though he must be distinguished from Byronic heroes by his good quality,<sup>12)</sup> it is decisive for Shelley that the Alastor poet lacks social sympathy. Christine Gallant rightly analyses the preface: "The reproving tone of the second paragraph implies that the attempt to live without such sympathy is reprehensible, and that the poem is thus supposed to be a warning of what can happen to even the best-intentioned of men."<sup>13)</sup> In *Alastor*, Shelley describes not only the public indifference to poets but also typical mistakes of such poets.

In the pessimistic mood after the French Revolution, Shelley understood that it would be harmful for intellectuals to be self-indulgent in unsocial or anti-social seclusion. Poetry needs social context to be read and transmitted; poets must have audiences and social relationships. Here comes a great dilemma for Shelley. Popularity is indispensable for poets to be acknowledged and to become influential in a society, but idealist poets are often excluded for their very thoughts. The loss of the Alastor poet is a great damage for the society because it should be nurtured by spiritual force like his. Shelley comments in *A Defence of Poetry*:

Poem is a fountain for ever overflowing with the waters of wisdom and delight; and after one person and one age has exhausted all its divine

effluence which their peculiar relations enable them to share, another and yet another succeeds, and new relations are ever developed, the source of an unforeseen and an unconceived delight. (SPP 500)

His journey, which should be prevented, symbolizes the unavoidable conclusion by social neglect or even repression of liberal artistic activities. It is also a fault of the *Alastor* poet that he did not attempt to use his capabilities for social purposes. Instead of succeeding inspiring power, he just leaves "pale despair and cold tranquillity" (SPP 87). So, what has he found or have we found in his travel to the East?

Before starting composing *Alastor*, Shelley made a trip up the Thames in a boat with Mary Wollestoncraft, Thomas Love Peacock and Charles Clairemont in August 1815 for ten days.<sup>14)</sup> His experience is certainly reflected in the *Alastor* poet's journey up the river. For Shelley, the image of the river is particularly important in figuratively expressing ontological questions like the *Alastor* poet's. He goes up the rivers Indus and Oxus to seek the origin of himself and mankind; the origin of rivers and that of a man parallel each other. The river symbolizes geographical and chronological flow. The *Alastor* poet's journey up the river suggests a quest for the origin of time, space, thought and self. This is similarly suggested in his visits to ancient relics of Greece, Jerusalem, Egypt, Ethiopia: "he saw / The thrilling secrets of the birth of time" (SPP 73).<sup>15)</sup> His travel proceeds and his metaphysical questions develop until "He seeks in vain for a prototype of his conception" (SPP 69). Refuting Wordsworthian seclusion in nature, Shelley concludes that a pursuit of the ideal can never become beneficial to a poet and the reader.

In "A Treatise on Morals" written probably between 1812 to 1815, Shelley comments on the complex function of human mind, describing our attempts to trace back our own memories even to infancy and comparing the mind with a river: "It is like a river whose rapid and perpetual stream flows outwards—like one in dread who speeds through the recesses of some haunted pile and dares not look behind. The caverns of the mind are obscure and shadowy; or pervaded with a luster, beautifully bright indeed, but shining not beyond their portals."<sup>16)</sup> Assimilating the journeys into space and memory, Shelley virtually claims the impossibility of detecting the terminations through recollection and reasoning. When we go up to the very first memory, another epistemological question about nativity rises. When we reach the original spring of a river, we wonder about its creation and its origin. There is no way for a finite being to know the infinite.<sup>17)</sup> The *Alastor* poet, therefore, "over the world wanders for ever, / Lone as incarnate death!" (SPP 86). As William A. Ulmer says, whether "the Poet's travels lead to the birthplace of humankind in

the Indian Caucasus or the legendary site of the Garden of Eden near the western Caucasus, his destination remains the mythic origin."<sup>18)</sup> To this, Saree Samir Makdisi retorts with a convincing interpretation, suggesting the meaningless topographical identification: "*Alastor* concerns itself with and limits itself to the Orient that its Visionary has discovered, explored, appreciated and above all understood. The 'living' Orient of the poem's own present, as opposed to the 'dead' Orient of ruined temples and palaces, is not seen (just as the Visionary does not really see the Arab maiden)."<sup>19)</sup>

On the other hand, even at his death, the *Alastor* poet still feels "The stream of thought" (*SPP* 85). The workings of nature continue indifferent to his subjective views and reasoning: both the river and his thought flow. His travel finishes in vain for himself, and his inquiries seem to be useless for the reader. But Shelley simultaneously suggests one important discovery of the *Alastor* poet in the poem: he has realized the image of river as analogous to that of life.

"O stream !  
Whose source is inaccessibly profound,  
Whither do they mysterious waters tend?  
Thou imagest my life !           (*SPP* 82)

In other words, nature, including the river, never offers anything except what we give a meaning to: "we receive but what we give, / And in our life alone does Nature live."<sup>20)</sup> The *Alastor* poet comprehends all through various sceneries by the stream's rapid motion that the world does not answer to his quest. This is in a sense an understanding of ignorance as Vincent Newey says: "Yet what is most significant within the context of *Alastor* itself is the Poet's wide-awake embrace of his state of ignorance" (Newey 16).<sup>21)</sup> His quest for the absolute knowledge terminates with ignorance. We cannot understand ourselves otherwise than through ourselves. And when we try to philosophize apart from ourselves, "We are on that verge where words abandon us, and what wonder if we grow dizzy to look down the dark abyss of how little we know" (*Prose* 174).

However, we can interpret this otherwise: in its rapid motion, its winding and quick flow, he could get answers about his existence and his life. The stream suggests that the infinite separation between human intellect and natural phenomena is not bridgeable with correspondence. The chronological notion can never be applied to the natural world, and the *Alastor* poet's quest should be confined with the dimension of human relationship. If it is vain to detect the original spring of the river for searching for his ontological problem, it is also vain that he would try to define the intellectual source as the archetypal beauty and to



perceive it as a reality.<sup>22)</sup> The reality exists in the flow of the river and in the action of his intellectual activities. It is like poetry. If one is obsessed with "what" rather than with "how" to express, one loses the heart of the matter. In a similar way, the *Alastor* poet loses his "how" and forgets his duty as a poet. Since the river reflects his life, he should not go back the river and go back to the past. But for the future, he should proceed, as Cythna says in *The Revolt of Islam*: "our thoughts flow on with stream, whose waters / Return not to their fountain" (*SPW* 130). The vain quest of the original spring, therefore, represents both his wasted life and his neglected occupation as a poet.

The failure of the *Alastor* poet is that he did not make efforts to converge his own "stream" of thought with others'. When knowledge and its artistic expression are purposed just for self-interest, they would become quite unfruitful. The solitary *Alastor* poet's solipsism prevents his personal ideas from developing into social actions. As Lloyd Abbey comments, "The 'Alastor' poet . . . does not translate his insight into human concern."<sup>23)</sup> When solitude is based on principle of self-love, even beautiful idealism cannot but be concluded as solipsism. According to Shelley's idea of poetry's social function, a revolutionary hero must find his satisfaction as people's response to him.<sup>24)</sup> He must turn his eyes not to the past (the origin of time), as the *Alastor* poet did, but to the future (the development of time or the rebirth of time). Shelley describes the East again with a political context in *The Revolt of Islam*, using the same image of river at its conclusion.

### 3) The East Transcended: *The Revolt of Islam*

The protagonists of *The Revolt of Islam*, Laon and Cythna, go to the Golden City forced by the tyrannical army, and there, each of them initiates a rebellion, which becomes a great revolt almost liberating the city from tyranny. They are strangers to the people in the city, and their thought appears fresh and disillusioning for them. They are also presented as poet figures who persuade the people towards liberty and equality as common goals. Though the plot of an intellectual experiencing the East is similar to that of *Alastor*, their motivation for liberty is described as spontaneous and unselfish, and it is best represented by the narrator poet's vow to obtain a superhuman will in order to attain an earthly paradise in "To Mary -- --": "I will be wise, / And just, and free, and mild, if in me lies / Such power, for I grow weary to behold / The selfish and the strong still tyrannise / Without reproach or check" (*SPW* 38). Laon and Cythna use their poetic talents and sacrifice themselves for an altruism, and they try to see their own idealism gradually reflected in people. Here, they are obviously different from the *Alastor* poet. They understand and regard the social function of poets highly. Shelley defines an ideal poet in the preface:

It is the business of the Poet to communicate to others the pleasure and the enthusiasm arising out of those images and feelings in the vivid presence of which within his own mind consists at once his inspiration and his reward. (SPW 33)

It is crucially important that poets are socially valuable and influential for realizing moral goodness, as Shelley repeats the same idea in *A Defence of Poetry*: "Poetry strengthens that faculty which is the organ of the moral nature of man" (SPP 488). He considers unselfishness as one of the most important characteristics for such social poets.

Laon and Cythna obtain their unselfishness from their mutual understanding and love; they believe themselves to be each other's soul mate. Laon, for example, finds his "second self, far dearer and more fair" (SPW 59) in Cythna. This is greatly different from the fatal failure of the Alastor poet who tried to see his double in the imagined ideal maiden and who refused to accept the love of the substantial Arab maiden. Laon and Cythna, therefore, can analogously associate their own personal love with the universal one, as Shelley mentions in the preface: "Love is celebrated everywhere as the sole law which should govern the moral world" (SPW 37). They understand their union as an example of a hoped-for ideal harmony of people and the world: "may all comfort wither / From both the hearts whose pulse in joy now beat together. . . . If as ourselves we cease to love our kind ! " (SPW 90). Neoplatonic idea governs their philosophy of love; their mutual love as microcosmic, their sympathetic love towards human kind as macrocosmic. Their revolution is based on natural and gradual permeation of sympathetic love among people.<sup>25)</sup> In fact, Laon forgives even his enemy, the tyrant.

Since poetry nourishes sympathy, Laon and Cythna holds nonviolence and uses poetic words as a weapon against tyrannical force: "As from a mine of magic store, I drew / Words which are weapons" (SPW 58). The words can be powerful because they are not those muttered in esoteric correspondence with nature in seclusion like the Alastor poet's but they are addressed to people and reflected in their thoughts and emotions. Understanding their social role as poets, Laon and Cythna regard themselves not as revolutionary heroes but as spokesmen of everlasting poetic spirit which transmits social goodness and moral aspiration.

Heroes, and Poets, and prevailing Sages,  
 Who leave the vesture of their majesty  
 To adorn and clothe this naked world; — and we  
 Are like to them — such perish, but they leave

All hope, or love, or truth, or liberty,  
Whose forms their mighty spirits could conceive,  
To be a rule and law to ages that survive. (*SPW* 128)

Laon and Cythna, who understand liberty as both personal and universal, see beyond their own age and words. They believe that their poetic spirit does not finish within their life stories; it could be mythologized, enlarged and multiplied in future generations: "such may yet become ! / Ay, wiser, greater, gentler" (*SPW* 56). When their poetic inspiration is shared with others, it naturally expands in time and space. Contrary to Byronic heroes' retrospective views of life, it always suggests prospective views. As Laon and Cythna say, the past corrupts people from within by remorse and despair: "The past is Death's, the future is thine own" (*SPW* 120).

Even when they are executed at the end, Laon and Cythna, therefore, do not have any reason to consider the failed revolt as despair. It is a memorial event for them to provide people with energy to pursue liberty as the goal.<sup>26)</sup> Laon and Cythna say at their execution:

'Our many thoughts and deeds, our life and love,  
Our happiness, and all that we have been,  
Immortally must live, and burn and move,  
When we shall be no more; —the world has seen  
A type of peace; and —as some most serene  
And lovely spot to a poor maniac's eye,  
After long years, some sweet and moving scene  
Of youthful hope, returning suddenly,  
Quells his long madness — thus man shall remember thee. (*SPW* 129)

Their poetic message is not just prophetic, but is immediately proved to be actual force affecting people. The people gathered there receive the spiritual legacy of Laon and Cythna: "but those who saw / Their tranquil victim pass, felt wonder glide / Into their brain, and became calm with awe" (*SPW* 147). Shelley describes ideal poets for moral progress in a society as spiritual force, and assures their posthumous reward using the image of river.

In the preface to *The Revolt of Islam*, Shelley mentions his trip in a boat: "I have sailed down mighty rivers, and seen the sun rise and set, and the stars come forth, whilst I have sailed night and day down a rapid stream among mountains" (*SPW* 34). After completing and publishing *Alastor*, he was not unaware of treating the image of the river again in his epic consideration of the East. As the epic poem demonstrates the unselfish, devotional love of Laon and Cythna to people, their

journey on a river, which is posthumously taken after their execution by fire, is depicted quite differently from the Alastor poet's retrospective one along rivers. The river leads Laon and Cythna to the blessed land for the dead in Greek mythology: the Elysium. The fact that Laon and Cythna, both Greek people, return to their native land rewarded and respected makes a contrast with the Alastor poet's lonely unknown death. In spite of their failure to bring about an immediate revolution, their travel is fertile and fruitful with their child born from their imagination. (The child is supposed be reborn and spiritualized from the one between Cythna and the tyrant.)<sup>27)</sup> Their spiritual child symbolizes the fruit of their love and understanding. Therefore, their journey guided by the child promises their apotheosis by their own poetic spirit. This implies that their idealistic creed and revolutionary action in the earthly world have been proved as necessary.<sup>28)</sup> Again, this contrasts with the wandering of the Alastor Poet.

And ever as we sailed, our minds were full  
 Of love and wisdom, which would overflow  
 In converse wild, and sweet, and wonderful,  
 And in quick smiles whose light would come and go  
 Like music o'er wide waves, and in the flow  
 Of sudden tears, and in the mute caress –  
 For a deep shade was cleft, and we did know,  
 That virtue, though obscured on Earth, not less  
 Survives all moral change in lasting loveliness. (SPW 155)

This is the most ideal version of Shelley's wandering and, as *Prometheus Unbound* reconfirms, the East becomes an indispensable element for his creation of paradises. Though the river is narrow, the East is connected to the Elysium where all miserable exiles are healed and rewarded and can inspire an ideal revolution and reformation.

### Conclusion

*Alastor* and *The Revolt of Islam* describes poets' spiritual and physical activities in the East, where the contamination of pessimism after the French Revolution does not reach, and the two poems conform the two sides of the same coin: failure and success, pessimism and optimism of the same idealistic human spirit.<sup>29)</sup> The difference lies only in the point whether poets' social participation is realized. If poets are "the unacknowledged legislators of the World" (SPP 508), they cannot fulfill their duties without establishing social relationship through language. On

one hand, Shelley questions the contemporary social attitude towards unfortunate poets, echoing his own problem with popularity. But on the other, he succeeds in representing duties of poets realistically and self-critically, using the two contrastive cases in the Eastern settings.

## Works Consulted

### Primary Sources

- Clark, David Lee, ed. *Shelley's Prose: The Trumpet of Prophecy*. London: Fourth Estate, 1988.
- Hutchinson, Thomas, ed. *Shelley: Poetical Works*. Oxford University Press, 1970.
- Jones, Frederick L., ed. *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*. 2 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964.
- Reiman, Donald H. and Sharon B. Powers, eds. *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1977.

### Secondary Sources

- Abbey, Lloyd. *Destroyer and Preserver: Shelley's Poetic Skepticism*. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1979.
- Allott, Miriam, ed. *Essays on Shelley*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1982.
- Blank, G. Kim, ed. *The New Shelley: Later Twentieth-Century Views*. London: Macmillan, 1991.
- Blank, G. Kim. *Wordsworth's Influence on Shelley: A Study of Poetic Authority*. London: Macmillan, 1988.
- Bloom, Harold, ed. *Modern Critical Views: Percy Bysshe Shelley*. Chelsea House: New York, 1986.
- Blythe, Roland, ed. *William Hazlitt: Selected Writings*. Penguin, 1987.
- Burwick, Frederick. *Mimesis and its Romantic Reflections*. University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001.
- Butler, Marilyn. *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries: English Literature and its Background 1760-1830*. Oxford University Press, 1990.
- Cameron, Kenneth Neill. *Shelley: The Golden Years*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1974.
- Chase, Cynthia, ed. *Romanticism*. Longman Critical Readers. London: Longman, 1993.
- Chichester, Teddi Lynn. "Shelley's Imaginative Transsexualism in *Laon and Cythna*." *Keats-Shelley Journal*. 45 (1996): 77-101.
- Claridge, Laura. *Romantic Potency: The Paradox of Desire*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992.
- Clark, Timothy. *Embodying Revolution: The Figure of the Poet in Shelley*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989.
- Clark, Timothy and Jerrold E. Hogle, eds. *Evaluating Shelley*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996.
- Cronin, Richard. *Shelley's Poetic Thoughts*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981.
- Duerksen, Roland A. *Shelley's Poetry of Involvement*. Macmillan, 1988.
- Everest, Kelvin, ed. *Percy Bysshe Shelley: Bicentenary Essays*. Essays and Studies 1992. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1992.
- Everest, Kelvin, ed. *Shelley Revalued: Essays from the Gregynog Conference*. Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1983.
- Favret, Mary A. and Nicola J. Watson, eds. *At the Limits of Romanticism: Essays in Cultural, Feminist, and Materialist Criticism*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press,

- 1994.
- Fischman, Susan. " 'Like the Sound of His Own Voice': Gender, Audition, and Echo in *Alastor*." *Keats-Shelley Journal*. 43 (1994): 141-169.
- Gilroy, Amanda, ed. *Romantic Geographies: Discourses of Travel 1775-1844*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000.
- Grimes, Kyle. "Censorship, Violence, and Political Rhetoric: *The Revolt of Islam* in its Time." *Keats-Shelley Journal*. 43 (1994): 98-116.
- Haines, Simon. *Shelley's Poetry: The Divided Self*. Macmillan: London, 1997.
- Hall, Jean. *The Transforming Image: A Study of Shelley's Major Poetry*. Urbana, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1980.
- Hogle, Jerrold E. *Shelley's Process: Radical Transference and the Development of His Major Works*. Oxford University Press, 1988.
- Holmes, Richard. *Shelley: The Pursuit*. Penguin, 1987.
- Karen A. Weisman, Karen A. *Imageless Truths: Shelley's Poetic Fictions*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994.
- Keach, William. *Shelley's Style*. London: Methuen, 1984.
- Leighton, Angela. *Shelley and the Sublime: An Interpretation of the Major Poems*. Cambridge University Press, 1984.
- Leask, Nigel. *British Romantic Writers and the East: Anxieties of Empire*. Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Manning, Peter J. *Reading Romantics: Texts and Contexts*. Oxford University Press, 1990.
- Marchand, Leslie A., ed. *Byron's Letters and Journals*. 12 vols. London: John Murray, 1973-82.
- McGann, Jerome J., ed. *Byron*. The Oxford Authors. Oxford University Press, 1991.
- Murphy, John F. "Time's Tale: The Temporal Poetics of Shelley's *Alastor*." *Keats-Shelley Journal*. 45 (1996): 132-155.
- O'Neill, Michael. *The Human Mind's Imaginings: Conflict and Achievement in Shelley's Poetry*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989.
- O'Neill, Michael, ed. *Shelley*. Longman Critical Readers. London: Longman, 1993.
- Page, Frederick, ed. *Byron: Poetical Works*. Oxford University Press, 1989.
- Paley, Morton D. *Apocalypse and Millennium in English Romantic Poetry*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999.
- Peckham, Morse. *The Romantic Virtuoso*. Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1995.
- Rajan, Tilletama. *The Supplement of Reading: Figures of Understanding in Romantic Theory and Practice*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1990.
- Richardson, Donna. " 'The Dark Idolatry of Self: ' The Dialectic of Imagination in Shelley's *Revolt of Islam*." *Keats-Shelley Journal*. 40 (1991) 73-98.
- Roberts, Hugh. *Shelley and the Chaos of History: A New Politics of Poetry*. University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997.
- Robinson, Charles E. *Shelley and Byron: The Snake and Eagle Wreathed in Fight*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976.
- Said, Edward W. *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*. Penguin, 1991.
- Scrivener, Michael Henry. *Radical Shelley: The Philosophical Anarchism and Utopian Thought of Percy Bysshe Shelley*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982.
- Shelley, Bryan. *Shelley and Scripture: The Interpreting Angel*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994.
- Sperry, Stuart M. *Shelley's Major Verse: The Narrative and Dramatic Poetry*. Cambridge,

- Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1988.
- Storey, Mark. *The Problem of Poetry in the Romantic Period*. London: Macmillan, 2000.
- Tetreault, Ronald. *The Poetry of Life: Shelley and Literary Form*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987.
- Ulmer, William A. *Shelleyan Eros: The Rhetoric of Romantic Love*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990.
- Wasserman, Earl R. *Shelley: A Critical Reading*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977.
- Webb, Timothy. *Shelley: A Voice Not Understood*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1977.
- Welburn, Andrew J. *Power and Self-consciousness in the Poetry of Shelley*. Macmillan, 1986.

- 
- 1) See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London: Penguin, 1991) 21-2. "Thus all of Orientalism stands forth and away from the Orient: that Orientalism makes sense at all depends more on the West than on the Orient, and this sense is directly indebted to various Western techniques of representation that make the Orient visible, clear, 'there' in discourse about it. And these representations rely upon institutions, traditions, conventions, agreed-upon codes of understanding for their effects, not upon a distant and amorphous Orient."
  - 2) All quotations from Shelley's poems are indicated by page number in parentheses and are taken from the following texts: Donald H. Reiman and Sharon B. Powers, eds, *Shelley's Poetry and Prose* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977) (abbreviated as *SPP* hereafter) and Thomas Hutchinson, ed., *Shelley: Poetical Works* (Oxford University Press, 1970) (abbreviated as *SPW* hereafter).
  - 3) "The Poet journeys eastward through Arabia, Persia, the Desert of Karmin (southeast Iran), across the Hindu Kush Mountains (the Indian Caucasus of *Prometheus Unbound*) and the source of the Rivers Indus and Oxus, to the fabled Vale of Kashmir in northwest India" (*SPP* 74n).
  - 4) For example, the Giaour is described as a vampire who not only annihilates his own mental peace, but also infects others with such self-negating pessimism: "But first, on earth as Vampire sent, / Thy corse shall from its tomb be rent; / Then ghastly haunt thy native place, / And suck the blood of all thy race." Jerome J. McGann, ed., *Byron, The Oxford Authors* (Oxford University Press, 1986) 227.
  - 5) Coleridge wrote "Monody on the Death of Chatterton," and Wordsworth mentions Chatterton in "Resolution and Independence." Shelley apotheosizes Chatterton in *Adonais* and Keats also dedicates *Endymion* to him.
  - 6) Nigel Leask points out that the East was displaced as "the Arcadian *locus amoenus* of neo-classicism from a Mediterranean 'Golden-Age' to a 'contemporary' eastern site" in the eighteenth century. For Shelley, "Revolution in the East was more than a dislocation of frustrated political idealism, however; it was also a *cure* for vitiated European nerves. . . ." Nigel Leask, *British Romantic Writers and the East* (Cambridge University Press, 1992) 20, 109.
  - 7) William Hazlitt's "Why Distant Objects Please" makes a good side note here about this wanderlust impulse of Romantic fictional figures. The watcher's craving sense for the unattainable appears as an interesting psychological situation of mingling the real and the unreal, the seen and the imaginative, the finite and the infinite, in his grand expectation of his



ideal. "Distant objects please, because in the first place, they imply an idea of space and magnitude, and because, not being obtruded too close upon the eye, we clothe them with the indistinct and airy colours of fancy. In looking at the misty mountain-tops that bound the horizon [sic], the mind is as it were conscious of all the conceivable objects and interests that lie between; we imagine all sorts of adventures in the interim; strain our hopes and wishes to reach the air-drawn circle, or to 'descry new lands, rivers, and mountains,' stretching far beyond it: our feelings carried out of themselves lose their grossness and their husk, are rarefied, expanded, melt into softness and brighten into beauty, turning to 'ethereal mould, sky-tinctured.' We drink the air before us, and borrow a more refined existence from objects that hover on the brink of nothing." Ronald Blythe, ed, *William Hazlitt: Selected Writings* (London: Penguin, 1987) 148.

- 8) Earl R. Wasserman concisely explains this Romantic tendency: "Liberated into infinite possibility with nothing to check or channel normal human aspirations, the Romantic, like Ione, often found himself in troubled possession of only those passionate longings, *Sehnsucht*, love-without-an-object, or infinite subject with only finite immediate objects, which the Preface to *Alastor* declares to be 'one of the most interesting situations of the human mind' and which the epigraph from Augustine describes." Earl R. Wasserman, *Shelley: A Critical Reading* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971) 27.
- 9) Shelley himself writes about exile in his letter to William Godwin on 21 February 1816, after completing *Alastor*: "You are perhaps aware that one of the chief motives which strongly urges me either to desert my native country, dear to me from many considerations, or resort to its most distant and solitary regions, is the perpetual experience of neglect or enmity from almost every one but those who are supported by my resources." Frederick L. Jones, ed., *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 2 vols., (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964) I: 453.
- 10) Shelley offers us interesting ambivalence about psychological travels which are developed in his poetry. In his later works, we can find a fantastic and eventful travel in *The Witch of Atlas*, grim and dangerous ones in *Adonais* and *The Triumph of Life*, or an ambivalent one like *Epipsychidion*. In this way, the wandering in *Alastor* forebodes the later fictional journeys.
- 11) One of the themes of *Alastor* is self-love. Because of this love, the *Alastor* Poet can love neither the Arab maid nor any human beings. Jean Hall rightly explains that he has found his own lady within his own mind as the ideal image. She mentions that there are self-loving affinities among the contemporary works, and connects such a tendency with the incest theme of Romantic literature. The ideal maid is "someone not himself, but like himself -- himself transformed into the form of woman. The notorious Romantic interest in incest is a special version of this." See Jean Hall, *The Transforming Image: A Study of Shelley's Major Poetry* (Urbana, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1980) 31.
- 12) John F. Murphy, however, interprets the admonishment in the preface as directed equally to the pessimistic and the *Alastor* poet: "According to Shelley, whether one fails to love fellow human beings through a 'generous error' such as the solipsistic Poet's misplaced search, or through a more 'detestable error' such as the spiritual lethargy of the 'morally dead,' the admonishment which concludes his Preface is the same." This comment does not pay attention to Shelley's representation of "A lovely youth" (*SPP* 72) who knows "all of great / Or good, or lovely" (*SPP* 72). See John F. Murphy, "Time's Tale: The Temporal Poetics of Shelley's *Alastor*" in *Keats-Shelley Journal*, Volume XLV, (1996): 140. Newey's view seems to be appropriate. See Vincent Newey, "Alastor, 'Selving' and the Psychic Realm" in *Percy Bysshe Shelley*:

- Bicentenary Essays, Essays and Studies 1992*, ed., Kelvin Everest (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1992) 5. "Shelley reserves his real scorn for another class of men, whose apartness consists in cold-hearted aloofness."
- 13) Christine Gallant, *Shelley's Ambivalence* (London: Macmillan, 1989) 22.
- 14) See Frederick L. Jones, ed., *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 2 vols., (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964) I: 430n.
- 15) Timothy Clark argues for the Alastor poet's incessant vain effort to catch the ideal by the irrecoverable one-way flow of river. He is right in pointing out Mary Wollstonecraft's idea of imagination as duping man into its labyrinthine working when he tries to catch it. But such a failure or an attempt is more meaningful for a revolutionary like Shelley, because such a question about mind allows a chance to understand the world in a new view. See Timothy Clark, *Embodying Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) 130.
- 16) David Lee, Clark, ed., *Shelley's Prose: The Trumpet of Prophecy* (London: Fourth Estate, 1988) 186. Hereafter abbreviated as *Prose*.
- 17) Cf. Karen A. Weisman, *Imageless Truths: Shelley's Poetic Fictions* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994) 33. "The Unknown becomes equated with the Absolute, as is all too easy for it to be, and death is of course the archetype of all unknowns; this is why the questor immediately assumes that 'death's blue vault' must lead to the 'mysterious paradise' that his sleep has shown him."
- 18) William A. Ulmer, *Shelleyan Eros: The Rhetoric of Romantic Love* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990) 33.
- 19) Saree Samir Makdisi, "Shelley's *Alastor*: Travel Beyond the Limit" in *Romantic Geographies: Discourses of Travel 1775-1844*, ed., Amanda Gilroy (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000) 247. Makdisi criticizes the other critics' disinterestedness about geography in *Alastor*: "they seem to be virtually unanimous in their view of *Alastor's* representation of the Orient, almost entirely taking for granted the poem's assumptions about Asia and the peoples and civilisations that happen to be there – whose existence and history make it difficult, in my view, to take Shelley so easily and uncritically at his word." See *ibid* 254.
- 20) John Beer, ed., *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Poems* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1963) 281.
- 21) His comment follows: "the words 'inaccessibly,' 'mysterious,' 'darksome,' 'searchless,' 'invisible,' 'measureless' all emphasize that the secrets of the universe are unknowable, while the closing lines express an equally strong sense that there can be no sure answers to questions of the origins or ends of human thought or existence" (Newey 16).
- 22) Using the river image as a metaphor of a human mind, Shelley renders the journey into an imaginative, philosophical inquiry again in "Mont Blanc" in 1817.

The everlasting universe of things  
 Flows through the mind, and rolls its rapid waves,  
 Now dark – now glittering – now reflecting gloom –  
 Now lending splendour, where from secret springs  
 The source of human thought its tribute brings  
 Of waters, – with a sound but half its own. (*SPP* 89)

- 23) Lloyd Abbey, *Destroyer and Preserver: Shelley's Poetic Skepticism* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1979) 24.

- 24) Timothy Clark argues the importance of solitude, but this seems to be questionable: "Paradoxically, it is this very solitude that is the condition for a poet's potent influence on others. Absorption in his own passionately imaginative life is necessary for the intensity of energy felt by the poet's auditors" (Clark 97). Ulmer emphasizes the negative aspect of the Poet as critically important: "The Poet must err, yet his error makes him a representative figure. It signifies a kind of fall and refashions him as a Romantic Adam" (Ulmer 27).
- 25) This anticipates the idea of "Man, oh, not men! a chain of linked thought, / Of love and might to be divided not" in *Prometheus Unbound* (SPP 205).
- 26) It is interesting that, in *Sardanapalus*, Byron writes of the suicidal death by fire of Sardanapalus and Mirrha as a symbolical martyr for liberty in the future: "the light of this / Most royal of funereal pyres shall be / Not a mere pillar form'd of cloud and flame, . . . but a light / To lesson ages, rebel nations, and / Voluptuous princes . . . hold it up / A problem few dare imitate." Frederick Page, ed., *Byron: Poetical Works* (Oxford University Press, 1970) 491.
- 27) Hugh Roberts argues that the death of this child represents the difficulty of harmonizing evil and good notions in the earthly world and that her spiritual accompaniment with Laon and Cythna in their posthumous journey is contrived not quite positively. His opinion seems to show one characteristic of Shelley's idea of revolution. Since the real revolution and freedom are committed to posterity, their fruitful victory is rather expected than ascertained at the moment of their journey. Therefore, the child, who is the symbolical result of their personal and universal love, has to wait to be reborn in the future generation. See Hugh Roberts, *Shelley and the Chaos of History: A New Politics of Poetry* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997) 195. "The child may be produced by tyranny, but she is not doomed to be defined by, and to replicate the patterns of, tyranny. Shelley appears to have a crucial loss of confidence over this child, however. By having her die at precisely the moment Laon and Cythna do, so that she may join them in their voyage to the Temple of the Spirit, he ducks the questions his attempted 'syn-thesis' of the 'two thoughts' is unable to answer satisfactorily."
- 28) Cythna philosophizes about the concept of historical necessity in her monologue:

Necessity, whose sightless strength for ever  
Evil with evil, good with good must wind  
In bands of union, which no power may sever:  
They must bring forth their kind, and be divided never ! (SPW 128)

Donna Richardson comments on this passage, emphasizing the importance of social commitment of poets for real moral reformation or revolution. See Donna Richardson, "'The Dark Idolatry of Self': The Dialectic of Imagination in Shelley's *Revolt of Islam*" in *Keats-Shelley Journal*, Volume XL, (1991): 97. "Paradoxically, the untangling of the real good in such conceptions, what Cythna called the binding of evil to evil and good to good, involves understanding that the good always lies in an intertwining of individual desire and Necessity rather than in some illusory idolizing of individual aspirations as an ultimate good separable from any limitation placed on the individual by the rest of reality."

- 29) See Bryan Shelley, *Shelley and Scripture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) 74. "As Shelley's secularized version of the millennium fails to materialize as a political reality, he is increasingly impelled to pursue it as an internal quest." Shelley seems to be wrong to suggest

Shelley's defeatism in his later personal or psychological poetry. He offers us different aspects of revolutionary ideas or presents them in various ways. Sperry's view is much more persuasive: "In *The Revolt of Islam* Shelley's imagination discovered a delicate balance between the vision of possible perfection and a steady awareness of the innumerable struggles, together with their attendant setbacks, necessary to its realization." See. Stuart M. Sperry, *Shelley's Major Verse: The Narrative and Dramatic Poetry* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: Harvard University Press, 1988) 64. Wasserman describes the social and the personal dimensions as "an immediate millenarian reform of the world" and "an infinite perfection at the end of infinite time" respectively, and acutely points out Shelley's ambivalent poetry: "However mutually exclusive and irreconcilable may be the directions of Shelley's two kinds of poetry, social and personal, they have a common source in an unqualified aspiration to perfection that is part of the spirit of the age" (Wasserman 26).