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‘—and so this tree— / O that such our death may be—’: Shelley’s Last Treescapes

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Abstract: Trees shift between visual, literal, and rhetorical figures in Shelley’s poetry, where distinctive tree species accentuate particular qualities of verse. Attentive to the final year of Shelley’s life, this essay explores the treescapes of the poet’s ultimate work, ‘The Triumph of Life’, and the pine’s suspension of time in Shelley’s last lyrics to Jane Williams: ‘To Jane. The Invitation’, ‘To Jane—The Recollection’, and ‘With a Guitar. To Jane’. The pines that populate the Jane Poems are complicit in the arrestation of the lyrical moment, embalming poetic speaker and subject in deathly amber. In ‘The Triumph of Life’, broadleaved species – the chestnut and the poplar – regenerate the fallen leaves of the ‘Ode to the West Wind’ by sowing the seeds of posterity. Rooted in a tradition of arboreal poetics from the classical world to the contemporary, Shelley’s trees construct an allusive network of intertextual echoes.

Keywords: Percy Bysshe Shelley, Romantic poetry, lyric, trees, leaves, death

‘—and so this tree— / O that such our death may be—’: Shelley’s Last Treescapes

Trees branch between Shelley’s last poems, from the pines – ‘The giants of the waste’ – that shadow ‘To Jane—The Recollection’ (22) and the felled tree’s transformation in ‘With a Guitar. To Jane’, to the ‘shadows, numerous as the dead leaves blown / In Autumn evening from a poplar tree’ that obfuscate ‘The Triumph of Life’ (528-29).¹ Trees also visually populate Shelley’s manuscripts, rising in miniature above cancelled lines of poetry, taking shape from drops of ink, and intricately spreading across landscape pages. Descriptions of ‘typical PBS doodles of trees’, to quote from the *Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts*, although addressing Shelley’s proclivity for drawing trees, crucially miss the diversity of distinct tree species in Shelley’s manuscripts.² While critical attention has been devoted to the importance of trees and tree species in studies of John Clare, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and William Wordsworth, Shelley’s trees have been neglected in comparison.³ This essay considers the significance of trees in a selection of Shelley’s poems composed in the last year of his life, centring in particular upon the role of pines in the poet’s lyrics to Jane Williams and the treescapes of ‘The Triumph of Life’.

Broadleaved species form the bulk of Shelley’s tree drawings in his extant manuscripts, from the ‘beech-groves of Bisham’ that are transported into the poet’s contemporaneous composition of *Laon and Cythna*, to the plane trees of the poet’s Geneva notebook.⁴ Shelley’s manuscripts evidence the poet’s ‘experiments with the visuality of written language and with the relationships of the verbal to the visual’, as Nancy Moore Goslee writes.⁵ In particular, Shelley’s drawings of trees form what I term an intermedial ecology within his manuscripts. By ‘intermedial ecology’, I include the study of the natural world, but also the ‘wider interrelationship between any system and its environment’,

wherein the poet's manuscripts foster an environment of textual and visual interrelations.⁶ The trees that populate a Gilpinesque landscape drawing in Shelley's Geneva notebook are overlaid by poetic prose reflections on his 1817 reading of Plato's *Symposium*, later translated in 1818 as *The Banquet*. 'Written around the drawing of cliffs and trees, drawn probably in Switzerland the year before, the note exudes the *genius loci* of this beautiful page in the notebook', James A. Notopoulos affirms.⁷ Shelley's note on the *Symposium* reveals an intermedial blending of the visual and the verbal with the poetical and the philosophical, where the poet concludes his reflections with an interpretation of eros and the critical, but playful, jibe: 'A subtlety to beat Plato'.⁸ The landscape drawing's relationship to the overlaid prose notes suggests Shelley's awareness of Plato's own penchant for subtlety. Shelley enmeshes the visual and the verbal through his drawings of trees in this scene, subtly figuring the philosopher's arboreal counterpart, *platanus*. Visualising Plato's own 'rhetorical trick', as Michael Marder has it, his 'self-insinuation' by way of the plane tree that shades Socrates and Phaedrus in the *Phaedrus*, trees mediate between poet and subject in Shelley's poetry, and between the visual and the verbal in his manuscripts.⁹

Drawing upon Cian Duffy's recent attention to the genre of Shelley's '*botanical poetry*' as 'poems which not only have a plant as their ostensible subject, or which develop extended plant imagery, but which also engage, either explicitly or implicitly, with contemporary botanical discourses and practices', trees are mediators in Shelley's corpus, where sketches interlink the visual to the verbal.¹⁰ In mediating between text and image in the manuscripts, and in mediating between lyric speaker and subject in Shelley's last poems, Shelley's trees engage with the Romantic plant's indeterminate category, 'restlessly situated between inanimate and animate kingdoms of nature', as Theresa M. Kelley writes.¹¹ This contemporary sense of indeterminacy lends itself to the quality of Shelley's poetry, which is intentionally indeterminate. As Zachary Leader and Michael O'Neill note of the final line of

the ‘Ode to the West Wind’, a poem in which Shelley shiftingly ‘treats the leaves figuratively as well as literally’, Shelley originally ‘finished with a statement: “Wind / When Winter comes Spring lags not far behind”’ before settling upon the indeterminate ‘If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?’ (70).¹² As such, the Romantic plant’s hovering between the categories of animate and inanimate enlivens the quality of indeterminacy that propels Shelley’s poetry. The interplay between Romantic plant and poetic form in the ‘Ode to the West Wind’ is emblematic of Shelley’s arboreal poetics and the proliferation of tree figures in his last poems, where the poem’s tumbling succession of *terza rima* sonnets embodies in verse its figuration of falling leaves.

Trees are also rhetorical figures in Shelley’s poetry, as in the orphic poet’s ‘dead thoughts’, passing ‘Like withered leaves’ in the ‘Ode to the West Wind’ (63-4), and the ‘shape all light’ of ‘The Triumph of Life’ who ‘did bend her / Head under the dark boughs...like a willow’ (352; 363-4). The amorphous shape’s approximation to a willow amidst ‘The scene of woods and waters’ underscores her mediation between the elemental boundaries of earth and water, but also between life and death (336).¹³ Shelley’s trees engage in what Kelley describes as the ‘visual-verbal axis’ of Romantic botany where, in the ‘figurative embodiments of plants’, ‘[t]he term *figura*, mean[s] both rhetorical figure and dynamic material shape’.¹⁴ The ‘dead thoughts’ figured as ‘withered leaves’ in the ‘Ode to the West Wind’ restlessly whirl into ‘The Triumph of Life’, becoming ‘shadows, numerous as the dead leaves blown / In Autumn evening from a poplar tree’ (528-9). While it is the deciduous cycle of budding and decay that propels Shelley’s ‘Ode’, and broadleaved trees comprise the bulk of the poet’s arboreal sketches, this essay focuses upon trees as rhetorical figures in Shelley’s later poems, turning first to figurations of pines in a selection of Shelley’s Jane Poems – ‘To Jane. The Invitation’, ‘To Jane—The Recollection’, and ‘With a Guitar. To Jane’ – before returning to the treescapes of ‘The Triumph of Life’.

In Shelley's Jane Poems, pines restlessly mediate between lyrical self and subject, emphasising the poems' encircling of the lyric moment. '[L]yric...might be summarized as a drama of interiority (of feeling thinking and of thinking feeling) figured as both combat and collusion between, in Wordsworth's phrase, "the mind of man and Nature," with both of those master-categories made present', Marjorie Levinson writes, 'exclusively so, in the verbal and rhetorical fabric of the text'.¹⁵ Shelley's Jane Poems mingle 'the mind of man and Nature' through the lyrics' poet-pine figures, commencing with the speaker's call to follow 'Away, away' in 'The Invitation':

To the wild wood and the downs,

To the silent wilderness

[...]

While the touch of Nature's art

Harmonizes heart to heart.—

('To Jane. The Invitation', 21-28)

The 'wild wood' acts as an intermediary between lyric speaker and feminine addressee, recalling the mediation between 'the mind of man' and nature in Wordsworth's 'Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey' (100).¹⁶ As much as Wordsworth's revisitations upon the banks of the Wye are rooted 'under this dark sycamore' (10), a tree 'necessary for his poetic journey of self-discovery' as Alan G. Hill has it, Shelley's recollections in the Jane Poems are encircled by pines.¹⁷ The poem's refrain to 'Awake, arise and come away / To the wild woods and the plains' locates, amidst the 'wild woods', a space 'Where the pine its garland weaves' (48-49; 52). The poet's imperative to 'Awake, arise and come away', in echoing Satan's command to 'Awake, arise, or be forever fallen', also invokes Satan's own

association with the pine: ‘His spear, to equal which the tallest pine / Hewn on Norwegian hills’. In *Paradise Lost*, the archangel’s affinity with the pine is juxtaposed against the scene of ‘His legions, angel forms, who lay entranced / Thick as autumnal leaves’, conjuring the forest of Vallombrosa, wherein the evergreen fir stands steadfast against the falling leaves of the beech.¹⁸ The specificity of the evergreen is similarly distinguished from the broadleaved woods in the Jane Poems, where the pine is implicit in the lyric sequence’s arresting of time.

Recalling a real moment in time, walking ‘through the Pine Forest to the sea with Shelley and Jane’, on February 2nd 1822, as Mary records in her journal, in ‘The Invitation’ and ‘The Recollection’ – first published together as the singular ‘The Pine Forest of the Cascine, near Pisa’ by Mary in *Posthumous Poems* – lyric speaker and subject are arrested in the unending ‘now’ experienced by the pine.¹⁹ ‘If narrative is about what happens next, lyric is about what happens now’, Jonathan Culler contends, ‘in the reader’s engagement with each line’.²⁰ The ‘now’ of the lyric moment is amplified, in the Jane poems, by the presence of pines, whose evergreen existence rejects the deciduous passing of time. ‘The Invitation’ invites Jane to a space enwoven by the pine-poet.

To the wild woods and the plains

And the pools where winter-rains

Image all their roof of leaves,

Where the pine its garland weaves

Of sapless green and ivy dun

Round stems that never kiss the Sun—

(‘The Invitation’, 49-54)

The poet-like pine weaves the bower where lyrical speaker and subject are preserved. In ‘The Recollection’, bearing the epistolary subtitle ‘Feb. 2. 1822’, ‘We wandered to the pine forest’ where

We paused amid the pines that stood

The giants of the waste,

Tortured by storms to shapes as rude

As serpents interlaced

(‘To Jane—The Recollection’, 9; 21-24)

Here, from the ‘white mountain-waste’, to ‘the soft flower beneath our feet / A magic circle traced’ (42-4). The Cascade pines, ‘The giants of the waste’, oversee an amber-like containment of lyric self and subject, and Susan J. Wolfson identifies ‘a past tense tortured through an intermediary signifying chain of waste, serpents, interlaced, and mountain-waste’ throughout ‘The Recollection’, locating in the lyric a ‘temporal magic’ or sense of ‘deathly arrest’.²¹ The ‘ecological plasticity’ of the pine – its distinctive ability to thrive on seaside crags and amidst cataracts, defying deathly environments – surfaces here, as does its mediation between the elemental spheres of earth, air, and water.²² Madeleine Callaghan, in reading ‘The Invitation’ and ‘The Recollection’ through Shelley’s letter of June 1822 wherein the poet ‘feel[s] too little certainty of the future, and too little satisfaction with regard to the past’ that he finds himself clinging, pine-like, ‘upon a precipice’, writes that Shelley is ‘consigned to the present’, where “The Invitation” and “The Recollection” hinge on this problem of both past and future extending no comfort to the struggling poet. Yet’, Callaghan affirms, ‘Shelley’s lyrical power is to fix upon a moment’ (*PBSL* ii. 436).²³ ‘The lifeless atmosphere’ of the pine forest embalms the lyrical moment, and recalls Mary Wollstonecraft’s epistolary picturing of the pines’ seeming resistance to death. In *Letters*

written during a short residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark, re-read by the Shelleys in February 1822,²⁴ Wollstonecraft describes how:

The pine and fir woods, left entirely to nature, display an endless variety; and the paths in the wood are not entangled with fallen leaves, which are only interesting whilst they are fluttering between life and death. The grey cobweb-like appearance of the aged pines is a much finer image of decay; the fibres whitening as they lose their moisture, imprisoned life seems to be stealing away. I cannot tell why—but death, under every form, appears to me like something getting free—to expand in I know not what element.²⁵

Shelley's Jane Poems are imbued with Wollstonecraftian *pinning* and 'imprisoned life', or life-in-death, the strange frozen decay afforded by the evergreen. The epistolary mode of the Jane Poems and their materiality as letters, folded and slipped in secret to Jane and Edward Williams, amplifies their Wollstonecraftian influence.

While Wollstonecraft's letters and Wordsworth's lyrical harmonising of 'the mind of man and Nature' haunt the Jane Poems, the lyrics' most explicitly referenced arboreal figure is Shakespeare's Ariel. The ministering, musical spirit of *The Tempest*, embodied within a cloven pine, is explicitly invoked in the opening direction of 'With a Guitar. To Jane': 'Ariel to *Miranda*' (1), and their presence is felt throughout the sequence of lyrics. The poet's doubled death as disembodied Ariel and as the felled tree-turned-guitar delight in the prospect of being freed: '—and so this tree— / O that such our death may be—' ('With a Guitar', 53-4). The chiming of 'tree' and 'be', and the long dashes that visually extend this rhyme, partake in this arboreal form of 'imprisoned life'—the long, drawn-out existence or 'be-ing' of the pine.

In ‘With a Guitar. To Jane’, the poet is arboreally embodied as Ariel, imprisoned within a cloven pine, as the guitar that is formed from the felled tree, and as the pine-poet that weaves ‘The Recollection’. ‘Shelley thinks as Ariel and even as the tree in which Ariel was confined’, Jonathan Bate writes of ‘With a Guitar’.²⁶ The specificity of the tree in which Ariel is confined, and the pines that shadow these Jane poems, warrant attention. In ‘the tradition of courtly love literature’, Frederica Brunori Deigan writes, ‘pines are a symbol of Venerean love’.²⁷ The Jane poems are invested in this tradition, as Richard Cronin and William Keach have shown. ‘The Invitation’, for Keach, ‘is a subtly muted variation on the *carpe diem* invitation genre that includes poems like Herrick’s “Corinna’s going a Maying”’. This mode is sustained until, in ‘The Recollection’, ‘The epitaph of glory fled’ and its echo of Wordsworth’s ‘sense sublime / Of something far more deeply interfused’ in ‘Tintern Abbey’ ‘indicates that Wordsworth has displaced Herrick’, Keach contends. ‘With a Guitar’ continues in this tradition of the courtly gift lyric, as Cronin notes, shifting from Herrick’s gift lyrics to Shelley’s association of ‘Ariel with the present that he gives, the guitar’. But the poems’ pine figures reach beyond the bounds of the courtly romance lyric, and ‘there is a crucial difference’, Cronin affirms; for Shelley, ‘[t]he felling of the tree was a death’.²⁸ In Shelley’s verses, the pine straddles the line between amour and agony, being at once a ‘symbol of Venerean love’, but also an imprisoned spirit confined to a state between life and death.

Pines haunt the sequence of Jane Poems from ‘The Invitation’ to ‘With a Guitar’, transported from Wollstonecraft’s Scandinavian letters to Shelley’s last lyrics by way of their shared Shakespearean influence. ‘Increasingly’, Mary A. Favret writes of Wollstonecraft’s *Letters written in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*, ‘the narrator cannot rely on herself to provide the forward momentum she desires. Spirits, nature, Shakespeare (especially *The Tempest*) all step in as surrogate motors for transport’.²⁹ In Wollstonecraft’s letters, Norway

is approximated to ‘Shakspeare’s magic island’, and pines and firs are mystical, musical beings, ‘rendering the wind audible—nay, musical’. Wollstonecraft imaginatively infuses the Scandinavian landscape, distinctively covered by forests of pines and firs, with the magic and musicality of ‘Shakspeare’s magic island’. Importantly, for Wollstonecraft, pines are distinctively poetical and philosophical trees:

The continual recurrence of pine and fir groves, in the day, sometimes wearies the sight; but, in the evening, nothing can be more picturesque, or, more properly speaking, better calculated to produce poetical images. Passing through them, I have been struck with a mystic kind of reverence, and I did, as it were, homage to their venerable shadows. Not nymphs, but philosophers, seemed to inhabit them—ever musing; I could scarcely conceive that they were without some consciousness of existence.³⁰

‘[W]e should remember that Shakespeare’s Ariel was freed by Prospero from imprisonment within a cloven pine’, where ‘*The Tempest* links the two parts of Shelley’s poem’, Richard Cronin writes of ‘With a Guitar’.³¹ Beyond explicit allusion to *The Tempest* in the opening stage direction of ‘With a Guitar’ – ‘*Ariel to Miranda*’ (1) – the ‘magic circle’ at the centre of ‘The Recollection’ also shares in this allusivity. Wollstonecraft, in ‘keep[ing] time with the melody of nature’, pleads: ‘again inclose me in your magic circle’, imbuing her epistolary laments with a sense of Shakespearean enchantment.³² Madeleine Callaghan and Barry Weller have identified the ‘magic circle’ in ‘The Recollection’ as allusively invoking ‘Prospero’s enchanted circle in *The Tempest* (5. 1. 32 [stage direction])’. Writing of Shelley’s ‘Unfinished Drama’, Cian Duffy notes that *The Tempest* was ‘much on Shelley’s mind in the spring of 1822’, and earlier, as this sequence of Jane poems shows.³³ But this allusion charts a veering course from Shakespeare through literary influences from Wollstonecraft to Walter Scott.³⁴

Mary Shelley records her reading of Scott's *The Pirate* from January 30th to the day of the Cascine pine forest wanderings on February 2nd. The novel's epigraph from *The Tempest*, 'Nothing in him—— / But doth suffer a sea-change', appears to impress itself upon the enchanted atmosphere in the Jane Poems. Scott's partial elision of the first line by way of the elongated dash seems echoed in 'The Recollection', wherein the poet at once elides and inscribes himself onto the page by way of a similarly elongated dash: 'Less oft is peace in ——'s mind' ('The Recollection', 87). Seemingly fated, these lines of *The Tempest* would come to be inscribed in full on Shelley's grave.

Beyond the pine's invoking of the disembodied, imprisoned Ariel and the strange decay or 'imprisoned life' of Wollstonecraft's pines, this tree's deathly associations are brought to the fore in the myth of Attis, wherein the lover faces his own self-emasculation and deathly transformation into a pine tree. The myth, included in Book Ten of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, was translated from Catullus as 'Atys' in Leigh Hunt's *Foliage* in 1818. Therein, Attis is driven to self-mutilation by the slighted Cybele. His 'foot of wild impatience touch'd the Phrygian forest dark', and under Cybele's spell he is confined within the pine: 'his living grave'.³⁵ Recalling the poet's self-cancellation and expiration in *Epipsychidion* – 'I pant, I sink, I tremble, I expire!' (591) – the Attis-like poet-as-pine of 'The Recollection' both insinuates and effaces himself through the unspoken dash that draws 'The Recollection' to a close. Combining portions of Attis and Ariel, the poet's cloven-pine body is transported into Shelley's last lyrics, drawing attention to trees' human connections alongside acts of textual embodiment. As Fiona Stafford writes, '[t]he relationship between people and pine trees is so intimate and ancient that it is difficult to regard it as anything other than "natural"'.³⁶ This human-tree connection is brought to the fore, as Stafford observes, in Marvell's 'The Garden', wherein the speaker mourns for displays of human love that turn into violence against trees:

Fond lovers, cruel as their flame,
 Cut in these trees their mistress' name;
 Little, alas, they know or heed
 How far these beauties hers exceed!
 Fair trees! wheres'e'er your barks I wound,
 No name shall but your own be found.³⁷

Deeply engaged in Shakespearean allusion and the tradition of the courtly gift lyric, Shelley's Jane poems play with Marvell's picturing of the tree's self-inscribed name nowhere more than in 'The Recollection', where, following the pine-implied line, 'forests ever green', Shelley both inscribes and elides his Ariel-as-tree-poet's name upon the page through the long dash that invites the reader to mentally inscribe Shelley's name into the poem. Pines suspend the lyric moment through their appearance of temporal detachment and deathly arrest. As such, Shelley's trees anticipate what Patrícia Vieira terms 'phytographia', meaning 'plant writing', or 'the coming together of the wordless, physically inscribed language of plants with an aesthetically mediated form of human language in literature'.³⁸ In particular, textual representations of pines in Shelley's last lyrics to Jane Williams foster a lyrical inscription of self and other, or poet-plant and reader.

Subtler than Shakespeare's explicit influence upon the Jane Poems, the lyrics also invoke the pained pines of Boccaccio and Ovid, where Book Ten of the *Metamorphoses* associates poetic activity and lost love with trees. Orpheus, mourning for Eurydice, pauses upon a wide, grassy plain devoid of shade and leafy shelter, and his presence prompts the entranced trees to uproot themselves so that they might creep nearer to the poet.

When here the heaven-descended bard sat down and smote his sounding lyre, shade came to the place. There came the Chaonian oak, the grove of the Heliades, the oak with its deep foliage, the soft linden, the beech, the virgin laurel-tree, the brittle hazel, the ash, suitable for spear-shafts, the smooth silver-fir, the ilex-tree bending with acorns, the pleasant plane, the many-colored maple, river-haunting willows, the lotus, lover of the pools, the evergreen boxwood, the slender tamarisk, the double-hued myrtle, the viburnum with its dark-blue berries. You also, pliant-footed ivy, came, and along with you tendrilled grapes, and the elm-trees, draped with vines; the mountain-ash, the forest-pines, the arbuté-tree, loaded with ruddy fruit, the pliant palm, the prize of victory, the bare-trunked pine with broad, leafy top, pleasing to the mother of the gods, since Attis, dear to Cybele, exchanged for this his human form and stiffened in its trunk.³⁹

Ovid's listing of trees in this scene amplifies the symbolism of distinct tree and plant species throughout the *Metamorphoses* more broadly, from Daphne's self-preserving transformation into the laurel tree to Narcissus's withering into his namesake golden flower. The distinction between varieties of firs and pines, from 'the smooth-silver fir' and 'the forest-pines' to 'the bare-trunked pine with broad, leafy top', is notable. In particular, Ovid's description of Attis's transformation into 'the bare-trunked pine with broad, leafy top' bears upon the pines of the *Jane Poems*.⁴⁰ Although such descriptive details of the particular species of pine are not found in Shelley's *Jane Poems*, the trees of the Cascine 'pine forest / That skirts the Ocean foam' and their close proximity to 'the sand hills of the sea' mark them out as the stone pines that abound upon the Mediterranean coasts ('The Recollection', 9-10; 'The Invitation', 56). John Ruskin, admiring the coastal stone pines at Sestri Levante in 1845, praised the distinctively shaped trees as "the true pine, whose double leaves give it the epithet *διπλόθριξ*": Ruskin 'thought that the stone pine was particularly related in the "Greek

mind”’, Pietro Piana, Charles Watkins, and Ross Balzaretto note.⁴¹ The intrinsic ‘doubleness’ of the stone pine permeates the Jane Poems, wherein the trees mediate between the enchanted lyrical moment and time’s impending encroachment by way of a divided, doubled landscape, where ‘the pools where winter-rains / Image all their roof of leaves’ (‘The Invitation’, 50-1). Recalling the two worlds of life and death of *Prometheus Unbound*, this doubled landscape extends into ‘The Recollection’, where:

We paused beside the pools that lie

Under the forest bough—

Each seemed as ’twere, a little sky

Gulfed in a world below

(‘The Recollection’, 53-6)

The pine’s strange temporal sway binds together the classical past with the present moment. William Gilpin introduces the stone pine as ‘the true picturesque pine’ in his *Remarks on Forest Scenery* and asserts its association with the classical landscape and Italian climate, wherein:

The soft clime of Italy alone gives birth to the true picturesque pine. There it always suggests ideas of broken porticos, Ionic pillars, triumphal arches, fragments of old temples, and a variety of classic ruins, which in Italian landscape it commonly adorns.⁴²

Shelley’s description of his pines as ‘Tortured by storms to shapes as rude / As serpents interlaced’ (‘The Recollection’, 23-24) finds an echo in Ruskin’s estimation of “‘the mingled grace and strength of the tree, where it grows on crag, and is tried by storms, as among the Greek islands’”.⁴³ But it is Ovid’s identification of Attis with the stone pine, in particular,

that resonates with Shelley's last lyrics of love, loss, and yearning. 'Attis, driven mad by the goddess Cybele...castrates himself making his gender thoroughly ambiguous', Jeffrey C. Robinson writes of Hunt's 'Atys', noting that the poem may, 'silently and obliquely, perhaps even unconsciously, refer to the masculine exclusivity of the Hunt circle and of the company's laurelled poets'.⁴⁴ The masculine poet partakes in or appropriates the feminine Daphne – transformed into the laurel tree – by virtue of his leafy crown. More explicitly, Attis, self-mutilated out of love, becomes a hermaphroditic figure before transforming into the stone pine, where the doubleness of the hermaphrodite – embodying both the masculine and the feminine – is complemented by the *διπλόθριζ* of the tree. The Attis myth underpins the Jane Poems in their figuring of the pine-poet and their uneasy mediation between the masculine poet and feminine subject.

Recasting the Attis myth in the *Filocolo*, Boccaccio's poet-protagonist persona, Idalogos, is transformed into a pine after being rejected by his beloved. This transformation of poet into pine conjures the vocal grove of pines in Virgil's eighth eclogue, where the pines' music complements the pained song of the lovelorn, suicidal shepherd.⁴⁵ As Alessia Ronchetti writes, pines are therefore 'part of a landscape immediately connected to poetic activity', but also with lamentations of love.⁴⁶ In the *Decameron*, an act of adultery is schemed 'underneath the Pine-Tree' in the garden.⁴⁷ The poet-pine of the Jane Poems, and the undertones of unrequited love and infidelity that haunt this sequence, contribute to the pine's place within this literary tradition. The broader landscape of the *Decameron* is conjured in the final section of 'The Recollection'. 'How much do I admire Boccaccio', Shelley writes to Leigh Hunt in 1819, deeming him 'in the high sense of the word a poet'. Considering the *Decameron*, Shelley's praise continues: 'What descriptions of nature are those in his little introductions to every new day' (*PBSL* ii. 121-2). While the pine's associations with adultery in the Seventh Day of the *Decameron* are shaded throughout the

amorous escapism of the Jane Poems, Shelley allusively involves Boccaccio's introduction to the Fourth Day in the final section of 'The Recollection'. Boccaccio's authorial defence 'That the impetuous and violent winds of Envy, do seldome blow turbulently, but on the highest Towers and tops of the Trees most eminently advanced' is carried into the 'envious wind' of the lyric's evergreen landscape.⁴⁸

Sweet views, which in our world above

Can never well be seen,

Were imaged in the water's love

Of that fair forest green;

And all was interfused beneath

With an Elysian glow,

An atmosphere without a breath,

A softer day below—

Like one beloved, the scene had lent

To the dark water's breast

Its every leaf and lineament

With more than truth expressed;

Until an envious wind crept by,

Like an unwelcome thought

Which from the mind's too faithful eye

Blots one dear image out.—

Though thou art ever fair and kind

And forests ever green,

Less oft is peace in ——'s mind

Than calm in water seen.

(‘The Recollection’, 69-88)

Writing of the ‘envious wind’ in line 81, William Keach notes that ‘[m]ost commentators have identified this wind and the “unwelcome thought” to which it is compared...with Mary’. However, ‘no biographical reading alone is adequate’; instead, more profitable is Keach’s recognition that ‘the “envious wind” and the disturbing, unwelcome thoughts figured in it are in fact the poem’s deep source of inspiration’, reading ‘The Invitation’ and ‘The Recollection’ as defences ‘reworking the figure of inspiration as “a wind over a sea” from the *Defence*’.⁴⁹ Apropos to Keach’s reading, the ‘envious wind’ that disrupts the lovers’ enchantment amongst the ‘forests ever green’ richly invokes Boccaccio’s own self-defence in the *Decameron*. Steadfast against the winds of envy, Boccaccio images himself in arboreal terms as ‘rudely shaken, yea almost half unrooted, by the extream agitation of those blustering winds’.⁵⁰ Boccaccio’s arboreal self-depiction as a tree threatened by the uprooting winds of envy places him within the literary lineage of ‘the man-trees in Vergil and Dante’, Federica Brunori Deigan contends.⁵¹ As much as trees forge a link between Boccaccio, Dante, and Virgil, Shelley’s own affinity with Boccaccio is an arboreal one. In a comparative reading of Shelley and Boccaccio, Enrica Viviani Della Robbia affirms that ‘dell’amore dei due autori per le selve’.⁵² The poets share a mutual love for the woods, harkening to the *selva oscura* of Dante, and Virgil’s poetic pine grove resonating with the voices of trees. By transplanting elements of the *Decameron* into ‘The Recollection’, Shelley roots himself within this literary lineage of tree-poets.

Pines amplify the arrested moment of Shelley's last lyrics. However, broadleaved trees dominate Shelley's manuscript drawings, and they also appear as rhetorical figures and landscape features throughout his poetry. I turn in closing to the treescapes of Shelley's final fragment, 'The Triumph of Life'. A particular tree overhangs the opening lines of 'The Triumph', shading the poem's narrator and giving rise to his inspired vision:

Stretched my faint limbs beneath the hoary stem

Which an old chestnut flung athwart the steep

Of a green Apennine

('The Triumph of Life', 24-26)

The narrator's repose beneath the chestnut prompts a dreamlike recollection 'Under the self same bough' (37), recalling Wordsworth's revisitations beneath the sycamore of 'Tintern Abbey'. Entranced, the narrator views a hurried multitude of people, each 'One of the million leaves of summer's bier' (51). They 'Whirled in one mighty torrent did appear, / Some flying from the thing they feared' (53-54), allusively echoing Wordsworth's recollection above the Wye, 'Flying from something that he dreads' ('Tintern Abbey', 72). As much as the frenzied leaves of the 'Ode to the West Wind' are literal as well as figurative, the trees of the 'Triumph' similarly vacillate between real and rhetorical figures. The chestnut that shades the narrator seems to transform, in his visionary state, into 'what I thought was an old root which grew / To strange distortion out of the hill side', its grass-like hair hanging over the hollows that 'Were or had been eyes' (182-83; 188). Noting that '[t]he speaker and the tree occupy the pre-visionary landscape', Bysshe Inigo Coffey asks: 'is it possible that the chestnut under which he reposes has turned into the old root in the dream?'⁵³ A similitude between the old chestnut and this malformed man-tree is suggested by its identification as 'what was once Rousseau' (204) and the philosopher's connection to the tree, from the bountiful 'little

chestnut wood’ of the *Confessions* to the prosperously planted chestnuts described in the *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*.⁵⁴ ‘Within Rousseau’s writing’, Coffey affirms, ‘the chestnut has a symbolic value’.⁵⁵

Where the chestnut shades the beginning of ‘The Triumph of Life’, a different tree shades the ending, unfinished sequence. Again, it is a tree ‘strongly associated with the philosopher Rousseau’, as Fiona Stafford writes of the poplar.⁵⁶ ‘[T]he symbolic and cultural value of poplars seems to have increased after Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s burial at the *L’île des peupliers* (“island of poplars”) in Ermenonville’, Frederike Middelhoff writes, and a ‘long history of aligning pain, melancholy, desolation, and death to the poplars became absorbed in the Romantic imagination’.⁵⁷ The root-like Rousseau recounts how

...each one

Of that great crowd sent forth incessantly

These shadows, numerous as dead leaves blown

In Autumn evening from a poplar tree—

(‘The Triumph of Life’, 526-29)

The ‘dead leaves’ that tumble through the *terza rima* of Shelley’s last poem are instantaneously reanimated by virtue of their resemblance to the ‘leaves dead’ of the ‘Ode to the West Wind’ (2):

Drive my dead thoughts over the universe

Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!

And, by the incantation of this verse,

Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth

Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!

(‘Ode to the West Wind’, 63-7)

The poplar, Stafford notes, ‘was widely known as the “Po poplar”’, and etymologically connected to the populace.⁵⁸ Ultimately, the dead leaves of the ‘Ode to the West Wind’ are revitalised through their reappearance in ‘The Triumph of Life’ where, distinguished as poplar leaves, they embody the poet’s ‘words among mankind’.

Notes

¹ References to Shelley's works are from *The Major Works*, ed. Zachary Leader and Michael O'Neill, revised edn (Oxford, 2009), apart from 'The Triumph of Life' which is quoted from *The Complete Poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Nora Crook, gen. eds. Donald H. Reiman, Neil Fraistat, and Nora Crook (4 vols to date, Baltimore, 2000-), vii. Subsequent references to this edition are abbreviated as *CPPBS*.

² Tatsuo Tokoo with B. C. Barker-Benfield, *A Catalogue and Index of the Shelley Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library and a General Index to the Facsimile Edition of the Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts* in *The Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts*, gen. ed. Donald H. Reiman (23 vols, New York and London, 1986-), xxiii. 118.

³ See, for instance, Fiona Stafford, 'Coleridge's Only Tree: Picturing the Birch', *Coleridge Bulletin*, 55 (2020), 1-12; Tim Fulford, 'Cowper, Wordsworth, Clare: The Politics of Trees', *The John Clare Society Journal*, 14 (1995), 47-59; and Peter Dale and Brandon C. Yen, *Versed in Living Nature: Wordsworth's Trees* (London, 2022).

⁴ Mary Shelley writes: 'The poem was written in his boat, as it floated under the beech groves of Bisham, or during wanderings in the neighbouring country, which is distinguished for peculiar beauty. The chalk hills break into cliffs that overhang the Thames, or form valleys clothed with beech', 'Note on the *Revolt of Islam*' in *The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Mary Shelley (London, 1839), 96.

⁵ Nancy Moore Goslee, *Shelley's Visual Imagination* (Cambridge, 2011), 2.

⁶ 'Ecology', *OED Online*.

<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/59380?redirectedFrom=ecology#eid>.

⁷ James A. Notopoulos, 'New Texts of Shelley's Plato', *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 15 (1966), 99-115, 115.

⁸ Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Geneva Notebook of Percy Bysshe Shelley: Bodleian MS. Shelley adds. e. 16 and MS. Shelley adds. c. 4, folios 63, 65, 71, and 72*, ed. Michael Erkelenz in *The Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts*, xi. 37.

⁹ Michael Marder, *The Philosopher's Plant: An Intellectual Herbarium* (New York, 2014), 4.

¹⁰ Cian Duffy, 'Wild Plants and Wild Passions in Percy Bysshe Shelley's Poems for Jane Williams' in *Wild Romanticism*, ed. Markus Poetzsch and Cassandra Falke (London and New York, 2021), 91-109, 91.

¹¹ Theresa M. Kelley, *Clandestine Marriage: Botany and Romantic Culture* (Baltimore, 2012), 11.

¹² Shelley, *The Major Works*, 762 n412 and 763 n414.

¹³ Fiona Stafford writes of the weeping willow, a distinctively Romantic tree, that '[o]ften the boundaries between the elements seem to be dissolving', *The Long, Long Life of Trees* (New Haven and London, 2016). The shape's downward posture above the river suggests the weeping variety of willow.

¹⁴ Theresa M. Kelley, 'Botanical Figura', *Studies in Romanticism*, 53.3 (2014), 343-68, 344.

¹⁵ Marjorie Levinson, *Thinking Through Poetry: Field Reports on Romantic Lyric* (Oxford, 2018), 3.

¹⁶ William Wordsworth, *The Major Works*, ed. Stephen Gill, revised edn (Oxford, 2008), 134. References to 'Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey', hereafter referred to as 'Tintern Abbey', are from this edition.

¹⁷ Alan G. Hill, 'The "poetry of trees" and Wordsworth's New Vision of Pastoral: An Unrecorded Letter', *Philological Quarterly*, 81.2 (2002), 235-45, 235.

¹⁸ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Stephen Orgel and Jonathan Goldberg, revised edn (Oxford, 2004), i. 330, 292-3, and 301-2, 12-13.

¹⁹ Mary Shelley, *The Journals of Mary Shelley*, ed. Paula K. Feldman and Diana Scott-Kilvert (2 vols, Oxford, 1987), i. 393. Subsequent references to this edition are abbreviated as *MWS Journals*.

²⁰ Jonathan Culler, 'Why Lyric?', *PMLA*, 123.1 (2008), 201-6, 202.

²¹ Susan J. Wolfson, *Formal Charges: The Shaping of Poetry in British Romanticism* (Stanford, 1997), 215-18.

²² David M. Richardson and Philip W. Rundel, 'Pine Ecology and Biogeography: An Introduction' in *Ecology and Biogeography of Pinus*, ed. David M. Richardson (Cambridge, 1998), 10 and 16.

²³ Shelley's letters are quoted from *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Frederick L. Jones, (2 vols, Oxford, 1964), hereafter abbreviated as *PBSL*, with citations to appear parenthetically within the main text. Madeleine Callaghan, *Shelley's Living Artistry: Letters, Poems, Plays* (Liverpool, 2017), 223.

²⁴ 'Read Letters from Norway', Mary writes in her journal entry for 19 February 1822. *MWS Journals*, i. 398. Although Mary stopped recording Shelley's reading lists in her journals from 1819, '[e]ven after 1819', Anna Mercer writes, Mary's 'journals up to 1822 indicate passim that the Shelleys were always reading'. Anna Mercer, *The Collaborative Literary Relationship of Percy Bysshe Shelley and Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley* (New York and London, 2020), 41. 'In such a household', the editors of *Romantic Circles* note, 'it is unwise to surmise that many books under perusal went undiscussed by the two'. 'Mary Shelley's Reading: Alphabetical List', *Romantic Circles*. <https://romantic-circles.org/editions/frankenstein/MShelley/readalph>.

²⁵ Mary Wollstonecraft, *Letters written during a short residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*, ed. Tone Brekke and Jon Mee (Oxford, 2009), 88. Subsequent references to this edition are shortened to *Letters written in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*.

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- ²⁶ Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth* (Basingstoke and Oxford, 2000), 93.
- ²⁷ Federica Brunori Deigan, 'The Author in the Pine Tree: Allegorized Autobiography and Arboreal Mythology in Boccaccio's *Filocolo* and *Decameron*', *MLN*, 134 (2019), 90-104, 93.
- ²⁸ William Keach, *Shelley's Style* (New York and London, 1984), 209; 212. On the tradition of courtly romance in Shelley's Jane poems, see, for instance, Richard Cronin, *Shelley's Poetic Thoughts* (London and Basingstoke, 1981), 242-49, 245 and Keach, *Shelley's Style*, 209-12.
- ²⁹ Mary A. Favret, 'Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark: Traveling with Mary Wollstonecraft' in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft*, ed. Claudia L. Johnson (Cambridge, 2002), 209-27, 218.
- ³⁰ Wollstonecraft, *Letters written in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*, 72, 57.
- ³¹ Cronin, *Shelley's Poetic Thoughts*, 245.
- ³² Wollstonecraft, *Letters written in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark*, 67.
- ³³ Cian Duffy, 'Percy Shelley's "Unfinished Drama" and the Problem of the Jane Williams Poems', *European Romantic Review*, 26.5 (2015), 615-32, 619.
- ³⁴ Callaghan, *Shelley's Living Artistry*, 231 and Paul Weller, 'Shakespeare, Shelley and the Binding of the Lyric', *MLN*, 93.5 (1978), 912-37, 925.
- ³⁵ Leigh Hunt, *Foliage; or Poems Original and Translated* (London, 1818), 91, 99.
- ³⁶ Stafford, *The Long, Long Life of Trees*, 247.
- ³⁷ Andrew Marvell, 'The Garden', quoted in Stafford, *The Long, Long Life of Trees*, 14.
- ³⁸ Patrícia Vieira, 'Phytographia: Literature as Plant Writing', *Environmental Philosophy*, 12.2 (2015), 205-20, 213.
- ³⁹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Frank Justus Miller, ed. Robert Squillace (New York, 2005), 189.

⁴⁰ See chapter xxi, ‘Of the Fir, Pine, Pinaster, Pitch-tree, etc.’, in John Evelyn, *Sylva, or A Discourse of Forest-Trees and the Propagation of Timber* (London, 1664), 51-54. William Gilpin, *Remarks on Forest Scenery; and Other Woodland Views*, 3 vols (London, 1791), i. 79.

⁴¹ Pietro Piana, Charles Watkins, and Ross Balzaretto, “‘Saved from the sordid axe’”: Representation and Understanding of Pine Trees by English Visitors to Italy in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century’, *Landscape History*, 37.2 (2016), 35-56, 46.

⁴² Gilpin, *Remarks on Forest Scenery*, i. 78.

⁴³ Piana, Watkins, and Balzaretto, “‘Saved from the sordid axe’”: Representation and Understanding of Pine Trees by English Visitors to Italy in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century’, 46.

⁴⁴ Jeffrey C. Robinson, *Unfettering Poetry: The Fancy in British Romanticism* (Basingstoke, 2006), 164.

⁴⁵ See Virgil, *Eclogues* 8.17-22.

⁴⁶ Alessia Ronchetti, ‘Speaking Pines: A Topological Reading of *Filocolo*, v. 6-8’, *Modern Language Review*, 106.1 (2011), 115-29, 128.

⁴⁷ ‘Bocaccio’ is included in the Shelleys’ shared reading list for 1819 and the ‘Decamerone’ for 1820 in Mary’s journal. ‘Begin the Georgics with S[helley]—Boccaccio in the evening’, Mary writes in her entry on 16 September 1820. *MWS Journals*, i. 303, 347, 332. Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Novels and Tales of the Renowned John Boccaccio, the First Refiner of Italian Prose: Containing a Hundred Curious Novels, by Seven Honourable Ladies, and Three Noble Gentlemen, Framed in Ten Days*, 5th edn (London, 1684), 316. Subsequent references to this edition are hereafter referred to as *Decameron*.

⁴⁸ Boccaccio, *Decameron*, 157.

⁴⁹ Keach, *Shelley’s Style*, 215.

⁵⁰ Boccaccio, *Decameron*, 157.

⁵¹ Deigan, 'The Author in the Pine Tree', 103.

⁵² Enrica Viviani Della Robbia, 'Shelley e il Boccaccio', *Italica*, 36.3 (1959), 181-97, 191.

⁵³ Bysse Inigo Coffey, *Shelley's Broken World: Fractured Materiality and Intermitted Song* (Liverpool, 2021), 190.

⁵⁴ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Confessions*, trans. Angela Scholar, ed. Patrick Coleman (Oxford, 2000), 219.

⁵⁵ Coffey, *Shelley's Broken World*, 191. Coffey offers an insightful study of Shelley's encounters with chestnuts while immersed in Rousseau in Switzerland and suggests a correlation between the root-like Rousseau of 'The Triumph of Life' and an anthropomorphic tree sketched in the poet's Geneva notebook, 188-89. This is also noted by Nora Crook in *CPPBS* vii. 263.

⁵⁶ Stafford, *The Long, Long Life of Trees*, 131.

⁵⁷ Frederike Middelhoff, 'Thinking and Writing with Leaves: Poplar Sympoetics in Romanticism', *Green Letters*, 25.4 (2021), 356-76, 357.

⁵⁸ Stafford, *The Long, Long Life of Trees*, 131.