A LIBERATING “VACANCY”:
PRIVATIVE ADJECTIVES IN THE WORKS OF PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

by

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ABSTRACT

While scholars of Percy Bysshe Shelley have noted and analyzed the pervasiveness of privative epithets in his works, no one has attempted to examine their use in a number of his major works within the context of his theory of poetry and language. My study examines privative adjectives in “Hymn to Intellectual Beauty,” “Mont Blanc,” *Queen Mab*, *Laon and Cythna*, and *The Mask of Anarchy*. My approach combines an analysis of how Shelley’s privatives articulate his political, religious, and moral concerns within individual works with an exploration of how his employment of privative adjectives reflects his larger theoretical views on the integral relationship between poetry and language. Shelley’s use of privatives is essential to his formulation of his larger revolutionary and poetic vision and his conceptualization of how the language of his poetry initiates, accompanies, and perpetuates the liberating progress of his revolutionary ideals in the human mind.

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CHAPTER I

An Inner Void and the Pursuit of Change

"[H]as there not been and is there not in England," Shelley writes in *A Philosophical View of Reform*, "a desire of change arising from the profound sentiment of the exceeding inefficiency of the existing institutions to provide for the physical and intellectual happiness of the people?" (20). In this passage, as he links a keen sense of dissatisfaction with the present political, moral, and religious actualities and a desire for change, the poet designates this intense awareness of a void in the fabric of human society as a kind of precondition fueling an impassioned desire for religious, political, and moral renovation, both individual and social. Timothy Clark points out that Shelley's desire to engender such a void within the public mind to fuel an impulse for a revolutionary change reflects an important poetic function the poet articulates in *On Life* (89). It is the "duty of the reformer in political and ethical questions," Shelley asserts, conceptualizing both his own role as a poet and the function of his poetic language, "to leave . . . a vacancy" (*On Life* 507).

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate how Shelley's use of privative epithets—a prominent characteristic of his poetic language—constitutes an essential element in the critical junction of his theory of poetry and language and the revolutionary ideals he intends his poetic language to disseminate. Building upon Clark's notion, we can say that Shelley's privatives, as expressions of denial, absence, and negation, certainly help arouse initial discontent within human consciousness with the present state of things (Clark 89; Shelley, *On Life* 507). At the same time, on a more fundamental level, Shelley's use of privative adjectives seeks to facilitate the initial liberation of the mind from oppressive customary concepts and to engender the growth and progress of revolutionary ideals in the human imagination in order to bring about a total transformation of political, religious, and social conditions of human experience, both within and without. Just how the use of privative epithets in Shelley is essential to his revolutionary poetics is the subject of the following inquiry.

Why Privatives? A "Vacancy" in Shelley Criticism

Critical authority has long pointed to the prevalence of Shelley's use of privatives throughout his work. The earliest exploration of Shelley's privatives comprises a portion of B. W. A. Massey's 1923 monograph, *The Compound Epithets of Shelley and Keats: Considered from the Structural, the Historical, and the Literary Standpoints.* While helpful for data, Massey's work did not focus only on privatives or explore the meaning behind their use. The next important study in this area was John Buxton's essay "On Reading Shelley," published in 1970. In his essay, Buxton discussed Shelley's use of privatives as a part of the poet's overall intellectual and poetic Hellenism (specifically, the author argues, his Platonism), rather than his Englishness as a poet (111, 120-22, 125). The study closest to my research is a 1983 essay by Timothy Webb, entitled "The Unascended Heaven: Negatives in *Prometheus Unbound.*" Looking back on Massey's work and F. S. Ellis' *Shelley Concordance*, Webb notes that Shelley's privatives (Webb uses the term *negatives*) are "deeply ingrained" throughout his work, and their uses "widespread, consistent, and peculiar" to the author ("Negatives" 38-40). Webb views

Shelley's use of privatives in *Prometheus* as representing potentialities for transformation of human political and moral conditions as well as metaphysical beliefs (56-57). Another important, and most recent, contribution to the subject is P. M. S. Dawson's short but insightful analysis of the use of privative epithets in *Prometheus Unbound* as a manifestation of the poet's philosophy of perfectibility (108-09, 120-21).

Massey's observations reveal that Shelley not only employed privative adjectives widely in his works, but also coined a substantial number of them himself. Massey credits Shelley with coining twenty-four new words ending in *-less*: at least twenty of these are altogether new, and Shelley introduced new meanings to four others already in use (Massey 18-25). Webb also demonstrates "Shelley's fertility as discoverer and creator both of negatives and of compound [negative] words": he lists seven of Shelley's original *-less* words that appear in *Prometheus Unbound* ("Negatives" 38-39, 60-61). Webb lists fifteen examples of epithets and compound epithets with privative prefixes in *Prometheus Unbound*, of which "nine appear to be entirely new in English and original to Shelley" (38-39, 60-61). These include *unreclaiming, unbewailing, all-miscreative,* and *sleep-unsheltered* (38-39, 60-61). For one additional adjective, *unpastured*, Shelley developed an original meaning, while at least two other adjectives have a "characteristically Shelleyan shading by the contexts in which they appear" (38-39, 60-61). Other scholars like Clark and Jerrold E. Hogle also identify Shelley's employment of privatives as a prominent feature of his works (Clark 89, 89n75; Hogle, *Process* 195, 376n67). A sample of Shelley's poetic works also reveals a prominent use of privative adjectives. Shelley's eighty-four-line poem, "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty," for instance, includes nine privatives; a companion poem of 144 lines, “Mont Blanc,” contains twenty privative adjectives. Shelley’s early political and moral manifesto, his poem *Queen Mab,* in its 2,304 lines boasts as many as 310 privative adjectives.

In light of this abundant evidence, both primary and secondary, of Shelley’s extensive use of privative epithets, I examine this use with an eye toward a specific concern that has remained unaddressed. This concern is best posited as a question: how does such a prominent element of Shelley’s poetic language—his use of the most common species of privatives, adjectives with the privative suffix *-less* and adjectives with privative prefixes *in-/un-* —reflect and realize his theory of poetry and language as effectuating political, religious, moral, and social revolutionary change? In one sense, limiting my exploration to Shelley’s privatives in relation to these three particular aspects—his poetic uses of privatives, his theory of poetry and language, and his impulse for revolutionary transformation as a driving force behind his poetic endeavors—is due in part, like the earlier studies of privatives, to the relatively circumscribed scope of my research. My main reason for focusing on these three factors, however, is that all three are integral to the nature of my argument. My study proposes to demonstrate that what has been noted as a prevalent characteristic of Shelley’s poetic language (his use of privative epithets) is essential to his theory of poetry and language and, more specifically, his view of how poetry fulfills its fundamental function through the medium of language—working to bring about a revolutionary transformation of human life and thought.

So far, studies of Shelley's use of privative terms have identified them as a prominent feature and analyzed them in terms of other data related to Shelley's use of language (Massey), attempted to provide a general philosophical and intellectual explanation for their frequent use (Buxton and Dawson), or explored their function mostly within the context of a single work or set of concerns (Webb and Dawson). As valuable as these studies are, no one has yet examined the use of Shelley's privatives across a range of Shelley's works and across a variety of periods of Shelley's career as a writer. Moreover, no one I know of has attempted to situate this characteristic of Shelley's poetic language within the context of his theoretical views on the relationship between poetry and language as a tool for dissemination of his revolutionary ideals. Thus, I believe my study may fill this present "vacancy" (to use Shelley's word in *On Life* [507]) in the scholarship of Shelley's use of privatives as an essential element of his revolutionary poetics, and may substantially augment extant scholarship on this issue.

The Present Study and the Larger Critical Discourse

In relation to the scholarly predecessors of my project delineated above, this study attempts to build upon their work in several ways. While Webb mentions Shelley's metaphysical beliefs, he ties Shelley's use of privatives in *Prometheus Unbound* mainly to his political and social convictions and thus does not address in detail the poet's concerns about the nature of language as poetic medium and its role in furthering his revolutionary vision. In one sense, my project extends the scope of Webb's work by exploring a range of Shelley's major poetic works in which he employs privative adjectives. In another sense, my exploration amplifies Webb's work by examining how Shelley's use of privatives reflects his more fundamental beliefs about language and poetry and their function of ushering in a revolutionary change, both within and without.

Unlike Webb, Buxton subsumes Shelley's use of privatives under the general authority of a single philosophical system—Platonism (Buxton 120-21). Dawson, somewhat similarly, views Shelley's privatives as signaling another province of his philosophical and intellectual convictions—his belief in perfectibility (108-09, 120-21). My study builds upon these perspectives and presents both a more complex and a more fundamental picture of the thought behind Shelley's employment of privative adjectives, for which neither his affinities with Platonism nor his belief in perfectibility alone can account.

In addition to Buxton, Webb, and Dawson, there are several other important critical discourses with which my study shall attempt to engage. William Keach's recent book *Arbitrary Power: Romanticism, Language, Politics*, his chapter in *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism*, entitled "Romanticism and Language," and, to a lesser extent, his earlier book *Shelley's Style* form a part of my discussion of Shelley's privatives in relation to his theory of poetry and language. I also examine Shelley's theoretical understanding of poetic language and his use of privative adjectives in light of Jerrold E. Hogle's essay "Shelley and the Conditions of Meaning," his arguments in *Shelley's Process: Radical Transference and the Development of His Major Works*, and, to a lesser degree, Clark's assertions in *Embodying Revolution: The Figure of the Poet in Shelley*. I will also reference Stuart Peterfreund's observations in *Shelley among Others:*

The Play of the Intertext and the Idea of Language and his essay “The Two Languages and the Ineffable in Shelley’s Major Poetry.”

Present Study: Major Arguments and Considerations

My present study insists that Shelley’s use of privatives reflects his view of poetry’s fundamental task as a “pioneer” (Shelley, *On Life* 507). This purpose is to help clear out the “overgrowth of ages” or uproot “error, and the roots of error”—oppressive political, religious, and moral concepts and institutions that hold dominion over the mind and restrict, diminish, and impoverish human experience and potential for improvement (507). The poet employs privative epithets to expose these oppressive ideas and entities as essentially degrading and inhumane and thus intends to liberate the mind from their tyranny and leave “what is too often the duty of the reformer in political and ethical questions to leave, a vacancy” (507). After restoring the mind to its primal freedom, privatives also posit Shelley’s revolutionary ideals of liberty, justice, and truth as immune to tyranny and change, and thus reclaim the liberated human consciousness as a potential agent of a larger political, religious, and moral transformation.

In working to subvert the forces of oppression within the mind and reclaim the emancipated consciousness for virtue, liberty, and hope, Shelley’s privatives also participate in formulating a counter-discourse. That is, privatives reflect his employment of poetic language toward revolutionary and egalitarian ends, specifically in opposition to what the poet confronts as distortion and manipulation of language by dominant religious and political ideologies to advance forms of inward and outward enslavement. The use of privatives also reflects the poet's efforts to renovate language from within: by denoting absences and expressing negations, privatives extricate poetic language not only from the immediate bounds of referentiality, but also, as the poet was keenly aware, from political and ideological formulations inherent in the very nature of language. Furthermore, as privatives help convey the poet's revolutionary vision for humanity with less distortion from contextual and ideological constraints than any other form of words, they impart this vision even more faithfully and more directly affect the human mind. Finally, in fulfilling their basic poetic function to help effectuate the initial liberation of the mind from the bonds of tyranny, privatives also help further the way Shelley intends for his poetry to interact with the human imagination. The poet's privative adjectives accompany the progress and growth of revolutionary ideals within the imaginative mind and continue to transform and enlarge human consciousness in such a manner as to unleash perpetual reconfigurations and re-imaginings of human thought and experience. Thus, positioned at the critical intersection of the poet's view of language and poetry and his revolutionary vision, privative epithets comprise a basic building block in the foundation of Shelley's poetic style.

Basic Categories and Method of Research

My main category, privatives in Shelley's works, and my method of research require further explanation. I focus my attention mostly on the poet's use of adjectives with the privative suffix *-less* (originating in Old English and denoting a sense of deprivation) and adjectives with the privative prefixes *in-* and *un-* (the first originating in

Latin, the second in Old English, and both serving to express “negation or privation”) in relation to formative political, religious, and moral forces in a selection of Shelley’s major poetic works (“-less, suffix”; “in-, prefix^3”; “un-, prefix^2,” *OED*). These works include two 1816 companion poems, “Hymn to Intellectual Beauty” and “Mont Blanc,” *Queen Mab* (1813)—his first major political and philosophical statement—as well as Shelley’s longest poem, *Laon and Cythna* (1817), and his 1819 poem *The Mask of Anarchy*. My study groups these texts thematically and begins with Shelley’s more concise and concentrated interrogation of dominant religious, political, and epistemological ideas and attitudes in the two 1816 poems. *Queen Mab*, *Laon and Cythna*, and *The Mask of Anarchy* share an acute concern with words as weapons of mental warfare. On one hand, these poems counter words and ideas distorted and manipulated to further religious, political, and moral enslavement of the human mind and, by this means, of the body. On the other hand, they disseminate words and concepts intended to liberate the consciousness and, thereby, an entire person from the dark domination of oppressive ideas and institutions.

One criterion for selecting these works is that all of them are major works in the Shelley canon previously unexplored for their use of privative adjectives. The other criterion is that all of these works, arguably, form a representative sample of texts outlining Shelley’s revolutionary vision and the ideals he sought to disseminate with his poetry. To attempt an analysis of all his major poetical works for their use of privatives would require at least a book-length project, so other texts that are no less important to the poet’s political and philosophical statements had to be omitted from the present exploration. In the larger poems especially, my discussion of privatives proper is necessarily selective, again due to the relatively circumscribed scope of my research, and tends to focus only on major instances related to formative political, religious, and moral concepts and institutions.

Chapter Contents

The following chapter discusses the poems “Hymn to Intellectual Beauty” and “Mont Blanc.” The next is dedicated to the longer narrative poems *Queen Mab*, *Laon and Cythna*, and *The Mask of Anarchy*. Chapter four examines Shelley’s use of privatives in the context of his theoretical views of poetry and language and several critical approaches to these views. The fifth and final chapter repositions my argument within the larger critical discourse and restates major considerations and conclusions of the present study. I close this last chapter by outlining several possibilities for further exploration and research.

CHAPTER II

Introduction

Both composed in the summer of 1816, Shelley's poems "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" and "Mont Blanc. Lines Written in the Vale of Chamouni" explore their immediate subjects, the metaphysical concept of Intellectual Beauty or Divine Power and the natural landscape of Mont Blanc, respectively.[1] At the same time, the poems also critically examine the imaginative mind's revolutionary interaction with and action on these subjects. In each text, the poem's subject seems to recede in the background only to position the imaginative mind at the forefront of poetic speculation. To enable this elevation and amplification of the mind's power over its subjects, Shelley's privative adjectives facilitate a mental "vacancy," through which the mind acquires freedom from oppressive conventional categories of thought in religion, politics, and epistemology and a concomitant freedom for entertaining revolutionary revisions and recreations of these concepts and their potential incarnations (Shelley, *On Life* 507). As I hope to show in detail, the poet's use of privative adjectives plays a formative role in liberating and enlarging the imaginative mind to conceive of a large-scale revolutionary change that will transform humankind. Privatives also reflect and realize Shelley's underlying desire to be among "[a]ll the authors of revolutions in opinion" and, like Poetry itself, to be the "most unfailing herald, companion, and follower of the awakening of a great people to work a beneficial change in opinion or institution" (Shelley, *Defence* 515, 535).

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[1] Noah Heringman's *Romantic Rocks, Aesthetic Geology* contains an insightful discussion of "Mont Blanc" in the larger context of eighteenth-century aesthetics, the literary tradition of "travel narratives," Wordsworth's poetry, and the emergence of geology as a science (Heringman xiii-xiv, 69-77).

“Hymn to Intellectual Beauty”: Re-spelling the Idea of God

The word *spells* appears in the poem twice. In the first instance, as the persona denies any form of revelation of the Divine to humanity, he describes the “name of God and ghosts, and Heaven”[2] as the “records” of poets’ and sages’ “vain” attempts to articulate that which defies definition (Shelley, “Hymn,” lines 25-28). These futile human attempts at articulating the Divine are but “[f]rail spells” of “uttered charm,” devoid of power to shield humankind from the glaring evidence of “all we hear and all we see” that “[d]oubt, chance, and mutability” govern this universe (29-31). The “uttered charm” of these “[f]rail spells” does not remain innocent in its futility, though, but turns sinister when wielded as an instrument of indoctrination of young minds (27-29). “While yet a boy,” the persona recollects in stanza five, “I called on poisonous names with which our youth is fed” (49-53). Yet, the boy’s prayers to the “poisonous names” of “God and ghost, and Heaven” prove answerless as the names invoked ring hollow; he “was not heard” and “saw them not” (27-29, 53-54).

The same word *spells* acquires a redeeming, freeing value when used to describe the effects of Intellectual Beauty on the poetic persona at the end of the poem. In the concluding prayer, the persona speaks of himself as one "[w]hom, SPIRIT fair, thy spells did bind / To fear himself, and love all human kind" (83-84). The binding spells of Intellectual Beauty evoke not only the poetic persona's earlier account of his dedication to its power ("I vowed that I would dedicate my powers / To thee and thine"), but, in binding the persona's affection, also paradoxically give him hope "that thou [Intellectual Beauty] wouldst free / This world from its dark slavery" (61-62, 69-70). Earlier in the hymn, the spells of conventional religion vainly attempt to confine their subject to human terms and thus poison the speaker's mind as a boy with their falsity (27-29, 53-54). In contrast, the spells related to Intellectual Beauty free the heart for genuine devotion and bind the mind to the hope of universal liberation of "[e]ach human heart and countenance" toward self-respect and love of all "human kind" (7, 69-70, 83-84).

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[2] Michael O’Neill discusses the alternate version of this line as it appeared in the first publication of the poem in the *Examiner* in 1817. In the *Examiner*, the word *God* was substituted with *Demon*, and line 27 read: “the names of Demon, Ghost, and Heaven” (O’Neill, “Commentary” 488). O’Neill explains that the “*Examiner* reading was probably introduced by Hunt [Leigh Hunt, Shelley’s friend, a writer, a political radical, and the publisher of the *Examiner*] or at his suggestion, to avoid the charge of blasphemy” (475). Later Shelley corrected the *Examiner* printing of the line and changed the word from *Demon* back to his preferred term *God* (475, 488). For more details and observations about this and other changes to the poem, see also Stuart Curran’s “Shelley’s Emendations to the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*” in *ELN* 7 (1970): 270-73 (O’Neill, “Commentary” 475, 488).

In both its negative and positive uses, *spells* appears to denote sets of "words, a formula or verse, supposed to possess occult or magical powers; a charm or incantation; a means of accomplishing enchantment or exorcism" or suggest an "occult or mysterious power or influence; a fascinating or enthralling charm" ("spell, n. 1" Def. 3a, 3b, *OED*). The hymn's formulation of *spells* as "uttered charm[s]" binding the poetic persona makes these meanings obvious (Shelley, "Hymn," lines 28-29, 83-84). It is also possible that Shelley's use of the word looks back to a much older, by his time obsolete, meaning of *spell* as a "discourse or sermon; a narrative or tale" ("spell, n.1" Def. 2a, *OED*). In this sense, the two instances of *spells* in the hymn may be seen as outlining a major thematic movement away from a restrictive and poisonous discourse about the Divine confined to empty conventional categories toward a radically freeing discourse on spirituality that fosters “Love, Hope, and Self-esteem” and carries potential for a universal liberation (Shelley, “Hymn,” lines 37-38, 69-70, 83-84).

The hymn’s movement away from the discourse on spirituality steeped in codes and corruption of conventional categories lies in employing the language of *re-spelling* (in the sense of rewriting a narrative or discourse) portions of this discourse with the use of privative adjectives. “The awful shadow of some unseen Power,” boldly assert the poem’s opening lines, “[f]loats tho’ unseen amongst us,—visiting / This various world with as inconstant wing / As summer winds that creep from flower to flower” (1-4). Here, the negation of the twice repeated *unseen* in relation to the Power’s shadow stresses the denial of a religious system based on divine revelation (1-2). In Shelley’s most immediate context, such a system would be Christianity with its assertion that God revealed himself through the Scriptures and the incarnation of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. The poem’s later lines assert, “[n]o voice from some sublimer world hath ever / To sage or poet these responses given” (25-26). Similarly, Shelley’s privative “unseen” counters “Christian claims that man is the recipient of a divine revelation” (Shelley, “Hymn,” lines 1-2; Cronin 229).

The description of Intellectual Beauty as “unknown” later in the poem again retraces this poetic gesture of protest against the doctrines of revelation and incarnation, which state that God the Father becomes known through the Son (Shelley, “Hymn,” line 40). From Shelley’s perspective, the Divine Logos of St. John’s Gospel never became flesh. In light of this, in order to speak of a God-like spiritual power, it is necessary to rewrite our discourse of the Divine by stripping it of all that is fleshly, namely, of the idea that God may be seen and known. In his 1817 fragmentary essay *On Christianity*, Shelley argues that "[t]he universal being can only be described or defined by negatives, which deny his subjection to the laws of all inferior existences" (252). Earl R. Wasserman observes that the "Hymn" shows how "Christian terminology and conceptions can be transvalued by translation into the true religious framework" (193). To advocate for this "true religious framework"—for a purer spiritual devotion—Shelley offers a new way of discoursing about the divine power (Wasserman 193). The subject of this new discourse is non-formulaic and free from the fixities of doctrine and creed.

Thus, by using privatives to assert that Intellectual Beauty is "unseen" and "unknown," Shelley firmly disassociates spiritual devotion from several key categories of the older creed, beginning with the doctrine of divine revelation ("Hymn," lines 1-2, 40-41). By extension, the poem's denial of revelation also serves as denunciation of the person of God and the promise of the afterlife, postulated by Christianity among other religious systems: the "name of God and ghosts, and Heaven," those "poisonous names with which our youth is fed" (27-28, 53). Thus, Shelley's hymn may be seen not only as a devotional poem that promotes a different kind of spirituality, but also as a poetic discourse about this new object of piety. The privative adjectives related to Intellectual Beauty and its manifestations ("unseen," "inconstant," "uncertain," and "unknown") sever the poetic language from the "[f]rail spells" of conventional spirituality and weave a new spell to bind the mind to a more liberating spiritual devotion (1-3, 6, 27-29, 38, 40). This devotion has the potential to be free from human errors associated with personifying the divine. "Where indefiniteness ends," Shelley cautions the reader in *On*

Christianity, “idolatry and anthropomorphism begin” (252). More specifically, formulating the divine in privative terms purges religious practices of the “idolatry and anthropomorphism” of such concepts as the “King of Heaven” and “paternal Monarch” (which Shelley identifies as misconceptions of God in *On Christianity*) and suggests the reform of a political system mimicking religious idolatry with the institution of monarchy (250-52).

The poem’s revision of conventional piety and formulation of a mind-liberating spirituality resembles a similar development Shelley pursues in *On Christianity* (Murray 459-60). Christ’s conception of God, Shelley argues in his essay, differs widely “from the gross imaginations of the vulgar” misconceptions of the masses, and distortions of literal interpreters of Jesus’ words (*On Christianity* 250-52). Shelley attributes to Jesus attempts to correct these distortions of the idea of God and reformulate God not as the “King of Heaven” to whom all must give account on the day of judgment for their deeds, but rather as the “overruling Spirit of the collective energy of the moral and material world” (250-51). Partaking of all the attributes of various Greek deities, this God is not so much a divine person as the all-encompassing Spirit of “all the energy and wisdom included within the circle of existing things. . . . mysteriously and illimitably pervading the frame of things” (250). This reformulation of God as a Spirit devoid of anthropological qualities closely parallels the revision of the idea of God Shelley undertakes in the “Hymn.” The poem abandons even the word *God*—the concept underlying the abhorrent system of this world’s religious and political “slavery”—in favor of the less restrictive epithets “Spirit of BEAUTY,” “awful LOVELINESS,” and “SPIRIT fair," and denies its subject a divine personhood by using the privative terms "unseen," "inconstant," and "unknown" (Shelley, "Hymn," lines 1-3, 6, 13, 40, 69-71, 83). Similar to Christ's God (as Shelley sees him), the poem's depersonalized Divine Power is "[l]argely de-anthropomorphized and altogether non-sectarian"—a suitable object for advocating the kind of religious tolerance in spiritual practices that Shelley argues for in his earlier pamphlet *An Address, to the Irish People* (Shelley, *Address* 10-11; Murray 461).

Like the poem, the essay *On Christianity* also reformulates (again presenting Jesus as propagating these views) the idea of God not as a person, but rather as a universal Power that pervades and stimulates all intellectual and spiritual virtue. "There is a power," Shelley argues, reflecting on a passage from the Sermon on the Mount, "by which we are surrounded, like the atmosphere," and our most virtuous impulses, our most elevated thoughts and deeds are but "passive slaves" that owe all of their human "majesty" and grandeur to "some higher and more omnipresent Power" (Shelley, *On Christianity* 251-52). "This power," Shelley asserts, "is God" (252). In a similar revision, the hymn's divine subject is asserted as a power (Shelley, "Hymn," lines 1, 78). The poetic persona is similarly passive and subject to the influence of the Power's visitations: Intellectual Beauty descended upon his "passive youth" and bound him to love and virtue (78-84). Shelley's essay argues that, in their best and loftiest moments, those who "have seen God"—that is, according to Shelley, those open to the influences of this Power—cultivate a power of virtue and goodness of their own, an inner sanctity aligned with its original source (*On Christianity* 252, 255). In the poem's similar statement, such individuals become consecrated with the hues of light emanating from the Power or "Spirit of BEAUTY" to fear themselves and "love all human kind" (Shelley, "Hymn," lines 13-14, 83-84).

Other parallels between the discourse on revisionary spirituality in the poem and in the essay are no less striking. Both the poem and the essay designate the human mind and heart as subject to the influences and manifestations of the Power. In the poem, the power's shadow visits "[e]ach human heart and countenance" and shines upon "human thought or form"; in the essay, one pure in heart "may walk among his species, deriving from the communion with all which they contain of beautiful or of majestic, some intercourse with the Universal God" (Shelley, "Hymn," lines 6-7,14-15; *On Christianity* 251). Also, both the poem and the essay describe spiritual renewal as associated with an awakening of nature in the spring and with the sadder graces of autumn. In the poem, the spiritual renovation first takes place in the spring, "at that sweet time when winds are wooing / All vital things that wake to bring / News of buds and blossoming," and later in a "harmony" of life's autumn, with its solemnity and serenity (Shelley, "Hymn," lines 55-58, 73-77). Similarly, in the essay, the experience of a spiritual renewal may come while "inhaling joyous renovation from the breath of Spring" or while "catching" from the autumnal sounds and air "some diviner mood of sweetest sadness which improves the solitary heart" (Shelley, *On Christianity* 251).

As the hymn strives to reconfigure conventional anthropomorphized conceptions of divinity, it also formulates a kind of spirituality which privative adjectives help facilitate. "Dearer for its mystery," the "unseen," "inconstant," and "unknown" Power of

Intellectual Beauty nourishes the human mind, just as “darkness” accentuates the brightness of a “dying flame” (Shelley, “Hymn,” lines 1-3, 12, 40, 44-45). Darkness in this instance is positive and stimulating, in contrast with the oppressive and limiting darkness of spiritual and political “slavery” (68-70). The idea of a mysterious Power, submerged in the darkness of the “unseen,” “inconstant,” and “unknown,” becomes dearer for the stimulating speculations its nature, couched in privative terms, presents to the human mind (1-3, 6, 40). Contemplation of the possibilities its mystery conceals has the potential of igniting human imaginative thought and enabling the active mind to shine all the brighter in its imaginative speculation precisely because of the Power’s enigmatic nature, enshrouded in the darkness of mystery. The poet’s privative adjectives outline the mystery of the Power in such a way as to feed or nourish the mind to begin imagining the vast, unexplored depths of the “unseen” and “unknown”—as if to encourage an open-ended speculation that would yield “as many variations” evoked by the concept as there are “human minds themselves” (Shelley, “Hymn,” lines 1-3, 40; *On Christianity* 249).

This newly formulated discourse on spirituality proves to be mind-enlarging, not mind-degrading, invigorating the intellect rather than poisoning it as, Shelley believes, revealed religion does (“Hymn,” lines 49-54). The excellence and perfection of the image of the divine, Shelley asserts in *On Christianity*, “resembles more or less its original and object in proportion to the *perfectness* of the mind on which it is impressed” (258; italics in original). Shelley goes on to argue that the human perfection in “resembling God” is the same as the Divine perfection of God, comprehending “within itself all that constitutes human perfection” (259). Thus, the hymn’s stimulation of intellectual excellence and virtue in "[e]ach human heart and countenance" by positing the Divine Power primarily in privative terms becomes a pathway to the purer apprehension of the divine (Shelley, "Hymn," lines 6-7). "Hymn" argues that we are to approach the divine not in humility and lowliness stemming from our awareness of the smallness and finiteness of the human mind before the Almighty, as conventional Christian piety would prescribe. Instead, apprehension of the divine, as "Hymn" formulates it, would result in an undiminished "Self-esteem" and "self-reverence," as the persona's prayer to "fear himself" suggests (Shelley, "Hymn," lines 37, 84; O'Neill, "Commentary" 496). This self-awe arises from the mind and heart enlarged by the contemplation of the mysterious Power and growing apprehension of a correspondent divinity within (Shelley, "Hymn," lines 37, 84; *On Christianity* 251).

My earlier discussion of the word *spells* is but one prominent instance in the larger process of Shelley's revisionary discourse in "Hymn." The "fear" associated with the "dark reality" of human existence transforms into a fear of one's self, a positive "self-reverence" at the wonder of human imaginative powers (Shelley, "Hymn," lines 48, 84; O'Neill, "Commentary" 496). The "dark reality" of life and "dark slavery," both religious and political, which Shelley specifically associates with institutionalized Christianity and monarchy, find their opposite in the freeing "darkness" of Intellectual Beauty that enkindles the mind to re-imagine both religious and, by extension, political systems (Shelley, "Hymn," lines 45, 48, 70; *On Christianity* 250-252, 260, 270). Richard Cronin's observation that Shelley does not make a clear connection between his Intellectual Beauty and the "overthrow of tyranny" fails to recognize the extent to which the poet's privative descriptions of Intellectual Beauty enact an overthrow of religious and political categories tyrannizing the mind (228). The vacancy and desolation of the human "state" without the "Spirit of BEAUTY" become a vacancy suggesting a "void, created by the deconstruction of outmoded ideas, that awaits the poet's imaginings as a replacement"—a void evoked by the privatives "unseen," "inconstant," and "unknown" (Shelley, "Hymn," lines 1-3, 6, 16-17, 40; O'Neill, "Commentary" 487). This void becomes a fertile soil for religious speculation, and a heterodox, non-formulaic, "non-sectarian" spirituality (Murray 461). With the removal of doctrinal and sectarian boundaries, such spirituality becomes a devotion filled with hope and love for oneself and "all human kind" (Shelley, "Hymn," lines 36-37, 69, 84).

In his later essay *A Defence of Poetry*, Shelley argues for the elimination of distinctions between poetry (in its broader sense) and philosophy (514-15). Shelley also asserts that philosophy's task, and by extension that of poetry, is to destroy error and the "roots of error" (*On Life* 507). Both poetry and philosophy in their mutual role as agents of reform thus act to uproot the errors of conventional categories (the "overgrowth of ages") and leave a "vacancy," or to reduce the mind "to that freedom in which it would have acted but for the misuse of words and signs, the instruments of its own creation" (Shelley, *On Life* 507; *Defence* 535). While this statement requires more detailed attention, what seems clear is that, following the eradication of orthodox categories, the "vacancy" of the mind leads to a liberated ability to re-imagine how to "work a beneficial change in opinion or institution" (Shelley, *On Life* 507; *Defence* 535).

Similar to the wildernesses in Shelley's later work *Prometheus Unbound*, "vacancy" here speaks of "that free-range of possibility which is available to the human mind when it has liberated itself from the shadow of the darker forces" (Webb, "Unascended Heaven" 50). Shelley's privative adjectives "unseen," "inconstant," and "unknown" in the "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" are instrumental in facilitating precisely this kind of vacancy: a liberation from the "[f]rail spells" of conventional religious categories to effectuate free-thinking imaginings of a "beneficial change" in spirituality and, potentially, in politics (Shelley, "Hymn," lines 1-3, 6, 27-29, 40; *Defence* 535). To return once more to my earlier attention to the two different uses of the word *spells* in the poem, Shelley rewrites or "re-spells" conventional ideas of God and spirituality by repudiating traditional categories. In re-spelling the concept of God, Shelley lays a foundation for religious and even political reform on a large scale as conceived by the liberated imagination.

"Mont Blanc": "Unacknowledged" Legislations of Revolutionary Thought

The twenty privative adjectives in "Mont Blanc" relate to natural or mental imagery, or both. In stanza II, the persona's apostrophe to the personified Ravine of Arve includes several such adjectives. The "chainless winds still come and ever came / To drink their [the surrounding pines'] odours" (Shelley, "Mont Blanc," lines 19-24). The Ravine's "earthly rainbows" color the "ethereal waterfall, whose veil / Robes some unsculptured image" of the rocks behind the flowing waters (Shelley, "Mont Blanc," lines 25-27; Reiman and Fraistat 97n7). The whole Ravine is a conglomeration of sounds:

the "loud, lone sound" of the river Arve, combined with the sounds of pines and wind (an "old and solemn harmony"), the sounds of the waterfall, and the "voices of the desart," all pervade the Ravine's entire landscape with "that ceaseless motion" and "unresting sound" (Shelley, "Mont Blanc," lines 19-34). These privative adjectives denoting a primeval ceaselessness of sound are woven into the larger fabric of sound imagery with a prominent thread of echo and reverberation.

These sounds, ever free (the "chainless" winds in the pines), ever without cessation or rest in their perpetual projections, echoes, and reverberations between the mountain and rocks, waterfall and river ("ceaseless motion" and "unresting sound") usher in the image of the individual mind that likewise both "renders and receives" impressions of the "clear universe of things around" (19-24, 32-40). The sounds of the Ravine bring about the persona's meditative "trance sublime and strange," and cause him to muse upon his own "human mind" because the processes of echoes and reverberation of sound are just as ceaseless as the mental "interchange" with the surrounding universe is "unremitting" (34-40). The external processes of sound distribution in the Ravine of Arve find their analogue in the internal processes of meditation upon the Ravine. The persona's mind, his "[o]ne legion of wild thoughts," like the Holy Spirit in Genesis, hovers in creative activity above the Ravine's "darkness," as the Ravine itself becomes "no unbidden guest, / In the still cave of the witch Poesy"[3] (41-44).

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[3] Here the double negative form of the privative "no unbidden guest" suggests an almost involuntary process of how an object in nature (the Ravine with its "darkness") becomes the subject of the imagination and thus a matter of poetic speculation (Shelley, "Mont Blanc," lines 39-44). In the *Defence*, Shelley asserts a similar involuntariness of the act of imaginative creation that warrants a description only in privative terms. The

The poetic imagination thus positions the Ravine of Arve as both its subject and the "emblem of [its] thinking" (O'Neill, *Human Mind's Imaginings* 44). The quest of this poetic meditation, the pursuit behind the mind's "unremitting interchange" of rendering and receiving consists in "[s]eeking among the shadows that pass by, / Ghosts of all things that are" (Shelley, "Mont Blanc," lines 37-39, 45-46). As if it were a kind of prelude, we learn that what is to follow is an imaginative mediation upon the landscape of the Ravine. Its goal is an insight into the life of things ("Ghosts of all things that are"), and its progress is dependent upon thoughts the landscape supplies, "some shade of thee [the Ravine], / Some phantom, some faint image" (45-47). Since the mind's activity is defined as an "unremitting interchange," the achieved insight is not to be seen as final and having absolute authority (39). In other words, the reader finds himself drawn into a process of speculation, which will yield not resolutions, but only further speculative possibilities.

This poetic speculation begins non-assertively, as if to maintain its tentativeness even in what it is about to repudiate: "Some say that gleams of a remoter world / Visit the soul in sleep," that "death is slumber, / And that its [the remoter world's] shapes the busy thoughts outnumber / Of those who wake and live" (49-52). The conventional Christian

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state of imaginative inspiration or the "mind in creation," the poet argues, "is as a fading coal which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness" (531). "The conscious portions of our natures," he adds, "are unprophetic either of its [imaginative inspiration's] approach or its departure" (531). Since the privative *unbidden* does not appear to participate directly in Shelley's questioning of the dominant political, religious, and epistemological ideas and attitudes in the poem, I omit the term from my discussion in this chapter.

idea of an afterlife and, perhaps, the concept of the pre-existent state of souls[4] (a "remoter world"), the transience of death, and the preeminence of spiritual concerns over physical and material needs are the first set of concepts subject to poetic speculation (49-52). The persona looks up at the mountain, Mont Blanc, for answers, which also come in the form of speculative questions. The first question, "Has some unknown omnipotence unfurled / The veil of life and death?" is reminiscent of the "[f]rail spells," the "name of God and ghosts, and Heaven," indicted in the "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty," which was apparently begun only weeks before "Mont Blanc" (Shelley, Mont Blanc," lines 52-54; "Hymn," lines 27-29; O'Neill, "Commentary" 473, 498-99).

The question whether God conceals a mystery of life and death prompts another question. Do "I lie / In dream" and "does the mightier world of sleep / Spread far around and inaccessibly / Its circles?" the persona wonders (Shelley, "Mont Blanc," lines 54-57). Questions about whether the mystery of life and death lies in the conception of God or if limitations of human existence condemn us to a life of dream-like ignorance of reality may drain and exhaust the human spirit. "For the very spirit fails," the persona exclaims, "Driven like a homeless cloud from steep to steep / That vanishes among the viewless gales!" (57-59). The privative adjectives here underscore a crisis of human existence, an internal destabilization ("homeless") and air-like thinness ("viewless") similar to that of the psalmist: “Hear me speedily, O LORD: my spirit faileth: hide not thy face from me, lest I be like unto them that go down into the pit” (Shelley, “Mont Blanc,” lines 57-59; Ps. 143.7).

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[4] Shelley would be familiar with the concept of the pre-existence of the soul, such as Plato posits in *Phaedo* and on which Wordsworth improvises in his *Intimations* ode. In *The Platonism of Shelley*, James A. Notopoulos discusses Shelley's likely reading of *Phaedo* as early as in the poet's years at Oxford and certainly in 1820 (514). Shelley translated *Phaedo,* among other dialogues of Plato, but the translation, unfortunately, is lost (514-15). Carl Woodring, in his 1965 book *Wordsworth,* offers a short, but insightful discussion of Wordsworth's employment of the Platonic and neo-Platonic idea of the pre-existence of the soul and lists *Phaedo* as one of the sources of this concept (91).

The landscape of the mountain suggests possible answers about the extent of human knowledge in questions of religion and epistemology. These answers are steeped in privative adjectives. Thus, “[f]ar, far above, piercing the infinite sky,” the mountain “appears,—still, snowy, and serene” (Shelley, “Mont Blanc,” lines 60-61). The “unearthly forms” of the lower, surrounding mountains “[p]ile round it [Mont Blanc], ice and rock” (62-63). This is a place of “frozen floods, unfathomable deeps,” and a “desart peopled by the storms alone”; faint signs of life appear only “when the eagle brings some hunter’s bone, / And the wolf tracts her there” (64-69). The privative adjectives *infinite*, *unearthly*, and *unfathomable* paint a blank, hostile, and vast mountain landscape as the mind that ever renders and receives impressions of the external world now struggles to render meaningful the scene it beholds (37-40, 61-69). What strikes the receiving mind is an alienating sight that seems to have neither origin, nor termination (*infinite*), neither an analogue, nor point of reference (*unearthly*), and thus seems to elude the mind’s attempts at rendering such a landscape meaningful (*unfathomable*) (61-69). Shelley’s privatives here outline the inchoate shapelessness and meaninglessness characterizing the scene. How “hideously,” the persona muses upon receiving such a sight, “[i]ts shapes are heaped around! rude, bare, and high, / Ghastly, and scarred, and riven” (69-71). The apparent meaninglessness of the ghastly sight prompts speculations about a prehistoric cataclysm once befalling the landscape: was this place a plaything for the children of the "old Earthquake-dæmon"? or "did a sea / Of fire, envelope once this silent snow?" (71-74).

Neither the earlier religious and epistemological questions, nor the present geological inquiries seem answerable. Echoing the silence of the snow earlier, the line "[n]one can reply—all seems eternal now" appears to mute the mind's attempts to imbue the received scene with meaning (74-75). Yet, when the landscape offers no possible answers, it only intensifies the mind's imaginative speculations. The blank and ghastly meaninglessness of the vacant and shapeless scene provokes not silence in the mind, but an "interchange" and act of rendering the otherwise abhorrent nothingness of the surrounding received by the mind with meaning (37-40). "The wilderness has a mysterious tongue / Which teaches awful doubt, or faith so mild, / So solemn, so serene," the persona continues, "that man may be / But for such faith with nature reconciled" (76-79).

The repugnant chaos of the wilderness scene "teaches" the mind to doubt the conventional Christian belief in the benevolent order and purposiveness of the existing universe (76-79). Another possible form of doubt the wilderness "teaches" is that the "natural world is ruled over by an evil deity" (Shelley, "Mont Blanc, lines 76-79; Webb, *Shelley* 137). This doubt is indeed "awful" because the entire Christian paradigm of Western thought that positions man within the universe in relation to a benevolent and almighty Maker here seems to collapse under the weight of the empirical evidence gathered from observing the mountain wilderness (Shelley, "Mont Blanc," line 77). This "awful doubt" also addresses the earlier questions of spirituality and epistemology: with conventional Christianity apparently undermined, Christian spirituality, with its concept of heaven and spiritual existence in the afterlife (“gleams of a remoter world”), becomes bankrupt, and with the apparent absence of a benign Providence, human knowledge becomes fragmentary and accidental (49, 53-57, 77). This “awful” questioning of the central Christian framework for the relationship between God, man, and the universe may also be a kind of reconciling faith (77-79). Since neither nature nor man bears evidence of divine purposes and benevolence, this implies a re-conception of man as a mere part of the natural world, rather than its glory and its crown in God’s creation. In this sense, a faith that affirms only the here and now of earthly existence, the eternity of nature rather than God, may serve as a pathway to “reconciliation between man and nature” (Shelley, “Mont Blanc,” lines 78-79; Erkelenz 102; O’Neill, “Commentary” 516).

By undermining with its appearance the idea of the Divine Providence, Mont Blanc thus has a “voice” to “repeal / Large codes of fraud and woe” (Shelley, “Mont Blanc,” lines 80-81). That is, the persona’s mind renders the received empirical appearance of the mountain and surrounding landscape as corroding not only conventional religious concepts of the benevolent Ruler-God and the afterlife, but also the entire political system of monarchical rule as an earthly analogue of God’s kingdom (Webb, *Shelley* 138). In this radical pronouncement upon the mountain’s landscape, Mont Blanc’s becoming a catalyst of potential revolutionary change depends on the mind’s becoming capable of bestowing upon the mountain such a revisionary meaning. Shelley’s use of privatives in the initial description of the landscape (“infinite,” “unearthly,” and “unfathomable”) is instrumental in the larger outline of the scene as vacant, shapeless, and meaningless, and thus enables and opens up the mind to conceive the radical religious, political, and epistemological implications of the scene (Shelley, “Mont Blanc,” lines 60, 62, 64). The speculative poetic rendering and receiving of the scene and its elements as *infinite*, *unearthly*, and *unfathomable*, among other epithets, powerfully drain the description of the landscape—and, by extension, the dominant religious and political discourse—of the concepts of underlying order and divine benevolence. Shelley’s privatives thus facilitate the poem’s resistance not only to the dominant “tradition of finding in mountain scenery the evidence of the hand of God,” but also to the notable poetic assertion of this tradition in Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s “Hymn before Sun-rise in the Vale of Chamouni” (Webb, *Shelley* 139, 141-42).

The result of such rendering and receiving is a faith or doubt re-imagining man, God, and nature in such tentative and provisional ways that it leaves out the absolute assertions of the existent “codes of fraud and woe” and keeps the commitment “mild,” “solemn,” and “serene” (Shelley, “Mont Blanc,” lines 77-78, 80-81). That is, in the absence of demands for absolute truths, fixed doctrine, and exhaustive transparency in its statements, such a faith remains undisturbed and, in this sense, unassailable, just like the mountain that first stimulated the mind to conceive a possibility of this kind of belief. For we read of Mont Blanc as similarly “still” and “serene” and begin to associate the mountain with the power, which “dwells apart in its tranquility / Remote, serene, and inaccessible” and is later described as the “still and solemn power” (61, 96-97, 127-28). The mountain’s refusal to yield definitive answers to questions of religion and epistemology, its final inaccessibility to human scrutiny, is precisely what appears to stimulate and enlarge the mind to embrace a tranquil and mild faith or doubt—an attitude in which perpetual speculation and open-ended potentiality make up the only creed.

The process of speculative meditation that begins with observing the barren, "[g]hastly," and deformed mountain landscape and renders it full of revolutionary religious and political suggestions similarly unfolds in stanza IV (71). The immutability of Mont Blanc, the "Power" that "dwells apart in its tranquility / Remote, serene, and inaccessible," contrasts with a long catalogue of "All things," both human and non-human, "that move and breathe with toil and sound / Are born and die; revolve, subside and swell" (84-97). The mountain's towering permanence and the endless flux of the living world below seem to come together in the description of descending glaciers. The monolithic immobility of the glaciers' initial position on "their far fountains," cemented in "dome, pyramid, and pinnacle, / A city of death, distinct with many a tower / And wall impregnable of beaming ice," changes to mobility as the glaciers "creep" and slowly roll on to become "not a city, but a flood of ruin" for everything that lies in their path (100-07). This "flood of ruin" wreaks havoc upon trees and rocks, destroys the "dwelling-place / Of insects, beasts, and birds," and sends the "race / Of man" to flight as "his work and dwelling / Vanish, like smoke before the tempest's stream" (109-20). The magnitude of chaos and destruction seems to parallel the barren and deformed landscape of the mountain wilderness earlier in the poem, described then with a question, "Is this the scene / Where the old Earthquake-dæmon taught her young / Ruin? Were these their toys?" (71-73). Yet, down in the vale, the glaciers transform into a life-giving and sustaining force as they join “one majestic River, / The breath and blood of distant lands” (120-24).

Shelley’s privative adjectives play a formative role in these transformations from the blank deformity of the mountain wilderness into a catalyst of revolutionary change in religion and politics earlier in the poem, and from the glaciers’ “flood of ruin” into becoming part of the “breath and blood of distant lands” later in the text (69-71, 76-83, 107, 120-24). Earlier in the poetic text, *infinite*, *unearthly*, and *unfathomable* empty the wilderness landscape of the conventional ideas of divine order and purpose and free the observing mind to begin viewing Mont Blanc as thus capable of repealing both religious and political “codes of fraud and woe” (60, 62, 64, 80-81). Later, Shelley’s movement from the “inaccessible” site of the mountain and the “impregnable” ice of the glaciers to the “restless” gleams of life-giving waters in the valley may be seen as a natural type of the kind of the mental change toward entertaining revolutionary ideas described in the previous passage (Shelley, “Mont Blanc,” lines 97, 106, 121; Dawson 44-45). Just as the wilderness scene in the earlier passage needed to be purged of ideas of underlying divine benevolence in order for revolutionary religious and political ideas to surface, so the mountain landscape in the later passage undergoes destruction and chaos that result in the unleashing of the glaciers’ life-giving force down in the valley. In both passages, privative adjectives work to clear out or empty the dominant mental preconceptions that may accompany contemplation of the scene, in order to reveal its hitherto unexplored potential to be a catalyst (the mountain) or a type (the glaciers) of revolutionary transformation. In both cases, each poetic observation of the scene results in a lesson—

whether the wilderness' "mysterious tongue" and the mountain's "voice" or, more generally, the "naked countenance of earth" and "these primæval mountains" with their glaciers—both scenes "[t]each the adverting mind" (Shelley, "Mont Blanc," lines 76-81, 98-100; Dawson 44-45).

These speculative insights (imagining a revolutionary voice in the appearance of the mountain or a type of a revolution in the descent of the glaciers) seem to have so expanded and stimulated the mind as to increase its role as predominantly a renderer of meaning, rather than merely a receiver of external stimuli as it was earlier in the poem (Dawson 44-45). Imaginative speculations, facilitated by privative adjectives, amplify the mind's activity and energy as it acts upon the scene in the poem's concluding stanza. In this passage, privative adjectives again indicate the kind of absences and vacancies that maximize the potential of the individual mind for imaginative speculation. The entire site where "Mont Blanc yet gleams on high" with its "many sounds, and much of life and death," with its snow, winds, and lightning, is both invisible and mute (127-29). When the "snows descend / Upon that Mountain," whether in the "calm darkness of the moonless nights," in the "lone glare of day," burning in the "sinking sun" or starlight-pierced, "none beholds them there" (Shelley, "Mont Blanc," lines 127-39). Similarly, "[w]inds contend / Silently there," and lightning is "voiceless" in the mountain solitude (134-39).

Alongside other images of sightlessness and silence, the privative adjectives *moonless* and *voiceless* underscore that the scene is inaccessible to human senses. They also frame the background for the mind's ability to create the scene and render it meaningful and draw attention to this act of creation *ex nihilo*: “And what were thou [Mont Blanc], and earth, and stars, and sea, / If to the human mind’s imaginings / Silence and solitude were vacancy?” (142-44). That is, it is the “human mind’s imaginings” which, out of nothing, populate silence and solitude with the objects and scenes otherwise unbeheld and therefore vacant (142-44). It is plausible here, Judith Chernaik comments, to see the mind as “going beyond active contemplation to creation itself, since there are in effect no data given” (47). “The secret strength of things / Which governs thought, and to the infinite dome / Of heaven is as a law” is the power of the imaginative mind, which “inhabits” or dwells (Shelley uses “rests” in the Scrope Davies version) on Mont Blanc as the object of its imaginative speculation; the mind also endows heaven with a religious or political meaning, whether oppressive or liberating (Shelley, “Mont Blanc,” lines 139-41; Shelley, “Scene,” line 142). The “still and solemn power” of the mountain is the power of the speculative mind to imagine the mountain’s “many sights, / And many sounds, and much of life and death”—otherwise a “voiceless” and “moonless” “vacancy,” inhabited by “[s]ilence and solitude” alone (Shelley, “Mont Blanc,” lines 127-30, 137, 142-44). The poem’s “insistence on the creative powers of the human mind” points to Shelley’s ultimate suggestion that “man is the master of his universe” (Webb, *Shelley* 139).

The power of the poetic mind in the poem unfolds in political, legal, and constitutive terms. It belongs to the imaginative mind to govern thought and be to the “infinite dome / Of heaven” as a “law,” to view Mont Blanc as having a voice “to repeal / Large codes of fraud and woe,” to imagine a type of revolution in the descent of the glaciers, and to acknowledge self-reflexively its own infinite capacity to inhabit, revise, and create otherwise vacant scenes and concepts (Shelley, “Mont Blanc,” lines 80-81, 100-26, 139-41; Dawson 44-45). This legislative, chartering, and creative power of the mind depends on the work of Shelley’s privative adjectives to facilitate a liberating mental vacancy, a site of both uprooting of received error and the replanting of a speculative truth. To recall Shelley’s concept of vacancy in *On Life*, it is the duty of a reformer in “political and ethical questions” (a role Shelley undoubtedly assigned to himself and his poetry) to liberate the individual mind by impressing upon it a vacancy (Shelley, *On Life* 507). This vacancy nullifies the erroneous mental preconceptions and becomes a “site of potentiality” for imagination to commence its work (O’Neill, “Commentary” 522).

In “Mont Blanc,” Shelley thoughtfully approaches this duty to open up a vacancy in the minds of his reader. The poet’s “infinite,” “unearthly,” and “unfathomable” first render the mountain wilderness scene vacant of the signs of divine benevolence and, secondly, endow it with a voice advocating religious and political reform (Shelley, “Mont Blanc,” lines 60, 62, 64, 76-81). Two privatives frame the description of the descent of the glaciers. The privative adjective *impregnable* empties the glaciers of any potential for life and good, while *restless* unleashes the glaciers’ transformative, life-giving power, which may be seen as a type of the sweeping revolutionary change advocated earlier (Shelley, “Mont Blanc,” lines 100-26; Dawson 44). Finally, as if to recapitulate the speculative and liberating processes of the entire poem, the privatives *moonless* and *voiceless* create a vacancy of “[s]ilence and solitude” to highlight the imaginative mind as the sole power capable of populating it with revolutionary religious, political, and epistemological realities and ideas otherwise unbeheld and unimagined (Shelley, “Mont Blanc,” lines 130, 137). By freeing the mind to rethink—and thus, in a sense, to remake the world—the use of privative adjectives charts a poetic vacancy. This vacancy should be seen as realizing a kind of “unacknowledged” legislation—a subtle, “secret,” and calculating reformist “strength” of Shelley’s poetry—to enact revolutionary thought that will transform humankind (Shelley, *Defence* 535; “Mont Blanc,” lines 139-41).

Conclusion

In his “Hymn to Intellectual Beauty,” Shelley’s privative adjectives facilitate the removal of the conventional outlines of the concept of God and the divine underlying religious and political tyranny, and the liberation of the imaginative mind to embrace an inclusive, broadly defined spirituality that entails a social change: increased self-reverence and love for all humanity. In “Mont Blanc,” privative adjectives first effectuate the eradication of mental preconceptions about the mountain landscape in order to free the mind to find in the mountain scenery a catalyst for or a natural type of revolutionary change. Privatives also lead to the mind’s self-reflexive recognition of its capacity to re-conceptualize objects *ex nihilo* and endow them with revolutionary political and religious meaning. Both texts demonstrate the critical role of privative adjectives in creating a mental vacancy—a necessary precondition for the mind’s agency in bringing about revolutionary religious, political, epistemological, and social transformation. As privative adjectives help revise notions of divinity and spirituality in “Hymn” and enable the concept of the human mind as capable of absorbing and creating infinitudes in “Mont

Blanc," Shelley lays the groundwork for a further potential for reform in religion, politics, and social life. In using privative adjectives to facilitate a revolutionary momentum, the poet also outlines and realizes his life's role as a visionary, prophet, and one of the "unacknowledged legislators of the World" (Shelley, *Defence* 535).

CHAPTER III

Introduction

All three political and philosophical poems examined in this chapter—*Queen Mab*, *Laon and Cythna*, and *The Mask of Anarchy*—frequently employ privative adjectives. Published in 1813, *Queen Mab* may be seen as Shelley's first major work and his earliest political and philosophical manifesto (Reiman and Fraistat, "Commentary" 493, 495-96). Shelley's longest poem, *Laon and Cythna*, written and published in 1817, reflects the poet's larger "interest in revisiting—and reconfiguring—the disappointed ideals of the French Revolution as a subject of his literary endeavors" (Neth 109, 550-51). The latest in the selection of poems in this chapter is *The Mask of Anarchy,* which the poet wrote in the early fall of 1819 (Reiman and Fraistat, *Mask* 315). *The Mask* was occasioned by the tragedy that later came to be known as the Peterloo Massacre—a violent dispersing of a peaceful rally in St. Peter's Field, Manchester, by "drunken militiamen and cavalrymen" who "misinterpreted their orders" (315).

A prominent characteristic of these three poems is their use of privatives, which furthers Shelley's revolutionary vision to counter such violence and oppression. In exposing the desolation and destructiveness of oppressive religious, political, and (prominently in *Queen Mab*) commercial principles, the poems' privatives also create a kind of wilderness of their own—a mental clearing free of life-inhibiting tyrannical principles. As a part of the poet's philosophical and poetic vision, expressed in *On Life*, privatives thus function as pioneers, working to destroy "error, and the roots of error" and leaving "what is too often the duty of the reformer in political and ethical questions to leave, a vacancy" (Shelley, *On Life* 507). Formulating positive ideas and principles of liberty, truth, and justice also in privative terms allows the poet to secure this "vacancy" and begin replanting the cleared mental ground with these liberating ideals by insisting on their immunity against time, change, and the assaults of tyranny (507). Although the power of individuals and their words to bring about revolutionary change is tempered in *Queen Mab* by the poetic concept of Necessity, all three works uphold the importance of individual commitment to liberty and virtue—a commitment privatives help facilitate.

Queen Mab: Reclaiming Humanity's "Pathless Wilderness"

In *Queen Mab's* Canto VIII, lines 134-65, Shelley brings together external and internal natures in such a way that external nature serves as a kind of analogue of man's internal state. Along with the external natural world, under oppression man "[s]hrank with the plants, and darkened with the night," like the feeble herbage of the polar climate (8.145-49). With "[h]is chilled and narrow energies" subject to tyranny, man becomes "[i]nsensible to courage, truth, or love" as he leads an existence that is a "feverish dream of stagnant woe" (8.150-56). In contrast to this picture of both inward and outward desolation, as "[a]ll things [in external nature] are recreated, and the flame / Of consentaneous love inspires all life," the "human being" also "stands adorning / This loveliest earth with taintless body and mind," drawing on virtuous "thoughts that rise / In time destroying infiniteness" (8.107-08, 198-211). Between a long history of external and internal desolation and the complete transformation within and without that lies far ahead, the fairy Mab suggests that the immediate future—the time for Ianthe and all of

Shelley's readers "firmly to pursue / The gradual paths of an aspiring change"—lies like a "pathless wilderness" that "remains / Yet unsubdued by man's reclaiming hand" (9.143-48). Just as the fairy's vision serves to help Ianthe remain "of resolute mind, / Free from heart-withering custom's cold control, / Of passion lofty, pure and unsubdued," and prepares her to reclaim the human condition through virtuous revolutionary action, so the poem's entire message forms a groundwork for reclaiming the "pathless wilderness" of humankind (9.143-45, 200-02). In his text, Shelley employs privative adjectives to further polarize desolation and reclamation, oppression and liberation. In doing so, privatives expose tyrannical concepts and institutions as a form of desolation, while also formulating ideals of justice, liberty, and hope as ways to reclaim humanity from its wildered condition.

The view of words in *Queen Mab* as "tools" wielding political and religious power is similar to the conception of words and thoughts as weapons in the poet's later works *The Mask of Anarchy* and *Laon and Cythna* (*Mab* 4.221-23). The "influence" of "Kings, priests, and statesmen," the fairy asserts in *Queen Mab*, poisons society with "specious names" impressed upon children from an early age that later "[s]erve as the sophisms with which manhood dims / Bright reason's ray, and sanctifies the sword / Upraised to shed a brother's innocent blood" (4.104-16). These deceiving "names" of "ideological indoctrination" are similar to the oppressive "name of God and ghosts, and Heaven" in the "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty," and the different names for power that Cythna observes "are each a sign which maketh holy / All power" (Reiman and Fraistat, "Commentary" 553; Shelley, "Hymn," lines 25-28; *Laon*, lines 3280-84). Shelley also identifies which specific words "[s]upport the system whence their [religious 'hypocrites''] honours flow" (*Mab* 4.203-07). The poet sees the word *God* representing a "vengeful, pityless, and almighty fiend," the word *Hell* denoting a site of eternal torment of "those hapless slaves / Whose life has been a penance for its crimes," and the word *Heaven* standing for a reward for all those "who dare belie / Their human nature" and "quake, believe, and cringe / Before the mockeries of earthly power" (4.208-20). These three words, *God*, *Hell*, and *Heaven,* work as "tools" that the "tyrant tempers to his work / Wields in his wrath, and as he wills destroys, / Omnipotent in wickedness" (4.221-23). All the while, people "tamely" obey "His bidding, bribed by short-lived joys to lend / Force to the weakness of his trembling arm" (4.223-26). Oppressive conceptions of God, hell, and heaven in these passages dim "Bright reason's ray," they sanction violent use of political and religious power, and they also facilitate fearful slave-like obedience of the people who thus "lend / Force" to their otherwise weak and "trembling" ruler (4.115-16, 223-26).

Shelley also exposes the "wordy eloquence" of statesmen as distorting reality. Politicians' words "can gild / The bitter poison of a nation's woe" and "turn the worship of a servile mob / To their corrupt and glaring idol fame, / From virtue," even as this idol's "dazzling pedestal be raised / Amid the horrors of a limb-strewn field, / With desolated dwellings smoking round" (5.93-102). When describing the dissolution of all the world's evil, crime, and falsehood in the final canto, Shelley characterizes falsehood as that, which "[l]ong sanctified all deeds of vice and woe" (9.44-46). In this instance, falsehood's role to sanctify all forms of evil and tyranny harkens back to the poem's earlier indictment of “specious names,” those “sophisms” employed by tyrants to eclipse the lights of reason and “sanctify” their bloodshed (4.112-14, 9.38-46). This idea of words sanctifying and endorsing evil and corruption also echoes the account of political trickery that “can gild” even the “bitter poison of a nation’s war” to make it appear as fame, though dark and blood-stained (5.95-102).

In a sense, Shelley’s poem fights all forms of political and religious oppression with the enemy’s weapon—words, and more specifically, privative adjectives that further polarization between tyranny and oppression on one hand and a promise of liberty, justice, and complete renovation of nature and humanity on the other. When applied to tyranny and oppression, privatives underscore how these principles cause both internal and external desolation, an analogy, as I mentioned earlier, more explicitly unfolding in the last two cantos of the poem.

Judaism, the poem argues, is a religion of an “inhuman and uncultured race” who “[h]owled hideous praises to their Demon-God” and “rushed to war, tore from the mother’s womb / The unborn child” (2.149-52). In Canto VII, the phantom of Ahasuerus compares the Lord Jehovah to a “heartless conqueror of the earth” inflicting “ceaseless woe” and “endless” damnation upon those in hell (7.106-13, 121-22, 129-30). Those who “ne’er shall call upon their Saviour’s name” perish in hell “unredeemed” (7.143-45). The power of Christianity, Ahasuerus states, is driven by the “quenchless flames of zeal” of Christ’s teaching and “pityless zeal” of his followers, who violently “confirm “all unnatural impulses” as they spread their faith by violence throughout the “unhappy earth” (7.167-72, 211, 225-34). Ahasuerus’ oppressor, God, is said to exercise “unprevailing malice" and "bootless rage," punishing his enemies with "impotent eternities" of suffering, yet remaining "powerless" to subdue Ahasuerus' "stubborn and unalterable will" (7.247-53, 256-61).

In these passages, privatives like *inhuman*, *uncultured*, *heartless*, *ceaseless*, *endless*, *unredeemed*, *quenchless*, *pityless*, *unnatural*, *unhappy*, *unprevailing*, *bootless*, *impotent*, and *powerless* in relation to Judaism, the Judeo-Christian God, and institutionalized Christianity function similarly to their role in *Laon and Cythna* (2.149, 7.113, 121, 130, 145, 170, 211, 227, 230, 248-50, 257). From Shelley's perspective, such privatives expose these systems and institutions as divested of anything humane. Devoid of the "love and mercy" and "brotherhood and peace" these systems suggest or proclaim, they reveal but "narrowness and crime" with their "deeds" (7.239-43). To recall the poem's picture of the desolate man in Canto VIII, lines 145-56, institutionalized religions generally, and Judeo-Christianity in particular, reveal an internal desolation of tyranny as its essence. Privatives also point to a more external desolation as an outcome of religion: tearing from the "mother's womb / The unborn child," causing the "fatherless" to curse their misery, fostering "unnatural" corruption "Learnt in soft childhood's unsuspecting hour," sanctifying the sword to shed "innocent blood," subjecting "hapless slaves" to eternal torture, luring the "heedless victim" to its service, and beguiling the "insensate mob" to approve of religious violence (2.151-52, 3.26-29,4.109-16, 216-17, 232-35, 7.16, 239). The privatives *unborn*, *fatherless*, *unnatural*, *unsuspecting*, *innocent*, *hapless*, *heedless*, and *insensate* underscore a more external desolation brought about by internally desolate humans (2.152, 3.28, 4.109, 113, 116, 216, 235, 7.10, 239). Here again, the external desolation of religion parallels the desolate man image in Canto VIII, lines 145-56.

The poem also sees proponents of institutionalized Christianity, themselves "Without a hope, a passion, or a love," as supplying a religious conceptualization for various forms of tyranny (4.203-04). The three-word master dictionary of the tyrant—*God*, *Hell*, and *Heaven*—supplies him with the concept of a "pityless" Deity, "undying worms" for "hapless slaves" in hell, and a reward of heaven that fosters slavery (4.203-20). All "Kings, priests, and statesmen" use a form of this dictionary to foster the "unnatural pride of crime" even among the young in their "soft childhood's unsuspecting hour" (4.104-16). While they buy for the tyrant the fear and obedience of his people, concepts such as God, hell, and heaven also lend support to the system of tyranny characterized by the absence of love, hope, peace, joy, and pleasure. The king's palace is a place filled with "groans" and "curses of the fatherless," yet the king's heart remains "bloodless," his revelry stays "unjoyous," his appetite "unwilling," and his sleep "dreamless" (3.26-29, 35-40, 44-46, 49-51, 64-67). All "kings and parasites," the fairy asserts, are like an "unnatural line of drones, who heap / Toil and unvanquishable penury" upon those who work for their well-being (3.118-22).

In her apostrophe to the "priest, conqueror, or prince," to "[l]ook to thyself," the fairy poses several questions steeped in privative adjectives (4.237-40). "Are not thy days," she asks, addressing the person of great power, "[d]ays of unsatisfying listlessness?" (4.247-48). "Is not," she questions, "[t]hy manhood blighted with unripe desease?" (4.250-52). "Are not thy views of unregretted death / Drear, comfortless, and horrible?" the fairy demands, and "[t]hy mind, / Is it not morbid as thy nerveless frame, / Incapable of judgment, hope, or love?" (4.253-56). In this passage, the privatives *unsatisfying*, *unripe*, *unregretted*, *comfortless*, *nerveless*, and *incapable,* along with *unnatural*, *bloodless*, *unjoyous*, *unwilling*, *dreamless*, and *unvanquishable* in the earlier passages, heighten the sense of both internal and external desolation fostered by the principles underlying all forms of tyranny and oppression (3.37, 39, 46, 67, 120; 4.109, 248, 251, 253-56). In all these instances, the "priest, conqueror, or prince," himself internally void and hollow, leads a fruitless life compiling nothing but misery and destruction as the sole record of his existence (4.237-65). He is both the perpetrator and the victim of his own evil.

Similarly, selfishness, "at once / The cause and the effect of tyranny," along with "Commerce" that "has set the mark of selfishness, / The signet of its all-enslaving power," reveal internal desolation and emptiness as their essence and external desolation as their outcome (5.22, 31-32, 53-54). Their forces emerge in the poem as "unimpassioned, spiritless" and their manifestations "unattractive" (5.25-26, 29). The power of selfishness and commerce is "[u]nblushing, hardened, sensual, and vile; / Dead to all love but of its abjectness," and "impassive by more noble powers / Than unshared pleasure, sordid gain, or fame" (5.32-35). The slave trade shows the "wide-wasting and insatiate pride" of the tyrant as he counts "[h]is hosts of blind and unresisting dupes" (his subordinates) and reduces his slaves to a state "[h]ardened to hope, insensible to fear" (5.64-66, 69-75). Dragging to "earth his [man's] towering hopes, / Blighting all prospect but of selfish gain, / Withering all passion but of slavish fear" and "[e]xtinguishing all free and generous love / Of enterprize and daring," the corruption and degradation of wealth and commerce stand "[u]nqualified, unmingled, unredeemed" (5.83-87, 89-93). Similar to the privatives pervading the descriptions of Judeo-Christianity and monarchy, in these passages the privatives *unimpassioned*, *spiritless*, *unattractive*, *unblushing*, *unshared*, *insatiate*, *unresisting*, *insensible*, *unqualified*, *unmingled*, and *unredeemed,* in relation to selfishness, commerce, and their manifestations, emphasize their powers to make desolate both the internal and external aspects of human life (5.25, 29, 32, 35, 66, 69, 73, 92).

Queen Mab's privatives thus demonstrate an internal and external void, emptiness, and desolation inherent in the concepts and institutions of Judeo-Christianity, monarchy, and various forms of commerce. Privatives expose the essence of these religious, political, and commercial principles and their outcomes in the lives and deeds of their proponents to be a widespread desolation, both within and without. In addition to showing how words wield religious and political power and how forms of this power reveal and spread desolation, the poem also exposes the very words behind these forces to be similarly void and hollow (Shelley 4.104-16, 203-26, 5.93-102). The tyrant, the fairy argues, "has invented lying words and modes, / Empty and vain as his own coreless heart; / Evasive meanings, nothings of much sound" (4.232-34). Part of the poem's larger poetic vision then lies in combating the desolation engendered in and caused by words. It also becomes a warfare that words alone can wage. Shelley's privatives confront "lying words and modes" by exposing the corelessness not only of the heart that invented them but, even more importantly, of the inventions themselves—concepts and institutions of tyrannical religious, political, and commercial powers (4.232-33).

Yet the poem's vision lies not only in exposing the "pathless wilderness" to be reclaimed, but also, in supplying Ianthe and the reader with tools "to pursue / The gradual paths of an aspiring change" (9.144-48). The reclamation of the word-engendered wilderness and its complete transformation must also be accomplished with the help of privatives, words which, both in meaning and in form, demonstrate their refusal to surrender to the forces they oppose. The "virtuous man," for instance, "stands amid the silent dungeon-depths / More free and fearless than the trembling judge"; his fame is "unfading" and his memory is "deathless" (3.151-69). Only the virtuous "of resolute and unchanging will" can resist the appeal of "gold or fame" and lead a "life of resolute good, / Unalterable will, quenchless desire / Of universal happiness" even in the face of suffering and death (5.169-75, 225-27). When recalling her witnessing of the burning of an atheist, the Spirit of Ianthe remembers noticing his "dauntless mien" and his "unaltering eye" (7.5-6). Similarly, the phantom of Ahasuerus calls those defying Jehovah's will the "dauntless and the good," and his own "defiance" of the "almighty tyrant" as "unwearied," his will "unalterable" (7.89-96, 196-201, 258). Reason establishes the "imperishable throne / Of truth, and stubborn virtue," thus making "vain" all of God's "unprevailing malice" and "bootless rage" against those opposing him (7.245-53).

Privatives also mark the poem's images of man and nature free from tyranny and transformed. The "immeasurable" sands of the desert become sites with "countless rills and shady woods" (8.70-75). The image of a "dreadless kid" who now plays with a lion because its "claws are sheathed" and "teeth are harmless" echoes passages from Isaiah and Virgil's *Eclogues* (Shelley, *Mab* 8.124-28; Reiman and Fraistat, "Commentary" 586). Birds of heaven now become "dreadless partners of their [children's] play" (Shelley, *Mab* 8.224). "Fearless and free" children also play among the "massy prison's mouldering courts"—a faint vestige of the long-forgotten tyranny—and "mock the dungeon's unavailing gloom" with their colorful chaplets (9.114-18). The new, transformed humanity now "stands adorning / This loveliest earth with taintless body and mind" and its virtuous thoughts transcend the "unprevailing hoariness of age" (8.198-99, 208). Once "fleeting o'er the transient scene / Swift as an unremembered vision," man now "stands / Immortal upon earth" as his "[r]eason and passion" in harmony "unfettered o'er the earth extend / Their all-subduing energies, and wield / The sceptre of a vast dominion there" while "every shape and mode of matter lends / Its force to the omnipotence of mind" (8.209-11, 231-36).

Pairs of juxtaposed privatives like the "imperishable throne / Of truth" nullifying God's "unprevailing malice" and "bootless rage," "countless rills and shady woods" replacing "immeasurable" desert sands, "[f]earless" children mocking with their playthings the "dungeon's unavailing gloom," and humankind whose life was once like an "unremembered vision" now becoming "immortal" are particularly noteworthy (7.246-49, 8.70-75, 210-11; 9.115-18). In a more closely knit pattern they demonstrate how more generally the privatives counter the "lying words and modes" of ideas and institutions of tyranny (4.232-33). To use Shelley's concept from *On Life*, on one level, privatives engender a liberating "vacancy" (*On Life* 507). As they expose oppressive concepts and institutions as "[e]mpty and vain . . . Evasive meanings, nothings of much sound" and show their actual manifestations as spreading desolation, privatives, in a sense, undo or desolate these concepts and their powers and free the mind (create a "vacancy") from their constraints (Shelley, *Mab* 4.229-36; *On Life* 507). On another level, privatives like *fearless*, *unfading*, *deathless*, *unchanging*, *unalterable*, *quenchless*, *dauntless*, *unaltering*, *imperishable*, *unfettered*, and *immortal*, to name several, also create a "vacancy" as they claim that liberty and hope are no more in danger of ever becoming "nothings of much sound" than they are subject to tyranny, change, decay, and death (Shelley, *Mab* 3.155, 163, 165, 4.229-36, 5.171, 226, 7.5-6, 246, 8.211, 233; *On Life* 507). Privatives thus function not only as positive tools to render desolate oppressive concepts and ideas, but also as instruments of reclamation in showing that principles of liberty, hope, and justice are devoid of fear and alteration, and are not subject to the desolating powers of tyranny.

In exposing oppressive religious, political, and commercial concepts and institutions as empty and void, and thus leaving them desolate, and in presenting the principles of liberty as immune to negation by tyranny, the poem's privatives foster an assurance of both the ultimate triumph of good and its irreversible progress. It is with this assurance the fairy urges the Spirit of Ianthe to "pursue / The gradual paths of an aspiring change" and with a "resolute mind" to follow her destiny and an "eternal war to wage / With tyranny and falshood, and uproot / The germs of misery from the human heart" (Shelley, *Mab* 9.146-48, 189-200). The poem's privatives thus function as tools to reclaim a “pathless wilderness”—the world desolated by oppressive principles and institutions and at the same time awaiting its renewal (9.144-45). *Wilderness* here, as later in *Prometheus Unbound*, may also be a positive phenomenon suggesting the mind’s “vacancy,” a promise of “infinite potentiality” and a “free range of possibility which is available to the human mind when it has liberated itself from the shadow of darker forces” (Shelley, *Mab* 9.144; *On Life* 507; Webb, “Negatives” 50). Yet, before this untapped wealth of possibilities becomes available to humankind, privative adjectives must uproot oppressive concepts and institutions and build an assurance of the unconquerable triumph of good with a sense of “vacancy” that desolates evil on one hand and presents good as immune to its assaults on the other (Shelley, *On Life* 507).

However, unlike in Shelley’s later poem *Laon and Cythna*, written “for the same object as ‘Queen Mab,’” privative adjectives in *Queen Mab* and words and thoughts generally have a more circumscribed role (Shelley, *Letters* 1:557, 557n8). In *Queen Mab*, the responsibility of individuals to wage an everlasting war “[w]ith tyranny and falshood, and uproot / The germs of misery from the human heart” plays an important, but not a decisive role (Shelley, *Mab* 9.189-92). The man of virtue “leads / Invincibly a life of resolute good,” Ahasuerus continues to mock his “powerless tyrant’s horrible curse / With stubborn and unalterable will,” and, as a part of the poem’s larger impetus, the fairy Mab urges the Spirit of Ianthe to “fearlessly bear on” upon the path of liberating change (3.151-54; 7.254-58; 9.146-48, 164). At the same time, however, the poem holds up Necessity, a concept Shelley adapted from Baron Holbach’s *Système de la Nature*, William Godwin’s *Political Justice*, and David Hume’s *An Inquiry Concerning Human*

Understanding (Baker 33; Reiman and Fraistat, “Commentary” 502-03, 568). Necessity —an impersonal and amoral force that directs all the workings of nature and humanity and “[r]egardst them all with an impartial eye”—stands in the poem as an ultimate agent behind the future liberating transformation of earth and humankind (Shelley, *Mab* 6.197-238). In contrast, in *Laon and Cythna*, the power to disseminate “[t]ruth’s deathless germs to thought’s remotest caves” through words as a revolutionary weapon and thus “frame” people’s “thoughts anew” primarily resides within individuals like Laon and Cythna (Shelley, *Laon*, lines 3132-35, 3669-70). Although Shelley mentions Necessity in *Laon and Cythna* in the Ninth Canto, stanzas XIV and XXVII, he does so briefly (Neth 835-36, 845-46). Shelley’s Necessity in this poem serves more as a “reminder that actions are not to be divorced from their consequences,” while the poem reflects his conviction rather of the “necessity of leadership by the wise and the just” (Dawson 97-98; Baker 39).

Contrarily, *Queen Mab*’s “HAPPY Earth! reality of Heaven!” is a “glorious prize of blindly-working will,” and while individuals like Ianthe and Ahasuerus may reflect this will and somehow participate in it, their active role appears diminished (Shelley, *Mab* 9.1-5). As Carlos Baker remarks, the early Shelley believed that “good will naturally ensue upon the elimination of outworn political and religious establishments” (36). Along with human agency, the role of words and thoughts as furthering revolutionary change is also circumscribed. The poem’s elaborate explanation of the Spirit of Necessity does not deny human responsibility. Yet the poem also asserts, as an example, that whether they have been led by “merciless ambition, or mad zeal,” neither the actions of the “two hosts of dupes" killing one another upon the "battle-field," nor their words when they "call the sad work glory" matter as much as the power of Necessity ruling and directing "[a]ll passions," all thoughts, wills, and actions (Shelley, *Mab* 6.177-90).

Although in this framework words carry out Necessity's bidding and have their active powers tempered, Shelley's privatives, nevertheless, serve to destroy or desolate "error, and the roots of error" and create a mental "vacancy" by exposing the emptiness of tyrannical concepts and institutions (Shelley, *On Life* 507). Privatives also work as instruments of reclamation when they foster a mental "vacancy" by formulating liberty, justice, and hope as immune to corruption and decay (507). Thus cleansed and renewed, the mind enjoys the "freedom in which it would have acted, but for the misuse of words and signs,"—the tyranny of "lying words and modes, / Empty and vain . . . / Evasive meanings, nothings of much sound" (Shelley, *On Life* 507; *Mab* 4.229-36). This mental freedom, in turn, sets the individual on the path of embracing the "omnipotence of [the human] mind, / Which from its dark mine drags the gem of truth / To decorate its paradise of peace"—the poet's vision of the "golden age" (Shelley, *Mab* 8.235-38; *Letters* 1:152; Reiman and Fraistat, "Commentary" 586). Finally, privatives also fulfill Shelley's more fundamental revolutionary vision as a poet. Although with diminished enthusiasm about the poem's poetic quality, four years after the printing of *Queen Mab* Shelley restated his ambition behind the poem and his entire life in his letter to Mr. Waller: "the doctrines of equality & liberty & disinterestedness, & entire unbelief in religion of any sort, to which this Poem is devoted, have gained rather than lost that beauty & that grandeur which first determined him [the author] to devote his life to the investigation & inculcation of them—" (*Letters* 1:566-67).

Laon and Cythna: A "War of Earthly Minds"

In the latter part of the poem, when Cythna relates to Laon her learning during her captivity in a sea cave, she recalls that, while her "hope" appeared "departed," she grew "fearless-hearted," kindling anew her temporarily darkened thoughts of liberty and justice (3091-99). In her meditations, Cythna gains an apprehension of a universal mind, the "type of all" and a fountain of "all human wisdom" (3100-08). As a result, the "cave" of her own mind becomes like this universal mind, the "moveless wave / Whose calm reflects all moving things that are" (3100-08). Just as Laon earlier mined wisdom from "deathless minds" of old, Cythna now also "rifled through and through" her mind, turned universal, that became open to her "like a mine" (Shelley, *Laon*, lines 838-42, 3102; Hogle 272-73; Neth 810). Noting Shelley's improvisation on previous conceptions of the mind's cave in Plato and Lord Bacon, Michael J. Neth observes that "[t]he cave of Cythna's mind paradoxically becomes the source of her revolutionary effectiveness" (809). One of her insights into "all moving things that are" is a recognition of all human affairs as a "war of earthly minds"—a vision which supplied her with the power to "frame their thoughts anew" (Shelley, *Laon*, lines 3103-05, 3127-35). Shelley (to the extent that he voices his convictions and passion for liberty through Cythna's persona) relocates the universal struggle between oppressors and oppressed to the plane of idealism—a conflict of ideas—and reveals the poem's underlying philosophy. Thus, weapons on both sides of the conflict between liberty and tyranny, justice and oppression, hope and despair should be sought among the words and thoughts that underlie all the political, religious, and social structures arising from the two opposing systems, traditional Christian monarchism on the one side and democratic egalitarianism on the other.

Laon's "communion" with liberty-loving "deathless minds" full of eternal truths proved an important stage in the formation of his revolutionary mind (838-39). "As from a mine of magic store," he recollects, "I drew / Words which were weapons; —round my heart there grew / The adamantine armour of their power" (841-43). Laon also explains earlier that words of truth, hope, and freedom are but hopeful and liberating thoughts "invested with the light of language" (802-08). The idea of words and thoughts as weapons to penetrate hearts or to shield them as armor from oppressive and false beliefs and desires (Shelley uses a similar concept in *The Mask of Anarchy*) may be seen as one of *Laon and Cythna's* central themes. In the Dedication, the poetic persona describes how liberating knowledge "[w]rought linked armour for my soul, before / It might walk forth to war among mankind" (Shelley, *Laon*, lines 37-42; Clark 42).To echo Shelley's idea, the poet often "invests" this idea of words and thoughts as weapons or armor with privative language (*Laon*, lines 802-08). Often clothed in privative adjectives, weapon-like words and thoughts both reflect and realize the poem's larger self-conception as precisely such a weapon against the tyranny and injustice of Shelley's day (802-08).

Thus, as Laon describes the shaping of his vision for fighting the world's tyranny and injustice with "Hope," "Justice," and "Truth," he recalls that he fully formed his convictions as his “soul communion knew” with the “deathless minds” of preceding ages (Shelley, *Laon*, lines 777-78, 838-42). The privative adjective *deathless* here suggests that the love of liberty and truth makes a human mind immortal; in a similar way Cythna’s mind would also be transformed by the same passion to make her appear “[l]ike a bright shade of some *immortal* dream / Which walks, when tempest sleeps, the wave of life’s dark stream” (838-39, 870-73, emphasis added). Implanted in Cythna’s mind, hope and freedom enable her to clothe the dark and dreary world with the “*undissolving* radiancy” of these principles (874-79, emphasis added). Echoing *deathless* and *immortal,* the privative adjective *undissolving* furthers the idea of truth and liberty’s eternal and immutable power to challenge and defeat the ideas underlying forces of tyranny (838-39, 870-79).

Similarly, Cythna’s vision for liberating women from inequality and servitude, whether in “Pride’s golden palaces” or “Penury’s roofless huts,” consists of using words and thoughts of justice and hope she formed in her communion with Laon as a weapon against tyranny (1036-37). She argues that, “with the music of thine own sweet spells”—the word *spells* is reminiscent of the liberating spells in “Hymn to Intellectual Beauty”—“[w]ill [I] disinchant the captives” (1040-41). I “will pour,” she adds, “[f]or the despairing, from the crystal wells / Of thy deep spirit, reason’s mighty lore,” and “power shall then abound, and hope arise once more” (1041-44). Echoing Laon’s idea of words of truth as the “adamantine armour,” Cythna sees the light of liberty as an “invulnerable charm” protecting her from assaults of evil and working all “dark falsehood to disarm” (841-43, 1055-62). By striving to become more and more like Laon in his devotion to freedom, she internalizes the power of his liberating words and thoughts ("such lore"), which transform her from a "young child" to an "undaunted," fearless revolutionary (1018-26).

Protected by an "invulnerable charm" of truth and "undaunted" because of her devotion to a mightier power of liberty, Cythna envisions her revolutionary work as an unquenchable fire raging through the forests of a "pathless mountain" (1018-26, 1055-62, 1072-75). As this fire consumes "all the kinds / Of evil," Cythna now casts off the "impotence" of her childhood and "thro' the paths of men / Will pass, as the charmed bird that haunts the serpent's den" (1072-80). Shelley's careful coupling of the privative *pathless* with passing "thro' the *paths* of men" in describing the enflaming power of Cythna's revolutionary mind points to both illimitable potential for complete transformation and impossibility of resisting its progress even in a "pathless" world of darkness and evil (1072-80, emphasis added). *Pathless* here also echoes earlier description of Cythna's restoring, life-giving power as she passes through dreary life as "thro' the waste air's pathless blue, / To nourish some far desart" (865-70). In this instance, *pathless* emphasizes transformative potentiality and a positive, cultivating progress of revolutionary thought as if to balance out its later description as a devastating fire (865-70, 1072-80). Cythna's determination to "pass, as the charmed bird that haunts the serpent's den," with its word *charmed,* harkens back to the idea of words and thoughts of liberty as an "invulnerable charm," the "adamantine armour"—a weapon forged in "communion" with "deathless minds" of old (838-45, 1060-62, 1080).

In another instance, captive Laon in a moment of despair tries to break the "adamantine links" of his chains so that he might die, but his invocation of Liberty, along with the "starry night, with its clear silence, sent / Tameless resolve which laughed at misery / Into my [Laon's] soul" (1270-78). Here, Laon's contemplation of the words of liberty and justice, his "adamantine armour," like a weapon participates in a mental, if not actual, triumph over the "adamantine links" of his captivity (841-43, 1270-78). By describing Laon's renewed "resolve" as "[t]ameless," the text points back to Laon's earlier thoughts of freedom and hope, a "tameless multitude," thus formulating the "mighty lore" of liberty and hope as an undefeatable and overwhelming weapon to counter both the present overwhelming suffering of Laon's captivity and the overwhelming human suffering of others he witnessed in his earlier experience (739-47, 1040-43, 1270-78).

"Great is the strength / Of words," the Hermit tells Laon when relating to him the effects of Cythna's revolutionary work through words and thoughts of liberty and hope (1569-70). The poet has so far described the strength of words and thoughts of liberty and their manifestations as *deathless*, *immortal*, *undissolving*, *invulnerable*, *undaunted*, *tameless*, and passing even through a *pathless* wilderness of the world of tyranny and oppression (747, 838, 869, 872, 876, 1019, 1061, 1072, 1277). Characterized by these privatives, Cythna's "strength / Of words" enacts the replacement of the old thought-order with a new one: "Kind thoughts, and mighty hopes, and gentle deeds / Abound" because "fearless love, and the pure law / Of mild equality and peace" gradually replace "faiths which long have held the world in awe, / Bloody and false, and cold" (1540-44, 1569-70). The privative *fearless*, echoing such earlier descriptions of liberty's creed and its effects as *undissolving*, *invulnerable*, and *undaunted*, presents liberating words as an unconquerable weapon against the assaults of tyranny (876, 1019, 1061, 1541). Hence, according to the Hermit's story, Cythna accomplishes her revolutionary work in the Golden City "unassailed," being "veiled / In virtue's adamantine eloquence, / 'Gainst scorn, and death, and pain thus trebly mailed" (1576-84). *Unassailed* further reinforces the view of liberating words as protective weapons of "adamantine eloquence" that make their bearer "invulnerable," a concept which, in its turn, looks back to the "adamantine armour" of the words of justice and truth (841-43, 1060-62, 1576-84).

The poem's rival concepts and practices that oppose the "adamantine armour "of a liberating mindset similarly appear alongside privative adjectives. These are the "vital words and deeds" that form "[t]raditions dark and old, whence evil creeds / Start forth, and whose dim shade a stream of poison feeds" (680-84). Adopting these oppressive principles and creeds, Laon's countrymen are "blind" in their "helpless misery" (712-16). Their helplessness is self-imposed as they permit "Guilt" and "Woe" to build a "dark dwelling for their homeless thought" and form a basis for their dark religion (721-29). The mental bondage of all, "[t]yrant and slave, victim and torturer," consists in their bending "[b]efore one Power, to which supreme controul / Over their will by their own weakness lent, / Made all its many names omnipotent" (730-34). This religion's "ungentle" creed breeds "hopeless unconcern" for "this fair world"; worship to "[a]ll symbols of things evil, all divine" brings "Imposture's impious toils" to "each discordant shrine" that long betrays the people's "impious trust" (728-29, 735-38, 760, 779-83). The

Tenth Canto, with its accounts of the tyrant Othman's vengeful bloodbath destroying all those suspect of loving liberty and the ensuing desolation of famine and plague in the city is a dark story describing "heartless" and "impure" slaves, family members "voiceless" with fear, "lest some tongue / Be faithless to the fear yet unbetrayed" (3829-31, 3847-46, 3894-98). It is an account of the "helpless agony," "unnatural pity," and "helpless groan" of suffering, and a "starless and a moonless gloom" (3921-27, 4087-89, 4171-72).

Earlier in the poem, when admonishing the mariners to cast off the chains of oppression, Cythna calls the tyrannical Power God and lists his basic attributes, which align him with how Shelley saw the God of Christianity as depicted in the institutional denominations of his day. Denounced by Shelley through Cythna, this vengeful God is said to possess "immortal power," "punish wrong" with his "immortal wrath" of "red hell's undying snakes," and sanction scourging oppression and slavery under the authority of "Priests and Kings" (3233-34, 3251-67). In passages like these Shelley, as Wasserman asserts, "most explicitly defined theology as a fiction invented to authorize man's tyranny over man and to sanction punishment of those who violate its own decrees" (Wasserman 90; Neth 816). The poem's figure of the Christian Priest calling for the imminent execution of Laon and Cythna as a way to appease God's wrath in stanzas XXXI-XXXIX of the Tenth Canto and stanzas X-XII of the Eleventh Canto serves as a human embodiment of these principles. Political, religious, and social structures arising from such a religion may be summed up by the dictum "The will of strength is right" (Shelley, *Laon*, lines 3269-70).

In her denunciatory address to the mariners, Cythna also emphasizes the role of words in naming various forms of power as a way to acquire power. Much like "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty's" indictment of corrupt powers behind the "name of God and ghosts, and Heaven," the different names for power "are each a sign which maketh holy / All power" (Shelley, "Hymn," lines 25-28; *Laon*, lines 3280-84). Shelley's use of biblical language in *maketh holy* underscores how "anthropomorphic theology" underlies and makes sacred oppressive uses of power (Shelley, Laon, lines 3280-81; Wasserman 91-92). All such power, whether real or imagined, "the ghost, the dream, the shade / Of power," is a reflection of "lust, falsehood, hate, and pride, and folly" and a site "whence all fraud and wrong is made" (Shelley, *Laon*, lines 3281-83). Sanctified by religion, these dark forms of power under many names become a "law to which mankind has been betrayed" (3283-84). Naming as a form of consolidating power once again reminds us that Cythna's (and implicitly Shelley's) revolutionary task belongs to the realm of words and thoughts and, as Cythna learned in her captivity, human minds as battlefields (3127-35).

Shelley's privatives *helpless*, *homeless*, *ungentle*, *hopeless*, *impious*, *discordant*, *heartless*, *impure*, *voiceless*, *faithless*, *unnatural*, *starless*, *moonless*, and *immortal* in descriptions of oppressive religious and political forces and their effects expose the pervasive degradation and bankruptcy of ideas and the institutions and practices these ideas help forge (715, 722, 729, 738, 760, 783, 3233, 3252, 3830, 3845, 3896, 3898, 3927, 3935, 4171). On one level, such privatives work to expose these ideas and institutions characterized by "Scorn, and Hate, / Revenge and Selfishness" as "desolate" and divesting life of humanity's most cherished values, "Pity and Peace and Love," and "divine Equality" (2208-12). On another level, these privatives reveal the hollowness and insubstantiality of tyrannical ideas and institutions because they are made real and "omnipotent" only to the extent that the human mind creates and submits to them (721-38). Although related to another passage of the poem, Kelvin Everest's observation equally applies here: the "basis of tyranny" lies "in own our conscious or unconscious assent to it" and "revolutionary change" implies a "change in the structure of consciousness" (72-73). That is why, when calling on the mariners to shake off their chains of political and religious tyranny, Cythna proclaims that "[d]ungeons and palaces" are "transitory" and fading "like vapour" when "Man" awakens to the power his will possesses (Shelley, *Laon*, lines 3334-42).

Shelley's privatives thus expose tyranny's dehumanizing nature and effects. Privative adjectives also reveal this tyranny at its very basic level to originate and exist in the mind through the power of words and thoughts. As a poet and an author of "revolutions of opinion," Shelley uses privatives to create a liberating "vacancy" by revealing how the tyrannical ideas and institutions that appear most stable are devoid of anything humanly valuable, and how these principles exist as long as humans choose to live in mental bondage (Shelley, *Defence* 515; *On Life* 507). Just like his primary characters Laon and Cythna, the poet sees his primary warfare to be with oppressive ideas and thoughts and uses privative adjectives to undermine them—to deface a hypocritical appearance of religious and political forces and destabilize their very existence by exposing them as nothing but various forms of a self-imposed mental captivity.[1]

In relation to words and thoughts of hope, privatives such as *deathless*, *immortal*, *undissolving*, *invulnerable*, *undaunted*, *tameless*, *fearless*, and *unassailed* also facilitate a liberating "vacancy" (Shelley, *Laon*, lines 747, 838, 872, 876, 1019, 1061, 1276, 1540, 1579; *On Life* 507). By negating death, dissolution, defeat, vulnerability, and fear with the use of privatives, Shelley consolidates the power of words and thoughts of liberty, hope, and justice; in a similar way, the naming of various forms of tyranny consolidates its oppressive force (Shelley, *Laon*, lines 3280-84). In this instance, however, Shelley's poetic vacancy voids weakness, death, and defeat, and thus realizes Shelley's purpose for writing *Laon and Cythna*. In the Preface to the poem, the poet states that he strove to kindle "within the bosoms of my readers, a virtuous enthusiasm for those doctrines of liberty and justice, . . . which neither violence, nor misrepresentation, nor prejudice, can ever totally extinguish among mankind" (Shelley, *Laon,* Preface, lines 6-13). By facilitating a kind of immunity of the "doctrines of liberty and justice" against all forms of destruction, Shelley's use of privatives enable him to speak particularly effectively both to his own and the previous generation (10-11). With the defeat of their hopes for a triumph of liberty and justice associated with the French Revolution, many of the "most ardent and tender-hearted of the worshippers of public good" continued to live through an "age of despair" (64-66, 93-96). With the privatives *deathless*, *immortal*, *undissolving*, *invulnerable*, *undaunted*, *tameless*, *fearless*, and *unassailed* characterizing the principles and effects of truth, liberty, and justice, Shelley achieves one of his main goals for writing the poem—to dispel the "gloom and misanthropy" that "have become the characteristics of the age in which we live" (Shelley, *Laon*, lines 747, 838, 872, 876, 1019, 1061, 1276, 1540, 1579; Preface 96-99; Dawson 73-74).

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[1] The bondage of human consciousness appears to be a widely used Romantic trope that reflects a larger Romantic interest in ways to increase the potentiality of the human mind and point out hindrances to the unfolding of potential within human consciousness. William Blake, for instance, writes of hearing the "mind-forg'd manacles" in every scene of human misery and woe the persona observes on the streets of London ("London," lines 7-8). In Lord Byron's *Manfred*, the incantation closing the first scene in Act I poignantly describes the protagonist's psychological imprisonment within his sense of guilt: the "clankless chain hath bound thee" (1.1.259). Visiting humans in their sleep, the Witch of Atlas sees "all the code of custom's lawless law / Written upon the brows of old and young" (Shelley, "Witch," lines 541-42).

The poet's use of privatives in the poem also contributes to realizing Shelley's larger vision for his role as a revolutionary and a poet and his words as weapons against tyranny and injustice. Just as the liberating words of Laon and Cythna, despite their deaths, will live on "[w]ithin the minds of men," so the poet hopes his words will live on also (Shelley, *Laon*, lines 1095-98). In an extended metaphor echoing the concluding lines of "Ode to the West Wind," Laon and Cythna see their words and thoughts of truth and justice as "winged seeds," driven by autumnal winds and asleep and stifled only until spring comes and "[e]arth like an eagle springs" (Shelley, *Laon*, lines 3649-3702; Neth 842). By working to demolish and negate the mentality of tyranny and oppression and consolidate the power of a revolutionary mindset, Shelley's privatives, like these "winged seeds" of liberty and hope, drive "Truth's deathless germs to thought's remotest caves" as a revolutionary weapon in a "war of earthly minds" and a power to "frame their thoughts anew" (Shelley, *Laon*, lines 3132-35, 3649-50, 3669-70).

The Mask of Anarchy: Words' Revolutionary Replacement

Shelley's 1819 poem *The Mask of Anarchy* insists that the words of people proclaiming themselves free must become a weapon (Shelley, *Mask*, lines 298-300). "Strong and simple," these words of freedom ought to be "[k]een to wound as sharpened swords"—weapons of offense—and "wide as targes" ("Large lightweight shields or bucklers")—weapons of defense (Shelley, *Mask*, lines 299-302; Reiman and Fraistat, *Mask* 324n7). These are the same words that will gain power to become "[l]ike oppression's thundered doom / Ringing through each heart and brain, / Heard again—again—again— " (Shelley, *Mask*, lines 364-67). The two stanzas beginning "Rise like lions after slumber"—marking the opening of the Earth's speech and concluding the poem—appear to be the most immediate context for this repetitive thundering of words (151-55, 367-72). At the same time, this idea of words as a weapon of liberty underscores the poem's commentary upon its own power to become this weapon and a realization of this power. This theme of words working as a weapon of liberty and the poem's self-reflexive urging to be seen as such provide a context for the mission of privative adjectives in Shelley's text.

Liberty-proclaiming words will thunder and ring over and over again, and the privative *unvanquishable*, with its variation *unvanquished*, both related to the people of England and their struggle for freedom, appear in the poem three times and thus quite literally thunder and ring through the text "again—again—again" (152, 322, 364-67, 369). *Unvanquishable*, both in the stanzas opening and closing the Earth's speech, refers to the vast number of the oppressed people of England, and Shelley seems to use the word *number* here in the sense of a "large or considerable, collection or aggregate of persons or things, not precisely reckoned or counted" (Shelley, *Mask*, lines 152, 369; "number, n." Def. 10a, *OED*). "How precisely do the downtrodden and oppressed people become an 'unvanquishable number,'" the reader might ask, "an unconquerable force so vast that it becomes incalculable?"[2]

To begin answering this question, it is first important to examine how privatives like *unvanquishable* participate in vanquishing certain realities and attitudes. The poem's catalogue of indictments against slavery-like oppression identifies several areas of mental slavery: "'Tis to be a slave in soul"; it is to complain about tyranny "With a murmur weak and vain," only to be trampled; it is to "feel revenge" against the oppressors; it is to exist as if already in the grave (Shelley, *Mask*, lines 184-96, 209-12). The people's self-addressed declaration that they are free as "God has made" them seems to depend upon words like *unvanquishable* for undoing these forms of internal oppression (295-98). To echo the words of Shelley's *On Life*, privatives uproot errors of the mind's internalized slavery—the "very name [of slavery that] has grown / To an echo" of peoples' own thoughts and voices—and replace forms of mental oppression with mental states characterizing freedom (*On Life* 507; *Mask*, lines 156-59). Freedom, apart from improvement of life's physical and material conditions, is similar to certain aspects of slavery in that it initially operates on the level of the human mind. Freedom is uncompromised "Justice"; it is "Wisdom," which rejects religious superstition, and "Peace" that refuses to use violence against the tyrants (230-41). Freedom is also "Love," which follows in the footsteps of Christ; it is also "Spirit, Patience, Gentleness," while "Science, Poetry and Thought" serve as lamps shedding freedom's light upon dwellers of a humble cottage (246-49, 254-61).

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[2] Shelley's use of *number* here is similar to his use of *millions* in *Laon and Cythna*. Referring to the *Shelley Concordance*, Neth points out that by *millions* the poet often means "vast numbers of persons, myriads" ("Commentary" 739). In *Laon and Cythna*, however, *millions* functions as the "epic hyperbole" (833).

Alongside the terms "Justice," "Wisdom," "Peace," "Love," "Spirit," "Patience," and "Gentleness," the poem's privatives participate in a process of mental liberation—a revolutionary replacement of several tyrannies of the mind with joys of freedom to awaken the "unvanquishable" force slumbering within the people (151-55, 230, 234, 238, 246, 258, 368-72). Thus, in describing the people's "great Assembly" that consists "Of the fearless and the free," the privative *fearless* undermines and replaces the people's being "a slave in soul" (184-87, 261-65). People need to remain "calm and resolute" in the face of armed attacks of the oppressors and stand firm with "folded arms and looks which are / Weapons of unvanquished war" (319-22). The privative *unvanquished* here undermines and replaces a "weak and vain" enslaved murmuring in response to tyranny (188-92, 302). In the same passage, as Shelley's poetic voice urges people to let "Panic" and fear pass like a "disregarded shade / Through your phalanx undismayed," the privatives *disregarded* and *undismayed* similarly negate the mind's former slavery to fear before the oppressor and forge a peaceful, but also militantly courageous mentality, additionally emphasized by the word *phalanx* (Shelley, *Mask*, lines 323-26; Baker 163-64).

Thus, in order for the downtrodden working people of England to realize that they are an “unvanquishable” and countless force, fear must be supplanted by fearlessness, and any timidity and reservation in the struggle for freedom must be replaced with a peaceful determination that remains undismayed in the face of danger and disregards even deadly risks (151-55, 188-92, 319-26, 368-72). To return again to Shelley’s statement in *On Life*, in uprooting error, philosophy (and poetry, as Shelley argues in *A Defence of Poetry*) leaves the mind in a state of freeing “vacancy” (Shelley, *On Life* 507; *Defence* 514-15). The poet’s use of privatives throughout the poem realizes this process of creating an internal vacancy for the exercise of freedom. In his text, Shelley infuses this vacancy with ideas of “Justice,” “Wisdom,” “Peace,” “Love,” “Spirit,” “Patience,” and “Gentleness” and pursuits of “Science, Poetry and Thought” that present limitless possibilities for the liberated human imagination and, hence, constitute a yet “unwritten story” (Shelley, *Mask*, lines 148, 230, 234, 238, 246, 254, 258). Unlike the fear, hatred, and superstition of slavery, these specific manifestations of freedom are not circumscribing, but vastly rich with imaginative possibilities to realize.

To attain such a freedom, new words and new thoughts—the twice repeated *unvanquishable*, *unvanquished*, *fearless*, *disregarded*, and *undismayed*—must undermine and replace the old forms of mental slavery with the attitudes and forms of freedom (152, 263, 322, 325-26, 369). This replacement both mutes the internalized pervasiveness of what oppression has become—an echo of people’s own voices and thoughts—and seeks to instill new forms and expressions of freedom just as deeply pervasive. In the process of enacting such a revolutionary replacement, the poem realizes its view of words as an unconquerable weapon of revolutionary change. Over and over the poem draws our attention to the concepts of speech and words: words as “swords,” words as “accent unwithstood,” and words becoming “oppression’s thundered doom” that must reverberate in “each heart and brain / Heard again—again—again— ” (138, 145, 260, 297, 299-300, 364-67). Susan J. Wolfson observes that “*words* are not just likened to and rhymed with *swords*, but are literally infused into them: *swords*” (200). Shelley carefully realizes a similar principle in his use of privatives. Heard throughout the poem and twice strategically placed within the poem’s identical rallying cries to arouse a fight for liberty (“Rise like Lions after slumber / In unvanquishable number”), Shelley’s privatives work to unsay slavery’s “woes untold” and replace them with a yet “unwritten story”—a life conceived by the mind set free (*Mask,* lines 148, 151-55, 291, 368-72).

Conclusion

In *Queen Mab*, the fairy exhorts Ianthe “firmly to pursue / The gradual paths of an aspiring change” even as her way lies through a “pathless wilderness” that “remains / Yet unsubdued by man’s reclaiming hand” (Shelley, *Mab* 9.143-48). In *Laon and Cythna*, Cythna similarly sees her revolutionary life like a passage of fire raging through the forests of a “pathless mountain” (Shelley, *Laon*, lines 1072-75). “All the kinds / Of evil, catch from our uniting minds,” she says to Laon, “The spark that must consume them” (1072-77). This passage echoes the earlier description of Cythna’s reclaiming and restoring power as she passes through life as “thro’ the waste air’s pathless blue, / To nourish some far desart” (865-70). The image in these passages is that of a revolutionary pioneer, making a path for others to follow through the otherwise impassable wilderness of human life.

This role of a revolutionary pioneer is also how Shelley views the vocation of a philosopher and poet in *On Life*. “Philosophy,” he argues, “has much work yet remaining as pioneer for the overgrowth of ages” (Shelley, *On Life* 507). “It makes one step towards this object however,” the poet goes on, “it destroys error, and the roots of error. It leaves, what is too often the duty of the reformer in political and ethical questions to leave, a vacancy” (507). As I have attempted to show, in *Queen Mab*, *Laon and Cythna*, and *The Mask of Anarchy*, Shelley’s privatives perform precisely this pioneering role. They clear out the “overgrowth of ages” and work to uproot tyrannical concepts, institutions, and practices by revealing a kind of wasteland, an internal and external desolation that underlies the essence and manifestations of these ideas and institutions (507). In this sense, the oppressive “overgrowth of ages” may be seen as a wilderness, the domain of tyranny, its only record and monument (507).

Yet, while privatives in these poems reveal a human wilderness created by tyranny, they also facilitate a different kind of wilderness, necessarily preceding genuine change. Realizing Shelley’s conception of pioneer philosophy and poetry, they engender a mental clearing, a “vacancy” after customary ways of thinking and living have been uprooted (507). To repeat Webb’s words, such a wilderness is “that free range of possibility which is available to the human mind when it has liberated itself from the shadow of the darker forces” (“Negatives” 50). In *Laon and Cythna*, *Queen Mab*, and *The Mask of Anarchy*, privative adjectives secure this internal site of revolutionary potentiality when they also formulate concepts of liberty, truth, justice, and hope. Presenting the principles of liberty and truth as *deathless*, *immortal*, *undissolving*, *invulnerable*, *undaunted*, *tameless*, *fearless*, and *unassailed* not only upholds the uprooting of tyrannical forces—an earlier step of revolutionary poetics—but also safeguards the replanting and persistence of these ideals in the mind (Shelley, *Laon*, lines 747, 838, 872, 876, 1019, 1061, 1276, 1541, 1579). Immortalizing the ideals of liberty and justice—“all that is best and beautiful in the world”—Shelley’s poetry “redeems from decay” these glorious “visitations of the divinity in man” (Shelley, *Defence*, 532).

CHAPTER IV

Introduction

My approach in this chapter is simple and straightforward. After gathering a sample of poetic evidence of Shelley's use of privatives in "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty," "Mont Blanc," *Queen Mab*, *Laon and Cythna*, and *The Mask of Anarchy* in my previous chapters, I posit a question in this one about the poet's theory behind his employment of privative epithets. My question is: "How does Shelley's theory of poetry and language inform, support, and expand our understanding of his privatives as a tool to effect a revolutionary change—a view emerging from the reading of these poetic works?" In my efforts to situate the poet's use of privatives within his larger conceptions of poetry and language, I have found my arguments at times reflecting the existing critical perspectives and, in certain instances, opposing them.

I begin by examining the concept of the pioneering work of privatives to engender a liberating "vacancy" within (Shelley, *On Life* 507). In the next section, I address and in part respond to a poststructuralist perspective on a passage in Shelley's *On Life* that is central to my entire argument. Next, I explore how privatives work from within the medium of language to redeem it from its inherent limitations. Finally, my analysis of how the poet's privatives engender definable referentiality and meaning without succumbing either to the rigidity of interpretive dogmatism or a refusal to communicate any determinate and substantive meanings altogether concludes both my chapter and my response to the poststructuralist approach I addressed earlier.

The Pioneering Work of Privatives to Facilitate a "Vacancy"

"Philosophy," and, it must be added, poetry (for Shelley memorably eliminates the distinction between poetry and philosophy in *A Defence of Poetry*), "has much work yet remaining as pioneer for the overgrowth of ages" (Shelley, *On Life* 507; *Defence* 514-15). Reiman and Fraistat's explanatory note for Shelley's word *pioneer* echoes an entry for the term in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (Reiman and Fraistat 507n4). In its military sense, *pioneer* means a "member of an infantry group going with or ahead of an army or regiment to dig trenches, repair roads, and clear terrain in readiness for the main body of troops" ("pioneer, n." Def. A1a, *OED*; Reiman and Fraistat 507n4). Assigning to his poetry, and therefore also to his use of privatives, the function of a military pioneer, Shelley underscores the critical activity of poetic language in advancing a revolutionary vision. Privatives realize this revolutionary vision by working to clear away the "overgrowth of ages" and destroy "error, and the roots of error" in order to leave "what is too often the duty of the reformer in political and ethical questions to leave, a vacancy" (Shelley, *On Life* 507).

In the "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty," privatives like *unseen*, *inconstant*, *uncertain*, and *unknown* related to Intellectual Beauty do not signal, as C. E. Pulos argues, a "noncommittal" attitude and poetic argument that "postulates nothing regarding ultimate reality" (Shelley, "Hymn," lines 1-3, 6, 38, 40; Pulos 82-83). On the contrary, such privatives demonstrate Shelley's specific commitment, like a pioneer, to make a clearing through what he saw as "error, and the roots of error"—anthropomorphic attributes of the God of orthodox Christianity and other major Western institutional faiths

(Shelley, *On Life* 507). Pulos correctly observes that “Shelley cannot possibly mean that his concept [of Intellectual Beauty] embodies a truer version of ultimate reality” (82). This observation, however, comes short of recognizing how the privative terms Shelley uses to define his concept of Intellectual Beauty recommend a more liberating and, therefore, in his mind, “truer version of ultimate reality” (82). The poet’s privatives in “Hymn” facilitate a mental “vacancy,” an open-mindedness prepared to consider the poem’s heterodox and non-formulaic spirituality that fosters hope and love for oneself and “all human kind” (Shelley, *On Life* 507; “Hymn,” lines 1-3, 6, 36-38, 40, 69, 84).

Clark argues that Shelley’s idea of facilitating a mental “vacancy” as essential to the role of the poet demonstrates the influence of Madame de Staël-Holstein (Clark 58, 89, 89n77; Shelley, *On Life* 507). In de Staël’s *The Influence of Literature upon Society,* published in London in 1812, Shelley read that “As the human species is constantly recruiting itself, an individual can create a void only in opinion” (de Staël 1:49; Clark 58, 89, 89n77). Linking this idea in de Staël with the “vacancy” argument in Shelley’s *On Life*, Clark shows that the poet similarly sees that his function consists in “awakening discontent with the status quo” (Clark 89, 89n77; Shelley, *On Life* 507). Analyzed from this perspective, *Queen Mab’s* indictment of tyranny and oppression as *unsatisfying*, *unripe*, *unregretted*, *comfortless*, *nerveless*, *incapable, unnatural*, *bloodless*, *unjoyous*, *unwilling*, *unfeeling*, *dreamless*, *unnatural*, and *unvanquishable* may be seen as fostering precisely such a sense of dissatisfaction in the reader essential to Shelley’s conception of the poet (Shelley, *Queen Mab* 3.37, 39, 46, 51, 67, 119, 120, 4.106, 109, 248, 252-56). Shelley seems to think of a similar initial discontent that poetic language engenders when he writes of poetry as the “most unfailing herald, companion, and follower of the awakening of a great people to work a beneficial change in opinion or institution” (*Defence* 535). “[A]wakening discontent” thus reflects a pioneering role of privatives in Shelley’s poetic impetus to effectuate a revolutionary change (Clark 89). This pioneering role of privatives also reflects Shelley’s larger aesthetic conception of the poet as a pioneer or “explorer in previously uncharted realms of the human mind” (1, 58, 83).

As a part of the larger role of poetic language, the pioneering task of privatives to liberate the mind and leave a “vacancy” reflects another important function Shelley assigns to words in *On Life*. His reflections on the mystery of life and human limitations in apprehending the grand totality of all being gradually transition to a discussion of the limited, fragmentary nature of human knowledge and its expressions through the medium of language. Shelley remarks, “What is life? Thoughts and feelings arise, with or without our will, and we employ words to express them. We are born, and our birth is unremembered and our infancy remembered but in fragments. We live on,” the poet continues, “and in living we lose the apprehension of life” (*On Life* 506). “How vain,” Shelley exclaims, “is it to think that words can penetrate the mystery of our being,” and adds, “[r]ightly used they may make evident our ignorance to ourselves, and this is much” (506). The futility and vanity of words in capturing our constantly fading “apprehension of life,” Shelley argues, may only be redeemed by such a use of words that reveals to us the pervading limitations of the human knowledge (506). To unfold this statement further, a right use of words exposes the “ignorance” of what we think we know and reveals what we do not yet know (506). “Rightly used” poetic language —to echo an idea from Shelley's discussion of his skeptical idealism in the essay—takes us to the "verge where words abandon us, and what wonder if we grow dizzy to look down the dark abyss of—how little we know" (506, 508).

These concepts of a mental "vacancy," a void of our "ignorance," and the "abyss of—how little we know" further clarify the pioneering role privatives fulfill within Shelley's larger conception of poetry as enacting a complete internal renovation (Shelley, *On Life* 506-08). Before poetry can turn "all things to loveliness," before it can create "for us a being within our being," and prior to creating "anew the universe after it has been annihilated in our minds by the recurrence of impressions blunted by reiteration," poetry must do its "pioneer" work (Shelley, *Defence* 533; *On Life* 507). To achieve its transformative goals, the language of poetry must first strip the "veil of familiarity from the world," withdraw "life's dark veil from before the scene of things," purge "from our inward sight the film of familiarity which obscures from us the wonder of our being," and only then create "anew the universe . . . in our minds" (Shelley, *Defence* 533). As a part of this conception of poetry, Shelley's privatives strip, withdraw, and purge (533). They remove vestments of "error, and the roots of error" in the mind (reveal "our ignorance to ourselves") and purge "from our inward sight the film of familiarity" (bring us to the dizzying "abyss of—how little we know") (Shelley, *On Life* 506-508; *Defence* 533).

Privatives undermine our customary and habitual categories of thought, or, in Shelley's phrase from *On Life* that he later repeats in *Defence*, "impressions, blunted by reiteration" (Shelley, *On Life* 506-508; *Defence* 533). The poet's employment of privatives thus might be seen as an instance of his "artistic and political self-awareness"

(Peterfreund, *Shelley* 44). For privatives also, to use Peterfreund's phrase, attract attention to themselves by functioning on the "principle of defamiliarization, which is a disruption of both aesthetic and political 'business as usual'" (*Shelley* 44-45). "Defamiliarization," Peterfreund explains, "attains its end by social and/or political means—chief among these, the refusal to participate in the annihilation of the poetic imagination by accepting without question" what Shelley calls the "recurrence of impressions blunted by reiteration" (Peterfreund, *Shelley* 45; Shelley, *Defence* 533). Pioneer-like, such adjectives help eliminate these dulled mental structures that keep us from the "apprehension of life" and facilitate a liberating mental "vacancy" that makes this apprehension possible (Shelley, *On Life* 506-08; *Defence* 533).

"Misuse of Words and Signs": Shelley and a Poststructuralist Perspective

The importance of a mental "vacancy" engendered by privatives lies in how such a "vacancy" specifically affects the mind (Shelley, *On Life* 507). This "vacancy," Shelley states, "reduces the mind to that freedom in which it would have acted, but for the misuse of words and signs, the instruments of its own creation" (507). Emphasizing what he "peculiarly" means by *signs*, the poet adds: "In this latter sense [his specific meaning of *signs* here] almost all familiar objects are signs, standing not for themselves but for others, in their capacity of suggesting one thought which shall lead to a train of thoughts.—Our whole life is thus an education of error" (507). Before examining how exactly such a mental vacancy "reduces the mind to . . . freedom," it is first important to analyze what Shelley means by the “misuse of words and signs” that inhibits this freedom and the relationship of signs to objects and thoughts he seems to articulate (507).

In his essay, “Shelley and the Conditions of Meaning,” Hogle offers one explanation. Bringing *On Life*’s assertion that “nothing exists but as it is perceived” into his reflections on Shelley’s “misuse of words and signs” passage, Hogle argues that “there is no perceived ‘object’ here that is not already a sign, something that has been observed, interpreted, and thereby turned into a signifier by a perceiver in another position” (Shelley, *On Life* 506, 508; Hogle, “Conditions” 49). “Each perceived sign, moreover,” Hogle adds, “which is also a thought interpretable by different thoughts, is always other than itself, ‘standing not for itself but for others,’ that is, for other signs and thoughts, not for referents or objects that are somehow entirely separate” (49). Only as “[e]ach sign has the potential, then, of directing thoughts about it towards an extensive ‘train’ of related signs and thoughts,” Hogle suggests, referring to A *Defence of Poetry*, does poetry fulfill its purpose as it “awakens and enlarges the mind itself by rendering it the receptacle of a thousand unapprehended combinations of thought” (Hogle, “Conditions” 49; Shelley, *Defence* 517). Hogle concludes that

> [f]or him [Shelley] or one of his speakers or characters really to believe in and consistently defer to some ultimate Referent, be it inside or outside thought, a physical object or a metaphysical essence, is for that projective thinker to become the slave of an object of thought, . . . an Absolute that, again, seems to mandate one particular train of thought and destroys the freedom of the mind to pursue “unapprehended relations.” (52)

In other words, to assume a single referent behind a sign "makes us slaves of an assumed 'reality' that is actually no more than a construction of signs, . . . almost always ideological and political instead of objectively and metaphysically 'true'" (49-50). Thus, meaning for Shelley, Hogle insists, is "generated by transfers between and across signifiers" (51-52).

Keach's caution against the ease with which Shelley's "poststructuralist readers [such as Hogle] have often found their theoretical concerns anticipated" may be applied here as a more general response to Hogle's approach (*Romanticism* 103). Keach offers words of precaution against a poststructuralist tendency toward an ahistorical and misconceptualized view of British Romanticism, but his assertion also speaks directly to Hogle's claim that "Shelley anticipated some postmodernist assumptions, especially in his mature writing" and Hogle's subsequent poststructuralist interpretation of Shelley's arguments in *On Life* and the *Defence* (Keach, *Romanticism* 103; Hogle, "Conditions" 48).

First, just as Hogle argues, Shelley in *On Life* indeed seems to eliminate a distinction between internal perception and the external world: "things are seen to function like words" or signs ("almost all familiar objects are signs, standing not for themselves but for others"), and "'things' get dissolved into 'thoughts'" as the poet suggests when he states, "By the word *things* is to be understood any object of thought, that is, any thought upon which any other thought is employed, with the apprehension of distinction" (Keach, *Power* 36; Shelley, *On Life* 507-08). At the same time, Shelley's broad-stroke conflation of mental and non-mental phenomena in *On Life* seems to be for the poet rather a “cause for dismay” (Keach, *Power* 36). It is only in his “few self-consciously utopian moments,” as in the triumphant vision at the end of *Prometheus Unbound*, “in which things will be transformed by the liberated imagination into a condition of unalienated oneness with thoughts,” that Shelley celebrates this seamless unity as a positive ideal (36, 39).

Referring to John Locke’s *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* and its formative role on English Romantic thought about language, Keach argues that generally Shelley “either accepts or confirms” the “Lockean division of words from things” and, it seems by extension, of signs (of which words are a species) from things (*Romanticism* 105; *Power* 36). Keach notes, “The dualism of mind and matter [basics of the ‘popular philosophy’ Shelley repudiates in *On Life*] inheres in the very structure of our language, and Shelley’s or any other writer’s desire to dissolve it must risk violating not only such formal coherence but such practical social and cultural efficacy as existing language may be deemed to offer” (Keach, *Romanticism* 123-24; Shelley, *On Life* 506-07). “For Shelley as for Blake,” Keach explains further, “although for very different epistemological and linguistic reasons, political resistance precludes any accommodation of words to what [William] Godwin calls, in the title of the novel we know as *Caleb Williams*, ‘things as they are’” (*Power* 39). The following excerpt of Shelley’s letter to Godwin illustrates this tension. “You say that words will neither debauch our understandings, nor distort our moral feelings,” Shelley writes,

> But *words* are the very things that so eminently contribute to the growth and establishment of prejudice: the learning of *words* before the mind is

> capable of attaching correspondent ideas to them, is like posessing [*sic*] machinery with the use of which we are so unacquainted as to be in danger of misusing it. But words are merely signs of ideas, how many evils, & how great spring from the annexing inadequate & improper ideas to words. (*Letters* 1:317; italics in original)

Precisely because words have a potential of becoming corrupted like the things they denote, "[p]oetic language preserves an intimacy with thought in necessary opposition to things—to the natural world as it is habitually experienced, to social life as it is customarily lived" (Keach, *Power* 39).

In essence, for Shelley to accept the elimination of distinction between words and signs on one hand and things on the other would mean to acquiesce to the present state of things, the status quo. The poet certainly hopes for a unity between words and things in a fully transformed future social order, such as the one he envisions at the end of *Prometheus Unbound* as a "perpetual Orphic song" (Keach, *Power* 39-40; Shelley, *Prometheus* 4.415-17). Shelley's attempts to "reclaim words from 'things as they are'" result in a "radical idealist resistance" he expresses in *On Life* (Keach, *Power* 39-40). In both of these instances Shelley works—and this is the point I wish to address later in detail—to redeem language both "from the annexing inadequate & improper ideas to words" (with words thus determined by "immediate historical and material conditions of life") and from the "curse which binds us to be subjected to the accident of surrounding impressions" (skeptical idealism) (Shelley, *Letters* 1:317; *Defence* 533; Keach, *Power* 39-40).

In returning now to *On Life*'s concept of a privatives-engendered "vacancy" inhibited by the "misuse of words and signs" (Shelley 507) and Hogle's approach to this passage, several observations should be made. Hogle correctly recognizes that Shelley, in that instance, collapses the distinction between mental and non-mental phenomena, acts of inward perception and objects in the outside world. Yet, placed in its appropriate historical and philosophical context, Shelley's stance should not be seen as an anticipation, as Hogle suggests, of "some postmodernist assumptions" ("Conditions" 48). Shelley, as Keach shows, generally remains in the Lockean camp and maintains the "division of words [and signs] from things" (*Power* 36). Keach remarks that "[w]hile Shelley's radical philosophical idealism . . . springs from a deep political as well as intellectual aversion to dualistic separations and subordinations of mind and nature, thoughts and things, the separation persists as the incommensurability between imaginative desire and a historical actuality" (36, 39).

It is also important to recognize that although "Shelley may sometimes push his writing towards 'that verge where words abandon us'"—hence all the attention to his writing of poststructuralist critics like Hogle—"even there we find him [Shelley] working—not just desperately, but with determined resourcefulness—to overcome the sheer dizziness that his skeptical intellectual convictions produce in himself and his readers" (Keach, *Romanticism* 124). As I have argued so far, a mental "vacancy" facilitated by Shelley's use of privative adjectives is his attempt to challenge and subvert oppressive political and religious institutions and concepts (Shelley, *On Life* 507). I shall also try to demonstrate that, at the same time, the poet's privatives represent his endeavor to make a “virtue rather than a vice” of the politically- and ideologically-wrought “arbitrary signifying processes on which language depends” (Keach, *Romanticism* 124; Hogle, “Conditions” 50).

Privatives as “A Subtler Language within Language”

Early on in *A Defence of Poetry*, Shelley argues that poetic language “is a more direct representation of the actions and passions of our internal being, and is susceptible of more various and delicate combinations, than colour, form or motion, and is more plastic and obedient to the controul of that faculty of which it is the creation” (513). This view of language, in contrast with other media of artistic creation, as more organically connected with the imaginative mind springs from the poet’s conviction that “language is arbitrarily produced by the Imagination and has relation to thoughts alone” (513). In contrast with poetic language, “all other materials, instruments and conditions of art have relations among each other, which limit and interpose between conception and expression” (513).

Paradoxically, though, a potential for corruption or, to use Shelley’s words, for limitation and interposition “between conception and expression” lies in the very nature of the intimacy that thoughts and words enjoy (513). Reflecting on the meaning of the word *arbitrary*, Keach highlights the interaction between “its signifying at once absolute determination” (whenever employed in political discourse of the time) and “utter indeterminacy” (when used as a linguistic term) (*Power* 4). *Arbitrary* signals a complex interrelationship between political power and linguistic structures, and by implication, reveals language as both politically and ideologically constituted and constitutive—language as a manifestation of "cultural and political history" as well as a method to create such a history (Keach, *Power* 13, 22; *Style* 40-41). Language can "just as easily tyrannize over" as reflect the imaginative mind (*Style* 40-41). In light of this insight, Shelley's elevation of words as more integrally related to imaginative processes (unlike other artistic media) entails a more immediate potential for political and ideological corruption through the medium of language. This is a concern the poet expresses in the aforementioned letter to Godwin, suggesting the potential of words to "debauch our understandings" and "distort our moral feelings" (Shelley, *Letters* 1:317). Put differently, Shelley's concern about the danger of "annexing inadequate & improper ideas to words" becomes particularly acute considering the immediacy of words' relation to thoughts that he asserts in the *Defence* (Shelley, *Letters* 1:317).

The poet's use of privative adjectives, as I have argued so far, realizes his larger conception of poetry as a "pioneer" working to clear out the "overgrowth of ages," destroy "error, and the roots of error"—oppressive ideas and concepts—and leave "what is too often the duty of the reformer in political and ethical questions to leave, a vacancy" (Shelley, *On Life* 507). Language, to recall Shelley's assertion in the *Defence*, already relates to thoughts only and, hence, more accurately expresses the original imaginative conception than other artistic media (513). Within language, privatives by definition designate a "negative quality or condition," denote the "deprivation or absence of a quality or attribute," and serve simply to "express negation" ("privative." Def. A1a, A1b, C, *OED*). For this reason Shelley's privatives engender a liberating mental vacancy most directly because in their essence they either sever or significantly reduce their relations with, to use the formula Keach borrows from Godwin, "'things as they are'" (Shelley, *On Life* 507; Keach, *Power* 39). As expressions of negation and thus at the farthest possible remove from the politically and ideologically charged arbitrary relationships between signs or words and thoughts, privative epithets that Shelley employs work to redeem language from political and ideological corruption woven into its very fabric.

In their engendering of a mental "vacancy" and reducing the "mind to that freedom in which it would have acted," Shelley's privatives also relate "to thoughts alone" in the most intimate way (*On Life* 507; *Defence* 513). Denoting an absence rather than a presence, a vacancy rather than a substantive image, and often devoid of appeals to the senses, privatives' primary reference is to thoughts only on a level far deeper than other forms of linguistic utterance enjoy. Peterfreund points out how, when Shelley describes the ineffable, he employs verbal patterns with a lower "emphasis on the referential properties of language" ("Two Languages" 128). This observation, I believe, also applies to Shelley's privatives. Measured with the poet's scale of relations of the arts to the imagination, privatives may be viewed as a type of higher language within language, and an even more direct "representation of the actions and passions of our internal being" than other forms of human language permit (Shelley, *Defence* 513).

Reflecting on Cythna's learning described in the seventh Canto of *Laon and Cythna*, Keach remarks that Cythna's weaving of "[a] subtler language within language" in the process of her reflections exemplifies how "[l]anguage can only be revitalized from within, by making a virtue rather than a vice of the arbitrary signifying processes on which language depends" (Shelley, *Laon*, lines 3100-17; Keach, *Romanticism* 124-25). Shelley's use of privatives to facilitate a mental "vacancy" should also be seen as a revitalization of language "from within" (Shelley, *On Life* 507; Keach, *Romanticism* 124). Like his female heroine, Shelley takes the language "as it comes" to him "historically" and recreates it from within by weaving into his texts privative adjectives—a language of its own kind more intimately and exclusively reflecting and engaging human consciousness (Keach, *Romanticism* 125). Least referentially bound and least implicated in the dominant ideology that underlies language formation, Shelley's privatives are most faithfully representative "signs" of the "woofs" of "thought," with little left to interpose between the mind and its linguistic expression (Shelley, *Laon*, lines 3109-17). Privatives become the poet's own "self-empowering idiom" utilizing the "empiricist view of language" as "an inherently constrained yet incompletely determined [reflected in the term *arbitrary*] and therefore transformable product of human culture" (Keach, *Romanticism* 125).

Analyzing Shelley's use of privatives (referred to as *negatives*), Dawson remarks that while the poet "will not always find the language of concrete realities the most suited to his purposes" and "[s]ome of that language can be redeemed . . . but much of it can only be negated" (120). Although recognizing that Shelley's negatives are negations of negations, "[s]ince most of the forms of actuality [which the poet opposes] are really negations of man's true being," Dawson does not recognize the redemptive role privatives (or negatives) play not only in Shelley's revolutionary vision as a poet, but even within the language he employs to create his works (120). "Shelley exercises considerable ingenuity and inventiveness" not only to "keep his language remote from actuality"—the political, religious, and social conditions he opposes—but also to "keep his language" from the actuality of language itself (120). With his use of privative adjectives the poet eliminates or minimizes the interposition of political, religious, and social ideologies underlying formative structures of language.

Privatives, Referentiality, and Meaning

So far in my analysis of Shelley's privatives I have argued that, in denoting an absence and a void, his privatives are minimally referential and, therefore, minimally affected by political and ideological principles embedded in the medium of language. This, of course, raises questions of referentiality and meaning—issues I mentioned in passing when discussing Hogle's poststructuralist approach. To address these questions thoroughly, it is important to consider several passages in Shelley's *Defence* related to the subject. Poetry, Shelley asserts, "awakens and enlarges the mind itself by rendering it the receptacle of a thousand unapprehended combinations of thought" (517). "Poetry enlarges the circumference of the imagination by replenishing it [the imagination] with thoughts of ever new delight," he adds, "which have the power of attracting and assimilating to their own nature all other thoughts, and which form new intervals and interstices whose void for ever craves fresh food" (517). Unlike the "story of particular facts, stript of the poetry which should invest them," poetry "for ever develops new and wonderful applications of the eternal truth which it contains" (515).

Hogle sees in these passages Shelley's denial of a single determinate referent "be it inside or outside thought, a physical object or a metaphysical essence" ("Conditions" 52). To assume such a referent, according to Hogle, is "to become a slave of an object of thought, . . . an Absolute that, again, seems to mandate one particular train of thought and destroys the freedom of the mind to pursue 'unapprehended relations'" (52). Shelley's words or signifiers do not have referents proper; in other words, they do not refer to anything external to themselves or other signs ("Conditions" 49, 51-52). In light of this, for Hogle, the poet's meaning emerges through "transfers between and across signifiers"—that is, through a suggested movement from one sign to another, a perpetual invitation to a "seeing of something through and in terms of something else" *ad infinitum* while the "wholeness of a meaning [is never] entirely achieved" (Hogle, "Conditions" 51-52; *Process* 23).

In one sense, Hogle's approach recognizes the potential of Shelley's writing to so enlarge the imaginative mind as to activate thought processes characterized by the endless creations, combinations, and movements between thoughts. "[A] single word even," the poet tells us, "may be a spark of inextinguishable thought" (Shelley, *Defence* 515). In another sense, that Shelley's writing is essentially a non-referential, self-enclosed system of signifiers interacting as to make "meaning's completion both desirable and impossible" (Hogle, *Process* 23) does not necessarily follow from the poet's refusal to consign his words to single referents and thus privilege only highly restricted interpretive possibilities which the conventional operations of written language would suggest. The privatives in the poet's texts make such ever-expanding possibilities of referentiality and, therefore, meaning possible. In denoting absences, these epithets also (even more than other forms of linguistic expression) point to actualities beyond themselves. Privatives refer not merely to other signs, but also to specific political, religious, and social ideas and institutions they repudiate and to possibilities for new reconfigurations of these concepts and institutions they strive to redefine and thereby to reclaim.

Pioneer-like, Shelley's privatives facilitate possibilities for the expansion of referentiality and meaning he designates as a crucial function of the poetic medium in the *Defence*. Poetry, he insists, "awakens and enlarges the mind itself by rendering it the receptacle of a thousand unapprehended combinations of thought"; it "enlarges the circumference of the imagination by replenishing it with thoughts of ever new delight, which have the power of attracting and assimilating to their own nature all other thoughts, and which form new intervals and interstices whose void for ever craves fresh food"; poetry "for ever develops new and wonderful applications of the eternal truth which it contains" (Shelley, *Defence* 515, 517). Poetry's awakening, and enlarging, of the imaginative mind and the formation of new mental spaces to invite and impel new meanings to emerge ("new intervals and interstices whose void for ever craves fresh food") parallel the pioneering function of privatives to create a liberating "vacancy" in the mind (Shelley, *On Life* 507; *Defence* 517). Moreover, the mind-enlarging capacity of poetry not only reflects the role of privatives, but also results from privatives' performance of this pioneering, precursory function. This function of privatives is a *sine qua non* to Shelley's conception of the poet as a revolutionary.

First, poetry's work to awaken, enlarge, and expand the imaginative mind parallels the function of privatives to uproot "error," to "purge" and defamiliarize, to create a clearing—important poetic functions I discussed in the first section of this chapter (Shelley, *On Life* 507; *Defence* 517, 533; Peterfreund, *Shelley* 44-45). Poetry's awakening and enlarging of the mind to accommodate ever-multiplying reconceptualizations of life and thought, and privatives' pioneer-like clearing out of the "overgrowth of ages" are both concerned with the same object (Shelley, *On Life* 507). They both tend to the creation of a mental space, a mind in its state of primal "freedom," devoid of habitual frameworks of thought that harbor tyranny and oppression (507). Reflecting on the position of Romanticism in relation to the mainstream of eighteenth-century thought, L. J. Swingle observes that "Romantic thought tends to be preoccupied with competing voices, values, systems of belief. . . obsessively concerned with different lore and, consequently, with stubborn oppositions of thought and value" (36). As I have demonstrated, Shelley's poetic thought similarly functions not in a self-enclosed vacuum of "an assumed 'reality' that is actually no more than a construction of signs," but in fierce opposition to specific political, religious, social, and economic realities of his day and resistance to the particular ways language becomes a tool to consolidate their oppressive powers (Hogle, "Conditions" 49-50).

Privatives not only accompany the expansion of imagination, but also lay the mental groundwork for such an expansion to become initially possible. Before poetry can enlarge the "circumference of the imagination by replenishing it [the imagination] with thoughts of ever new delight" and spread "its own figured curtain," privative epithets first must withdraw "life's dark veil from before the scene of things" (Shelley, *Defence* 517, 533). Before the mind can become the "receptacle of a thousand unapprehended combinations of thought" privatives, like a pioneer, first must clear out a "vacancy," liberating the mind from its internal constraints to rethink and reimagine the human condition (Shelley, *Defence* 517; *On Life* 507). Yet this "vacancy" never remains vacant (Shelley, *On Life* 507). In Shelley's poetic works I have analyzed, this liberating "vacancy" does not emerge as a refusal to make a specific assertion, an open stage for the free-play of speculative indeterminacy or a mere ground for the infinite interplay of signs or space to fill with poetic "phantoms of difference and trace" (Shelley, *On Life* 507; Tetreault 16, 28).This, certainly, is not to deny in Shelley's texts the presence of "gaps and instabilities of significance" or "indeterminacy, the oscillation between possible meanings" that is "no stranger to a poetic vision that wavers between scepticism and idealism" (O'Neill, *Imaginings* 4). Rather, my claim is that even as privatives invite multiple possibilities of meaning and may point to a playful interaction between signifiers, they also outline determinable parameters and directions for various interpretive possibilities, such as a movement between "scepticism" about legitimacy of the dominant political and religious ideologies and "idealism" in reclaiming the timeless ideals of liberty, truth, and justice (4).

Although Shelley's privatives, as I have argued earlier in this chapter, are least implicated in the ideological underpinnings of language, they clearly participate in furthering Shelley's liberal political, religious, and social convictions. Like love—a "going out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action, or person, not our own"—Shelley's privatives advance his thought to effect a revolutionary change that has definable and substantive internal and external ends in sight (Shelley, *Defence* 517). "The issues with which Shelley characteristically engages his work," observes Terence Allan Hoagwood, in opposition to the poststructuralist perspective, "entail society more than self, ideology more than psychology, and political argument rather than narcissistic projection" (Hoagwood xviii; Peterfreund 44). As a part of such a vision, the poet's use of privatives lays the groundwork for a realization of his larger poetic and revolutionary engagement. Shelley views poetry as a kind of catalyst for revolutionary change. As he reflects on Shelley's impulse for revolutionary reform, Ronald Tetreault notes that since "[l]anguage is the fundamental social institution, ... social reform may justly be expected to begin by verbal means" (28).

In Shelley's reformist vision, poetry stimulates the "great secret of morals," love, because it stimulates imagination's "going out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action, or person, not our own" (Shelley, *Defence* 517). Poetry advocates "whatever of beautiful, or generous, or true can have place in an evil time," functions to expand and strengthen imagination as the "organ of our moral nature," sows the seeds of "social renovation," and gives rise to the "principle of equality" and conceptions of the "abolition of personal slavery" and "freedom of women" (517, 522, 524-26). Poetry provides a foundation for the human pursuit of knowledge and seeks to realize "what is wisest and best in morals, government, and political œconomy," cultivates "Virtue, Love, Patriotism, Friendship, &c.," and ushers in “revolutions in opinion” (515, 530-31). Poetry may be seen as an “accumulation of the power of communicating and receiving intense and impassioned conceptions respecting man and nature” (535). Poetry is “[t]he most unfailing herald, companion, and follower of the awakening of a great people to work a beneficial change in opinion or institution” (535). Before a person can love and pursue his own and the social good, first—similarly to the experience of love, an internal deficiency (“when we find within our own thoughts the chasm of an insufficient void”)— a “vacancy” must be felt, and poetic privatives must work to create it (Shelley, *On Love* 503; *On Life* 507).

To return to the question of referentiality and meaning once more, I agree with Hogle that seeing in Shelley’s texts a single “ultimate Referent” entails a tyranny of meaning that contradicts Shelley’s major poetic convictions (Hogle, “Conditions” 52). However, I disagree with Hogle’s poststructuralist conclusion in that the only alternative to this circumscribed perspective is to have Shelley communicate neither his meaning nor his convictions—that a determinate meaning of his texts remains perpetually just out of our grasp (Hogle, *Process* 23). Peterfreund’s reflections on “Mont Blanc” offer a concise formulation of the perspective I have been advocating in this chapter and, more generally, in my entire argument: “poetry does not lead to some dogmatic truth . . . . Rather, poetry leads to *to pithanon*, or the probable, to the extent that nescient human beings are capable of comprehending it” *(Shelley* 120). Although undogmatically, poetry indeed *does lead* the mind to embracing the values and ideals that, Shelley believes, perpetuate such an unconstrained, undogmatic vision of life. As I have argued, privatives, in their instilling of an absence, are akin to the process of “defamiliarization” (Peterfreund, *Shelley* 44-45).

To understand the relation of privatives to meaning, Victor Shklovsky's observations on "defamiliarization" offer an insight (44-45). "An image," Shklovsky reflects, "is not a permanent referent for those mutable complexities of life which are revealed through it; its purpose is not to make us perceive meaning, but to create a special perception of the object—*it creates a 'vision' of the object instead of serving as a means for knowing it*" (Shklovsky 18; Peterfreund, *Shelley* 45). Denoting absences, Shelley's privatives first redraw the boundaries of mental spaces and then similarly outline a vision of liberating values that would be the mind's greatest gain to embrace (Shklovsky 18; Peterfreund, *Shelley* 45).

Conclusion

In his *Proposals for an Association of Philanthropists*, Shelley first states that "Man cannot make occasions, but he may seize those that offer" (Shelley, *Proposals* 39; Tetreault 28). He goes on to add that, a "recollection of the absent" and consideration of needs and interests of others "is a principal source of that feeling which generates occasions, wherein a love for human kind may become eminently useful and active" (Shelley, *Proposals* 39; Tetreault 28). As discussed above, this idea of a perceived absence as generating an impetus for social, political, and religious reform finds a firm position within Shelley's larger conception of poetry and language. Employed in realizing Shelley's poetic vision and reflecting his aesthetic conception of a pioneer-poet, privative adjectives, like military pioneers, first create a clearing, a mental "vacancy," by removing mind-inhibiting constraints—rigid mental categories not permitting internal and external reformation and change (Shelley, *On Life* 507; Clark 1, 58, 83, 89). The use of poetic privatives closely parallels poetry's larger work to awaken, enlarge, and expand the imagination and thus create new internal spaces where fresh reconceptualizations of human life and thought can multiply and flourish (Shelley, *On Life* 507; *Defence* 517). Privatives also precede such mental expansion by initially withdrawing "life's dark veil from before the scene of things"—by removing mental constraints of customary thought arrived at through conventional conceptualizations of language—in order to facilitate a potential for poetry to create "anew the universe after it has been annihilated in our minds by the recurrence of impressions blunted by reiteration" (Shelley, *Defence* 533).

Operating within an empiricist view of language as both "inherently constrained yet incompletely determined" and recognizing both its constituted and constitutive power, privatives are least susceptible to the ideological and political principles inherent in linguistic structures (Keach, *Romanticism* 125; *Style* 40-41). As they denote only absences and convey liberating negations, Shelley's privative adjectives exhibit few of the underlying political and ideological constraints of language and thus only minimally distort the original imaginative conception manifest in verbal poetic expression. Like Cythna's "subtler language within language," privative epithets with their minimal referentiality and ideological affinities constitute a redemptive remaking of language from within (Shelley, *Laon*, lines 3100-17; Keach, *Romanticism* 124-25). Adaptation of the privative idiom should be seen as a creation of a language of its own kind—a form of poetic utterance even more integrally and exclusively related to the human mind than other forms of expression within the poetic medium (Shelley, *Defence* 513; *Laon*, lines

3100-17; Keach, *Romanticism* 124-25). Shelley's use of privative language, in Swingle's words, is "[a] means of breaking free from tyrannical despotism [of conventional value-laden language] and of turning the potency of language to advantage" (48).

Outward-oriented, like Shelley's entire revolutionary poetics, privatives make space for and cultivate ever-growing imaginative reconfigurations of human life and thought, of both internal and external political, religious, and social actualities woven into the human condition. On one hand, to see the poet's language in terms of the single referent is to invite a tyranny of meanings, which lies in exact opposition to Shelley's poetic and reformist principles (Hogle, "Conditions" 52). On the other hand, to view Shelley's poetic and reformist principles as positioned only within a self-enclosed system of ultimately indecipherable signs—a poststructuralist take on his texts—is, in a sense, to subsume Shelley under another form of linguistic tyranny he would oppose (Swingle 48). Non-formulaic in denoting absences and negations, but also deeply involved in referring to multiple particular possibilities for internal and external emancipation, equality, and justice—major definable ends of Shelley's poetic vision—his privatives help foster a revivified language and a liberated mentality that can illuminate and transform human thought from within and without (Shklovsky 18; Peterfreund, *Shelley* 45).

CHAPTER V

Introduction

This chapter repositions my argument within the context of earlier approaches to Shelley's use of privatives. Here I also briefly revisit my interaction with the critical perspectives on the poet's use of language that was addressed in detail in my previous chapter. Since Massey's *The Compound Epithets of Shelley and Keats* identified Shelley's use of privative epithets as an important feature of his style, but was primarily concerned with linguistic data, I begin repositioning my argument in light of Buxton's essay—the first known attempt to account for Shelley's use of privatives. In exploring privatives proper, Webb and Dawson offer other major contextualizations for my position, while studies by Hogle and Keach provide an important critical context for my arguments on the poet's view of language. I close by reiterating key considerations and conclusions of my own argument and outlining several possibilities for further research.

Privatives in Buxton's Reading of Shelley

Buxton's "On Reading Shelley" argued that it is Shelley's temperamental and intellectual Hellenism, not his Englishness, that manifests itself most prominently in his work and thought (112). Shelley's use of negatives appears alongside his other essentially Greek approaches to poetry, such as the "predominance of verbs over epithets" and his interest in thought processes rather than in the "everyday world of sensuous experience" (115-17,124). Buxton asserted that the poet's idea of "divine possession, as the source of poetic inspiration," the tenuousness of his epithets, and his use of negatives are all

Platonic in nature (120-22). By employing negatives, Buxton argues, Shelley "strips away the sensuous character of experience, which he regards as a hindrance to the perception of truth" and removes the interposing veil of the "obscuring effect of concrete imagery, with its appeal to our senses" (121-22). Reading Shelley "more like reading a Greek [rather than English] poet" on one hand rescues his poetry from the "unexamined" and dismissive perspectives of critics like T. S. Eliot and Matthew Arnold (115, 125). On the other hand, such a reading fulfills what "is essential to any intelligent criticism": it analyzes a "writer's methods" and attempts to "account for their idiosyncrasies" (124).

Buxton's is the first attempt known to me to account for the poet's "idiosyncratic use of negative epithets" not only within the context of his works, but also as a part of his larger philosophical and intellectual affinities (121). In his discussion of Shelley's privatives, which Buxton called *negatives*, he underscored the "Platonic idealism of his [Shelley's] major poetry," the poet's "Platonism," and his attempts to distance his poetic experience "from the sensuous world" in order to approach the "intellectual, ideal world of Platonic forms" (120-22). In his own attempt to explicate Shelley's use of privative epithets in *Prometheus Unbound*, Webb objects to Buxton's approach on two accounts. Responding to Buxton, Webb argues first that "Shelley's use of the negative is more various than this [the poet's 'neo-classical inclination towards calmness and purity'] would allow" and second that "Shelley's use of the negative cannot be classified as Platonic without uncomfortable simplifications" (Webb, "Negatives" 54-55). In my present attempt to examine Shelley's use of negative or privative epithets and the philosophical and intellectual convictions behind such use, I also see Buxton's analysis as important and insightful, but insufficient in the two ways Webb points out. In one sense, Buxton's view fails to account for variation in Shelley's use of privatives. In expressing this concern, Webb appears to suggest that there are other, clearly non-Platonic uses of privatives Buxton's approach does not admit ("Negatives" 54-55). The concern with variation also relates to Webb's second objection, that is, that seeing the use of privatives strictly as a manifestation of Shelley's Platonism more generally entails "uncomfortable simplifications" (54-55).

My argument so far demonstrates a variation in the poet's use of privative epithets, which Buxton's analysis leaves unaddressed, and reveals the "uncomfortable simplifications" his perspective entails (54-55). For instance, in *Laon and Cythna,* the privatives *helpless*, *homeless*, *ungentle*, *hopeless*, *impious*, *discordant*, *heartless*, *impure*, *voiceless*, *faithless*, *unnatural*, *starless*, and *moonless* do not evoke the "intellectual, ideal world of Platonic forms" (Shelley, *Laon*, lines 715, 722, 729,738, 760, 783, 854, 3830, 3845, 3896, 3898, 3927, 4171; Buxton 120-22). Instead, these privatives expose specific moral and social deformities exhibited in and propagated by the tyrannical political and religious powers as absences of anything good and true and beautiful. In doing so, the poet's privatives work to undo and nullify the constraints of these powers upon the mind: like a "pioneer," they clear out this "overgrowth of ages" in human thought and create a liberating "vacancy" within (Shelley, *On Life* 507). To recall an instance with opposing values, in describing the ideals of liberty and justice, privatives such as *deathless*, *immortal*, *undissolving*, *invulnerable*, *undaunted*, *tameless*, *fearless*, and *unassailed* consolidate the forces of good (Shelley, *Laon*, lines 747, 838, 872, 876, 1019, 1061, 1072-80, 1276, 1541, 1579). In their turn, these privatives function to fill the mind's "vacancy" with ideas that in their privative formulation are immune to the negative and destructive forces of tyranny. Shelley calls these ideals "those doctrines of liberty and justice, . . . which neither violence, nor misrepresentation, nor prejudice, can ever totally extinguish among mankind" (Shelley, *On Life* 507; *Laon,* Preface, lines 6-13).

In this latter instance, it would be easy to interpret Shelley's presentation of these positive ideals as transcendent and thus, in a certain sense, akin to what Buxton saw as Shelley's "Platonic idealism" (Buxton 120-22), but I do not think the poem lends itself to this interpretation. Although, after their deaths, Laon and Cythna achieve immortality and join a "mighty Senate" of the "Great" in the "Temple of the Spirit," the ideals of truth, hope, and justice the brother and sister worked to advance while living will survive "[w]ithin the minds of men" of subsequent generations (Shelley, *Laon*, lines 604-12, 1095-98, 4810-18). Only in this sense will these ideals transcend the limits of temporality and particularity within human history.

Another instance, perhaps, most prone to be seen as a manifestation of Shelley's Platonism and neo-Platonism is "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty." Carl Grabo sees the poem as suggesting that it is "in Platonism and neo-Platonism" that Shelley "had found . . . the solvent and reconciler of the various philosophies which had thus far been the themes of his speculation" (178-79). James A. Notopoulos, in his seminal work *The Platonism of Shelley,* asserts that the poem's "greatness lies in its natural, direct, and indirect Platonisms, which upon analysis are distinguishable but in the poem form a perfect fusion" (204). In my analysis of "Hymn," I demonstrate that the privatives characterizing

Intellectual Beauty and its manifestations (*unseen*, *inconstant*, *uncertain*, and *unknown*) further Shelley's specific poetic vision as the "reformer in political and ethical questions" (Shelley, "Hymn," lines 1-3, 6, 38, 40; *On Life* 507). While "Hymn's" privatives work to subvert fundamental claims of Christian orthodoxy (and, to a degree, all institutional religions relying on revelation for their doctrines), they do so not in favor of Platonism and neo-Platonism, along the lines of Buxton's perspective, because for Shelley such an advocacy would mean exchanging one form of political and religious dogmatism for another. Instead, the poet's privatives function to facilitate a mental "vacancy" by negating the claims of Christian orthodoxy and thus liberating the mind from the strictures of doctrine and creed (Shelley, *On Life* 507). In its liberated state the mind then becomes more receptive to the poet's advocacy for more eclectic, heterodox, and less restrictive forms of spirituality (507).

This is not, of course, to deny that there may be manifestations of Platonic and neo-Platonic thought in Shelley's use of privatives or in his poetry in general. The problem with Buxton's argument, as Webb only hints at, is that Buxton's sweeping assertion of "Platonic idealism of his [Shelley's] major poetry" is neither qualified, nor, unlike Grabo's and Notopoulos' studies, thoroughly substantiated (Webb, "Negatives" 54-55; Buxton 120-22). Moreover, referring to Wasserman and Dawson in support of his argument, Clark offers a general caution against an unqualified embrace of what appears to be Shelley's Platonism. Clark argues that "however much Shelley may have adapted Plato for rhetorical purposes, his poetic theory contains no transcendent realm of ideas or forms to which a poem or the apprehension of the poet might correspond" (Clark 80, 80n52; Wasserman 204-05; Dawson 249). “Rather,” Clark goes on to explain, “these models are within (i.e. inherent in) the mind as the standard according to which it will reorganize impressions from without” (80).

In light of these observations, my arguments and examples in the present study significantly expand Buxton’s attempt to account for Shelley’s “idiosyncratic use of negative epithets” (Buxton 121), both as they appear in his works and as they form a part of his larger revolutionary and poetic vision. My analysis importantly accounts for variations in the poet’s use of privative epithets by closely examining a large number of their uses in a selective sample of the poet’s major works. Upon examination, these works show the use of privatives not primarily as a reflection of Shelley’s general philosophical and intellectual affinities, as Buxton proposes, with Platonism. Instead, the poet’s use of privatives should be seen at a far deeper level as essential to Shelley’s theory of poetry and language and as a basis of his poetic style. The poet’s use of privatives realizes his revolutionary vision, in which his poetry generally and privatives specifically function like pioneers (Shelley, *On Life* 507). They clear out the internal “overgrowth of ages”—that is, they undermine oppressive political, religious, and social frameworks of human thought—in order to instill a mental “vacancy” that enables the liberated mind to re-imagine both its own and the larger human condition (507).

Webb and Dawson: Further Considerations of Shelley’s Privatives

Webb’s essay “The Unascended Heaven: Negatives in *Prometheus Unbound*” first carefully demonstrates that the use of privatives (like Buxton, Webb terms them *negatives*) is “deeply engrained in Shelley and runs throughout his work” (37-40). In laying out the foundation for his argument about *Prometheus Unbound*, Webb convincingly shows that Shelley’s use of privatives is “sufficiently widespread, consistent, and peculiar to Shelley to suggest that it is more than a stylistic device or a flourish of the vocabulary or an irritating *tic* inherited from the eighteenth century” (40). The central revolutionary development of Shelley’s great “*Lyrical Drama*” (as he characterizes it in his subtitle), Webb argues, depends on his use of negatives as denoting a dual transformative potentiality “either for good or for evil” (Shelley, *Prometheus* 206; Webb, “Negatives” 51-52). Just as negatives serve as an attribute of internal and external tyranny, they also “cancel or reverse” conditions of negation and become, as in the instance with darkness in this play, the “matrix of potentiality, the cradle of possibility, the rich seed-bed of the future” (Webb, “Negatives” 48, 51). When Shelley uses negatives in relation to metaphysical or “transcendent realities” he follows the “*via negativa*” principle found in Plato and Thomas Aquinas (56-57). The poet also notably outlines the “scope of optimism” in his phrase “the untransmitted torch of hope” to suggest not only that the “responsibility” for moral change rests with the individual, but also that “it is possible for man to go either way, to remain shrouded inside his negative condition or turn grave into cradle and transform his negatives into positives” (Shelley, *Prometheus* 3.3.167-72; Webb, “Negatives” 59).

Dawson, similarly to Webb, uses *Prometheus Unbound* as a case study to illustrate his point that the “preference for negative epithets is pervasive in Shelley’s work” (119). “It is worthy of note,” he observes, “that the closing lines of Act III of

Prometheus Unbound have virtually nothing to tell us about the regenerated man in positive terms. He is defined entirely by negatives" (119). The main focus of Dawson's argument, however, is how Shelley's use of privatives or negatives reflects the poet's philosophy of perfectibility—a concept Shelley adapted from Godwin's *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (108-09, 120-21). "The language of negation is the natural language of Perfectibility," insists Dawson, and Shelley—who "has rightly been called 'the poet of perfectibility'—will naturally adopt a language that negates all existing limits, while refraining from setting up new limits of its own" (120). Dawson demonstrates how, in *Prometheus Unbound,* negatives reflect Shelley's argument that "As a free agent man cannot accept any limits as final, because to do so is to make them final—to impose them on himself by his very acceptance" (121-22). To be a liberated human is not a position circumscribed "by human nature or the human condition" (121). Rather, it is a "state of boundless potentiality, a state only to be defined in negatives, for to ascribe positive attributes would be to limit it" (121). The poet's negatives thus reflect Shelley's contention in *Prometheus* "that no goal is to be ruled out *a priori* as unattainable" (122).

Both Webb and Dawson link Shelley's use of negatives in *Prometheus Unbound* with potentiality. Webb sees this use as primarily the poet's "creative invention" and as a "moral burden on his readers and his interpreters"—the challenge of "discovering that so many apparent negatives are really positives, that if we peel away the veil of seeming negativity we will find the potentiality slumbering within" (Webb, "Negatives" 40, 57). Dawson views Shelley's negatives in *Prometheus* as a manifestation of the poet's doctrine of perfectibility, adapted from Godwin (108-09, 120-21). My argument in some instances also aligns with the central concept of potentiality employed by these two scholars. By revealing tyrannical concepts and institutions as devoid of anything but inherent desolation, privatives desolate or negate the "negative of deprivation, of limitation, of denial" that characterizes the tyranny embodied in *Prometheus* by Jupiter (Webb, "Negatives" 57). Also, as privatives in a pioneer-like fashion work to uproot and clear out internal constraints of tyranny in the mind, this clearing—a mental "vacancy"—in a sense becomes a ground of internal potentiality, to echo Webb's general argument about *Prometheus Unbound* (Shelley, *On Life* 507).

In formulating his major arguments about *Prometheus Unbound*, Dawson draws attention to the following passage from Shelley's *Speculations on Metaphysics*:

> Most of the errors of philosophers have arisen from considering the human being in a point of view too detailed and circumscribed. He is not a moral, and an intellectual,—but also, and pre-eminently, an imaginative being. His own mind is his law; his own mind is all things to him. If we would arrive at any knowledge which should be serviceable from the practical conclusions to which it leads, we ought to consider the mind of man and the universe as the great whole on which to exercise our speculations. (Shelley 65; Dawson 109)

Dawson's observations about this passage are particularly worth noting because they also illuminate the way my analysis of Shelley's privatives differs from those of Webb and Dawson. "The point of the last sentence," Dawson remarks, "is to emphasize that the transformation of existing reality depends directly or indirectly on a transformation of man's consciousness of the world which he both creates and experiences" (109). "The world," Dawson goes on to explain, "must be transformed in imagination before it can be changed politically, and it is here that the poet can exert an influence over 'opinion'" (109). My study of Shelley's use of privative epithets adds a new dimension to Webb's and Dawson's arguments by proposing to see the poet's privatives as a reflection of his foundational view of man as "pre-eminently, an imaginative being" and of his mind as "his law," as "all things to him" (Shelley, *Speculations* 65). Thus, since a "beneficial change in opinion or institution" or the "transformation of existing reality depends directly or indirectly on a transformation of man's consciousness," Shelley's poetry in general and privatives specifically work to transform individual consciousness to facilitate a political and moral transformation of the social order at large (Shelley, *Defence* 535; Dawson 109).

Although exhibiting these important parallels with Webb and Dawson, my analysis moves beyond the relatively limited boundaries of the critical work these scholars have done on Shelley's use of privatives. They both importantly identify the concept of external and internal potentiality as central to an understanding of Shelley's use of privatives; my argument incorporates a similar idea of a free mental territory for human thought to recreate itself. My analysis also reflects Dawson's observation on Shelley's *Speculations* that underscores the transformation from within the imaginative mind as an essential precondition for the external change (Dawson 109). At the same time, Webb and Dawson leave the ultimate question largely unanswered: "What in

Shelley's thought and poetic vision compels him to use privative epithets so widely and frequently in his works?"

In taking up this unaddressed question, my study supersedes the scholarly work of Webb and Dawson in several ways. First, my analysis moves beyond the scope of primarily a single work, *Prometheus Unbound*, and explores a sample of Shelley's major works previously unexamined for their use of privatives: "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty," "Mont Blanc," *Queen Mab*, *Laon and Cythna*, and *The Mask of Anarchy*. Second, my study brings together the somewhat separate (although certainly interrelated) venues Webb and Dawson offer to analyze Shelley's privatives. For the first time in Shelley scholarship, my analysis thoroughly combines an interest in Shelley's poetic craftsmanship in using privatives (Webb's primary approach) and the poet's philosophical views (Dawson's main focus and, earlier, Buxton's) in the area where they meet most closely—his theory of the intersection of poetry and language. Finally, I do not ground my conclusions so much in what moral, political, and poetic vision privatives advance within a single work (Webb) or what philosophical views they reflect within the context of this one work (Dawson and, to some extent, Buxton). Rather, in a novel way, my conclusion depends on the poet's own larger theoretical formulation of a moral, political, and poetic vision and his conception of how the language of his poetry is intended to advance his revolutionary goals within human consciousness.

Hogle and Keach: Privatives and Shelley's View of Language

Since my previous chapter discusses in detail the interaction of my arguments with the scholarly work of Hogle and Keach, here I shall restate only the major points of how my study builds on, reflects, or objects to the analyses of these scholars. Referencing Shelley's arguments in *On Life*, Hogle formulates his poststructuralist argument that, as signs, words in Shelley's texts refer to nothing outside of themselves and an infinite number of other signs (Hogle, "Conditions" 49-50). Thus, any meaning of Shelley's texts derives from an ever-shifting movement between signifiers, while any attempt to arrive at a substantive and determinate single meaning remains a perpetually elusive enterprise (Hogle, "Conditions" 51-52; *Process* 23). Hogle insists that such a perspective provides for the multiplicity of meanings and interpretive possibilities Shelley celebrates in the *Defence,* and contends that this poststructuralist view constitutes the only alternative to the tyranny of a single "ultimate Referent" that dictates only a handful of fixed interpretations of Shelley's texts ("Conditions" 49-50, 52).

Hogle correctly recognizes how Shelley's texts hold a potential for ever-unfolding creations, transformations, and combinations of thought and meaning within the human mind. From this, however, it does not necessarily follow, as Hogle insists, that Shelley's writing must be devoid of any substantive and determinate meaning at all (*Process* 23). In a more balanced way, my study shows that Shelley's privative adjectives are indeed minimally referentially bound; however, the poet does not employ them only and primarily to set in motion an infinite interaction of signifiers within a self-enclosed system of linguistic signs—a play of signs that voids possibilities for identifying their substantive and determinate meanings. Instead, as his poems and his assertions in the *Defence* demonstrate, Shelley uses privative epithets to repudiate particular forms of internal and external tyranny. As they work to subvert and un-define various manifestations of oppression from within and without, Shelley's poetic privatives also help liberate the mind toward an embrace of such specific and determinate moral, political, religious, and social ideals as can usher in perpetually fresh re-imaginings and reconsiderations of all aspects of human life.

In opposing Hogle's arguments, I agree with Keach that Shelley's skeptical elimination of any distinction between signs or words and external objects in *On Life* is, in that fragment, rather a "cause for dismay" for the poet; Shelley, at the same time, celebrates the elimination of this distinction as a manifestation of the fully transformed moral, political, and social actualities described in *Prometheus Unbound* (Keach, *Power* 36, 39). My analysis also follows Keach's assertion that, throughout his poetic career, Shelley maintains the empiricist distinction between words and things, as well as the empiricist attitude about the constitutive and constituting power of language—awareness that language is both "inherently constrained yet incompletely determined" (*Power* 13, 22, 36; *Romanticism* 125; *Style* 40-41).

I rely on these observations in formulating my own argument about Shelley's use of privatives. Denoting absences and expressing negations meant to liberate the mind, privatives even more intimately relate to "thoughts alone" than other forms of expression through the medium of language (Shelley, *Defence* 513). As they bespeak only denial, privation, and absence, and thus reflect minimal referential constraints, privatives also largely escape the political and ideological corruption inherent in language, even as they continue to operate within language. Shelley's use of liberating privative epithets—a language least interposing between imaginative "conception" and its verbal poetic "expression," and least contaminated by culture, politics, and ideology—should be seen as his revitalization of language from within by manipulating and resisting rather than acquiescing to the "arbitrary signifying processes on which language depends" (Shelley, *Defence* 513; Keach, *Romanticism* 124-25).

Present Study: Key Considerations and Conclusions

What emerges from this brief overview of the critical interaction between earlier scholarship on Shelley's use privatives and language and my present study is the significant novelty of my analysis in a number of ways. My present exploration of Shelley's privatives brings together both a substantial interest in Shelley's poetry (a detailed examination of the poet's privatives within a number of his major works) and a close inquiry into Shelley's intellectual, philosophical, and revolutionary thought where it informs his poetry most—his theory of the inextricable relationship of poetry and language. As demonstrated in the preceding chapters, Shelley's use of privatives functions as intrinsic, not merely auxiliary, to Shelley's fundamental conception of how the language of poetry is to make liberating progress through the human mind and help effect a complete imaginative transformation of the political, religious, moral, and social order, both within and without.

The work of privative epithets to advance poetry's fundamental and essential pioneer task to facilitate a mind-liberating "vacancy" manifests itself in a variety of ways in the works I have examined (Shelley, *On Life* 507). In "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty," privatives critically work to un-write the dominant religious discourse of Christian orthodoxy on one hand—creating a spiritual and political vacuum—and facilitate a new discourse on spirituality and, by implication, politics that invites a more egalitarian, heterodox spirituality with minimal doctrinal and political constraints. Privatives in "Mont Blanc" serve to eradicate perceived signs of divine handiwork in the mountain landscape and foster the mind's recognition of its own powers to reimagine and, in a sense, recreate the phenomenal world by reconfiguring major concerns of epistemology, religion, politics, and the larger human experience.

In the three poems, *Queen Mab*, *Laon and Cythna*, and *The Mask of Anarchy*, the work of privative adjectives may be seen in terms of desolation and reclamation, while privative epithets proper may be seen as weapons of liberty. In the process of exposing the impoverishment of human experience caused by political and religious oppression, both external and internal, privatives help destroy the roots of these forces deep in the human mind. Yet, they also reclaim this mental wilderness—this liberated, vacant territory of human consciousness—by replanting ideals of liberty, truth, and justice which are thus rendered invincible against tyranny and change. In terms of Shelley's historical moment, re-instilling these positive ideals within the mind weans the mind from the despair that followed the collapse of hopes associated with the French Revolution and the gloomy skepticism about the future of political and social reform in England following the massacre in St. Peter’s Field, Manchester. In working to uproot tyrannical forces and ideas and replant the mind with the enduring principles of liberty, virtue, and hope, Shelley’s privatives help prepare the imaginative mind for perseverance in its pursuit of revolutionary ideals and, by this means, are intended to bring about a total transformation of human life and thought.

These works demonstrate that Shelley’s use of privatives performs a critical pioneer or precursory role essential to the subsequent progress of liberating ideas that Shelley sees it as his poetic task to disseminate. Privatives are also essential to Shelley’s efforts to formulate a counter-discourse: to use the language of poetry to counter words that are wrongly employed. In their work to un-write, unsay, subvert, and undo political and religious tyrannical forces, Shelley’s privatives expose how these forces employ words, a means of verbal discourse, to consolidate their power. The poet also uses his privatives to formulate, support, and legitimize a counter-discourse in opposition or as an alternative to the dominant ideologies. Thus, in “Hymn,” privatives work to un-write the “[f]rail spells” of Christian orthodoxy and other revelation-based, institutionalized faiths (Shelley, lines 27-31). In “Mont Blanc,” privatives help consolidate the power of the imaginative mind to dispel the “[l]arge codes of fraud and woe”: the mountain landscape laden with perceived religious and, by implication, political values (lines 80-83*). Queen Mab*’s privatives help counter the “specious names” that forge forms of religious and political domination; *Laon and Cythna*’s privatives form an element in the arsenal of words as “weapons” to counter the names for tyranny that sanction its various incarnations; in *The Mask*, privatives join other sword-like words in bringing about and proclaiming the defeat of tyranny and oppression (Shelley, *Queen Mab* 4.104-16; *Laon*, lines 730-34, 842-43, 3280-84; *Mask*, lines 138, 145, 297-300, 364-67). All these instances in Shelley exemplify a larger Romantic concern with formulating a counter-discourse—postulating a verbal formulation of an alternate or opposite perspective—in relation to the dominant discourses and ideologies.

In addition to helping usher in an entire renovation of social order and formulating Shelley's counter-discourse in politics, religion, and morality, the poet employs privatives to renovate language from within. In his essentially Lockean perspective on language, the poet remains keenly sensitive to both the limitations and power of language, how language may at the same time be constituted by and itself constitute political and ideological formations, and how it reflects historical and cultural processes even while it works as an instrument of their making. To reduce the political and ideological corruption inherent in language, Shelley employs in his poetry privative epithets that denote only absence, negation, and void—adjectives that in their privative formulation exhibit minimal referential constraints, and, therefore, suffer less from political and ideological distortions. Also, in their minimal appeal to the senses and, consequently, with fewer referential constraints, privatives even more than other forms of verbal expression intimately relate to the mind only. As they convey more faithfully his imaginative conceptions through the medium of language, employing privative epithets helps the poet increase the potential for growth and progress of his revolutionary ideals within the human mind. Minimizing potential hindrances of language and maximizing its power of direct effect upon the mind, privative epithets offer to Shelley not only a fitting but also essential means to relate his revolutionary vision to human consciousness.

As they act upon the imaginative mind, privatives not only, like pioneers, help initially liberate the consciousness for acceptance of Shelley's revolutionary vision, but also accompany the progress and growth of the liberated mind toward imagining ever-expanding egalitarian reconfigurations of human life and thought. Privatives initially work to liberate the mind, uproot "error," and "purge" the mind from the tyranny of customary thought sanctioned by conventional conceptualizations of language (Shelley, *On Life* 507; *Defence* 533). Privatives help unweave the mental shroud of doctrine, statute, and tradition that keeps an imaginative vision of life dim, in order to facilitate a liberating *tabula rasa* within human consciousness (*On Life* 507; *Defence* 533). Privative adjectives also further poetry's larger fundamental work to awaken and enlarge the mind and create boundless spaces for perpetual re-imaginings of mental, political, moral, and social order. Privative epithets in Shelley are the "unacknowledged legislators" of his revolutionary poetics (*Defence* 535).

Conclusion

Just as my analysis provides a greater acknowledgement of the essential function of privative adjectives within Shelley's revolutionary and poetic vision, it also reveals possibilities for further research. It is, therefore, most fitting to end my present study by pointing out what new beginnings and future improvements my work suggests. One obvious possibility is to examine more of Shelley's works, his poetry, prose, and letters, to see whether there are additional patterns and variations in his uses of privatives. Another avenue of research is to ask whether Shelley's use of privatives succeeds in what he intends for them to do: liberate the mind and further his revolutionary vision. It would also be worthwhile to devote more attention to Shelley's theory of poetry, language, and imagination, and their interaction. Yet another study might explore the way Shelley revitalizes language not only in his uses of privatives, but also in coining new privative epithets. Both Massey and Webb point out that Shelley coined a number of privative epithets, and this would be an interesting subject to revisit especially in comparison with up-to-date entries in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (Massey 18-25; Webb, "Negatives" 38-39, 60-61). Shelley's neologisms might also be considered within a larger Romantic attempt to revitalize language in this way. Along these lines, one might productively ask, "How did Shelley's (and, perhaps, generally Romantic) inventiveness with words have an impact on the English language and its literature?" Although significantly exploring Shelley's privatives, my present study is, in a sense, similar to my subject: it also works as a pioneer to make a path for further scholarly expansion and possibilities for inquiry.

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