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“A Bright Erroneous Dream”: The *Shelley Memorial* and the Body of the Poet

Luisa Calè and Stefano Evangelista

“Poets are the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration; the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present.”

(P. B. Shelley, *Defense of Poetry*)

1. Introduction: Garnett, the *Shelley Memorial*, the Shelley Corpus

In an article entitled “The Shelley Monuments,” published in the *Illustrated London News* in May 1892, Richard Garnett makes a striking connection between the steady growth of Shelley’s fame among English readers and the recent revival of English sculpture. This parallel progress is symbolized and to a certain extent made visible in three memorials commemorating Shelley, all reproduced on the page: a simple gravestone that marked the burial place of Shelley’s ashes in the Protestant Cemetery in Rome; a cenotaph by Henry Weekes, exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1853 and erected in the Old Priory of Christchurch Minster in 1854,¹ which Garnett somewhat cattily labels “an excellent work for the period”; and finally Edward Onslow Ford’s “magnificent” memorial initially intended for the Roman cemetery, on view at the Royal Academy that year, and inaugurated the following year at University College

¹ “Shelley’s Monument. Engraved by G. Stodart from the Sculpture by H. Weekes,” *The Art Journal*, 15 (March 1863): 56-58. George J. Stodart’s stipple engraving was published in 1853, the year before the sculpture was inaugurated. The authors would like to thank Caroline Vout for her response to an early version of this article presented at Tate Britain.

Oxford. Garnett praises Onslow Ford for his technical mastery of the medium, as well as his ability to envelop his work in an “atmosphere of thought and feeling”; Onslow Ford’s work is therefore “an index to the progress of English sculpture” away from the “decorous feebleness” which used to characterize it.² For Garnett, the evolution from the plain inscribed stone of the Protestant Cemetery to the work of art destined for the Oxford college represents a fitting narrative for the literary canonization of Shelley, whose life and poetry could now no longer be held as “a bright erroneous dream,” as Thomas Moore had referred to them just over half a century earlier.³ Garnett maintains that, in the altered cultural landscape of the 1890s, “hardly any competent judge would dispute” that Shelley stands, together with Wordsworth, at the head of the English Romantic school.

Garnett was certainly a competent judge, although he might also have been a somewhat partial one. By 1892 he had been working hard to promote Shelley’s reputation for decades. At least since 1859, he had been corresponding with Lady Shelley, the daughter in law of the poet and severe guardian of his public image, gradually winning her trust. When she commissioned Onslow Ford to build the *Shelley Memorial* in 1890, she entrusted him to see the project through should she die before its completion.⁴ At the time of the *Illustrated London News* article Garnett,

² Richard Garnett, “The Shelley Monuments,” *Illustrated London News* (21 May 1892): 627.

³ The full quotation goes: “His short life had been, like his poetry, a sort of bright erroneous dream, - false in the general principles on which it proceeded, though beautiful and attaching in most of the details.” *The Works of Lord Byron: with his Letters and Journals, and his Life*, ed. Thomas Moore, 17 vols (London: John Murray, 1832), 5:365; quoted in Garnett, “The Shelley Monuments,” 627.

⁴ The correspondence between Garnett and Jane Shelley is preserved in the Harry Ransom Center in the University of Texas at Austin. The letter in which she charges him to oversee the project in case of her death is dated 27 March 1890; Richard Garnett Papers 54.4.

together with Benjamin Jowett, was also involved in facilitating Lady Shelley's donation of her Shelley manuscripts to the Bodleian Library, in Oxford, which was completed in 1893, opening new directions in textual scholarship.⁵

Garnett was by no means the only high-profile intellectual active in rehabilitating the poet whom Matthew Arnold had infamously labelled as a "beautiful and ineffectual angel."⁶ William Michael Rossetti, with whom Garnett collaborated closely, had produced a landmark edition of *The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (1870) with a "Prefatory Notice" in which he refuted the commonly-held opinion that Shelley was "a mere vague idealist."⁷ If Arnold's negative pronouncements seemed to encapsulate a mid-Victorian attitude of hostility towards Shelley, a new generation of prominent critics, including Rossetti, A. C. Swinburne, and Oscar Wilde, advocated Shelley's work (and often his life) with a passion that had distinctly cultish overtones.⁸ Nor was the new popularity of Shelley an exclusively academic phenomenon. From 1885 onwards, the Shelley Society organized public lectures and performances, and sponsored the publication of facsimiles and critical essays – all intended to broaden Shelley's readership and consolidate his influence on modern literature. This late-Victorian wave of interest in

⁵ On this topic see Michael Rossington, "William Michael Rossetti and the Organization of Percy Bysshe Shelley in the Later Nineteenth Century," *European Romantic Review* 26, no. 3 (2015): 387-93.

⁶ Matthew Arnold, "Shelley," *Nineteenth Century* (January 1888): 23-39, 39.

⁷ W. M. Rossetti, "Prefatory Notice," in *The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (London: Moxon, 1870), xxiv.

⁸ Studying this turn in critical reputation, Anthony Kearney has argued that Shelley played a central role in the debates over the institutionalization of modern English literature as academic subject in the 1890s; Kearney, "Reading Shelley: A Problem for Late Victorian English Studies," *Victorian Poetry* 36, no. 1 (1998): 59-74.

Shelley was reflected in (and fed by) a series of popular Shelley biographies that followed each other in close succession, ranging from the frequently reprinted John Addington Symonds's *Shelley* (1878) to Edward Dowden's famously scandalous *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (1886) and William Sharp's more sedate *Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (1887). Shelley's works and knowledge about Shelley thus circulated both within elite circles close to the artistic and literary avant-gardes and within a broader popular public, creating the conditions for new and different ways of reading. Onslow Ford's monument played an important role in this refashioning of Shelley's corpus.

Garnett's pairing of sculptural modernity and a changing history of reading Shelley is therefore worthy of further exploration. In the 1890s Garnett was by no means alone in claiming the arrival of a new era in British sculpture. The best-known of such interventions was a series of essays by Edmund Gosse published in the *Art Journal* in 1894 in which Gosse codified the "New Sculpture" as being characterized first and foremost by a close observation of nature reflected in its attention to detail, surface, and "colour." Although Gosse did not mention the *Shelley Memorial* explicitly, Onslow Ford was one of the heroes of his story. Like Garnett, Gosse believed that Frederic Leighton, Hamo Thornycroft, Thomas Brock, H.H. Armstead, Alfred Gilbert, and Onslow Ford rescued British sculpture from its otherwise certain death, lending "a fresh concentration of the intellectual powers on a branch of art which had been permitted to grow dull and inanimate."⁹ From a twenty-first-century vantage point, we may well be sceptical of how "new" the New Sculpture really was, given its evident continuities and points of contact with previous nineteenth-century

⁹ Edmund Gosse, "The New Sculpture, 1879-1894," *Art Journal* (October 1894): 306-11, here 311.

The series ran from May to October 1894.

traditions and with the Italian neoclassical school scorned by Gosse. Yet it is undeniable that late-Victorian critics used this discourse of newness to reclaim for modernity an artistic medium that, in a long history of aesthetics that goes from Lessing to Hegel and Pater, was strongly identified with antiquity and the past.

Onslow Ford's Shelley monument suggests different ways of reading the relationship between sculpture and literature at the *fin de siècle*. In this essay we explore how Shelley's poetic corpus is rearticulated by the *Shelley Memorial*. Onslow Ford's sculpture participates in a late-Victorian debate about the memorialization and literary canonization of the Romantics, which takes shape through subtle exchanges between print, the visual arts, and sculpture. Just as the complex and problematic Victorian reception of Shelley's romantic poetics informed the sculptural iconography of the poet, the sculptural medium generated new ways of reading Shelley that are occluded in the textual record. Shelley's sculptural corpus illuminates the aesthetics and politics of Victorian classicism, and it embodies attitudes to the cultural significance of the male poetic body. In particular, the *Shelley Memorial* makes a striking and largely side-lined contribution to the sexual politics of the *fin de siècle*, bringing into the public sphere transgressive modes of androgyny and homoerotic desire, and giving substance and visibility to new "queer" readings of the Shelley corpus.

2. The Cultural Body of the Romantic Poet: Rebels and Heroes

The question of monumentalization was part of a late-Victorian struggle to find adequate ways of memorializing poets as figures of national importance. In *On*

Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History (1840), Thomas Carlyle reached back to Dante and Shakespeare to find models of “The Hero as Poet,” “a blessed heaven-sent Bringer of Light,” whose vision can bring all people “together into virtually one Nation.”¹⁰ The *fin de siècle* produced a different canon. Visiting Rome in 1877, the young Oscar Wilde composed sonnets on the graves of Shelley and Keats, in which he is clearly moved by the modesty of the resting places of the two poets. Substituting ornate poetic language for the lack of an adequate material, in “The Grave of Shelley” Wilde rewrote the very architecture of the Roman cemetery into a giant funerary monument for the English poet, with its cypresses “[l]ike burnt-out torches” and the pyramid of Cestius hiding some “Old-World Sphynx.” Poetry, Wilde seems to say, is a more fitting monument for a poet than sculpture, especially for one whose “restless tomb” is in the depths of the sea rather than in the womb of the earth.¹¹ Yet, on a more polemical note, in an article on the tomb of Keats published shortly afterwards in the *Irish Monthly*, he complained that, impressive though the Roman setting is, “this time-worn stone and these wild flowers are but poor memorials of one so great as Keats,” especially in a city where one is surrounded by so many luscious funerary monuments erected to emperors, popes, and saints. Wilde is scathing towards the medallion portrait by Warrington Wood that had been recently fixed to the wall of the cemetery (1876), complaining that it made Keats look ugly (his face “rather hatchet-shaped, with thick sensual lips, and [...] utterly unlike the poet himself”) and hoping that it would soon be taken down. He emphatically

¹⁰ Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1840), 130-31, 133.

¹¹ “The Grave of Shelley,” in *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde, Volume I: Poems and Poems in Prose*, ed. Bobby Fong and Karl Beckson (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 43.

claimed that Keats was “worthy of a noble monument” and proposed “a coloured bust, like that of the young Rajah of Koolapoor at Florence, which is a lovely and lifelike work of art.”¹² Wilde sent a copy of his article to William Michael Rossetti, who agreed that the “English people ought to erect a statue to Keats,” adding that he would be happy to lend his support to such a scheme.

It was Shelley, however, rather than Keats, that Rossetti was most keen to memorialize. Indeed, in the same letter to Wilde he envisaged a joint monument to Shelley and Byron: “I did some while ago – when the Byron statue was first projected – put into print a strong suggestion that advantage might be taken of the movement so as to combine a Shelley with a Byron memorial, but it led to nothing. All three must get their statues some day.”¹³ The Byron statue to which Rossetti refers here is a work by Richard Belt that would eventually be erected in Hyde Park in 1880. The Byron memorial has its own long and complex history, which reaches all the way back to the 1820s, when a committee headed by Byron’s friend John Hobhouse first commissioned the Danish sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen to produce a statue of the poet

¹² Oscar Wilde, “The Tomb of Keats,” *Irish Monthly* (5 July 1877): 476-78. Wilde refers to the monument that had recently been erected (1874) in Florence to Prince Rajaram Chuttraputti, Maharaja of Kolhapur, who had died suddenly there at the age of twenty-one, in 1870. This sad story must have struck Wilde as similar to Keats’s in its pathos, and he was obviously troubled by the contrast between the lavish bust and imposing cenotaph erected to the Indian prince and the inconspicuousness of the memorial dedicated to Keats. On Wilde’s questioning of traditional masculinity through Keats see James Najarian, *Victorian Keats: Manliness, Sexuality, and Desire* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 44-45.

¹³ William Michael Rossetti to Oscar Wilde (3 August 1877), in *Selected Letters of William Rossetti*, ed. Roger W. Peattie (University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990), 355.

with the view to have it installed in Westminster Abbey.¹⁴ The Abbey, however, turned down the application and the statue, which arrived in London in 1834, languished in storage for over two decades until it was finally installed in the library of Trinity College Cambridge, where it remains to this day (fig. 1). Fifty years later, a committee was set up once again with the aim of securing a proper memorial for Byron; nonetheless, despite the passionate support of Benjamin Disraeli and other influential public figures, the outcome was once again disappointing. The first competition for a design for the memorial, held in the South Kensington Museum in 1876, proved abortive as none of the sketches presented was found worthy of merit. A second competition held in the Royal Albert Hall in 1877 – the same year as Rossetti’s letter to Wilde – selected Belt’s design without great enthusiasm. Rossetti unceremoniously described the statue as “a pitiful eyesore”; while the very head of the commemoration committee, Richard Edgcumbe, declared it “wholly inadequate” as a representation of a poetic genius and “*mesquin*” as a work of art.¹⁵

Memorial sculpture had to navigate a perilous dividing line between the private and public; it involved writers, critics, artists, institutions, and organized bodies of readers and admirers (the Byron Monument Scheme, the Shelley Society). The story of the Thorvaldsen monument to Byron, in particular, can be seen as an ironic echo of the controversy over the Elgin Marbles in which Byron himself was involved in the beginning of the nineteenth century. This time, though, the key problem was ethical rather than aesthetic: was it right to elevate into objects of public

¹⁴ The historical material in this paragraph is drawn from Richard Edgcumbe, *History of the Byron Memorial* (London: Effingham Wilson, 1883).

¹⁵ Respectively in a letter from Rossetti to Swinburne (13 December [1880]), in *Selected Letters of William Rossetti*, 389; and Edgcumbe, *History of the Byron Memorial*, 11.

admiration (and potentially emulation) Byron and Shelley, both notorious for their atheism and their defiant violations of bourgeois sexual morality, and neither of whom had distinguished himself for patriotic feeling? A public memorial could be seen as a way of publicly sanctioning transgressive ideas and behaviours, as the body/corpus of the poet becomes an official and recognized part of the national heritage. Westminster Abbey's repeated refusals to take in Thorvaldsen's statue show that, in this period, the concerns over public morality had the upper hand. As Rossetti summed up, "it is a burning shame to the English people – a reflection on their common sense, and we may say their common honesty, for cant and hypocrisy are at the bottom of it all – that fifty-one years after the death of Byron, and fifty-three years after that of Shelley, those two radiant geniuses remain without any public monumental recognition in their own country."¹⁶ As Rossetti hints here, there might have been something specifically English in this reluctance to use public sculpture to honour literary achievement.

Eventually, Shelley, like Byron, was granted a monument, which was, like Thorvaldsen's Byron, placed in an Oxbridge College – a convenient in-between space between public and private. In the case of Shelley the politics of this decision was complicated by the fact that University College had famously expelled the young Shelley for his pamphlet *The Necessity of Atheism*. In the unveiling ceremony of the Onslow Ford memorial, which took place on 14 June 1893, the Master of University College presented the arrival of a work of modern art in the old college and the return of Shelley as a double symbol of reconciliation between the present and the past: as *The Times* reported, "[i]f Oxford was to be what it claimed to be – the very centre and heart of the growth of young England – it seemed to him clear that Oxford must

¹⁶ Anon. [W.M. Rossetti], "Notes and News," *Academy* (24 April 1875): 423.

advance with the world, must expand and be open to all new influences, and he could not conceive any more true emblem of the present century than the great poet whose effigy they had now received. [...] [T]he memorial was a sort of emblem and symbol to them of a rubbing out of old ill-wills and old ill-feelings.”¹⁷ Tapping into the debates about the memorialization of poets, Garnett, who was present at the unveiling, went further in declaring it “a national consecration.”¹⁸ Yet other commentators saw some irony in the Master of University College “hailing ‘the rebel of eighty years ago’ as ‘the hero of the present century’”: “here was the Master of the college which drove Shelley from its doors, lauding the outcast as a great prophet, and welcoming his monument to a place of honour within the college precincts. Matthew Arnold’s ‘beautiful and ineffectual angel beating in the void his luminous wings in vain’ was not, it would seem, so vain and ineffectual after all.”¹⁹ To this reviewer the rehabilitation of Shelley at Oxford called to mind the story of Socrates, hailed by Shelley himself as a cultural hero for having “dared to combat the degrading superstitions in which his countrymen were educated,”²⁰ condemned to death, and posthumously transformed into a demigod. Offering Shelley as an alternative model of the poet as hero, the reviewer repurposes Carlyle’s patriotic categories to highlight the political tensions involved in the precarious attempt to subsume the rebel under the category of the hero.

The fissure between the optimism of the Master and the irony of the reviewer alerts us to the fact that Shelley’s legacy was the site of a hermeneutical struggle, in

¹⁷ “The Shelley Memorial at Oxford,” *The Times* (15 June 1893): 11.

¹⁸ Garnett, “The Shelley Monuments,” 627.

¹⁹ Anon., “Shelley and his College,” *The Speaker* (17 June 1893): 680.

²⁰ P. B. Shelley, “A Letter to Lord Ellenborough,” in *Selected Prose Works of Shelley* (London: Watts & Co., 1915), 15-31, here 24.

which ethical and political questions were paramount. The critic William Sharp sums up the situation at the outset of his 1887 biography, where he describes the late-Victorian Shelley as a “perplexing” poet: “[h]e is worshipped, and he is not less ardently abhorred; he is upheld as a demi-god, and subjected as a sweet-voiced demon; his teachings are preached with fervour from the house-tops, and are denounced with equal vehemence from neighbouring summits.”²¹ The dispute highlights a moment of transition from the lyrical Shelley beloved by mid-Victorian readers (the poet of the “Skylark,” the “Cloud,” and “The Sensitive Plant”) towards a political Shelley: “the poet will fade, and the socialist-philosopher will arise; the singer will become the political or sectarian stalking-horse.”²² Already in 1845, in *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, Friedrich Engels had shown his impatience with the lyrical Shelley, complaining that “the bourgeoisie owns only castrated editions, family editions, cut down in accordance with the hypocritical morality of to-day.”²³

The overwhelming lyricism of Onslow Ford’s monument would seem to occlude these increasingly prevalent political readings. Yet, viewers who, like William Michael Rossetti, shared Shelley’s atheism and Republican beliefs, would now be able to galvanize political readings through the monument. As Rebecca Senior points out, Carlyle’s transition from the military commander to the poet as hero is

²¹ William Sharp, *Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (London: Walter Scott, 1887), 11.

²² *Ibid.*, 12.

²³ Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1943), 240; see also Paul Foot on “the castration of Shelley at British places of learning,” in *Red Shelley* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson in association with Michael Dempsey, 1980), 9-10; and Eric O. Clarke, *Virtuous Vice: Homoeroticism in the Public Sphere* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 218, note 38.

reflected in a “cross-continental visual language that broached the early and late nineteenth-century genres of military and poetic memorialization.”²⁴ The *Shelley Memorial* activates the revolutionary form of the poet as prophet and “unacknowledged legislator” and thus subverts Carlyle’s patriotic notion of the poet just as it complicates the easy equivalence between lyricism and bourgeois morality.

3. The *Shelley Memorial*, 1893: A Classical Shipwreck

By the time that Lady Shelley commissioned him to carry out the memorial, Onslow Ford was already a successful artist. He was originally trained as a painter but, after a period of study in Munich under Michal Wagnmüller, he had returned to England, where he made his Royal Academy debut in 1875 with a bust of his wife, followed by public sculptures of the postal reformer Rowland Hill for the Royal Exchange and William Gladstone for the City Liberal Club. His breakthrough work was a portrait of the actor Henry Irving playing Hamlet, exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1883.²⁵ Besides memorials of public figures, Onslow Ford gained a reputation for statuettes. *Folly*, produced with a lost wax process, was exhibited in 1886, and bought by the Chantrey Trustees.²⁶ *The Singer* involved experimentation with enamels, gold, and precious stone, resulting in a polychrome work that “stands on the border-land

²⁴ Rebecca Senior, “Sculpting Heroes: David d’Angers’s *Le Jeune Barra* (1838) and Edward Onslow Ford’s monument to Percy Bysshe Shelley (1893),” *Church Monuments Society Journal* 30 (2015): 191-200.

²⁵ M. H. Spielmann, “Current Art,” *Magazine of Art*, 6 (January 1883): 375-81.

²⁶ For an analysis of this statuette, see Susan Beattie, *The New Sculpture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 150-55.

between sculpture, in the usual sense, and *orfèvrerie*.²⁷ As Martina Droth argues, Onslow Ford's statuettes exemplify the attention to the physical properties and material multiplicity of the new sculpture and its attempt to carve out an alternative to the transcendental abstraction of neoclassicism: "we cannot pretend to go back to this colourless type," claimed Edmund Gosse.²⁸ The *Shelley Memorial* was Onslow Ford's most substantial and ambitious commission to date (he would later be asked to make a statue of Queen Victoria for the city of Manchester). In an article for the *Magazine of Art* published a few months before Garnett's, Marion Hepworth Dixon described it as his "crowning work";²⁹ looking back after Onslow Ford's death, Marion Harry Spielmann argued that with it, the sculptor "breathed [...] a spirit of humanity into the classicism of twenty-five years ago."³⁰

The *Memorial* is a polychrome structure composed of an assemblage of four different materials (fig. 2): on a pedestal made of Rosso di Levanto marble stands a bronze structure including a downcast melancholic figure of Urania, represented as the muse of poetry bending over a broken lyre. At her sides two winged lions, which a contemporary reviewer took to be allusions to the lion of St Mark in Venice, support

²⁷ W. Armstrong, "E. Onslow Ford, A.R.A.," *The Portfolio: An Artistic Periodical* 21 (January 1890), 69-71, here 70; see also "Edward Onslow Ford," *The Athenaeum* (4 January 1902): 23-24.

²⁸ Martina Droth, "The Ethics of Making: Craft and English Sculptural Aesthetics c.1851-1900," *Journal of Design History* 17, no. 3 (2004): 221-35, here 221, 229 and 230, quoting [Edmund Gosse], "Sculpture at the Royal Academy," *Saturday Review* (28 June 1890): 794.

²⁹ Marion Hepworth Dixon, "Onslow Ford, A.R.A.," *Magazine of Art* (January 1892): 325-30, here 326; M. H. Spielmann, "Mr Onslow Ford's New Statue of the Queen," *Magazine of Art* (January 1898): 618-20.

³⁰ M. H. Spielmann, "E. Onslow Ford, RA: In Memoriam," *Magazine of Art* (Jan 1902): 181-84.

the upper part of the monument.³¹ Above them rests a slab of pale sea-green Irish marble, which, according to the reviewer in the *Athenaeum*, “is carved in a broad and unobtrusive fashion so as to suggest, without exactly representing it, the shore on which the poet’s corpse was found.”³² This green slab functions as a transitional space underneath another slab, this time of white marble, on which Onslow Ford rests the naked body of the poet, also carved out of white marble. The modulation of colours, going from earthbound to lighter forms, is articulated into contrasts in the composition of the sculptural group: the seated Urania bending forward and downwards in a melancholic pose works against the recumbent, slightly twisted, and upward facing figure of the poet.

The overall effect is both grandiose and intimate, thanks to the lyricism of the naked body, sculpted to make the marble appear soft and tactile. Onslow Ford depicts Shelley as he was washed up from the sea after the famous shipwreck of 1822, on the beach of Viareggio. The horizontal reclining posture and the arrangement of the limbs suggest the agency of the natural elements on the lifeless body. While in Weekes’s memorial the marble body “glistens in such a way as to convey a bloodless cadaver that is still wet,”³³ in Onslow Ford’s memorial the most visible trace of Shelley’s death by drowning is in the poet’s hair, which seems still steeped in sea water that parts it into thick clumps held together by the drying salt (fig. 3). Around the poet’s head was a bronze gilt bay wreath that echoed the use of bronze beneath and that reminded the *Athenaeum* reviewer of “a halo such as sculptors have sometimes placed

³¹ Respectively [anon.], “The Shelley Memorial,” *The Athenaeum* (5 March 1892): 314-5, here 315; and [anon.], “Royal Academy Sculpture,” *The Builder* (28 May 1892): 416.

³² [anon.], “The Shelley Memorial,” *The Athenaeum*, 315.

³³ Benedict Read, *Victorian Sculpture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 179.

about the brows of the drowned Orpheus.”³⁴ The shape and size of the base allude to the form of the sarcophagus, and yet in failing to fulfill that expectation the sculptural ensemble marks a point of departure from ancient death rituals and, as the same reviewer put it, from “the customs of the Italians,” who represent “effigies of dead worthies resting on sarcophagi.”³⁵ The alternative composite form represents the layered and conflicting iconographies that constitute the cultural body of the dead poet. Once seen as an outcast rebel, the radical Romantic poet comes back in pomp, transported on the wings of lions.

The representation of Shelley’s body was a crucial focal point for Victorian reviewers, who would often isolate it from the sculptural ensemble, seeking there the ultimate meaning of the work. In particular, several reviewers pointed to the representation of the dead body as a marker of Onslow Ford’s realism – the type of attention to detail and texture that Gosse would identify as one of the key canons of the New Sculpture. Critics agreed that Onslow Ford had chosen to represent Shelley in the historical circumstances of his death, “as he may be supposed to have lain when washed up from the sea”; or, in the words of Hepworth Dixon: “[t]he poet is represented as he was found on the storm-washed shore of Viareggio, lifeless, nude, cold, but still beautiful, inexpressibly beautiful, in death.”³⁶ The gruesome story of Shelley’s death had been told again and again as part of a biographical tradition stemming from Edward Trelawny’s sensational *Recollections of the Last Days of Shelley and Byron* (1858). Trelawny witnessed the recovery of Shelley’s body from

³⁴ [anon.], “The Shelley Memorial,” *Athenaeum*, 315. The bronze wreath was removed from the Memorial and transferred to the University College Archive in 1929, see University College Oxford, Shelley Papers, UC: FA11/2/AR1/1.

³⁵ “The Shelley Memorial,” *Athenaeum*, 315.

³⁶ Respectively “The Shelley Memorial at Oxford”; and Dixon, “Onslow Ford, A.R.A.,” 329.

the sea and then presided over the pagan ceremony of Shelley's cremation, famously claiming to have snatched Shelley's heart from the burning pyre. Victorian biographies routinely made dramatic use of Trelawny. John Addington Symonds, for instance, concluded his life of Shelley with an extended quotation from Trelawny, full of gory detail.

Yet what is striking when we compare the written records to the statue is how much Onslow Ford actually departs from the historical accounts. His depiction of the naked body of Shelley blatantly contradicts one of the best-known circumstances about Shelley's death, emphasized by Trelawny, namely that he was found wearing his clothes and, famously, with copies of Keats and Sophocles in his pockets. An even more striking point of departure from historical realism is that Shelley's body in the *Memorial* has none of the signs of emaciation, bloating, and decay that we would expect from a corpse that has been tossed about in the sea for days, and that are also a staple of written records, with Sharp, for instance, claiming that "[t]he soilure of the sea had so disfigured [Shelley and Edward Williams] that recognition was difficult; the faces and hands were fleshless, and the bodies pitiably frayed."³⁷

Onslow Ford refashions Shelley's body, erasing all signs of disfigurement and potentially grotesque features by drawing on the visual idiom of Greek – specifically Hellenistic – classicism. The perfect outline and whiteness of the marble work against the written narratives of decay of the organic body, introducing a symbolism of timelessness that is of course particularly appropriate for memorial sculpture. At the same time, turning the grotesque body into a classical body, Onslow Ford draws attention to Shelley's own classicism or what one could call Shelley's Greekness – his instinctive sympathy with the arts but also with the aesthetic and moral values of

³⁷ Sharp, *Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 187-88.

Greek antiquity;³⁸ so that, to modern viewers and readers, he becomes an intermediary into that past, his Hellenism a medium to access the classical world.

In his 1868 essay on Winckelmann – a foundational document of Victorian Hellenism – Walter Pater examines the difficulties involved in reconstructing the classical ideal in post-classical times. Pater draws particular attention to Winckelmann’s extraordinary ability to piece together the scant material remnants that have come down to us into a total vision:

from a few stray antiquarianisms, a few faces cast up sharply from the waves, Winckelmann, as his manner was, divines the temperament of the antique world, and that in which it had delight. It has passed away with that distant age, and we may venture to dwell upon it. What sharpness and reality it has is the sharpness and reality of suddenly arrested life.³⁹

In a set of images that partly draw on Winckelmann’s own writings, Pater envisages the death of classical civilization as shipwreck; he expresses the loss of the classical past, in emotional terms, as the bereavement caused by a premature death; and, employing a macabre metaphor that became widespread in the late-Victorian years, he conjures the material remains of antiquity as mutilated body parts cast up from the sea. Pater is obviously referring to spectacular stories of casual finds of ancient statuary by fishermen or on the seashore that were becoming more and more popular

³⁸ Cf. for instance Walter Bagehot’s comment that “[i]t is only necessary to open Shelley to show how essentially classical in its highest efforts his art is.” Bagehot, “Percy Bysshe Shelley,” *National Review* 6 (October 1856): 342-79, here 376.

³⁹ Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*, ed. Donald L. Hill (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980), 166.

in this age of increasing archaeological activity. In fact, in the same essay Pater describes Winckelmann himself as “a relic of classical antiquity, laid open by accident to our alien, modern atmosphere” and an exile in the modern world.⁴⁰ These important reflections on the material epistemology of antiquity are echoed in Onslow Ford’s representation of Shelley, where the body of the poet is literally a classical fragment cast up from the waves, dead but not corrupted by time; its sculptural symbolism striving to embody what Pater calls “the sharpness and reality of suddenly arrested life.” Classical allusion in Onslow Ford’s work seals the process of memorialization: in 1893 Shelley is no longer an outcast – the infamous “ineffectual angel” of Matthew Arnold – but a modern classic.

Pater’s quotation moreover alerts us to a symbolic dialectic between stone and water also evoked in the *Shelley Memorial* through a series of oppositions: presence and absence, creation and destruction, memory and oblivion. Stone recreates and preserves what water makes “one with Nature” – as Shelley writes in “Adonais.” Stone evokes permanence, while water reminds us that time inevitably causes transformation. Onslow Ford twists the interplay of the two elements into a distinctly sculptural form of lyricism, which also looks back to the inscription on Shelley’s tombstone in Rome, taken from Ariel’s song in *The Tempest*:

Nothing of him that doth fade,
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 175.

The body of Shelley thus projects a set of meanings that are implicated within the aesthetics and politics of Victorian Hellenism. Looking back to the tradition of the classical male nude, the naked Shelley depicted by Onslow Ford embodies a drive towards abstraction and the ideal that, following Hegel's influential critique in the *Aesthetik*, was seen as a key characteristic of classical culture, most strongly expressed in the plastic arts, and a marker of the big historical and cultural cleft between modernity and antiquity. Pater, for instance, had repeatedly pointed to Winckelmann's idealism as a quality that set him aside from his contemporaries, putting him instinctively in touch with antiquity and enabling him to look at classical sculpture like an ancient.

Onslow Ford leans on these discourses in order to recast the accusation of idealism, pejoratively attached to Shelley by Arnold and others, in a positive light: the *Memorial* endorses Symonds's assessment that Shelley's greatest contribution to English literature was "a quality of ideality, freedom, and spiritual audacity, which severe critics of other nations think we lack."⁴¹ Idealism and abstraction were now something to celebrate and these canons suited the distinctive aesthetic of Onslow Ford who, according to Hepworth Dixon's criticism, could conjugate realism with "the cunning of some hidden meaning, some suggestive grace, by I know not what of allurements by which we are beckoned into other and ideal worlds."⁴²

Compared to Onslow Ford, Thorvaldsen and Belt take a more conservative approach to the representation of the cultural body of the poet. "The Poet who could merely sit on a chair, and compose stanzas, would never make a stanza worth much,"

⁴¹ Symonds, *Shelley*, 183.

⁴² Dixon, "Onslow Ford, A.R.A.," 325.

argued Carlyle in his discussion of the poet as hero.⁴³ Both Thorvaldsen and Belt represent Byron seated, fully clothed and with a book in his hand, his gaze lost in the middle distance offering a conventional representation of poetic genius. Thorvaldsen references Byron's classicism by adding several fragments of Greek art, on which the poet rests triumphant, comfortable in his classical knowledge. Accomplished though the work is, Thorvaldsen's neo-classicism does not present a "difficult" poet or challenge the viewer or allude to the controversial reputation of Byron's works and life. Both Byron memorials in this sense domesticate a poet who was a romantic icon of individualism and free-thinking all over Europe. By comparison, Onslow Ford's classicism is far from being an imitative and bloodless aesthetics. To see the body of Shelley represented in this way is to "see Shelley plain," in the sense made famous by Robert Browning's expression in "Memorabilia."⁴⁴ Shelley's nakedness is at once the signifier of the poet's authentic classicism, his paganism, and his strong bond with nature; it celebrates his fearlessness in revealing his most intimate feelings and desires, his love of truth and political and intellectual freedom, and his brave unmasking of hypocrisy. The monument refuses to dispel anxieties about Shelley's religious or sexual morality that still continued to bedevil even Shelley's supporters, or turn the romantic rebel into an acceptable bourgeois. Rather than castrating Shelley, to go back to Engels's metaphor, it displays his sex as a focal point in the composition.

⁴³ Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*, 94.

⁴⁴ "Ah, did you once see Shelley plain, / And did he stop and speak to you? / And did you speak to him again? / How strange it seems, and new!" Robert Browning, "Memorabilia," in *The Poems*, ed. John Pettigrew, 2 vols (London and New York: Penguin, 1996), 2:643.

Equally charged with ideological meanings is the representation of Shelley's youth. In his biography Symonds shows how Shelley's youthfulness acquires a special mythology in the afterlife of the poet: "[t]hrough all vicissitudes he preserved his youth inviolate, and died, like one whom the gods love, or like a hero of Hellenic story, young, despite grey hairs and suffering."⁴⁵ Shelley's early death means that to posterity he will be forever young, preserved from disillusionment, impotence, and tiredness. The parallel is once again with the Greeks who, according to a widespread cliché of nineteenth-century Hellenism, never grew old because their development as a civilization was arrested at an early stage – a circumstance that, however, according to Pater, must not be regretted too much when we remember that a later age would experience the joy "of finding the ideal of that youth still red with life in the grave."⁴⁶ Onslow Ford stages this miracle of the rekindling of classicism lyrically described by Pater: the encounter with the Greek Shelley – the beautiful corpse unravaged by time and the elements – gives modernity the promise of new life. In *Studies of the Greek Poets*, Symonds had visualized the "Genius of the Greeks" as "a young man newly come from the wresting-ground, anointed, chapleted, and very calm" – an essentially sculptural image, tinged by a strong homoeroticism.⁴⁷ Onslow Ford closes the circle by using modern sculpture to look back on a long literary tradition of Hellenism that goes from Shelley to Pater and Symonds, in which classical sculpture had provided the inspiration to challenge the aesthetic and ethical orthodoxies of modernity.

⁴⁵ Symonds, *Shelley*, 182.

⁴⁶ Pater, *The Renaissance*, 167.

⁴⁷ Symonds, *Studies of the Greek Poets* (London: Smith, Elder, & Son, 1873), 399.

4. Light, Platonic Reversals and the Sculpture of Passing Shadows

The emotional power of the sculpted body is inflected by its physical surroundings. The intended, ideal site of the poet's monument in the Protestant Cemetery in Rome captures the Romantic nostalgia for the organic place of classical sculpture in the natural landscape. In Romantic classicism the metaphor of light is used to interrogate the role of climate in the production of culture. Organic metaphors emphasize original place and belonging, raising questions about the fragmentation, preservation, and restitution of classical culture: what stories do objects tell in their places of origin? How do their modes of address shift when they are relocated to the museum? Should classical specimens remain under Mediterranean skies or be preserved in Northern collections? In *Modern Greece. A Poem* (1817) Felicia Hemans activates the trope of *ubi sunt* to evoke the cultural climate in which Greek sculpture saw the light. An apostrophe to the Parthenon brings before the eyes of the reader the "brilliant skies, that round thee spread their deep ethereal blue." Under "resplendent skies" she animates the "sun-bright scene" of "sculptured forms, of high and heavenly men."⁴⁸ Through the linguistic power of the apostrophe, Hemans animates the "bright age of Pericles," using deictics to locate it within the reader's ideal grasp: "let fancy still / through Time's deep shadows all thy splendor trace."⁴⁹ Through an act of linguistic restitution, she imaginatively restores Greek sculpture to its organic environment, climate, land, and people. The shadow metaphor, however, complicates the power to bring the absent scene back to life, suggesting that even modern Greece can no longer

⁴⁸ Felicia Hemans, *Modern Greece. A Poem* (London: Murray, 1817), 34, 36, and 38.

⁴⁹ Hemans, *Modern Greece*, 39.

be home to the classical ideal.⁵⁰ The passage of time is presented as an opaque medium that obfuscates or interrupts the ideal unmediated vision of the classical past brought temporarily back to life by Romantic ekphrasis.

The elegiac possibilities of light and shadow are rearticulated by Percy and Mary Shelley, and their *fin-de-siècle* reception. “An isle under Ionian skies” is the point of destination of a boat trip to “one of the wildest of the Sporades” in Percy Shelley’s *Epipsychidion* (1821). In *Shelley Memorials*, Lady Shelley reprinted the correspondence that linked the poem to the poet’s last days. Pointing out that the poem was “a production of a portion of me already dead,”⁵¹ Shelley offered an uncomfortably proleptic image of impending tragedy; the poem’s referential anchoring shifts when it is read as a projection and premonition of the poet’s own death. In *Epipsychidion*, the soul of the loved one (Teresa Viviani, called Emilia in the poem) is presented as a “radiant form,” and the body of the lover as “shadow of that substance.” “As to real flesh and blood, you know I do not deal in those articles,” Shelley told John Gisborne in another letter published in *Shelley Memorials* (1859), and reproduced in Harry Buxton Forman’s privately-printed edition of *Epipsychidion* in 1876, “but I intend to write a Symposium of my own to set all this right.”⁵² A platonic notion of love helps editor Stopford A. Brooke defuse accusations against

⁵⁰ For an analysis of *Modern Greece* as an anti-Winckelmannian argument about the placelessness of Greek remains, which provided a political agenda for the British appropriation of the Elgin Marbles, see Noah Comet, “Felicia Hemans and the ‘exquisite Remains’ of Modern Greece,” *Keats-Shelley Journal* 58 (2009): 96-113.

⁵¹ P. B. Shelley to Ollier, 16 February 1821, in *Shelley Memorials: From Authentic Sources*, ed. Lady Shelley, second edn (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1859), 152.

⁵² P. B. Shelley to John Gisborne, October 1821, in *Shelley Memorials*, 154; republished in the editorial note to *Epipsychidion*, ed. H. Buxton Forman (printed for private distribution, 1876).

Shelley's morality in his introduction to the Shelley Society's edition of *Epipsychidion*, published in 1887. According to him, the poem should be read as an expression of "Shelley's Platonics" in line with the "archetypal Beauty" of Shelley's "Hymn to Intellectual Love," which is presented as a "pervading spirit, whose shadow, but never whose substance, is seen."⁵³ Stopford Brooke had access to the private papers in Lady Shelley's custody and was careful in treating questions of desire. Evidence of Shelley's sexual dissatisfaction informs Stopford Brooke's attempt to depersonalize the poem's referent, encouraging a sublimated reading of platonic love as *eros ouranious*, the celestial or virtuous mode of homoerotic love theorized by Pausanias in the *Symposium*.⁵⁴ Accordingly, the relationship between substance and shadow must be shifted and disembodied. While in Shelley's poem Emilia Viviani was the substance and Shelley her shadow, the reading must be rectified to interpret the woman as "but the passing shadow of his substance."⁵⁵ Mediated by light, distinctions between form and matter become uncertain and unstable in a series of platonic reversals, which open up fluid gender positions.

Shelley's Platonic reversals and the possibilities of reading the shadow for the substance participated in the wider currency of Greek love raised by Plato's *Symposium*. Unpublished during his lifetime because of concerns about its account of Greek homosexuality, Shelley's translation of the *Symposium* underwent significant cuts before appearing posthumously in 1840. As a result of a consultation with Leigh Hunt, Mary Shelley omitted the passages dealing with homosexual love; however, she

⁵³ *Epipsychidion by Percy Bysshe Shelley with an introduction by the Rev. Stopford A. Brooke, M.A., and a note by Algernon Charles Swinburne*, ed. by Robert Alfred Potts (London: Published for the Shelley Society by Reeves and Turner, 1887), xxii-xxiii.

⁵⁴ Maud Rolleston, *Talks with Lady Shelley* (London: Harrap & Co, 1925), 75-76.

⁵⁵ Shelley, *Epipsychidion*, xxiv.

did not discard the fair copy she produced for the press, as was common practice.⁵⁶ Material evidence of the editor's attachment and ambivalence is recorded in an interleaved copy of the 1840 volume with the mutilated text restored in manuscript.⁵⁷ In the bowdlerized version of Shelley's translation, reissued in 1887 and 1893, *fin-de-siècle* readers could read of the Greek archetype of love in the accompanying fragment "On the Literature, the Arts, and the Manners of the Athenians," where Shelley points out that "this object or its archetype forever exists in the mind, which [...] fills up the interstices of the imperfect image, in the same manner as the imagination moulds and completes the shapes in clouds, or in the fire, into the resemblances of whatever form, animal, building, &c., happens to present to it."⁵⁸

The question of Greek love was also critical to Benjamin Jowett, whose complete translation of Plato's Dialogues appeared in 1871 (revised editions followed in 1875 and 1892). In his introduction to the *Symposium* (1871), Jowett argued: "The passion which was unsatisfied by the love of women, took the spurious form of an enthusiasm for the ideal of beauty – a worship of some godlike image of an Apollo or Antinous. Thus wide is the gulf which separates a portion of Hellenic sentiment in the

⁵⁶ On the vicissitude of Shelley's version of the *Symposium*, see Michael O'Neill, "Emulating Plato: Shelley as Translator and Prose Poet," in *The Unfamiliar Shelley*, ed. Alan Mendel Weinberg and Timothy Webb (Farnham and Burlington VT: Ashgate 2009), 239-56.

⁵⁷ P. B. Shelley, *Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments* (London: Moxon, 1840), Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, Shelley adds.e.19 was acquired by the Bodleian in 1961 as part of the bequest of Sir John Shelley-Rolls (1871-1951), after the death of his widow Georgiana. This is in all likelihood the one bequeathed by Jane, Lady Shelley. We are grateful to Dr Bruce Barker-Benfield for assistance in tracking down the provenance of this item.

⁵⁸ P. B. Shelley, "On the Literature, the Arts, and the Manners of the Athenians. A Fragment," *Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments*, 67. The later editions were issued as part of Cassell's National Library and included a short introduction by the editor Henry Morley.

age of Plato [...] not only from Christian, but from Homeric feeling.”⁵⁹ But how wide was the gulf? Embodiment, its dislocations and sublimations were key to the aesthetics of Greek love, and sculpture had its role to play in mediating the ideal, the shadow, and the substance. The poetic dynamics of shadow and substance in *Epipsychidion* thus finds a correlation in the question whether Platonic love between men was “a matter of metaphor” or a “present poignant reality,” as Jowett and John Addington Symonds respectively put it in the late 1880s.⁶⁰ The epistolary exchanges between the two show the mounting consciousness, among a classically educated late-Victorian readership, of Platonism as an appealing discourse of identity formation for homosexual men. The third edition of Jowett’s *Plato* came out in 1892, the year of the Shelley centenary and Onslow Ford’s display of the memorial monument at the Royal Academy, just as Jowett was busy mediating the acquisition of the *Shelley Memorial* by University College and the Shelley papers by the university. Shelley’s translation of the *Symposium*, though, was not among the manuscripts that Lady Shelley donated to the Bodleian Library.

Barred from the articulations of prose, the physical forms and homoerotic possibilities of platonic love remain the unspoken possibility of poetic form. How

⁵⁹ Benjamin Jowett, *The Dialogues of Plato*, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1871), 1:486; quoted in Stefano Evangelista, “Against Misinterpretation: Benjamin Jowett’s Translations of Plato and the Ethics of Modern Homosexuality,” *Recherches anglaises et nord-américaines* 36 (2003): 13-25, here 16.

⁶⁰ Symonds to Henry Graham Dakyns, 27 March 1889, *The Letters of John Addington Symonds*, ed. Herbert M. Schueller and Robert L. Peters, 3 vols (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1967-69), 3:365; and Symonds to Benjamin Jowett, 1 February 1889, *The Letters of John Addington Symonds*, 3:346-7. See Stefano Evangelista, “‘Lovers and Philosophers at once’: Aesthetic Platonism in the Victorian *Fin de Siècle*,” *Yearbook of English Studies* 36 (2006): 230-44, here 233-34.

poetry could give shape to the poet's memorial was a much-rehearsed question, rooted in a classical commonplace. In his epigraph to Shakespeare, Milton turns the possibility of a paper memorial: "Thou in our wonder and astonishment / hast built thyself a live-long monument." Inscribed in the paratext of the Second Folio, Milton's poem suggests how words can translate the poet's corpus into an alternative architectural form: "thou dost make us marble with too much conceiving."⁶¹ While Milton pushes the Horatian line, drawing on the paragone to undermine marble memorials and address the reader to shape a Protestant inner temple of reading, Shelley's *fin-de-siècle* corpus offers an alternative power of articulation. Can sculpture go against the archival record, revive and supplement the words on the page? Can reading poetry with sculpture restore the mutilated textual body of the poet by means of "eye and ear / both what they half-create, / and what conceive"⁶²

The ephemeral metaphoric of light is central to the poet's memorialization from paper to marble. It inflects the poet's life, death, and resting place in Mary Shelley's elegy "The Choice," which Forman published in his 1876 edition of Shelley's *Poetical Works*. In her poem the work of mourning is organic, in situ; the memorial shaped by the elements: "The sky a vault, and Italy a tomb."⁶³ Her way of remembering Percy Shelley involves rearticulating the Platonic weather tropes of *Epipsychidion*, peopling its substance and shadow to voice a different experience of mourning. Her allusions shift his poem's references to Emilia Viviani to the radiant

⁶¹ John Milton, "On Shakespeare," *Complete Shorter Poems*, ed. John Carey (London and New York: Longman, 1968), 123, lines 7-8 and 14.

⁶² William Wordsworth, "Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey, on revisiting the banks of the Wye during a Tour, July 13, 1798," *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), lines 107-08.

⁶³ Mary Shelley, "The Choice," in *The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 4 vols, ed. H. Buxton Forman (London: Reeves and Turner, 1876-7), 1:3, line 6.

form of the poet, who “upon my young life’s cloud like sunlight burst / and now has left me, dark.”⁶⁴ Working through absence, the mourner attempts to capture the ethereal form of the past through spatial proximity: “beneath this sky my race of joy was run.”⁶⁵ In 1859, a sketch entitled “Tomb of the Poet Shelley, in the Protestant Cemetery at Rome,” engraved by W. J. Linton, was used as a frontispiece to anchor Lady Shelley’s volume *Shelley Memorials* to the poet’s resting place. The monument she commissioned on the occasion of his centenary, initially intended for the Protestant Cemetery in Rome, sealed her work of memorialization later in the century. The metaphoric of weather associated with loss shaped the monument’s transfer from the radiant skies of Italy to the “darkened sky” of England. How could the monument capture Shelley’s radiant form in marble? How could the sculpture’s installation attempt to produce the effect of light shining through the “darkened sky” to convey the possibility of animation, however transient? How could the azure sky of Rome be transposed to the indoor cenotaph at University College in Oxford?

When the monument was displayed at the Royal Academy exhibition in 1892, it was envisaged to “stand under a sort of temple of Ionic columns sustaining an appropriate entablature, the roof within which is to be glass, in order that the sculptures may be seen in a proper light from above.”⁶⁶ While Basil Champneys’s plan for a temple structure was discarded, the final structure reflects Onslow Ford’s request that the Shelley Chamber be “lighted from above, with a North, or East, aspect if possible, inside, the wall behind the memorial should be some dark colour,

⁶⁴ Mary Shelley, “The Choice,” 3, lines 12-3.

⁶⁵ Mary Shelley, “The Choice,” 5, line 61.

⁶⁶ “The Shelley Memorial,” *Athenaeum* (5 March 1892), 315.

and the pavement light.”⁶⁷ When viewers stand on the threshold of the chamber, their line of sight rests on the sensual contours of Shelley’s body made radiant by a stream of light channeled from above.

Since this is a poet’s memorial, the monument can be read as an architectural recreation of Shelley’s poetic corpus. The *Shelley Memorial* activates the platonic reversals of materiality celebrated in Shelley’s writing through the architectural play with the metamorphic possibilities of light, shadow, and substance. The platonic contrast between physical and ideal body comes across two contrasting reactions to the Monument by contemporary viewers: while Hepworth Dixon admired the sculpture’s ability to capture Shelley’s body “still beautiful, inexpressibly beautiful, in death,”⁶⁸ Michael Field complained about its imperfect ideality: “The drowned nude [...] is an excellent portrait of the model, and therefore unworthy of Shelley, to my mind.”⁶⁹

How can sculpture take on the shifting modes of address of Shelley’s lyric? In *Epipsychidion* “my spirit” is “a shadow of that substance [...] flashed from her motion splendor like the morn’s, / and from her presence life was radiated / through the grey earth and branches bare and dead.” The poem’s first person pronoun shifts the subject position to the reader. Thus the Platonic relationship can be transferred

⁶⁷ “The length of the building should be 24 to 34 feet, the width 18 feet, and the height 16 or 17 feet lighted from above, with a North, or East, aspect if possible, inside, the wall behind the memorial should be some dark colour, and the pavement light.” Onslow Ford, 9 May 1892, University College Archive, UC: FA11/2/C1/1. For architectural plans for the *Memorial*, see University College Archive, UC: FA11/2/Y1; Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, Abinger Papers, MS. Abinger c. 83, fol. 38.

⁶⁸ Marion Hepworth Dixon, “Onslow Ford, A.R.A.,” *Magazine of Art* (January 1892): 329.

⁶⁹ A brief excerpt from this letter, containing this comment, is included in Mary Sturgeon, *Michael Field* (London: George Harrap & Co., 1922), 41.

and acted out again and again. Light morphs the materiality of marble into the play of substance and shadow that is so central to Shelley's Platonic poetics. Such shifting forms inflect the substance of the sculptural body, emphasizing the ephemeral shapes it can take in the ethereal dynamic of light and shade produced by changing weather conditions. Writing about John Addington Symonds, Michael Hatt reflects on the ephemerality of *fin-de-siècle* encounters with sculpture as a sensuous object of light and shadow. In contrast to archeological and museological efforts to protect objects from the passage of time by eliminating the accidental, isolating them and presenting them in "optimal and stable viewing conditions," writing can reimagine the mutable shapes of sculpture as an organic form inflected by landscape and environment.⁷⁰

Back in Oxford, the memorial's architectural sky translates the platonic form of Shelley's "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" through the visionary power of light that appears and disappears with the passage of clouds. Shelley's celebration of "Mutability" is echoed in the play of weather effects. The apotheosis of the poet is suggested by the flashing light cast on the sculptural body from the window above:

Thou wert the morning star among the living,
Ere thy fair light had fled;
Now, having died, thou art as Hesperus, giving
New splendor to the dead.

This Greek epigraph attributed to Plato, which Shelley translated and chose as an epigraph for *Adonais*, is architecturally reflected in the blue dome of air envisaged by

⁷⁰ Michael Hatt, "In Search of Lost Time: Greek Sculpture and Display in Late Nineteenth-Century England," *Art History* 36, no. 4 (2013): 768-83, here 770.

Onslow Ford to commemorate the dead Shelley. Through the architectural medium of light, the *Memorial* performs platonic reversals and suggests the possibility of enthusiasm as a mystical union of substance and shadow. Its play with marble and its dematerializations activate an ethereal poetics, a form seen in glimpses under the uncertain sky of the north.

5. Inscriptions: Remembering Shelley / Dismembering *Adonais*

In the *Shelley Memorial* the relationship between sculpture and poetry is sealed by a bronze ribbon, inscribed with lines from *Adonais*, which runs alongside the base of the monument:

He is made one with Nature, there is heard
His voice in all her music, from the moan
Of thunder, to the song of night's sweet bird;
He is a presence to be felt and known
In darkness and in light.

Carved in bronze, Shelley's words participate in the poet's memorial and invoke his voice, music, presence. The transposition from paper to bronze embeds the lyric in the medium of commemoration and remembering. Encircling the base of the monument, the words support the marble revelation offered above "in darkness and in light," under the elements channeled by the architectural glass opening onto the sky. Yet the inscription radically changes their power of articulation. Detached from the poet's utterance, Shelley's words are inflected to capture him in the third person, the

grammatical form that articulates absence. Cast in the third person, become referent, the poet is excluded from active articulation. The inscription takes over his corpus and opens up its posthumous world of reference: “The birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author.”⁷¹

Adonais was Shelley’s elegy for Keats, who had died in Rome and was also buried there in the Protestant Cemetery. Keats’s epitaph, “here lies one whose Name was writ in water,” associates him proleptically with Shelley’s death by drowning, a circumstance recorded by Trelawny’s choice of Ariel’s Song from Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* as a funerary inscription for Shelley’s grave. The retrospective shift in reference that shaped *Adonais* as the poet’s elegy to himself is confirmed by the anecdote mentioned above, according to which a copy of Keats’s poems was found in the pocket of the drowned Shelley. Text and body are inextricably intertwined in the posthumous corpus of the poet. Lady Shelley recalled opening Mary Shelley’s desk a year after her death: “Lying alone and apart was a copy of the *Adonais* – the early Pisa edition – with a page torn loose and folded over in four. We opened it reverently and found ashes – dust – and we then knew what Mary had so longed to tell us: all that was left of Shelley’s heart lay there.”⁷² Using *Adonais* as an epitaph for the *Shelley Memorial* marks the poem’s transposition to remember Shelley’s death and posthumous dissemination.

The poem’s inscription aligns the *Shelley Memorial* to a sequence of previous uses of excerpts from *Adonais* as poetical inscriptions to remember the poet in his former dwelling places and to mark the passing of his life. Instead of consecrating the

⁷¹ Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author,” in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), 142-48, here 148.

⁷² Rolleston, *Talks with Lady Shelley*, 31.

Memorial as the poet's dwelling place, the dissemination of the poem's stanzas articulate a memorial sequence, as if moving from one stanza to the other connects the places inhabited by the poet in a poetical geography. A stanza from *Adonais* was chosen as an epitaph to Henry Weekes's Shelley memorial at Christchurch Minster in 1854:

He has outsoared the shadow of our night,
Envy, and calumny, and hate, and pain;
And that unrest which men miscall, delight,
Can touch him not, and torture not again:
From the contagion of the world's slow stain
He is secure, and now can never mourn
A heart grown cold, a head grown grey in vain;
Nor, when the spirit's self has ceased to burn,
With sparkling ashes load an unlamented urn.

This same epigraph is painted high on the walls of the Shelley Chamber at University College, segmented in three stanzas of three lines each.

Epigraphs from *Adonais* spell out premonitions and punctuate transitions from life to death. Fragmentation, dissemination, and inscription turn the poet's corpus into an instrument of mourning in the chapters recounting Shelley's last days in Trelawny's *Recollections* (1858) and *Shelley's Memorials from Authentic Sources*, edited by Lady Shelley in 1859. In 1867 another stanza was inscribed on a tablet placed outside Shelley's house in Marlow:

He is gone where all things wise and fair
Descend. Oh dream not that the amorous deep
Will yet restore him to the vital air,
Death feeds on his mute voice, and laughs at our despair
Adonais⁷³

Conversely, an engraving of Shelley's tombstone is used as a frontispiece to Harry Buxton Forman's 1877 edition of *Adonais*.⁷⁴ The metaphor of disinterment is frequently used to discuss editorial questions relating to the poetic corpus of the poet.⁷⁵ While editions claim to re-member the poet's corpus, inscriptions disseminate it in the form of fragments. Thus rearticulated in relation to a shifting body of references, the corpus is dismembered and destabilized.

Inscriptions mark places associated with Shelley. These acts of referential anchoring attempt to recover and renew his presence. In the case of the *Memorial*, the elegy thus takes on characteristics of the epigram as a form that anchors words to their referent. Closer to the epigram than the epitaph, Shelley's elegy here marks the poet's absence through the material presence of his marble body. Unlike the epitaph, the

⁷³ Transcribed in Buxton Forman, 1876, 1:xl.

⁷⁴ P. B. Shelley, *Adonais*, ed. Harry Buxton Forman (n.pl.: 1877).

⁷⁵ "Neither the lost volumes nor the missing manuscripts, however, need we deem irrecoverable in these days of eager and ceaseless disinterment"; "Editor's Preface," *The Prose Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 4 vols, ed. Harry Buxton Forman (1880), 1:xxviii; P.B. Shelley, *The Mask of Anarchy, written on the Occasion of the Massacre at Manchester*, facsimile of the holograph manuscript with an introduction by Harry Buxton Forman (London: Printed for the Shelley Society by Reeves and Turner, 1887), 36; Clarke, *Virtuous Vice*, 212.

words do not activate the voice of the dead in an act of prosopopoeia. The cenotaph further frustrates the desire to conjoin the words to their absent referent.

6. Iconographies: “A Bright Erroneous Dream”

Onslow Ford chooses to commemorate “life’s unquiet dream.” Taken from Shelley’s “Hymn to Intellectual Beauty,” this platonic commonplace came to stand for Shelley’s life itself, reappearing in various guises in Victorian biographical and critical works. George Moore’s powerful formula, “A bright erroneous dream,” repeated by Garnett in his 1892 review of the Shelley memorials, was a permutation of the same. In his sculptural depiction of Shelley’s body Onslow Ford alluded to the composition of the Pietà adopted by Henry Weekes’s memorial to Shelley at Christchurch Minster, but deliberately did away with “Michael Angelesque grandiosity,” as the *Athenaeum* reviewer noted.⁷⁶ Instead, he secularized and overlaid it with a literary and visual palimpsest of dreams. From Julio Romano’s *The Dream of Hecuba*, to Sir Joshua Reynolds’s *The Death of Dido* (RA 1781) and Henry Fuseli’s *The Nightmare* (RA 1782), the female body of the dreamer became the male body of the poet used in Henry Wallis’s *Chatterton* (possible extra fig). Exhibited in the Royal Academy in 1856, this popular and iconic image in turn provided inspiration for Onslow Ford.

The switch in this tradition between pictorial and sculptural, female and male bodies results in the effeminate masculinity of Chatterton, famously modeled on George Meredith, who was described by Symonds in a poetic ekphrasis as lying “like

⁷⁶ “The Shelley Memorial,” *Athenaeum*, 314-15.

sculptured marble / Fashioned from some Grecian's brain / For a young Adonis sleeping / Till the Zephyrs wake again."⁷⁷ Symonds astutely captures the sculptural intertext of Wallis's painting, revealed by the patch of white skin visible through the unbuttoned shirt, which is in such stark contrast to the chromatic luxuriance of the rest of the canvas, and subjects it to a decidedly homoerotic gaze, as Joseph Bristow and Rebecca N. Mitchell have pointed out.⁷⁸ The arrangement of the body and elegiac mood of Onslow Ford's memorial suggests obvious parallels between Chatterton and Shelley, both romantics with controversial reputations who died tragic premature deaths (Chatterton committed suicide at the age of seventeen).

Wallis and Onslow Ford restored to the body of the male poet the classical beauty that Wilde had missed in the medallion portrait of Keats. Their works turned the male body into an object of desire, as Symonds's homoerotic verses on *Chatterton* demonstrate, offering it for scrutiny as a potentially perverse body that resists fixed norms of gender and sexuality. In the case of Shelley, commentators had long found his sexuality problematic. On the one hand, Dowden's recent biography brought to late-Victorian readers lurid revelations about Shelley's inability to control his libido; on the other, several critics and biographers drew attention to Shelley's androgyny, the Italian critic Giuseppe Chiarini claiming that it was enough to look at a portrait of Shelley to see that "there is nothing strong or virile in his countenance: it is the

⁷⁷ Symonds, "For a Picture of the Dead Chatterton," *Fragilia Labilia (Written mostly between 1860 and 1862)* (Privately printed, 1884). Only twenty-five copies were printed of this collection where the poem on Wallis's picture features in the company of mostly homoerotic verse.

⁷⁸ Joseph Bristow and Rebecca N. Mitchell, *Oscar Wilde's Chatterton: Literary History, Romanticism, and the Art of Forgery* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015), 88.

countenance of a youth, a maiden, a seraphim.”⁷⁹ Arnold’s image of the “beautiful and ineffectual angel, beating in the void his luminous wings in vain” uses the same androgynous imagery in a more negative light, recasting the angel’s sexual indeterminacy as inability to create.

The two, apparently paradoxical, images of the hyper-sexed and a-sexed male body can in fact be reconciled in an eighteenth-century model of effeminacy, of which Shelley appeared to the Victorians as a somewhat belated representative. Yet in the late-Victorian period the cultural category of effeminacy was undergoing a cultural transition as a distinct male homosexual identity started to emerge. The way that Shelley’s body gets caught in this cultural shift can be seen in Symonds’s biography, where Shelley’s “almost feminine” looks,⁸⁰ together with his sensitivity, gentleness, sweetness, and his inability to fit into the crude all-male environment of the public school, all look forward to a narrative of homosexual *Bildung* that Symonds would use in his own autobiography. When Symonds describes one of Shelley’s boyhood crushes at school as the “kind of passionate attachment that often precedes love in fervent natures” it is possible to hear the language of Victorian uranism creep into his prose.⁸¹ Symonds wants to discover a queer Shelley (not so much a practising homosexual as a model for homosexual readers), so that even Shelley’s “flight towards the region of impossible ideals” can be read as a gloss on what in *Studies of the Greek Poets* and other writings he calls “*l’amour de*

⁷⁹ Giuseppe Chiarini, “Percy Bysshe Shelley,” in *Ombre e Figure: Saggi Critici* (Rome: Sommaruga, 1883), 5-49, here. 22. The original quotation reads: “Guardate un ritratto dello Shelley: niente di forte e di virile in quel volto; vi pare il volto di un fanciullo, di una giovinetta, di un serafino.”

⁸⁰ Symonds, *Shelley*, 23.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

l'impossible" – an expression that he uses to spiritualize homoerotic desire.⁸²

Shelley's Platonism could also now be read in an explicitly homoerotic key. The depiction of masculinity in Onslow Ford's memorial brings into view the queer Shelley that we glimpse in Symonds's writings, playing on an established Victorian tradition of representing homosexual feelings in an elegiac key that spans from Tennyson's *In Memoriam* to A. E. Housman and to Symonds's own verses. Pater's image of the Greek youth "still red with life in the grave" and Symonds's comparison of the dead Chatterton to Adonis also belong to this same tradition, which, as we have seen, was heavily invested in classical sculpture as an art form that provided inspiration for how male homoerotic desire could be made visible with none of the pejorative connotations attached to it in modern times. Onslow Ford's *Shelley Memorial* thus came into being in a culture that was discovering new and sometimes transgressive meanings in the poetic and sculptural male body. In fact, rumours circulated that Onslow Ford had used a female model for the statue (his son later claimed that it was he who had posed as the model).⁸³ This further tale of sexual ambiguity in the potential switch of male and female bodies alerts us to one last sculptural echo in Onslow Ford's monument: the Borghese Hermaphrodite in the Louvre – a Hellenistic statue that depicts the sensuous, slightly twisted form of a double-sexed body, asleep and resting on a bed.

⁸² Symonds, resp. *Shelley*, p. 41. For Symonds's use of "*l'amour de l'impossible*" and its meanings in Symonds and Wilde, see Horst Schroeder, "ΕΡΩΣ ΤΩΝ ΑΔΥΝΑΤΩΝ – L'amour de l'impossible – A Graeco-French Collocation in 'The Critic as Artist,'" *Notes and Queries* 40, no. 1 (March 1993), 52-53.

⁸³ David J. Getsy, *Body Doubles: Sculpture in Britain, 1877-1905* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 131 and 202.

The mythic body of the Hermaphrodite is, like Onslow Ford's Shelley, also the product of a death by water: in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* the beautiful youth Hermaphroditus is raped by the Nymph Salmacis, who leaps on him as he is bathing in a pond and prays to the gods that their bodies may never be disentangled; her prayer is granted but the two emerge as one new, conjoined being that carries both male and female sexual characteristics. Both Winckelmann and Pater had celebrated the hermaphrodite as embodying the Greek sculptural idea of harmony and supreme or ideal beauty ("ein Bild hoher Schönheit [und] idealisch") – the latter in a passage in his essay on Winckelmann that he excised from later editions of *The Renaissance*.⁸⁴ But it was A. C. Swinburne who, in one of the most controversial lyrics in *Poems and Ballads* (1866), provided an extended reverie that brought the full imaginative potential of the Hermaphrodite's body to the attention of his Victorian contemporaries (this poem was one of the most widely discussed and attacked by reviewers). "Hermaphroditus" is an ekphrasis of the Louvre Hermaphrodite in four sonnets, in which he sets up a dialogue between textual and sculptural versions of the myth. Swinburne's interpretation of the hermaphrodite is remarkable not only for refusing to see the hermaphroditic body as grotesque but also for rewriting its sterility into a source of powerful creative energy. The beginning of the second sonnet encapsulates these characteristics:

Where between sleep and life some brief space is,

⁸⁴ Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Joseph Eiselein, 12 vols (Donauöschingen: Verlag Deutscher Classiker, 1825-29), 4:76; and Pater, *The Renaissance*, 263. See Catriona MacLeod, *Embodying Ambiguity: Androgyny and Aesthetics from Winckelmann to Keller* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998), 30-31; and Lene Østermark-Joahnsen, *Walter Pater and the Language of Sculpture* (Farnham and Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2011), 119.

With love like gold bound round about the head,
Sex to sweet sex with lips and limbs is wed,
Turning the fruitful feud of hers and his
To the waste wedlock of a sterile kiss;
Yet from them something like as fire is shed
That shall not be assuaged till death be dead,
Though neither life nor sleep can find out this.⁸⁵

Swinburne, who was an enthusiastic admirer of Shelley and would shortly rewrite Arnold's image of the ineffectual angel into "an archangel winged and weaponed for angel's work,"⁸⁶ interprets the sexual in-between-ness of the Hermaphrodite as the potential for self-creation, poetic invention, and artistic freedom. Shelley's death-sleep in the Oxford memorial looks back to the sleep of the Hermaphrodite. It celebrates provisionality, becoming, and the metamorphic power of art: it is a suspended state between masculinity and femininity, death and life that revitalizes the possibility of Shelley's "bright erroneous dream."

7. Perspectives: Walking, Looking, Unbuilding Lines of Sight

The figure of the hermaphrodite exhibits the possibilities of sculpture. As a three-dimensional medium that depends on both movement and time, sculpture complicates

⁸⁵ A. C. Swinburne, *Poems and Ballads and Atalanta in Calydon*, ed. Kenneth Haynes (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2000), 66.

⁸⁶ A. C. Swinburne, "Notes on the Text of Shelley," in *Essays and Studies* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1875): 184-237, here 216. The essay was originally published in the *Fortnightly Review* in May 1869.

G. E. Lessing's definition of the boundaries between the arts. If the visual arts can tell a story as a point in time by placing bodies next to one another in space, the positioning of the viewer marks one way in which sculpture differs from painting. How can metamorphosis be stilled in an image? In what ways can different arts shape the myth of the hermaphrodite into a definite form? In sculpture its classical form finds its ideal temporal unveiling. This process of change depends on circumambient viewing. What appears to be a female recumbent form seen from behind suddenly discloses its genital surprise as the point of view shifts upon walking around the sculpture.

At first sight, Onslow Ford's *Memorial* plays with the opposite subject position, a recumbent form lying on its back, exposing its frontal side offered upwards to the sky and the viewer. The architectural framing of the *Memorial* encourages this privileged line of sight on the recumbent sculpture. Standing on the threshold of the cenotaph, in the semi-dark interior, the viewer observes the radiant form of the poet lighted from above by an unseen source. The central perspective focuses the eye on the poet's frontal image, with the phallus in full view; it leaves no doubt about Shelley's masculinity. This privileged point of view is inscribed in the architectural layout of the cenotaph, punctuated by two seating positions, which invite the viewer to stop and contemplate the sculpture from two concentric points of observation, one above and the other just below the chamber's enclosure.⁸⁷ Viewers who could enter the enclosure and go down the steps that lead into the cenotaph would find themselves in the circular space of the chamber. This inner circle encourages walking around the sculpture, opening up alternative possibilities. Taking in the body's unveiling, part

⁸⁷ Basil Champneys, Design for the *Shelley Memorial*, University College, Oxford, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, Abinger Papers, MS. Abinger c. 83, fol. 38.

after part, brings into view the feminine curve of the poet's buttocks (fig. 4). Looking at the sculpture from the opposite side then reverses the gender positions of the viewer. From the back, the body of the poet can seem sexed female.

Sculpture as a form unfolds through movement in space, unravels the static frontal view encouraged by the external architectural partitions of the visible, and disrupts the architectural attempt to frame the body's sexual significations. In the inner circle, the viewer is included in perambulatory ways of seeing sculpture, which enhance the hermaphroditical form's verbal unveiling. Its subversive logic disrupts attempts to distinguish anatomical attributes by either/or operators or to order them into a sequence through the narrative of metamorphosis. By contrast, the hermaphrodite intermingles forms through a both/and dynamics. Its form appears obliquely by glimpses, disturbs the orthodox view, opens up alternative rear views and sidelines. The wont of sculpture in the expanded field of the *Memorial* goes against what the architectural frame wants the viewer to see.

Crowning decades of attempts to control the poet's reputation and restore his corpus, on 14 June 1893, Lady Shelley solemnly handed over the gold key of the Shelley Chamber to the Master of University College.⁸⁸ The rear view, like the private papers and the *omissis* in Shelley's Symposium translation, were reserved to an exclusive, "fit" audience. Shelley's own reflections on the apotheosis of the poet tell another story, in which mutability constantly rearranges questionable shapes. The imaginary metamorphosis that Shelley traces in "The Cloud" refuses to be fixed:

For after the rain when with never a stain

⁸⁸ *The Times* (15 June 1893): 11.

The pavilion of Heaven is bare,
And the winds and sunbeams with their convex gleams
Build up the blue dome of air,
I silently laugh at my own cenotaph,
And out of the caverns of rain,
Like a child from the womb, like a ghost from the tomb,
I arise and unbuild it again.