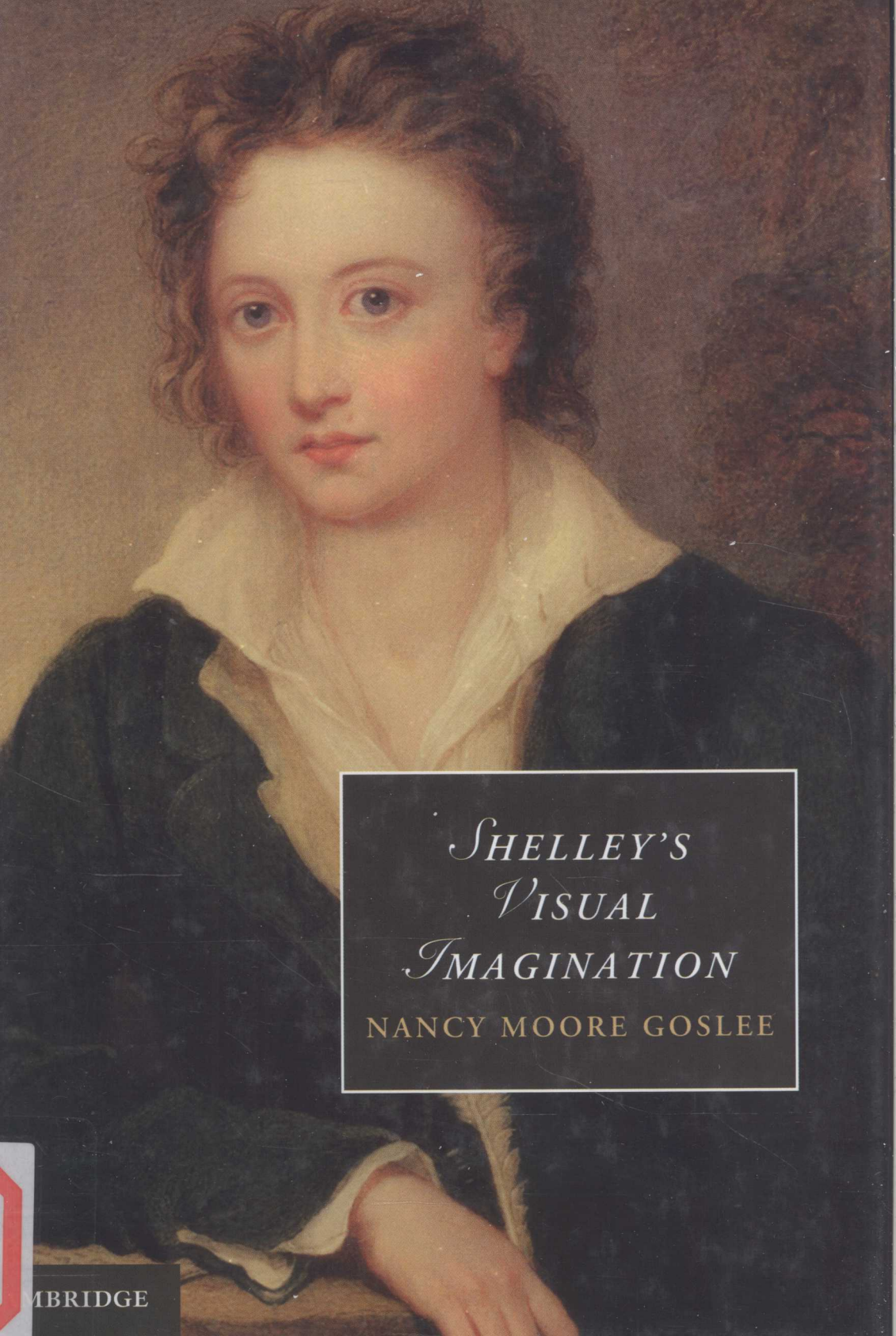

Shelley's Visual Imagination

NANCY MOORE GOSLEE

SHEI JAL IM N

NANCY MOORE GOSLEE

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town,
Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi, Tokyo, Mexico City

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107008380

First published 2011

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Goslee, Nancy Moore, 1941–
Shelley's visual imagination / Nancy Moore Goslee.
p. cm. – (Cambridge studies in romanticism)
ISBN 978-1-107-00838-0 (Hardback)
1. Shelley, Percy Bysshe, 1792–1822–Criticism and interpretation. I. Title. II. Series.
PR5438.G67 2011
821′.7–dc22 2010050007

ISBN 978-1-107-00838-0 Hardback

SHELLEY'S VISUAL IMAGINATION

Shelley's drafts and notebooks, which have recently been published for the first time, are very revealing about the creative processes behind his poems, and show – through illustrations and doodles – an unexpectedly vivid visual imagination which contributed greatly to the effect of his poetry. *Shelley's Visual Imagination* analyzes both verbal script and visual sketches in his manuscripts to interpret the lively personifications of concepts such as "Liberty," "Anarchy," or "Life" in his completed poems. Challenging the persistent assumption that Shelley's poetry in particular, and Romantic poetry more generally, reject the visual for expressive voice or music, this first full-length study of the drafts and notebooks combines criticism with a focus upon bibliographic codes and iconic pages. The product of years of close examination of these remarkable texts, this much-anticipated book will be of great value for all students of Shelley, and for all those interested in the Romantic process of creation.

NANCY MOORE GOSLEE is Professor of English Emerita at the University of Tennessee.

CAMBRIDGE STUDIES IN ROMANTICISM

This series aims to foster the best new work in one of the most challenging fields within English literary studies. From the early 1780s to the early 1830s a formidable array of talented men and women took to literary composition, not just in poetry, which some of them famously transformed, but in many modes of writing. The expansion of publishing created new opportunities for writers, and the political stakes of what they wrote were raised again by what Wordsworth called those "great national events" that were "almost daily taking place": the French Revolution, the Napoleonic and American wars, urbanization, industrialization, religious revival, an expanded empire abroad, and the reform movement at home. This was an enormous ambition, even when it pretended otherwise. The relations between science, philosophy, religion, and literature were reworked in texts such as *Frankenstein* and *Biographia Literaria*; gender relations in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and *Don Juan*; journalism by Cobbett and Hazlitt; poetic form, content, and style by the Lake School and the Cockney School. Outside Shakespeare studies, probably no body of writing has produced such a wealth of comment or done so much to shape the responses of modern criticism. This indeed is the period that saw the emergence of those notions of "literature" and of literary history, especially national literary history, on which modern scholarship in English has been founded.

The categories produced by Romanticism have also been challenged by recent historicist arguments. The task of the series is to engage both with a challenging corpus of Romantic writings and with the changing field of criticism they have helped to shape. As with other literary series published by Cambridge, this one will represent the work of both younger and more established scholars, on either side of the Atlantic and elsewhere.

For a complete list of titles published see end of book.

To my daughter Susan

Acknowledgments

This project has been so long in the making that a genetic study of its origins, of its sources of inspiration and support, would be far longer than the finished book itself. Shelley criticism and scholarship, Romantic criticism, and theories of textuality have all provided inspiration and challenges, and in spite of my efforts I fear that my documentation scarcely touches my intellectual debts. I should begin, however, by acknowledging more local and practical debts. First, the generous support of the John C. Hodges Better English Fund at the University of Tennessee has given me the opportunity for many trips to examine Shelley's manuscripts, as well as funding several sabbatical terms for writing; and the Graduate School at Tennessee has also supported the project with a number of faculty development grants. Second, I wish to remember my late colleague Richard Finneran, the Yeats scholar who drew me into the orbit of the Society for Textual Scholarship (STS) with its contentious debates over textual theory and its cadre of Shelleyans involved in those debates: Donald H. Reiman, Doucette Fisher, the late Betty Bennett, Stuart Curran, Timothy Webb, Neil Fraistat, Stephen Jones, and others. Although my interest in visual–verbal relationships in Romantic poetry and my fascination with Shelley's visual sketches goes all the way back to my more-or-less formalist Yale dissertation and my somewhat more historicist first book, my awareness of the hermeneutic possibilities in material textuality, both verbal and visual, was honed by STS conferences. It was also honed by my experience in editing one of Shelley's draft notebooks for the Bodleian Shelley Manuscript facsimile series, an opportunity offered me by Don Reiman. He asked whether I'd prefer a neat notebook or one with rougher drafts – I said "rougher" and I was hooked. During my work at the Bodleian on the editing project, I also met more Shelleyans engaged on similar projects and was guided by Dr. Bruce Barker-Benfield, with his wide knowledge of the Shelley material and of everything from paper makers to ancient Greek to modern sailing. His

meticulous scholarship and his patience have been enormously helpful, even through the last stages of preparing this manuscript. Further, I want to recognize the generosity of the Bodleian Library of Oxford University for allowing me to examine and to quote from its Shelley manuscripts. I also want to thank the staffs of the Henry H. Huntington Library and of the Carl H. Pforzheimer Collection of Shelley and his Circle, the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations. The two anonymous readers for Cambridge University Press provided extremely helpful suggestions for sharpening my argument. The errors that remain are of course my own responsibility.

Several chapters or parts of chapters have been previously published, and I thank the journals and publishers for permission to use them here. "Dispersoning Emily: Drafting as Plot in *Epipsychidion*" first appeared in the *Keats–Shelley Journal* 42 (1993): 104–19 and was then reprinted with some changes in Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat, eds., *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, 2nd edn. (New York: Norton, 2002), 735–47. Chapter 6 was first published as the article "Pursuing Revision in Shelley's 'Ode to Liberty,'" in *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 36, no. 2, 166–83. Copyright © 1994 by the University of Texas Press, all rights reserved. Parts of chapters 1, 4, and 9 were first published in Alan M. Weinberg and Timothy Webb, eds., *The Unfamiliar Shelley* (Farnham, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009) as "Shelleyan Inspiration and the Sister Arts," 159–79.

Contents

Illustrations

CHAPTER I

Introduction: text and figure

CHALLENGING ROMANTIC ICONOPHOBIA: THE CASE OF SHELLEY

In Act II of *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley's oracular character Demogorgon responds to Asia's questions about a supreme deity by asserting with skeptical conciseness that, "A voice / Is wanting, the deep truth is imageless." A brilliant revision of Milton's account of Death and Burke's praise of that account as a model of verbal sublimity, Demogorgon's own voice emerges from the "deep" of his volcanic cave while Asia and her sister can see only a "mighty Darkness," "Ungazed upon and shapeless," a darkness possessing "neither limb / Nor form nor outline."[1] Shelley thus tempts critics into making the second half of Demogorgon's utterance a guide for interpreting not only this lyrical drama, but all of his poetry, as a skeptical attack upon both the aesthetic medium and the philosophic implications of visuality. Further, Romanticists have repeatedly invoked that phrase, "the deep truth is imageless," to characterize Romantic poetry more generally as a turning away from the "mirror" or mimesis of an objective world or its transcendent structures to the voice or music of an expressive subject.

So pervasive has been this focus upon the second half of Demogorgon's assertion that W. J. T. Mitchell quotes it to characterize what he calls the "iconophobic" or anti-visual tendency of Romanticism. Citing the repeated warnings in Wordsworth and Coleridge against "the tyranny of the eye," culminating in Wordsworth's discovery of an imagination that speaks through the unseen sound of waters on Snowdon, Mitchell enlarges M. H. Abrams' account in *The Mirror and the Lamp* with an historicist argument that these writers were turning against not only an Enlightenment aesthetics but also an Enlightenment radical politics derived from the French *philosophes*. His purpose in describing this anti-"idoliste" view of British Romanticism, however, is to qualify it by examining the composite art of Blake.[2] My purpose here is to qualify

it still further: to argue that Shelley's writing indeed represents the expressive subject but represents its emergence into active engagement with public discourse. This engagement, I argue, draws both upon a Promethean creative imagination and upon a philosophical skepticism about all such making of visions. He accomplishes this not only through figures of elusive voice and music like those in Act II of *Prometheus* but also through experiments with the visuality of written language and with the relationships of the verbal to the visual.

For much of Shelley's poetry invokes the very iconicity that Demogorgon seems so darkly to attack. It does so both to bring into focus the idolatries created by cultural, religious, and political institutions in order to critique and revise them, and, as the freed Prometheus tells Asia in Act III, to "make / Strange combinations out of common things," so that they become "The wandering voices and the shadows . . . Of all that man becomes" (III.31–2, 57–8). However shadowy in the present, these new images of what humanity might aspire to become are figures, shapes, forms, images created by Prometheus as demiurge. Furthermore, we might read Demogorgon's "deep truth," itself represented by the visibly dark, possibly volcanic lair into which Asia and her sister Panthea have descended as a place inhabited, like Prometheus' cave in Act III, with the unformed, unarticulated potential of the human mind. Capable of generating figures, forms, and images, that mind is also capable of forgetting that such images, such ideals, even of creators, are themselves created – and that "all deities reside in the human breast," as Blake provocatively says in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*.[3] If the "deep truth" of the mind's originating reservoirs remains a dark but fiery abyss, we should read Demogorgon's ambiguous volcanic metaphor, "If the Abysm could vomit forth its secrets" (II.iv.115), not as an absolute denial of such a vomiting of "sparks" or "coals," not as a denial of the witnessing power of visual images, but as a denial of their claims to an absolute, transcendent authority or transparent transmission of truth that would deny human creativity and agency. If cleared of false idols through a critical skepticism, as Demogorgon urges, that mind is ready to generate redemptive images. Such a cave or abyss may represent an individual mind in the process of articulating and communicating its consciousness – the "mind in creation" as a "burning coal" – or it may represent a collective, infinite potential of mind, as Shelley suggests in "On Life."[4]

Moreover, not only *Prometheus Unbound*, but all of Shelley's poetry, emerges from a mind unknown to us onto the material page in ways that seize upon and then thematize the graphic and material processes of

writing. For even if the "deep truth" underlying representation may be "imageless," Shelley's processes of composing his poetry are richly visual. The genesis of his published poems in draft notebooks shows repeated play with visual sketches and other graphic, material gestures, scripted words often punctuated or interwoven with visual sketches, texts often revised to incorporate their own sometimes resistant materiality into their themes and then reproduced as figures and themes in a printed text. Medieval manuscript copyists and Blake after them designed "iconic" pages on which visual image and visually perceived script work together to create a total effect carrying semiotic and aesthetic significance. Though Shelley does not work to produce such an iconic page as a final state of his artistic production, his generation of poetic verbal texts through the matrix of a provisionally, sometimes even accidentally, iconic page leaves traces, I will argue, on the verbal images and themes of the completed poem. Moreover, this process, as in Blake's illuminated pages, evokes and then challenges a further meaning of "icon" based upon the Christian theology of the incarnation and the human as an image of the divine: the icon as a religious painting representing a holy person and itself venerated as a holy object. Critics of such veneration, from Byzantine iconoclasts on, argued that such icons tended toward idolatry – and this debate, running in revised form through Catholic–Protestant polemic from the Reformation on, also influences, as Mitchell suggests, English attitudes toward French culture even when that culture is itself temporarily anti-Catholic. Modern debates over the meaning of the term "icon" – or how icons convey meaning – run from C. S. Peirce's distinction of the icon from the symbol and the index through Nelson Goodman's skeptical, nominalist critique of Peirce to Mitchell's wide-ranging analysis in *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* and beyond.[5]

A number of Shelley's poems also test this ambiguous iconicity through verbal figuration of the visual, especially through figures of allegorical personification such as "Liberty" or "Hope" or "Famine" or "Death." More explicitly and more centrally than *Prometheus Unbound*, with its allusion to Milton's figure of Death, these other poems dramatize the borderline not only between text and image, but also between concept and its temporary incarnation in human figure.[6] Such eerily insubordinate figures exert a visualizable, energetic,[7] quasi-human agency within his drafting processes. Once deputized, they become central figures in the completed poem, where they enact both psychological and cultural conflicts. As Stephen Knapp shows, the ambiguous status of such figures, manifesting human, divine, or merely verbal energy, provoked uneasy

responses in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Milton's portrayal of "Death," that "shape which shape had none," serves as a primary example of this provocative instability.[8] Writing to Elizabeth Hitchener in 1811, Shelley exploits the uneasiness that Knapp describes with a calculatedly outrageous iconoclasm: "Imagination delights in personification. Were it not for this embodying quality of eccentric fancy we should be to this day without a God."[9] Yet in spite of his disparaging attitude toward such "eccentric fancy," Shelley repeatedly dramatizes imagination's delight, employing "this embodying quality" not only to set up iconoclastic critiques of religion, but also to embody a more positive potential for figure and for creating mind. For him, the ambiguity of these borderline figures poised at the intersection of living person, visual image, and verbal concept allows intellectual and artistic creativity. Semi-autonomous delegates, Promethean sub-agents of the poet's, and hence of society's, creative power to construct deities, they are also subject to the recurrent, critical recognition that they are constructed agents and hence subject to imaginative renovation by an individual and by a community.

A close study of the interplay between these two elements – the material processes of the poet's drafting of words and visual sketches onto the page and the delegated agencies of personified concepts in those written texts – suggests that Shelley's Promethean imagination is not simply a process of continuous transference, as Jerrold Hogle argues.[10] Instead, both in its generative stages and in the final, completed works, it reveals a process of shifting hypostases, repeated icon-forming, and then critical revision of them. Moreover, just as Shelley reads and revises his own drafts as archives for the individual mind's struggle to find a public arena or stage for testing its yet-potential ideals, the allegorical personifications emerge as dramatically individual and yet, as they develop their careers, so to speak, they, too, test the boundaries of the individual mind. Whether positing a split in self or consciousness resembling a Blakean fall into division or figuring collective action or beliefs, these personifications are sometimes dangerously misleading and sometimes redemptive.

To evaluate these sequential experiments with personification allegory, two synchronic and formal perspectives guide my work. First, I include not only poems in which allegorical personification is the central organizing device, but also several that, like *Queen Mab*, employ the figure more indirectly – yet in ways that illuminate both personification and poem. Second, I ask to what extent the personification acts as a private or a public figure, whether it works as an "epipsyche" or projection from an individual subject, or as a public icon or an idol in Francis Bacon's sense,

a more collective projection. Shelley often connects these public icons to the civic progress or triumphal procession. The poems which Shelley organizes through a central personification are (in chronological order) "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty," *The Mask of Anarchy*, *Ode to Liberty*, and *The Triumph of Life*.[11] He also experiments with personification in a cluster of "popular songs," which I will consider very briefly. The poems in which personifications do not determine the structure but are significant elements in the rhetoric of characters or narrators are, in addition to *Queen Mab*, *Laon and Cythna* and its revised version, *The Revolt of Islam*, *Epipsychidion*, and *Adonais*. From his earliest works to his final, incomplete poem, it is clear that Shelley moves back and forth between these two ways of deploying such figures, adding depth and complexity as he goes on.

This second synchronic scheme works most effectively not to describe entire poems but to establish an heuristic starting-point for analyzing the shifting function of personifications within individual poems. The first motif, the "epipsyche" or "soul out of the soul," enacts a subjective, individual process of projection or reabsorption that questions the borders between one self and another. This motif pervades Shelley's poetry. Most central to *Epipsychidion*, it is also helpful for understanding *Queen Mab*, the "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty," *Laon and Cythna*, *Adonais*, and the final section of *The Triumph of Life*. The second motif, the triumph, enacts a public, communal *tableau vivant* or "progress" that may be positive, as in Laon and Cythna's victory celebration, or negative, as in *The Mask of Anarchy* or *The Triumph of Life*. Further, both epipsyche and triumph share an emergent, temporally processual dynamic.

Before considering further the cultural and political history of tableau and triumph, let me turn first to two theoretical approaches, less explicitly historical, that also inform my argument about visual text and figure. Although these approaches seem opposed to one another, one grows out of the other – and they both influence historicist and cultural-studies approaches. The "linguistic turn" is Richard Rorty's compelling characterization of post-Saussurean, linguistically based philosophy and criticism that leads both to skeptical deconstruction and to semiotic analyses of visual art in linguistically based terms. Following and responding to this stage, W. J. T. Mitchell proposes, is a late twentieth-century "pictorial turn" in western culture high and low – a turn toward graphic images influenced both by semiotic theories of common ground between literature and the visual arts, and by the technologies of film, television, and now the computer.[12]

For interpreting Shelley, literary criticism emerging from the twentieth-century "linguistic turn" has proved highly productive, not only because of the subtle analytics of its practitioners, but also because of Shelley's own skepticism. Paving the way for these deconstructionist interpretations of Shelley, Kenneth Neill Cameron and C. E. Pulos challenged transcendentalist, Platonic interpretations of the poet by tracing his readings in late eighteenth-century skepticism.[13] Because the "linguistic turn" of the deconstructionists includes a turn away from symbol, metaphor, and other logocentric renderings of presence, it is one particularly well suited to Shelley's skeptical attacks upon monumental cultural idols. By challenging the unity of the Coleridgean symbol and advocating instead a reading of allegory as a microcosm of Saussurean language, an ungrounded, unmotivated, anti-metaphysical mode, Paul de Man's version of the deconstructionists' "linguistic turn" has stimulated re-readings of allegory and of personification, the latter dismissed so firmly by Wordsworth, across all Romantic writing. His essay "Shelley Disfigured," in the 1979 collection of essays *Deconstruction and Criticism*, has proved extremely influential in focusing this "linguistic turn" upon Shelley.[14] Yet my analysis of Shelley's writing will argue for a more limited skepticism that defends its communicative agency.

Several critics have explored such limits. One group, extending the work of Cameron and Pulos, re-examines the influence of Sir William Drummond upon Shelley's skepticism, linking it to a revised, politically liberal Lucretian philosophy that speculatively infers but refuses any dogmatic knowledge claims for some unknowable power as the source of our empirical perceptions. Terence Hoagwood argues that Shelley, following Drummond, does not deny the existence of external objects – they exist as we perceive them but we cannot affirm or deny their absolute independent existence.[15] Responding both to Hogle and to Hoagwood, Hugh Roberts and Michael Vicario have placed Shelley within the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century revival of interest in Lucretius and his transmission of Epicurean skepticism. Both argue, if with somewhat different emphases, that the version of Lucretius transmitted by translators and by Drummond offered a model both for a skepticism based upon the ceaseless swerves of atoms and for a form of idealism grounded in the indifferent, unknowable power behind sense perceptions.[16] Roberts argues that Shelley oscillates between these two possibilities in Lucretius' thought, the idealism reinforced by the poet's interest in a post-Kantian organic vitalism (452 fols.). Vicario sees a more consistent and stable balance strongly influenced by the

"intellectual system" of seventeenth-century skeptical Platonists. This balance, he argues, permits agency as it steers between two determinisms – the first that of a complete materialism and the second of a dogmatic dualism presided over by an intervening deity (Vicario, *Shelley's Intellectual System*, 18–19).

In her introduction to *Solitude and the Sublime*, Frances Ferguson challenges the linguistic form of skepticism advanced by de Man. Although she does not discuss Shelley directly, her concerns about agency and her questioning of de Man's theory of a linguistic materialism bear directly on both strands of my argument here: the materiality of Shelley's compositional processes and the embodiment of concepts in human-like figures. "The de Manian textual turn," she writes, "insists that language disarticulates bodies – prevents individual humans from being able to present their thoughts as the inner contents of their bodies to others in apprehensible form – because language has a body of its own" and that body, "like material objects, has a perceptibility and opacity of its own that continually exceeds its representative function."[17] Thus "the deconstructive portrayal of language," by generalizing from literary uses of language, "has seemed to make it impossible to sustain traditional accounts of an author who has responsibility for the meaning of a literary work" (15). Running through her critique of de Man's position and its denial of agency is a language that points toward Shelley's play with the partially opaque and resistant materiality of his textual processes, his reflexive development of ink blots, paper flaws, and visual sketches, into figurative language for his poetic drafts. It also points to his experiments with allegorical personification, the embodying of a concept as a person, an embodiment that paradoxically takes on a sort of resistant sub-agency even while, as deconstructive theory would point out, it possesses only a fictional living presence or logos. In both cases, I will argue, we can read Shelley's drafts not to deny the author's intentional agency before a determining, or rather, resistantly indeterminate, materiality of language, but to affirm it, or to affirm, at least, sequences of changing and redetermining meaning through changes on the material, marked page that reflect the author's productive encounter with the resistances of language, of literary conventions, and of social meanings.

Although Ferguson does not mention allegorical personification specifically, she does cite Stephen Knapp's analyses of that figure and readers' fears about its oscillating agency. In *Reinventing Allegory*, Theresa M. Kelley continues Knapp's exploration of the "linguistic turn" by