Shelley’s Revolt in the Mediterranean: Writing Restoration

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Writing to Byron on 8 September 1816, Shelley urged him to compose an epic on the French Revolution, 'the master-theme of the epoch we live in', in order to exert a revitalizing influence on the 'one mind' – his term for socio-political concepts such as 'the people' and 'public opinion', which were gradually emerging in the unsettled post-Napoleonic years.[1] Byron never complied, even though *Don Juan* would possibly have climaxed in Paris during the Terror, its hero guillotined like the historic Jean-Baptiste (Anacharsis) Clootz.[2] Instead, Shelley himself wrote such a poem, mixing epic with romance and inflecting 'the master-theme' through the ideological-textual weaponry he had been honing since the composition of *Queen Mab*, with 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty' and 'Mont Blanc' as crucial points in this line of development.[3] However, in *Laon and Cythna* and its reworking as *The Revolt of Islam*, he did not merely write a poem about the French Revolution *redux* or the possibility of its return. He also created a poem about restoration and of the Restoration era, sharing this focal concern with other contemporary works such as William Wordsworth's *The Excursion* (1814), Robert Southey's *Roderick, the Last of the Goths* (1814), Walter Scott's *Waverley* (1814), Felicia Hemans's *The Restoration of the Works of Art to Italy* (1816) and cantos III and IV of Lord Byron's *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1816-1818). In these years, two meanings of restoration circulated and competed in cultural-political discourse – 'returning to an original state' and 'adding something new' – both informing a literary debate about restoration as 'not simply looking backwards, but also

[1] *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Frederick L. Jones, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), I, pp. 504, 507.
[2] 'I meant to take him the tour of Europe—with a proper mixture of siege—battle—and adventure—and to make him finish as *Anarcharsis Cloots*—in the French revolution […] I had not quite fixed whether to make him end in Hell—or in an unhappy marriage,—not knowing which would be the severest'. *Byron's Letters and Journals*, ed. L. A. Marchand, 13 vols (London: John Murray, 1973-94), VIII, p. 78.
[3] See Cian Duffy, *Shelley and the Revolutionary Sublime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 125, 134, and on Shelley's use of romance in *Revolt*, see David Duff, *Romance and Revolution: Shelley and the Politics of a Genre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 167.

creating a present and future […] for post-Napoleonic Europe'.[4] While second-generation writers such as Shelley did not ignore the former meaning, they increasingly addressed restoration as a new dawn for Europe, and Britain within it, by reactivating and modifying ideas of change and transformation. Crucially, this semantic-ideological duality developed in conjunction with the evolving ideas of revolution which, over the same period, oscillated between the earlier meaning of a movement returning to its point of origin (and thus akin to the first notion of restoration mentioned above) and the newer meaning of 'abrupt, broken, and unpredictable sequences of events' resulting in an interrupted cycle, 'an overthrow, a half-circle, a disruption', in turn promising a fresh start and evidently resonating in the second meaning of restoration.[5]

Exploring post-1815 literary writings concerned with 'a re-visioning of the original revolutionary departure', Paul Hamilton's *Realpoetik* (2013) is one of the most effective recent critical contributions on the connection between Restoration and Romantic-period literature.[6] Its philosophical, historical and aesthetic focus on post-Napoleonic Continental Romanticisms throws into relief how, during the Restoration, the political imagination effectively shaped political reality. Concurrently, his study has opened up critical insights into the possibility that 'second-generation English imaginings might not only satirize but also construct alternatives to the political imagining emerging from the Congress [of Vienna]'.[7] In this light, Hamilton investigates the different ways in which the literary field as a reconceived republic of letters overlapped with the concept of political republic to open up 'a creative opportunity' that could yield both conservative and radical outcomes – a dimension he calls 'the moment of *Realpoetik*', in which the battle for political reality is fought on 'a rhetorical field whose free speech is exemplary of what politics should be like'.[8] Since this process of 'constructing alternatives' as a way of operating within reality or acting upon it is central

[4] Fiona Robertson, 'Walter Scott and the Restoration of Europe', *The European English Messenger*, 24 (2015), pp. 48, 49.
[5] Ronald Paulson, *Representations of Revolution (1789-1820)* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1983), pp. 49, 50.
[6] Paul Hamilton, *Realpoetik: European Romanticism and Literary Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 4.
[7] Hamilton, *Realpoetik*, p. 3.
[8] Hamilton, *Realpoetik*, pp. 33, 38, 35.

to Shelley's inspiration for *The Revolt of Islam*, with these premises in mind, this essay examines the poem's exploration of Continental imperial-national struggles instigated by the Restoration of the *ancien régimes* decreed by the Congress of Vienna. This panorama underlies much of the poem's geo-political discourse and recursive narrative structure, most visibly so in the reactionary backlash against Laon and Cythna's revolution in the Golden City. Figuring the conflict between freedom and 'anarchy' Shelley saw as the driving force in universal history, the poem also advances a reflection on post-Napoleonic politics, establishing an intertextual dialogue with other contemporary works such as Wordsworth's *Excursion*, Byron's *Childe Harold* IV and Hemans's *Restoration*.

The Preface specifies the aim of *Revolt* as that of 'illustrating the growth and progress of individual mind aspiring after excellence, and devoted to the love of mankind' by returning to the unalloyed principles of the French Revolution, its '*beau ideal*'.[9] In turn, the poem engages on several levels with the poets who first responded to the revolutionary upheaval, and Wordsworth in particular, whose *Excursion*, his first new publication since *Poems in Two Volumes* (1807), offered an extended and, to his many detractors, an unacceptably misguided rumination on the present and future of England, as well as a wholesale rethinking of the revolutionary years.

By repeatedly addressing Wordsworth's poetry in his career, Shelley aimed to confront 'the problem of creating effective poetic relationships' between subject and object and to counteract what he saw as Wordsworth's bungled way out of this impasse 'by a subjectively-produced illusion, a false strength, ending in the failure of *The Excursion*, where self-doubt becomes the poetry of hesitancy, inaction and compromise'.[10] As Timothy Morton notes, through *Alastor* Shelley countered Wordsworth's rethinking of the Revolution in *The Excursion* 'by showing that a solitary wanderer does not match the world in any meaningfully ethical way'.[11] In fairness, Wordsworth's poem

[9] *The Complete Poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, gen. ed. Donald H. Reiman, Neil Fraistat, Nora Crook, vol. III (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), p. 113 (all subsequent references – by canto, stanza and line number in the case of citations from the poetic text – appear in brackets in the text); *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, I, p. 564.
[10] G. Kim Blank, *Wordsworth's Influence on Shelley: A Study of Poetic Authority* (London: Macmillan, 1988), p. 162.
[11] Tim Morton, *Shelley and the Revolution in Taste: The Body and the Natural World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 105. On the relations between *Alastor* and *The Excursion*, see Sally West, *Coleridge and Shelley: Textual Engagement* (Abingdon, New York: Routledge, 2016 [2007]), p. 61.

insistently asserts the need to act and make a new start, for the individual and the polity alike, through a recovery of meaningful ethical codes. An emblematic feature in this respect is the process of revivification of the Solitary's withered mind and soul through the redirecting of his former revolutionary fervour, which reaches its climax and consummation in Book IV ('Despondency Corrected'). A sense of urgency similarly pervades the more stentorian sections of *The Excursion* where Wordsworth imagines a new England for post-Napoleonic times, as in the 'Poet's Address to the State and Church' at the beginning of Book VI. If *Revolt* follows the challenge of *Alastor* to *The Excursion* by 'seeking a renewed hope for the future', it does so by launching several challenges to Wordsworth's ideas of action and engagement, and, from the outset, through a prophetic perspective similar to that adopted by the Grasmere sage, for both in *Revolt* and *The Excursion* the present constitutes a map for reading the future of Britain and Europe in the post-Napoleonic Restoration.[12]

Shelley approached Wordsworth's poem through William Hazlitt's damning 1814 review in the *Examiner*, with its memorable *exordium*: 'This will never do!'[13] In his ruthless dissection published in three parts between August and October 1814, Hazlitt highlighted Wordsworth's overwhelmingly 'intense intellectual egotism' and how, in his verse, 'The power of his mind preys upon itself'.[14] By anaesthetizing the soul, this hyperbolic solipsism generates the loss of revolutionary passion that results in political apostasy. In its best-known and most controversial central section, the review sets up a powerful vindication of the French Revolution, which would have resonated strongly with Shelley since it offered an answer to what he denounced as Coleridge's views on the 'complete failure of the French Revolution'.[15] In contrast, as William A. Ulmer observes, in *Revolt* Shelley counters 'the politics of Wordsworth's sublime egotism' by throwing into relief 'the sexual passion of Laon and Cythna', in accordance with the cult of Mediterranean and classical sensuality through

[12] Jeffrey N. Cox, *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School: Keats, Shelley, Hunt, and their Circle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 215.
[13] See William A. Ulmer, *Shelleyan Eros: The Rhetoric of Romantic Love* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 53-54.
[14] *William Wordsworth: The Critical Heritage, 1793-1820*, ed. Robert Woof (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 370, 371.
[15] Ulmer, *Shelleyan Eros*, pp. 53-55.

which second-generation Romantic poets identified an alternative culture and politics in the post-Waterloo years.[16] Also, in the Preface Shelley rejects 'methodical and systematic argument' (p. 113), that is the idea of a 'system' informing poetic discourse expounded by Wordsworth in *The Excursion* and which Byron termed 'a new system to perplex sages' in *Don Juan*, associating it with Restoration politics and the systematic repression of liberty promoted by the Holy Alliance.[17] Shelley himself associated 'system' with the reactionary and repressive climate of the Restoration, as in his letter to Thomas Jefferson Hogg of late August 1815, where he remarks bitterly that the 'political events of the day' are characterized by the 'continuance of the same system which the Allies had begun to pursue' with the first fall of Napoleon in 1814.[18] Viewed in this context, what detractors tend to see as the poem's limitations (abstraction, idealism, excessive literary references, erudition and didacticism) are stylistic and structural aspects that form part of its polemical discussion of restoration and the Restoration, as well as of problematic poetic figurations of it such as Wordsworth's.

The oppositional nature of Shelley's writing may be gauged from his reinvention of several features of *The Excursion*. To some extent, the *dramatis personae* in *Revolt* are recreations of Wordsworth's: Laon goes into exile and becomes a solitary figure, like the homonymous character in *The Excursion*; like those of Wordsworth's 'Poet', Cythna's prophetic speeches have a quality that encourages the people of the Golden City to rebel; while the hermit who frees Laon in Canto III and helps him recover is a therapeutic figure, again like the Wanderer who enables the Solitary to recover from his post-revolutionary despondency. In addition, Shelley's challenge to Wordsworth's poem is orchestrated through a complex configuration of time and place. Regarding the chronological structure of *The Excursion*, Hazlitt had noted that, since 'All things move not in progress, but in a ceaseless round', 'we will never cease, nor be prevented from returning on the wings of imagination

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[16] Ulmer, *Shelleyan Eros*, p. 57. See also Marilyn Butler on the second-generation 'Cult of South' in *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries: English Literature and its Background, 1760-1830* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp. 113-37.

[17] William Wordsworth, *The Excursion*, in William Wordsworth, *The Poems: Volume Two*, ed. John O. Hayden (London: Penguin, 1977), p. 37; l. 28, 'Dedication' to *Don Juan*, in Lord Byron, *The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. J. J. McGann, 7 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980-93), V, p. 4.

[18] *Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, I, 430.

to that bright dream of our youth', 'that glad dawn of the day-star of liberty; that spring-time of the world'.[19] Shelley addresses this temporal organization by fashioning an intricate plot based on frequent shifts back and forth in time, and from the real to the visionary. Then, in terms of space and geography – the other half of the Bakhtinian 'chronotope' – Shelley replaces the English lakes, valleys and mountains of *The Excursion* with a Mediterranean and Levantine setting, an exotic and, above all, a transnational location through which he focuses on the post-Napoleonic geo-politics of Europe. Centred on the allusively named Argolis and Golden City, this setting reflects the universalizing rubric of a 'vision of the nineteenth century' as indicated by the subtitle to the original *Laon and Cythna* and by the powerfully trans-historical image of the eagle and snake 'wreathed in fight' in the poem's opening vision (I.8.4, p. 133). At the same time, however, both locations reference the South-Eastern borders of Europe between Greece and Istanbul. Indeed, Shelley's propensity to write Greece *sub specie aeternitatis* (most clearly so in *Hellas*, 1822) also implies the conjuring up of an Eastern Mediterranean setting which mirrors the key position of the South of Europe and the Levant in pre- and post-Napoleonic geo-politics as the hub of a network of continental instabilities. If, on the one hand, the geography of *Revolt* is a spatial translation of the clashing forces that shaped the French Revolution in the 1790s, it also refers to the mounting tensions between Greece and Turkey, as well as the hopes of European philhellenes, in the 1810s, while more generally refracting the repressive climate in Europe after the Congress of Vienna.

This geo-historical nexus inevitably raises the question of the significance of Islam in the poem. As Andrew Warren observes, critics have tended to read its oriental setting as 'merely a mask' for European or more generally Western concerns, making the poem an 'allegory for and theopolitical interrogation of the French Revolution set in a foreign realm'.[20] By contrast, recent interventions such

[19] *William Wordsworth: The Critical Heritage*, p. 375. As Alison Hickey notes, Shelley in *Revolt* 'repeatedly frustrates any expectations we might have entertained of narrative progression'. *Impure Conceits: Rhetoric and Ideology in Wordsworth's 'Excursion'* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 8.

[20] Andrew Warren, *The Orient and the Young Romantics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 186. For instance, Nigel Leask notes that the poem 'hovers in an underspecified space' alluding to what Shelley considered 'the two principal revolutionary sites of the year 1817' – England and India. *British Romantic Writers and the East: Anxieties of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 75.

as Warren's and Gerard Cohen-Vrignaud's have re-evaluated the poem's orientalist and global perspectives by simultaneously linking them to a reflection on oriental-style despotism in Regency England and an attack against conservative anxieties about politicized crowds and public political gatherings, respectively.[21] Moreover, the East contributes to Shelley's rewriting of Wordsworth's vision of restoration. The romance and colour of the Orient, which were among the reasons Shelley appreciated Southey's orientalist 'epics', form part of the 'brilliancy and magnificence' he bestows on his poem (p. 118) possibly in order to correct what Hazlitt deplored as the lack of 'pomp and decoration' and 'fanciful invention' in *The Excursion*.[22] The ornaments and atmospheres of the East could function as antidotes to the 'infectious gloom' (p. 116) Shelley saw as prevalent in the body politic, especially among erstwhile revolutionary enthusiasts; and, from a perspective that is even more pertinent to this essay, the East in *Revolt* also resonates with Shelley's concerns over the post-Napoleonic settlement of the Continent.

The East as a crucible of contemporary historical and ideological forces is visible in the narrative of the repression of the peaceful revolution in the Golden City. There, the 'leagued kings' from neighbouring countries and their armies of 'moving heartless things' gather for a ghastly conclave (X. 4. 6, X. 5. 2, p. 278). Tellingly, the most powerful voice at this Vienna-like congress is that of a 'Christian priest' in *Laon and Cythna*, significantly recast as an 'Iberian priest' in *Revolt*, who 'hated the clear light / Of wisdom and free thought' (X. 32. 1, X. 33. 1-2, pp. 288-9), a zealot preaching the annihilation of all revolutionary aspirations by burning Laon in an *auto da fe* to appease divine wrath and restore the status quo, which then leads to a massive immolation of revolutionaries in 'three hundred furnaces' around the city (X. 45. 6, p. 294). Intimating a practice associated with the Spanish Inquisition, Shelley effects a meeting of East and West (the priest is described as leading

[21] Warren, *The Orient and the Young Romantics*, p. 186; Gerard Cohen-Vrignaud, *Radical Orientalism: Rights, Reform, and Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 84-85.
[22] *William Wordsworth: The Critical Heritage*, p. 376. Hazlitt remarked further that the poem lacks in 'change of character', 'variety of scenery', 'bustle' and 'machinery' (*William Wordsworth: The Critical Heritage*, p. 371). See also Ulmer, *Shelleyan Eros*, p. 54.

the ‘legioned west’, X. 32. 2, p. 288) which allusively throws into relief the tensions kindled by the Restoration *status quo*.

This figuration draws upon a long tradition of negative images of Spain rooted in the early modern ‘Black Legend’ of a country dominated by despotism and obscurantism, which for many British commentators had become reality with Ferdinand VII’s return to the throne in 1814. A recurrent feature in the Romantics’ literary, cultural and historical-political imaginary, Spain condensed an inevitably variegated set of meanings: it stood for a staunchly traditional European nation, yet one imbued with, even contaminated by, oriental traits owing to the long Islamic domination or Eastern-style economic and social decline; politically, it displayed widely divergent forms of liberal reformism, patriotic conservatism and reactionary repression; it was an *exemplum* of heroic opposition to foreign oppression powered, however, by a deplorably blinkered Catholicism; and, in a few years, it went from a bulwark of anti-Napoleonic resistance and the birthplace of the 1812 liberal Constitution (and thus of political liberalism) to a post-Napoleonic condition as a secondary court firmly in the grip of an absolutist monarch.[23] In 1816, in the first of his ‘Lay Sermons’, Coleridge extolled Spain as a land of tradition and a locus of Burkean precedent, in which ‘loftier principles and wiser measures’ acted as a bastion against the diffusion of the ‘poor, cold, narrow’ principles of ‘the ENLIGHTENED EIGHTEENTH CENTURY’.[24] Conceived as a demonic manifestation of this vision taken to its extreme consequences, the Iberian priest in Shelley’s *Revolt* is a coded encapsulation of the oppressive regime of the restored Bourbon king, who reinstated the Inquisition and persecuted liberals through surveillance and imprisonment. More broadly, the priest is a trope for the whole process of restoration initiated by the Congress of Vienna and based on the concept of a ‘Concert of Europe’ orchestrated by the Holy Alliance. This connexion between the restored Spanish regime and the climate of repression in post-Napoleonic Europe was frequently the

[23] See Diego Saglia and Ian Haywood, ‘Introduction: Spain and British Romanticism’, in *Spain in British Romanticism 1800-1840*, ed. Diego Saglia and Ian Haywood (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 1-16.
[24] *Lay Sermons*, ed. R. J. White, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), VI, pp. 11, 15.

object of satirical prints in the same years – such as George Cruikshank's 'Twelfth Night or What You Will' (1815), Thomas Rowlandson's 'The Privy Council of a King' (1815) and George Cruikshank's 'The Curse of Spain' (1818). A few years later, George Cruikshank returned to this imagery and applied it to Britain in 'The Damnable Association or the Infernal Inquisition of Black Friars' (1821), a satire against the principles and activities of the 'Constitutional Association for Opposing the Progress of Disloyal and Seditious Principles'.[25] Writing in parallel with this figurative complex centred on a toxic mixture of oriental features and Gothic clichés made real, Shelley depicts Spain in *Revolt* as a focal point of oppression and repression in the post-Napoleonic West, which finds its counterpart in the Sultan's tyrannical power.[26]

In accordance with Shelley's universalizing approach, the Iberian priest personifies Holy Alliance policies and their human costs, yet, in keeping with the poem's cardinal theme of liberty and despotism 'wreathed in fight', the Gothic nightmare of the *auto da fe* is tempered by longer-term reflections and projections and, in turn, by the possibility of transcending the 'here and now'. Significantly, instead of fleeing to safety in America, Cythna returns to the Golden City and joins Laon on the pyre (XII, 8-15, pp. 307-10). Her sudden reappearance strikes fear into the expectant crowd, the soldiers and their tyrannical masters. However, once more, the Iberian priest dictates the course of action: 'Is it mine / To stand alone, when kings and soldiers fear / A woman? God has sent his other victim *here*' (XII. 11. 7-9, p. 309, my emphasis). He then orders the hesitating officials: 'Slaves, to the stake / Bind her, and on my head the burthen lay / Of her just torments' (XII. 12. 3-5, p. 309). Cythna's return signifies the unstoppable resurgence of the fight for freedom, whereas the Iberian priest embodies an equally resourceful tendency to repression. In addition, this point in the poem bears out Shelley's geo-political outlook on restoration as compressed within the 'here'

[25] For an examination of these visual renditions of Spain as a post-Napoleonic Gothic nightmare and the 'British Inquisition', see Ian Haywood, *Romanticism and Caricature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 121-36.

[26] See Cohen-Vrignaud, *Radical Orientalism*, pp. 75-77. This figuration of Spain can be contrasted with Shelley's representation of the Spaniards as a 'glorious people [who] vibrated again / The lightning of the nations' in 'Ode to Liberty' published with *Prometheus Unbound* (1820).

pronounced by the Spanish priest. On the one hand, this locative word refers to the Golden City; on the other, though, if we bear in mind Cythna's original transatlantic destination, it also means Europe and its Eastern boundaries, where Shelley's 'vision of the nineteenth century' is set. One of the meanings of restoration, the poem suggests, is that freedom is not merely an American dream but a possibility for Europe, too. Indeed, it is the gruesome *auto da fe* that enables the sanctification of Laon and Cythna and their transit to the 'immortal Senate', the Elysium where 'The better Genius of this world's estate' resides (XII. 31. 2, 5, p. 316).

The South of Europe (and Spain within it) was a pivotal geo-political zone in Restoration and post-Restoration Europe, and one connected to the East by a Mediterranean sea which was equally crucial as an area of nominal British supremacy, though with Barbary pirates scouring it and the Ottoman empire losing ground in the East. By creating a conjunction between the Western and Eastern extremes of the Mediterranean, Shelley in *Revolt* delineates a geography that historically and symbolically represents a passage, a necessary purgatory, towards a renewal of the fight for revolution and regeneration, a restoration of revolution and a renovated hope for an antidote to the gloom described in the Preface. In line with the inexhaustible fight between oppression and liberation opening the poem, Shelley proclaims the inexhaustibility of resistance and revolution by making the poem's geopolitics the site of an unlimited, eternally renewable, potential for freedom.

Shelley awards dramatic visibility to circularity and recurrence through the arresting image of the beasts 'wreathed in fight' in the initial vision. The allegorical combat points to a real conflict, both permanent and historically specific, which, in the poem's time-frame, translates the failed revolution in 'great France' (I. 39. 2, p. 144) into its iteration in Argolis and the Golden City, as well as into the 'Festival' celebrating the bloodless birth of a new polity (V. 37. 4, p. 206), which is a reprise of the revolutionary festivals of post-1789 France. Shelley's modelling of this scene on the *Fête de la fédération* held in Paris on the first anniversary of the Fall of the Bastille becomes even more significant within the poem's numerous narrative 'rewinds' or structural-ideological moments

of return and recurrence.[27] The next of these rewinds coincides with the repression of the revolution, which then introduces a new return to the past with the flashback of Canto VII, where Cythna relates her 'strange tale of strange endurance' (VII. 3. 1, p. 238), followed by her liberation from the cavern where she has been imprisoned and subsequent metamorphosis into a prophetess (VII. 38-41, pp. 250-1). Subsequently, Cantos X-XII feature a return of repression leading to the protagonists' death on the pyre, a section presenting further rewinds such as the reference to America (XI. 22-24, pp. 303-4) as the land where hope for political disenfranchisement will survive, and the protagonists' transfiguration into immaterial essences and the manifestations of 'a winged Thought' (XII. 31. 1, p. 316) harking back to the 'winged Form', the sight '[s]uspending thought' (I. 7. 6, I. 8. 2, p. 133), gradually coming into focus as the knotted eagle and serpent in Canto I.

Commenting on the alternating *détournements* and renewals of the revolutionary impetus in *Revolt*, Hugh Roberts notes that they serve to illuminate 'the relationships between power, conservatism, death, repetition, and aggression, which are all linked in Shelley's concept of custom'.[28] If repetition is central to Shelley's vision of history as chaos, the poem also presents the possibility of evading it, since it explores a 'subtending continuity' in history that differs from repetitively unproductive and ultimately numbing custom.[29] This double approach is undoubtedly a factor in the poem's complexity and its status as one of the least frequently examined in Shelley's canon.[30] However, it also determines much of its import in relation to its reworking of ideas of restoration and the Restoration.

Revolt critically confronts both ideas of restoration circulating at the time ('returning to an original state' and 'adding something new') by way of its complexly recursive structure. In this fashion, it emphatically abolishes the providential and teleologic line of development endorsed by

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[27] Duffy, *Shelley and the Revolutionary Sublime*, pp. 139-40.
[28] Hugh Roberts, *Shelley and the Chaos of History: A New Politics of Poetry* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), p. 164.
[29] Roberts, *Shelley and the Chaos of History*, p. 176.
[30] Stuart Sperry, *Shelley's Major Verse: The Narrative and Dramatic Poetry* (Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 43. Also Hugh Roberts notes that the poem generally resists interpretation, since it 'remains divided against itself and "unreadable"' (*Shelley and the Chaos of History*, p. 181).

Wordsworth in the patriotically triumphant sections of *The Excursion* (especially the hymn to the British Throne opening Book VI) and his 'odes' of 1814-16, most overtly in the celebration of the return of a 'goodly Ordinance' in 'Ode: The Morning of the Day Appointed for a General Thanksgiving. January 18, 1816'.[31] By contrast, Shelley adopts a sinuous, indeed an arabesque-like narrative structure (re-echoing Southey's use of the arabesque in *Thalaba*) in order to define restoration as an unfinished process, constantly halted but certainly not defeated and neutralized;[32] and this cyclic progression mirrors and expands Shelley's preoccupation with revolution, and the French Revolution in particular, the writing of which, as Cian Duffy perceptively notes, amounts to a 'righting' of it – a recursive 're-imagining' aimed at relocating revolutionary energy within an 'economy of hope'.[33] Shelley's narrative arabesque in *Revolt* is of an unmistakably circular and recursive kind. The initial image of 'wreathing' aptly returns near the end when Laon declares 'I do weave / A chain I cannot break' (IX. 33. 7-8, p. 276), reprising the notions of continuity and uninterruptedness that ground the poem's structure, as well as its ideological and political message. Shelley, Sperry observes, shapes the poem so that it 'permits him to anticipate repeated defeats for the Spirit of Good within the world and yet to argue the illogic of despair', each failure to reach the ideal bringing humanity closer to the supreme good.[34] This accords with the representation, in *Revolt*, of the seeming stability of post-1815 Europe through the recovery of an earlier balance which, however, is constantly threatened by shifts and transformations – in other words, the poem consciously activates and critically contrasts the two meanings of restoration intersecting in the Continent's political context.

As noted at the beginning of this essay, Shelley did not deal with these concerns in isolation, but rather as part of a contemporary poetic engagement with restoration from different ideological and historical perspectives. Comparable formal and ideological strategies to those adopted by Shelley

[31] l. 194, in Wordsworth, *The Poems: Volume Two*, p. 324.
[32] On Southey and Shelley's orientalism, see Francis Lo, 'Southey, Shelley and the Orientalist Quest: Geography and Genre', *European Journal of English Studies*, 6 (2002), pp. 143-58.
[33] Duffy, *Shelley and the Revolutionary Sublime*, pp. 124, 127.
[34] Sperry, *Shelley's Major Verse*, p. 43.

in *Revolt* appear in Canto IV of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1818), where Byron adopts a prophetic tone, as, speaking of the Holy Alliance, he thunders: 'For what they have done abroad, and especially in the South [of Europe], "Verily they *will* have their reward," and at no very distant period'.[35] Though describing the regime of Restoration imposed on the Continent as 'the intent of tyranny avowed', Byron also illuminates the gloomy prospect by voicing a hope for a second, 'better Spring': 'Yet, Freedom! yet thy banner, torn, but flying, / Streams like the thunder-storm *against* the wind'.[36] Similarly, Shelley's poetic reworking of restoration and the Restoration can be read in connection with Hemans's earlier *Restoration of the Works of Art to Italy* (1816), a historical-ekphrastic poem whose occasional nature – the return of Italy's artistic plunder from France after the Congress of Vienna – also addresses a more universal 'disposition of empire' and the 'means of resistance to it'.[37] As the poem develops, Hemans more and more incisively casts off nostalgic memories of ancient Roman greatness and resurgent imperial aspirations: 'Vain dream! degraded Rome! thy noon is o'er, / Once lost, thy spirit shall revive no more'.[38] These are then replaced by the power of art embodied in the returned Apollo Belvedere, which can 'Shed[] radiance round, with more than Being warm!'[39] Restoration through the revitalizing power of art inaugurates a new beginning that neutralizes expansionistic dreams of empire. In spite of its initial patriotic and militaristic outbursts, Hemans's poem is a potently eirenic anthem denouncing the futility of imperial self-renovations, and thus a fascinating correlative to Shelley's vision of the iterations of oppression and resistance to it in *Revolt* and its wish for 'a slow, gradual, silent change' (p. 116).[40]

In light of this discussion, the familiar shortcomings of Shelley's poem – its complexities, intricacies, contradictions even – appear to be textual mechanisms for effecting a re-engagement with

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[35] Lord Byron, *The Complete Poetical Works*, II, p. 124.
[36] IV. 95. 5-6, IV. 98. 1-2, in Lord Byron, *The Complete Poetical Works*, II, pp. 156, 157.
[37] Nanora Sweet, 'History, Imperialism, and the Aesthetics of the Beautiful: Hemans and the Post-Napoleonic Moment', in *At the Limits of Romanticism: Essays in Cultural, Feminist, and Materialist Criticism*, ed. Mary A. Favret and Nicola J. Watson (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 173.
[38] ll. 309-10, in Felicia Hemans, *Selected Poems, Letters, Reception Materials*, ed. Susan J. Wolfson (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 26.
[39] ll. 331-4, in Felicia Hemans, *Selected Poems*, p. 26.
[40] See also my essay 'British Romanticism and the Post-Napoleonic South: Writing Restoration Transnationally', *Essays in Romanticism*, 24 (2017), pp. 105-24.

revolution, as well as a rethinking of restoration and the Restoration. As Paul Hamilton observes, the poem functions as an instrument to stimulate readers, an 'experiment' to kindle 'virtuous enthusiasm' (Shelley, Preface, p. 113) through 'aesthetic education' as a pre-requisite for a new revolution.[41] To this he perceptively adds that Shelley's poem is 'strikingly engaged with the central philosophical problem of hooking up aesthetics to the world we know and in which we act'.[42] As appears from the inevitably brief comparative examinations offered above, it does so in ways that polemically rewrite the previous poetical generation and, conversely, intersect with second-generation voices.

Organizing *Revolt* as a formally and thematically provocative construct, Shelley also denies an idea of restoration as a finished process in the sense endorsed by the Congress of Vienna, replacing it with that of a renewable negotiation consonant with the poem's characteristic and strategic insistence on acts of returning and rewinding. If the poem's geo-politics unmistakably gestures at the post-Napoleonic context, its narrative structure contributes to producing the textual conditions for a rethinking of restoration and the Restoration. It does so by rekindling oppositional thinking and writing in unison with the post-1815 resurgence of reformist and radical movements, as well as by converting its Eastern setting into an expanded scenario that makes the poem's central questions relevant not only to post-Napoleonic Britain but also to the Continent and, in turn, internationalgeo-politics. As with some of his contemporaries such as Byron and Hemans, Shelley delineates an open-ended political and historical script at the centre of that still developing chapter in the Continent's history that was the Napoleonic aftermath. He combines a retrospective look at the French Revolution with an interpretation of the 'here and now' of the Restoration and its imperial implications by tracing a cultural-political geography caught up in a mechanism of iterating rewinds, which ultimately contributes to tracing the map of a vision of the nineteenth century.

[41] Paul Hamilton, 'Poetics', in *The Oxford Handbook of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Michael O'Neill and Tony Howe, with the assistance of Madeleine Callaghan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) pp. 183-4.
[42] Hamilton, 'Poetics', p. 185.