

“Words for Music Perhaps,” or Perhaps Not: Yeats’ Music in Shelley’s *Adonais*

by

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Abstract

In this thesis, I will offer a reading of *Adonais* that fully considers the reading of the way music structurally and philosophically pervades the poem. I will show that music Shelley's *Defence* performs a function in *Adonais* that poetry alone cannot. Then, I will align Shelley's his philosophy with that of Yeats. Though his lack of technical ability in music precludes a detailed, mechanical reading of the music in his works, I will apply the philosophical frameworks that, I argue, provide more complete readings of the function of music in Yeats' philosophy and in Shelley's poetry.

The introduction justifies the project of analyzing Yeats along with specific Romantic writings of music -- as others have done with Shelley -- despite Yeats' comparative lack of talent and experience. The first chapter of this thesis summarizes the arguments of *The Defence* and of Shelley's philosophy regarding the nature and purpose of poetry and human relationships and explores some of the musical foundations that inform Shelley's thought. It also details some of the music philosophies that, I argue, align with the way Shelley uses music; in particular, I consider the contemporary philosophies of nineteenth century music published by Rameau and Rousseau.

The second chapter offers a reading of *Adonais* centered around music and artifice to suggest that Shelley's philosophy as it appears in the *Defence* is more idealistic than his philosophy as it appears in his poetry; the materialism and skepticism that appear at the edges of the *Defence* becomes inhibiting in the process of enacting it in poetry. I argue that, although the poem doesn't fulfill the project of poetry as Shelley describes it in the *Defence*, it is not an unequivocal failure because the way that Shelley thought of and used music throughout his works -- particularly in his personal lyrics -- can be applied to *Adonais* to offer a more successful reading that depends upon the theoretical potential of music.

Chapter three will reveal the connections between Shelley's poetry and Yeats' prose to argue that Yeats' comprehension of music and of its poetic function is consistent with Shelley's, despite his comparative lack of musicality. I read Yeats alongside the more contemporary accounts of Romantic music from Barthes and Žižek. By considering some suggestive but powerful theories of music Yeats expresses in prose, I describe a poetic evocation of music not as a technical, practical, or material thing, but as a philosophical, temporal framework.

Keywords: Elegy, Romanticism, Death, Shelley

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Introduction

Matthew Arnold, a Victorian poet and critic, famously wrote that “the right sphere for Shelley’s genius was the sphere of music, not of poetry.” Shelley’s contact with music and his training as a musician make a consideration of his poetry with music a common course of study. Shelley’s philosophical and poetic relationship with Yeats is also well-studied. Their musical connection, however, has not been fully examined. Critics often dismiss Yeats’ ideas regarding music due to his lack of talent or technical skill; the small amount work that has been done tends to focus on the aural, rhythmic aspects of Yeats’ poetry as they reveal themselves in the recitation rather than their relationship to true music. By considering Yeats’ prose along with philosophies of art and music, I am hoping to show that he did have a sense of musicality that informs his poetic thought, and that considering his approach to music might let us more powerfully interpret *Adonais*.

My intention with music is not to address art that incorporates both music and poetry (for example, song settings or opera) – that is, music in poetry that requires technical knowledge (Yeats evidently had little)-- but to consider function of music in time and adapt that to poetry.¹ Analysis of music and poetry often considers metrical structure, prosody and tonality, poems set to music, or parallel formal aspects; instead, I am planning to consider music at the highest level of abstraction. I am not planning to do any sort of theoretical musical analysis, and especially not specific rhythmic or metrical analysis. I also don’t plan to map the rhythm of poetry exactly onto the rhythm of music; as Yeats aptly notes, “competing tunes and rhythms of tune [of verse and

¹Daniel Albright. *Lyricality In English Literature*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985.

music] were so often at discord with each other” so that they compete and diminish one another.² I want to consider the musical or aural qualities that frame our conception of poetry and music even when they are not performed.

To contextualize and defend a musical reading of Yeats despite his apparent lack of musical sense, I will align his philosophy with Shelley’s and then with other Romantic theorists. I will base my understanding of Shelley’s philosophy – and its heavy, well-documented influence on Yeats’ earlier thought and works – in his “Defence of Poetry,” with particular attention to the ideas concerning the way art – as poetry or as music – is created and exists in time. Shelley’s relationship with music is much more explicit than Yeats’, and he had much more talent and training. Like Yeats, Shelley seems to have a fascination with music as its own genre rather than as accompaniment to poetry I will read him along with philosophies and theories of the artistic nature of music rather than its technical details.

In the first chapter, I will describe the philosophy of art outlined in Shelley’s “Defence of Poetry” and describe the ways that certain aesthetics of music inform his understanding of poetic or revolutionary time. In particular, I will focus on Shelley’s idea of “poetry in the general sense” and argue that music might be a productive – or even the most productive – way of understanding the conception of temporality that is the basis of Shelley’s early philosophy.

In the second chapter I will provide a reading of Shelley’s *Adonais* to illustrate the nature of sound, music, and temporality in the poem. *Adonais* is nearly contemporary to the “Defence” and is intensely lyrical; I argue that its lyrical artifice, when read alongside the poem’s

²W. B. Yeats. *Ideas of Good and Evil* (1903). Murietta: Classic Books, 2000.

temporality of death and the genre of elegy, makes it necessary to use music to read the poem as a successful elegy.

In the third chapter, I argue that Yeats' prose- especially the earlier essays, when his philosophy was most completely aligned with Shelley's - reveals his often-ignored sensitivity to the nature of sound and music in music, and particularly to those things in abstraction or theory. By following a reading that addresses the abstractions of the ways music and poetry both function as art rather than one that aims to describe or notate the exact aural, rhythmic, or tonal components of poetry, I am hoping to show that, despite his lack of technical skill and knowledge, Yeats' sense of music's function in poetry lets us more powerfully read his predecessor's work.

Finally, to supplement my account of the music in poetry, I offer a brief account of the 'poetry' of music. I consider the ways that poetry and music work in time – their capacity for suggesting non-linear temporalities – to reveal the way music might offer closer access to all that is ineffable in poetry.

I. "The Defence"

Shelley's "Defence of Poetry," a philosophical account of poetry's capacity as a something for humans toward synthesis, unity, morality, and the unification of thought and sense, relies on his conception of music – grounded in practical experience and technical knowledge– in order to explain his theories of poetry, and of art more generally.³ This claim regarding this interdependency of lyric poetry and music – and especially Romantic poetry – in both Shelley's work and lyricism more broadly is by no means a new one. There is a long tradition and a fair amount of scholarship on Shelley's relationship with music in his life, poetry, and prose. My aim is to consider the sections of the "Defence" dealing with order, form, sound, and music from a musical approach in order to more fully understand his philosophy of poetry.

First, I want to summarize the arguments from the "Defence" that I will use in my reading of *Adonais* and that will later be relevant in my consideration of music. For Shelley, poetry alone is permanent, and it alone can be used to make or find or constitute the order of things / the world / the self so that they are made beautiful and good. This process toward synthesis depends on imagination rather than reason; the goal is not to perceive and describe any truth that already exists but to actually make truth by finding new relationships between and arrangements of things, and that act of creation requires imagination. The ordering of the mind through poetry lets it perceive the "previously unapprehended relations of things."⁴ The poem functions as the image or expression of eternal truth and of relations independent of time, place, or circumstance so that it corresponds to unchanging, unchangeable forms of human nature.

Shelley's treatment of temporality depends upon the reconciliation of binaries. Primary

³ Percy Bysshe Shelley. "A Defence of Poetry" in *Shelley's Poetry and Prose: Authoritative Texts, Criticism*, eds. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat. 2nd ed. New York: Norton, 2002.

⁴ Ibid.

among the ones that Shelley inverts or collapses are reason / imagination, past / present, utility / pleasure, emotion / knowledge, sense / perception, and history / eternity. In particular, the poem functions to unite history and eternity, so that the fantasy is one of a sort of temporal collapse, or a way of being out of time; simultaneously, in time, temporal progression augments the truth and beauty of the poetry. In the same vein, imagination is not opposed to knowledge; both are forms of the same truth. Imagination is better suited than reason to perceive the eternal order and truth, because the perception requires the transcendence of consciousness and of the intellectual limits of time and space. Poetry, by the faculty of imagination, enables mind to see itself in its ideal, eternal configuration, allowing a glimpse of possible wholeness. The same wholeness exists in the relationship between the sensory and thought. Poetry reaches the soul simultaneously through sense and mind. The imagination enlarges the mind by allowing it to imagine what it knows and by leading to the impulse to act on that imagination; these add to (or allow escape from) the confines of one's own experience and impressions, and move the mind toward the transcendent, divine order.

Shelley's resolution of the dichotomy between utility and pleasure involves his conceptions of two kinds of poetry—poetry in the restricted sense and poetry in the general sense. Poetry in its general sense corresponds with the ideal: it comprises the expression of the imagination. Imagination, to Shelley, is the faculty that composes thought; it discerns relations, similarities, rules according to which the universe is ordered, and structuring principles. It enables the assimilation of external impression into internal perception, so that the sensory contributes to the synthesis. Further, imagination – internal synthesis, unapprehended things – is necessary the pursuit and reproduction of pleasure. This pleasure is induced in a divine,

unapprehended manner; the poet is free of the constraints of time, place, the limitations of ideas, and personality. Poetry in its restricted sense also induces pleasure by imagination. The imagination arranges the material of the poem—meter, sound, rhythm – according to the best approximation to the divine order, so that the poem observes the order that causes the most pleasure—in this case, aural. In either sense of poetry, and in any medium, the imagination is the instrument by which order as pleasure and order as truth inform and constitute one another; it is generative. The expression of both beauty and truth requires the apprehension of relations between things, and the impulse toward that ordering is a certain impulse toward harmony, or toward rhythm or order. The role of the poet is “to apprehend the true and the beautiful... which exists in the relation, subsisting, first between existence and perception, and secondly between perception and expression”⁵ None of those alone is sufficient to generate either poetry or the pleasure it engenders; instead, the interrelation – and the sort of cycle – forms and re-forms the shapes of the relations. Various (and sometimes conflictingly) the artistic expression of the order of relations is either simultaneously mimetic or non-referential or productive; it makes anew at the same time that “it reproduces all that it represents.” By that process, the form and content – the poetic material and the representation of the ideal – collapse into one another. “Language, gesture, and the imitative arts, become at once the representation and the medium... the chord and the harmony.”⁶

The language of music pervades the “Defence,” and I think that it is not only used as figurative or metaphorical descriptions of Shelley’s philosophy of literature but as a component of the foundation of his theories. Jessica Quillin persuasively shows the ways that music and

⁵Shelley.

⁶Ibid.

musical aesthetics play a critical role in Shelley's conception of poetic form and representation.⁷ She writes that Shelley's philosophies and Romantic lyricism stem from a "pseudo-historical" framework which sees music and poetry as "functionally and ideologically interdependent" with shared origins in song, and so in passion rather than reason ("In the youth of the world, men dance and sing and imitate natural objects observing in these actions, as in all others, a certain rhythm or order").⁸ She proceeds from the assumption that Shelley's ideas of music are not technical or a consideration of "formal structure... but rather its aesthetic and melodic potential." So, the use of music lies in its potential to give aesthetic or sensory pleasure. Music, like poetry, is "a form with the power to communicate fluidly between soul and sense."⁹

The function of music in the "Defence" depends in part on which particular philosophy of music as representation or as medium Shelley uses. The same tension between mimesis and non-signification that complicated his ideas of poetry becomes even more apparent once he aligns poetry with music. She matches music itself with Shelley's restricted sense of poetry and music as a figure, or universal harmony, with poetry's general sense; in both, the degree to which the art (or the apprehension of divine order) constitutes a representation of the divine order artifice remains unclear. As Quillin notes, in both his sources and in his own writing, the question of music's referentiality, but she concludes that Shelley ultimately "distrust[s] the mimetic view of music in favor of a more organic view of music an "empty" sign."¹⁰ The task that remains, then, is to determine exactly what Shelley uses music to suggest if he doesn't use it representationally. The impulse, often, in studies that link music and poetry is to bring music into

⁷Jessica K Quillin. *Shelley and the Musico-poetics of Romanticism*. Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2012.

⁸Shelley.

⁹Quillin.

¹⁰Ibid.

the realm of the referential, so that its essence – form, sound, sense, power – can be delineated, by a co-analysis with poetry, into something referential and describable. That, to me, is a mistake. Readings of music in Shelley tend to prioritize his documented interest and experience in music during his life; I am hoping to turn away from that so that music as theory – as form, for Shelley – rather than its practice or its technical detail might be subordinated to the role of temporality in the medium.

Shelley seems to accept Jean-Jacques Rousseau's theories of the relationship between language and music, with which he was well-acquainted. Rousseau argues that music necessarily depends on a relationship with language to be understood and expressed. He writes that language as a medium depends on time and order, so music must also fundamentally depend on its order in time: melody, not harmony.¹¹ That is, the relationship between sounds is that between ones before and after it, not the simultaneous ones (the chords / harmonic structure). In any case, Rousseau defines melody as the relation between notes, and ascribes no meaning to a sound in isolation, or a sound without a coherent melodic context, and Shelley seems to adopt this view that music is essentially diachronic. The movement of music in time is like the movement of thought, and the generative capacity of poetry is reflected in the progression of music.

Rousseau's theories in turn originate in the writings of French baroque composer Jean-Philippe Rameau. To Rameau, harmony was only the physical aspect of sound, the way things sonically resonate, and so not useful in finding any divine order.¹² The harmony of consonant intervals, of matching vibrations, is a representation of nature, rather than a representation of what to Rousseau was the point of music: to mimic emotion. To impose

¹¹Jean-Jacques Rousseau. *Essay on the Origin of Languages and Writings Related to Music*. Translated by John T. Scott. Vol. 7. *The Collected Writings of Rousseau*. Hanover: University Press of New England, 1998.

¹²Jean-Philippe Rameau. *Treatise on Harmony* (1722). Translated by Philippe Gossett. New York: Dover, 1971.

harmonic structure would be to restrict music to artifice, and artifice would constrain affect to unfaithful representation. Shelley, however, seems to accept more ‘artifice’ in his music—or, in other words, more adherence to form. He also seems to distance himself some from the mimetic aspect of Rousseau’s philosophy. For Shelley, in the “Defence,” it seems that he (at least to an extent) sees form not as artifice but as material. The non-referentiality of music- the lack of semantic meaning – requires that it communicate itself—as pleasure and as divine order – by means of its form alone. Crucially, in music, form is diachronic. The temporal aspect of musical form is difficult; harmony and melody are both strictly teleological in performance but more flexible in theory (as formal concepts). The interplay between- harmony alone may not be progressive, but harmonic form depends upon progression, and harmony defined outside of time hardly constitutes harmony at all.

As Quillin notes, the ambiguities and vagueness with which Shelley writes about music make it difficult to conclude anything concerning the practical application of poetry in music. I might, however, suggest that choosing one philosophy of music – the one which, to me, seems easily preeminent in his work— the formal perspective –will offer a productive interpretative strategy for reading Shelley’s poetry.

II. Adonais

Shelley published *Adonais* in 1822 as an elegy for the death of his friend John Keats, who died at twenty-five of tuberculosis. Shelley wrote that it was “the least imperfect of my works;” critics have been inclined to agree.¹³ As an elegy, it approaches the monumental task of describing the nature and experience of loss and death. I argue the poem itself is inadequate in the face of trying to express grief, conceptualize death, or memorialize life—those of time, which tend to emerge at the points at which his poems address ineffability and unknowability not for want of trying, and certainly not for lack of poetic dexterity. Those things are, just, inexpressible – if not unknowable – and the poem, in its failure of expression, performs the task of proving just how inexpressible these things are. It is also useful in elucidating Shelley’s philosophies—of life, of death, of love, of poetic inspiration, of the sublime. Finally, I also think there are some ways out of the poem that aren’t as bleak as they may seem - namely, philosophies of language and music.

Angela Leighton, whose reading I will use as the basis for my understanding of the poem, convincingly proposes the argument that *Adonais*’s effect depends upon, among other things, its artifice: the only way the poet can approach the double bind of unbearable grief and unknowable death is by distancing himself from the content by means of aesthetic formalization.¹⁴ She argues that we can only come to terms with anything – here, the “brutally unadulterated death of a friend” – through terms of necessary fiction, and we are “compelled to an aesthetic rendering of all experience” and consequent deferral or evasion of actual experience.¹⁵

¹³ Shelley.

¹⁴ Angela Leighton. *Shelley and the Sublime: An Interpretation of the Major Poems*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

I also argue that the undermines the philosophy of the “Defence”; *Adonais* is not totally solid or self-contained; it tends to break out of its own boundaries and undermine its own assertions.¹⁶ “*Adonais* is neither an escape nor a forward-looking thing to “a rejuvenated temporal world, made more beautiful through love.”¹⁷ If it is neither of those things, then what, exactly, *is* it?

Leighton approaches the poem first from the perspective of Shelley’s artistic philosophy. Shelley’s aesthetic of poetic inspiration, she writes, depends upon on the idea of loss. The poem is a product of the inevitable distance between inspiration and composition. The moment of vision which was the impetus for the poem is destroyed by the act of writing the poem: “Poetry is a sword of lightning, ever unsheathed, which consumes the scabbard that would contain it.” In less figurative terms: ‘the poetic moment’ for Shelley is uncompromisingly ‘the moment of vision’. But vision cannot be made into poems without loss.”¹⁸ A theory of poetry grounded in loss is well-suited to portray – even if that portrayal is partial at best– the loss in death, even if that portrayal is only partial. *Adonais* engages the loss of inspiration and of subject in both its content and its process: the poem performs the elegist’s struggle of composition so that, in the same way that the poem is necessarily inadequate to the inspiration that precedes it; the elegist likewise finds that his craft is inadequate to his subject.

The genre of elegy itself of performs the elegist’s problem. The purpose of the poem is to organically and faithfully express spontaneous, genuine emotion, but the fact of its art, its artifice, undermines its naturalness and fidelity to human sorrow; the elegy, in particular, is a

¹⁶Earl Wasserman. *Shelley: A Critical Reading*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971.

¹⁷Karen Weisman. *Imageless Truths: Shelley’s Poetic Fictions*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994.

¹⁸Leighton.

formal, traditional sort of poem. The actual process of writing, too, denies the writer his full experience of grief—that is, if the grief is genuine, the poet will be too overwhelmed to write; if the elegy exists at all, it must not faithfully represent grief. That implied opposition—between the experience expression of emotion—appears in the text of Adonais in images of speech and writing, the living and the dead, the eternal and the ephemeral, the voiced and the silent. The poem “laments the loss of Keats but expresses that loss in terms of the lost voice or breath that first created poems.”¹⁹

This distance, or this loss, asserts itself in the opening lines of the poem.

I weep for Adonais—he is dead!

O, weep for Adonais! though our tears

Thaw not the frost which binds so dear a head!²⁰

In a reading that relies upon particular attention to the poet as elegist, and to the relationship between the death of the poet and his life in writing. She, among others, notes that “to weep” is to invoke an elegiac formula and, by adhering to the structural formula of the pastoral elegy, the poem immediately distances itself from its (literal) meaning, drawing attention (the poet’s and the reader’s) away from the pain of grief and toward the (already-too-late) process of poetic creation. As the speaker imagines that he transforms his writing into weeping, he “refers back to the living language of the heart, but in fact describes the task of writing on which the poet has embarked.” The declaratory statement is also undermined by its relationship to the poet writing it: the speaker claims to “weep” in his work, but the fact of the work tells us that he is not weeping: he is writing. “It is precisely because this poet no longer weeps, or... has not yet begun

¹⁹Leighton.

²⁰ Shelley.

to weep that he can write such careful stanzas.”²¹ So, the elegy performs the double tasks of referring to the emotion that spurred the writing and of performing it, but also inevitably fails at both of those tasks.

The self-undermining nature of the elegiac genre becomes further apparent when considering the subject matter and imagery of the poem. In particular, the language of dichotomies (life / death, writing / speech, sound / silence, wet / dry, forced silence / voluntary silence, wind or air / breath, breath / voice, song / speech, and so on) creates instability by their interrelation and overlap; further, the position or function of a certain symbol or image often seems to shift as if the elegist struggles to shape his material into single, coherent interpretative or representative framework. Further, all of these images cohere in the poem’s treatment of the act of weeping; weeping, in turn, occupies a suggestive, indefinite place between silence, speech, and song. That instability - both between the poem and its literary function and between images within the poem itself - is part of what makes the poem a successful elegy.

The second stanza, like the first, also suggests hopelessness despite its images of life motion and music. It opens with a desperate question as the poet asks, “where were you, muse, at the moment that he died?” so that he might have properly captured my moment’s experience of grief. The rest of the stanza, despite its imagery of rekindled life, is undermined by the fact of Urania’s absence. Urania, absent, retreated to her own “paradise,” sits “with veiled eyes,” ineffectual and unknowing while

One, with soft enamour'd breath,
Rekindled all the fading melodies,

²¹Leighton.

With which, like flowers that mock the corse beneath,
 He had adorn'd and hid the coming bulk of Death.

The fading melodies (rekindled versions of them, not the originals), in turn, “mock the corse beneath” in the same way that the flowers serve to hide death, and, in doing so, to mock to the dead, and so the elegist accepts that he cannot deny or ignore death. If the elegist wants to honour the dead properly he needs to confront death, which in turn defeats the purpose of “adorning” the subject of his pain with things that should be beautiful but, by drawing attention to the sensory and to the material, emphasize that the corpse lacks life and breath. The image returns in the latter half of the poem: “And flowering weeds and fragrant corses dress / The bones of Desolation's nakedness.” lowers, too, return to obscure vision and mock: “like incarnations of the stars... they illumine death / and mock the merry worm beneath.”

Leighton extends her idea of artifice or veil by tracking the poem’s rapid flitting between ideas in the poem’s treatment of its figures. The poem continues to re-affirm its own artifice in style and thematic content. She describes the subject material of poem and the speed at which it moves: she extends her description of the poet’s intentional reliance on artifice by tracking the poem’s rapid flitting between ideas in the poem’s treatment of its figures. The poem continues to re-affirm its own artifice in style and thematic content. There are a number of figures, she notes, who appear without narrative or symbolic significance, and disappear just as quickly. Abstract concepts – Splendours, Glooms, Incarnations, Phantasies, Pleasure, Sighs – are personified without real poetic weight, are only are an evasive performance of poetic virtuosity. In the same way, categories of images are treated in the same style of circling between self-attesting and

self-undermining. The profusion of lyrical, metaphoric language and the wealth of crossed, overlapping associations of and figurative of imagery make the imagery unstable in their representative functions, likewise fail to offer an interpretative framework for either the poet or the reader. All of these poetic figurations, despite their display of language at its greatest agility, “might seem / Like pageantry of mist on an autumnal stream.” They are exactly that: a product of death (mist) veiling the inevitable progression of nature / time toward death (the stream). If the poet can’t adequately express something, then he can at least prove his technical ability by the “obtrusive and artful deployment of poetic skill.”²² In this way, the poem functions as a double veil: the elegiac poem expresses, but, by virtue of language’s inadequacy to express death and grief, also masks them, and Shelley couches that mask in turn in the veil of poetic language. A second type of veiling in which the poem participates is a rapid shifting between ideas and images as an attempt to account for ineffable. In trying to address concepts which remain unrevealed and *un-revealable*, the poet constructs and abandons carefully artificial poetic constructs. These constructs modulate “quickly and with very little resistance.”²³ Likewise, the ideas of stillness and motion - which overlap with those life and death, muteness and speaking voice, and so on -- perform the same function. This motion, the elegist’s seemingly decisive commands, and the elaborate deployment of metaphor have the same result. William Keach argues that the consequence of this speed is artifice, and that this rapidity is suggestive of something either (or both) unexpressed or inexpressible.²⁴

Keach argues that the fact that the poem can move so easily away from its own careful constructions is a symptom that they are, in practice, insubstantial or ineffective. Searching, the

²² Leighton.

²³ William Keach. *Shelley's Style*. New York: Methuen, 1984.

²⁴ Ibid.

poet cycles restlessly between moments of “despairing finality” and then reverses them. The first three lines, cited above, offer an immediate example; the second stanza is a reversal, and the third stanza again returns to despair. The poet’s first attempt at audible or legible mourning has failed, so, in desperation, he turns to its counterpart. But, still, once the command to be silent is given, its futility is acknowledged, and further, hope for anything but futility is discouraged: “oh, dream not that the amorous Deep / Will yet restore him to the vital air” (ll. 25-6). Not even “despairing finality” is certain or stable; even this can only stay fixed for an impossible, still moment in time, so that the only certainty is despair, and everything else is cast into doubt, and so abandoned.

As the image categories and symbolism of the poem both oscillate without stability, the same motion occurs on a larger scale as nested self-denial or self-reversal by the elegist. The injunction to weep is repeated in the opening third stanza as a command to the mother/muse figure Urania, but, in a move parallel to the one in the first stanza, the command is immediately revoked. Again it is attached to images of sound and silence: “Wake, melancholy Mother, wake and weep!— Yet wherefore?” He commands that he as elegist and Urania as muse both perform their lament, but “wherefore?” He finds no answer; his plan shifts: “Quench . . . thy fiery tears, and let thy loud heart keep, / Like his, a mute and uncomplaining sleep” (ll. 21-3). Leighton argues that, because the memorialized poet is mute (in death, and because he no longer composes poetry), the mourner can better attune himself to the mode of the dead by assuming the same muteness. She describes the tension of the poem’s image of muteness: “The word brilliantly suggests a kind of silence which is not peace, but a stifling of the human voice.”²⁵ The

²⁵ Leighton.

distinction between forced and willful silence, and the fact that force is associated with both mourner and the mourned, suggests that the speaker's silence is not within his control.

The image of weeping is one that unites the functions of the poem's imagery and the limitations of its genre. Like the act of composing the elegy, it fails the poet. The boldness of the opening command is immediately undermined. These opening lines introduce the first dichotomy to appear in the poem, and one of its major motifs, already evident, is that between weeping and not-weeping, and the elegist's evident tension as he moves back and forth between pleading and commanding – to others and to himself – and his restless alternation between the two are both made immediately obvious. Weeping—as water, tears, ice—is the weakness of water—as ice and as tears – as able to reach the dead; this image returns again and again to undermine the act of weeping. If weeping stands for the act of composing an elegy, the potential for either act to either fully express the poet or confer life to him is precluded at the moment his attempt begins. The first nine stanzas of the poem invoke either the poet or the muse to weep eight times, but the imagery associated with tears in this stanza denies the act of any elegiac or memorializing capacity it might have.

Another figure whose tears are useless is that of the Dream, who believes Adonais lives, and shouts it, in the same way that the poet shouts, over and over, “he is dead!” She offers proof that he is alive: “see, there lies / a tear” but again tears prove themselves false: she is wrong; the elegist tells us that the tear is her own. To weep is not only ineffective but also counterproductive in that it obfuscates the image and the nature of the dead, introducing a false note into the memorial, and turning the focus of the process of memorialization from the mourned to the mourner—and worse, here, to the mourner's own self-delusion. In the eleventh and twelfth

stanzas, three more rituals and figures of grief come in quick succession, all with no effect. One “from an urn” washes him “embalming him,” and another lays on him a wreath “like an anadem” (a word borrowed from the tradition of the pastoral elegy). But, still, the tears fallen on the anadem are “frozen,” and another’s offer to willfully break her own bow “as if to stem/ a greater loss with one which was more weak” are merely hypothetical. The stanza ends there, unfulfilled despite “willful efforts” “as if... to dull the barbed fire against his frozen cheek.” Likewise, in stanza thirteen, The figure Pleasure is “blind with tears;” they are not only ineffective, but create a barrier to perceiving or creating an image of the dead.

Though it is not mute, weeping is an act that is neither speech (which is too closely associated with the noise of crying) nor poetry (which we know is too late and inadequate). Its presence is closely associated with song: Urania sings “loud lamentations,” and the poet’s command to weep is often also a command to sing: “most musical of mourners, weep anew.” Not even the nightingale mourns as melodiously as Echo, but even Echo’s song – only remembered– is ineffective.

Lost Echo sits amid the voiceless mountains,
 And feeds her grief with his remembered lay,
 Echo will no more reply to the sounds of nature

Both songs- natural and artificial ones alike – are silent; the mountains are voiceless, and Echo can only remember her song. She recalls it after the fact; too late, always. Her only use would be in imitation of his voice, but “she can mimic not his lips” so though she sings for others, for Adonais, who is “more dear,” she is silent. The remembered music also recalls the “echo” from the first stanza. It’s not a sound (of a voice, perhaps) but the remnant / trace of it: the original is

lost. It is the same with music in time. The voice – or the word in time is lost in the instant it is created.

William Keach offers a complication of this reading by applying the distinction of sound / silence to the images of breath (of a speaking voice, and of poetic inspiration) and of speaking or singing.²⁶ The poem clearly contrasts weeping with silence, but still, weeping occupies a space between silence and speech—weeping serves better as an expression of experience than it does as representation. The images of weeping – the effect of tears, and the sounds of crying – are also intertwined with images of nature. Morning, thunder, oceans, winds all perform their own lament: tears are, again, linked obviously to the aural; each of those, respectively, tears. moans, is unquiet, is sobbing. They cry, but the sound is ugly, and it accomplishes nothing.

A consideration of silence, sound, and speech in poetry must absolutely involve a consideration of the relationship between writing and speech. Leighton argues that the relationship between life and death in this poem hinges upon a parallel relationship between speech and writing:

To proclaim a difference between language living and dead, between speech and writing, is to create a model for poetry which is contradictory, and which it dooms it always to a dead letter. However, such a model also provides the elegist with a formalistic extension of the themes of life and death which are the main content of his poetry.²⁷

I think she is correct about the speech/writing figure' function in poetry more generally; what this reading lacks is the consideration of the role of writing in this specific poem. In Adonais, the

²⁶ Keach.

²⁷ Leighton.

elegist seems to be aware of his task only as a speaker—he mourns, weeps, laments, sings -- but nowhere in the poem does he acknowledge that he writes. The temporal dichotomy between the permanent written word and the impermanent spoken word is, to me, already much less stable than critics tend to assume; the word in time not as distinct from the voice in time as Leighton presumes. Further, the function of the voice in time is unstable in Adonais, depending upon whether it appears as singing, as weeping, or as speech. Weeping, more than speaking, is associated with music. Despite the elegist's avowal of inefficacy, images of weeping, in some places, seem to come closer to accessing the dead poet.

Death is not silent, but neither is the sound of speech adequate to reach whatever might comprise it. The way that weeping- literally and figuratively—proceeds temporally in the poem might be the best representation of the temporality of the elegy. The distinctions between the voices of the speaker and of both poets also intermingle and overlay so that the temporal distance between them, in some ways, begins to collapse. Their words occur in time and so they are lost, but they might occur at the same time, so that, despite the inevitable procession of time away from the moment of inspiration and away from the life and presence of the mourned, and the words, though dead and lost, provide some amount of memorial comfort. However, while I believe Leighton is correct about the nature of the “dead letter,” the spoken language of the living hardly serves as a promising counterpart.

Leighton interprets the speech / writing relationship by concluding that the elegy admits that “to write is to forgo the real nature of grief.” It does, but more importantly, it admits that to speak – or, in various places in the poem, to sing, weep, lament, moan, pine, wail, or scream —to make sound, in time, which inevitably fades to an echo -- is also to forgo the nature of the

experience. Crucially, the elegist, within the poem, makes no reference to writing; he only refers explicitly to speaking, or to the ambiguous “word.” The speaker conceives of himself as elegist, not poet, and so I do the same. The difference between grief and its poetic representation is not, here, as Leighton writes, “one that turns upon the underlying opposition of speech and writing.”²⁸

I think that the written word in time and the spoken word in time are not as distinct as Leighton suggests. The Defence seems to confirm this: in stanza nine, the elegist’s thoughts—the living sources of his ‘breath’ and his poetry-- is gone, so the written record isn’t much comfort. The written poetry, too, is secondary to the moment of inspiration; regardless of whether the word is written or spoken or even recorded at all, it’s always already too late.

Urania seems to offer consolation in temporal suspension, but it only holds for a moment:

In the death-chamber for a moment Death,
 Sham'd by the presence of that living Might,
 Blush'd to annihilation, and the breath
 Revisited those lips, and Life's pale light
 Flash'd through those limbs, so late her dear delight.

The preposition in the first line holds for the four lines that follow it. Breath returns to let him speak, and light flashes to unite visual + aural imagery of life, but also “flashes” for only an instant. But, death and Adonais both leave her, “as silent lighting leaves the starless night,” (no sound, no song, and another example of light that is only instantaneous). She pleads, “Kiss me, so long but as a kiss may live!” Not long: the word in time is ephemeral, and Keats’ voice is mute anyway. She pleads otherwise, imploring “That word, that kiss, shall all thoughts else

²⁸Leighton.

survive,” but to no avail. In Shelley’s philosophy, the thought that impels word, or the ‘breath’ that inspires poetry, can’t even outlast a word, “as a sword consumed before the sheath / By sightless lightning.” She offers nothing but her “vain caress.”

The elegist turns toward the image of monuments for consolation, but again arrives at note. Neither monument nor memory can hold against time, and the same holds for grief. If physical monuments are destroyed, both the description and performance of grief are inadequate, and the catalyst of grief is instantly lost, then grief itself is all the elegist has. In stanza whatever, that is true, but by the midpoint of the poem, that, too, fades.

But now, grief is mortal!

Alas that all we loved of him should be,

But for our grief, as if it had not been,

And grief itself be mortal!

As with monuments, though, it is grief’s susceptibility to time that gives it its elegiac power. There is some comfort in that: “when human artifacts are not in fact erased, the possibility or threat of erasure is what gives them life”²⁹ The suspension of time only matters if time is a threat; the fact that it is impossible is what necessitates the need for it..

There are some places in the poem that seem to contradict that in their confidence in permanence, but the conditions rest on assertions that are undermined elsewhere in the poem. In one instance, there are

many more, whose names on earth are dark

But whose transmitted effluence cannot die

²⁹ Keach.

So long as fire outlives the parent spark,

But, in Shelley's philosophies of poetry and of time more generally, the fire doesn't outlive the spark. The confidence that the poem rests on assertions or conditions that are invariably undermined or denied everywhere in the poem. For example, toward the end of the poem; "The splendours of the firmament of time / may be eclipsed, but are extinguished not;" but elsewhere, the flame metaphor is unstainable, and even if the flame is not extinguished and monuments do remain, they are forgotten anyway; everything, including thought / memory and even with reminders, is mortal.

In face of that, Urania wishes to die: "I would give / All that I am to be as thou now art!" She couldn't, though, constrained by whatever the conditions of her temporality were. ("But I am chain'd to Time, and cannot thence depart!"). The poet, however, faces no such restrictions. At least in the fantasy of the "Defence," the poet is not chained to time. "Die / If thou wouldst be with that which thou dost seek!" Daniel Albright follows this reading to its extreme, reading Adonais as an attempt to "abolish the division between the dead poet and the living" so that "there is behind the text no clear division of elegist and subject but instead a splayed hybrid thing, indeterminate between living and dead, as if the poetical genius were one multiform spirit."³⁰

This argument offers a new reading way that I have argued that the poem fits within its genre. The poet has failed as an elegist, the mourned poet within the poem faces the same thing, and mourns the same sense of loss that the elegist tries to confront:

All he had lov'd, and moulded into thought,

³⁰Albright.

From shape, and hue, and odour, and sweet sound,
Lamented Adonais.

Adonais only accesses what “moulded into thought” – his poetic inspiration – in death, so that he is now “a portion of the loveliness / Which once he made more lovely”; he must die in order to fully access the loveliness” (ll. 379-80). Adonais must die to become one with his subject. Crucially, so must the elegist. If the exercise of the elegy is futile anyway, then the elegist’s best mode of access is to parallel the experience of the subject; the sacrifice of death for access to, if not permanence, then at least loveliness. Weisman doubts the sufficiency even of death, but to me, the elegist seems committed to its sufficiency. In any case, his desire for death – whether it is misguide or not -- precipitates a collapse between the mourner and the mourned.

For Daniel Albright, the collapse between the identity of the living poet and the dead is even more complete, arguing that Protean mingling has been completed to the point that the corpse “becomes animated with the dead poet’s faculties.”³¹ This collapse between identities later serves to provide potential for hope, but again the hope is false. “He lives, he wakes—’tis Death is dead, not he.” This is another reversal and, like its predecessors, immediately undermined despite its presentation as fact. The elegist things imagines possible ways out:

Or go to Rome, which is the sepulchre
Oh not of him, but of our joy.
The grave, the city, and the wilderness

The fantasy is only that. The statement is imminently false; though Rome is the sepulchre of joy, it is incontrovertibly Keats’ sepulchre as well. The poet’s error is the assumption that it

³¹Albright.

must be one or the other, but the poem's methodical unification of its two processes and two poets deny that assumption.

Weisman reads this as a defence that the ultimate effect of intertwining the mourner's and the elegist's is not much; despite the collapse, "thy extreme hope... is waste." No matter what the poet does, he is powerless over the condition of the dead: "Death feeds on his mute voice and laughs at our despair." The marked change in the syntactic construction of this final line of the stanza leaves little room for argument. In a poem marked by convoluted / ambiguous syntax, this single clause given its own line. And, the stolen voice isn't even useful: *mute*, it was no use to the poet anyway. In *Adonais*, death is not silent, but nor is sound or speaking or music sufficient to convey life. In the rare places images of life – particularly of music – do succeed, their only power is to suspend death, not defy it, and only briefly. In other places, sound points toward the same desperation that forced muteness does ("The obscene ravens, clamorous o'er the dead") so that the elegist wants to distance both from his memorialized object and his process of memorialization.

If there *is* hope to be found, it will depend upon some fantastical manipulation of temporality, but the 'time' of the poem's lyrical style undermines time's fantasized arrest. Keach describes a second mode of time in the poem, which he calls Shelley's "speed."³² In concert with the temporalities within the poem --memorial, historical, or imagined— Shelley's "speed" as he reads it is a result of the interaction between formal pacing and poetic images of speed, noting the interaction between the construction of the poem and its thematic language. In particular, he tracks the word "quick;" he writes that "the word 'quick' comes alive as part of the figurative

³² Keach.

interplay between the speed of living thought and the static passivity of death.”³³ They are closely intertwined, but also confused- death is not, static; nor is ‘living’ thought sufficiently opposed to death. Crucially, he links the dichotomies on the level of imagery and of the elegist’s commands or desires with the relationship between life and death; because I read the former as blurred, I use his argument to defend that the latter is too.

This rapidity resonates on the level of thematic imagery. As images of stillness proliferate, sound is imagined to be silent, and the breath of music fails to return life; the stillness that might be found is not full arrest but only delay, the aesthetic illusion or suggestion of suspended time without real effect. In the poem, memory is reliable only *until* some future event. Death, corruption, and hunger “wait to trace” and “do not dare deface” their prey unless “darkness and the law / Of change shall o’er his sleep mortal curtain draw” (life, or the illusion that something other than the finality of death might be possible) but, in a world where Shelley’s revolution of time has not occurred, these are all things that *will* happen. The poem’s syntax likewise undermines its claims to teleology in the way: much of what is expressed is not narrated or but in a hypothetical future: a command, with no evidence to suggest that might be enacted. In addition, the disclosure that seeming assertions are only hypothetical is often delayed or separated from the subject. The poem tries to distract from the fact that its constructions are entirely lyrical, internal, and most importantly, fantastical. Further, the elegist’s indecision and flightiness has formal consequences. The poem’s project of stopping- or interrupting, at least, or trying to stop – the progress of historical time is accompanied by an acceleration of its ‘lyrical’ speed.

³³Albright.

That speed of motion is not only the speed of the form of the poem's thought, but the speed of *poetic* thought. It marks the impotency of thought / memory: "Swift as a Thought by the snake Memory stung." Memory is as flighty as any other thought, and disappears just as rapidly. "And barbed tongues, and thoughts more sharp than they, / Rent the soft Form they never could repel." Thought (and love) again is incisive, sharper than a tongue – than speech – and, failing to "repel" what is unbearable, can only harm it; the living motion itself of thought or feeling harms the memory of what it mourns, and, by the pain it brings, the one who mourns, too. They "whose sacred blood (Urania's / Splendour's)... paved with eternal flowers that undeserving way." They can't affect eternity; they cannot even hide it. They can only mock it. That thought moves – that it is alive – is the very thing that precipitates its subject's memorial death; that poetic thought is moveable, and that the mind is capable of poetic expression are the things that creates the distance that make poetry imperfect.

This failure and consequent distance (or, this distance and consequent failure) is not a poetic shortcoming but an inevitability, and further, a necessity. Even if he *wanted* to give himself over to the experience of his pain, he would find it impossible; not only unbearable, but entirely inaccessible. Weisman writes that the poem is not to be read or written as a "practical consolation;" "the fiction of death" is the only "real" consolation the poem offers. At the same time, though, the poem "knows now that death is the great unknown."³⁴ The elegist's own pain, like death, is unknown-and so necessarily fictionalized. "If the speaker chooses to believe that he has confronted nature unadulterated, "naked," without the aid of fictions, then he is on his way not necessarily to spiritual strength, but to a death to the world, to the shock of the

³⁴Weisman.

incompatibility of *desire for knowledge with its objects*. ”³⁵ The distance between the poet and his object –both his grief and Keats—is the thing that both demands and enables imaginative fictions and lets the poet not be dead to the world; in other words, it is “the loss that impels poetry.”

Even *that* fiction – of unity or perfect understanding between subject and object – is doomed to failure- if not by distance, then by time. Were perfect expression possible, the nature of time and change would make it possible for only a moment; even the moments of suspended time in the poem weren’t illusory, their instantaneity or transitory nature would make them fail. Further, a collapse or arrest of time would be destructive to poetry- not only because it undermines Shelley’s philosophy of inspiration, but because the nature of elegiac poetry is dependent on time- for loss, for distance that allows expression, for memory, and for grief *itself*. Grief itself is a formed thing, an abstraction of loss. Were time stopped, and permanent unity possible, the elegy would be entirely unnecessary. The “failed gestures toward elegiac consolation” mark not only the inaccessibility of death but the inaccessibility of grief. The poem is aware of this; it knows that its fictions will not suffice.³⁶

Even the potential consolation of death is uncertain. “The suicidal note at the poem’s end... is neither shocking nor an assurance of transcendence.” (recall: “Die, / If thou wouldst be with that which thou dost seek! (ll. 464-5).” The only way to be with is to *be*, but that relies on Albright’s reading of the lyrical construction of identity collapse, which the poet has already found insufficient. The poet cannot know; the “shock of incompatibility” between himself and what he desires to know is so great as to be insurmountable. He cannot know death, cannot know

³⁵Paul A. Vatalaro. *Shelley's Music : Fantasy, Authority, and the Object Voice*. Farnham: Surrey, England, 2009.

³⁶Weisman.

his dead friend, cannot even fully know his *own* grief. The failure of death within the poem is matched by the failure of poetic constructions of the poem. The question, then: if it's not constructing poetic fiction, then what does this poem actually *do*?

If the poem is a triumph of anything, it is a triumph of the aesthetic, not of the poet's representational or even, in a way, imaginative capacity, but it is *barely* that. As it fails at representation, if the poem is effective it is *only* because it is something aesthetic. It is ineffective both as faithful representation and as authentic expression. Something aesthetic is necessary—it can't *not* be fiction, because it can't be representative; it composes a “necessary fiction,” necessarily aestheticized. It is not perfect or complete expression, but it *is* expression.³⁷ Still, though, that expression is subsumed in pain, and ultimately, even the aesthetic is ultimately abandoned. “In anguish over the torment of the living, he privileges his pain over a potential aesthetic redemption for it.”³⁸

The elegist's privileging of his own pain is, I think, not a choice, but an inevitability. Any attempt at poetic or other representation in these conditions will yield that result. “The unveiling in which the poetry participates, partly through a process of veiling, yields thoughts that, in an unresponsive world, can only lead to anguish.” As Weisman notes, that anguish is not only personal grief but also an “epistemological angst” that is in no way obviated in poetry: “Poetic fictions do not do anything. They do not accomplish anything beyond the subjective potential for limited understanding.” That subjectivity is of course a characteristic of lyric poetry, but I think what matters is the way that subjective understanding is expressed, or *not* expressed. “The poetry

³⁷Weisman.

³⁸Ibid.

provides a definite form in which to confine his anguish, but beyond that, the poetry forms an apprehension of grief over a death and its philosophical and aesthetic representations.” The poetry is no longer even expression, just a construction of an apprehension, and even that is formal, and formed – adulterated, to use someone’s word – but it is the *only* apprehension available.

Approximate apprehension is the best the poet can hope for; to even fully experience grief – to indulge in the leisure - is impossible. “For Shelley the leisure for grief is and must be fiction, because grief itself is an abstract concept that, in a temporal world, relies on fiction for purposes of epistemological clarification. And that is not real definitive clarification at all, but merely articulation of intuitive approximation.” Exactly- there is no real clarification of anything, at least not denotatively. Again, though, the intuition / apprehension / approximation / articulation offers validation even as it remains inadequate: it is a mark that there is something worth writing about.

Like monuments, the very fact that time threatens memorial is what gives it life; the subject of loss, like the inspiration for poetry, is immediately lost and *must* be lost as a condition for poetry to exist at all. “The experience of loss is the exclusive experience of the temporally confined, indeed marks the condition of temporal confinement.”³⁹ The pain inherent in trying and failing to express loss is a necessary, animating component of both life and poetry. To fixate on denial or on hope for escape – which I think the poem, ultimately, doesn’t do, despite all of its poetic elaboration– is to deny that there is a loss worth memorializing. The consequence of this for Weisman is that “the poem’s strongest emphasis is not on the yearning for the Ideal from

³⁹Albright.

which we in our temporality are irrevocably separated, but the temporality to which we are consigned, and how we are able to manage within it.”⁴⁰ Weisman, however, is vague about what strategies for our management within time might actually look like. I think it might look like music. I find support for this argument by reading Jean de le Palacio’s and Paul Vatalaro’s considerations of music in Shelley’s poetry, with attention to their use of the concept of desire and loss.

⁴⁰Weisman.

III. Shelley and Music

By using Palacio's reading of *Alastor* for its musical qualities as my example, I want to supplement my reading of *Adonais*. In *Adonais*, Wasserman writes that the "animating power of light has been slain in the darkness" by the death of both *Adonais* and of nature.⁴¹ The animating power of music, however, may not have been. Death in *Adonais* is given the same sort of synesthetic representation that Palacio describes in *Alastor*, but now, the intertwining of the aural and visual images leads not to the flatness of the surrounding landscape but instead points toward a reflected delineation in the aural landscape; I read something similar in *Adonais*. Death is invisible but has a shadow; corruption is invisible, hunger's rage is pale, but they wait and "do not dare deface" "so fair a prey" – each figure stays within its realm of either light or dark, life or death- but only until "darkness and the law / Of change shall o'er this the mortal curtain draw." And when it does it falls not over a life not of wakefulness but of sleep, of the illusion that something other than the finality of death might have been possible. Lightness has been subsumed into death, but death has not claimed silence. In Albright's terms: "imagination can do nothing to alter fate, to bring the dead poet back to life, despite all its manipulations of surrogates. There is, however, a magical argument that some elegists use in order to claim that the dead poet has attained resurrection: that the dead poet survives as an animating presence in the mind of the elegist himself."⁴²

Palacio writes that Shelley uses music as "the intimation of something beyond-that is, a glimpse of the structure of Shelley's spiritual world." Tellingly, it is not just an artistic or imaginative impression of his spiritual world, but some sort of approximation of its *form*, and so

⁴¹Wasserman.

⁴²Albright.

capable of performing the work that Weisman reads. As I have done in *Adonais*, Palacio emphasizes the intermingling images of music, sound, speech, and silence: the only sounds heard are “muffled and whisperlike.” Harmony is expressed not aloud but in “eloquent silence,” the only heard, like in *Adonais*, is echo or reverberation. Palacio argues that this relegates music to a minor role in Shelley’s poetry; I’d like to argue the opposite. The fact that this music is half-heard – “a thrilling sound', 'half sense, half thought” – is exactly what makes it work. Palacio, too, notes the silence. “We cannot but be struck by such emphasis on muteness, rather uncommon in Shelley's poetry. In that spellbound universe, motionless and tuneless, sounds deepen to the lowest possible pitch.” Palacio, even as he emphasizes muteness, expresses this in terms of sound, and more specifically, *musical* sound. The exact use of this imagined music might be revealed in Barthes’ account of romantic music in his essay “Musica Practica.”

Barthes writes that, in the romantic paradigm of the early nineteenth century, the nature of musical composition and performance both changed. For Barthes, the key to understanding this music is form; like Shelley’s poet, “one must put oneself in the position or, better, in the activity of an operator, who knows how to displace, assemble, combine, fit together; in a word (if it is not too worn out), who knows how to structure.”⁴³ Further, like the apprehension of grief in *Adonais*, Beethoven’s music “cannot be received on the basis of pure sensuality, which is always cultural, nor on that of an intelligible order of (rhetorical, thematic) development.’ In other words, both conceptual form and aural experience of music cannot fully account for the way it works. Barthes suggests that the missing piece is perhaps that “Beethoven’s music has in it something *inaudible* (something for which hearing is not the *exact* locality).” This inaudible

⁴³ Roland Barthes. *Image Music Text*. Translated by Stephen Heath. New York: MacMillan, 1978.

thing in Beethoven, in turn, might be the same inaudible thing in *Adonais* that apprehends loss, pain or death where neither the poet nor the poem can in language. The fantasy is “a utopia of a Beethoven who is not played,” who is silent. “The operation by which we can grasp this Beethoven... can no longer be either performance or hearing, but reading.” This ideal Beethoven is not only silent but, like the lyric, is entirely internally constituted. It is, though, merely fictional. Its formal qualities exist as structural principles whether the music is heard or not. Both the language and the arguments in this essay are strikingly similar to what Yeats writes in his early essay volume, published in 1897, “Ideas of Good and Evil.” Yeats, despite his lack of musicianship, treats music in quite of his essays. Often, he brings it up to disparage it, but focus is important: his specific issue with music’s role in poetry is almost always in their *interaction*; he, like Barthes, aligns an abstraction of music from the sensory to with and abstracted sense of time.

Whenever I spoke of my desire to anybody they said I should write for music, but when I heard anything sung I did not hear the words, or if I did their natural pronunciation was altered and their natural music was altered, or it was drowned in another music which I did not understand.⁴⁴

His conception of the ideal relationship between music and poetry was not one of opera or art song but something more abstract I think that believes finds both of music and poetry- the auditory experience of sung music or spoken words – inadequate – the words are either altered from their natural pronunciation or subsumed by some not-understood music. Both music and poetry are alone are not what he wants, but the combination of the two is also not what he

⁴⁴ Yeats.

wants—the solution, then, might be comprised of *neither* of the two; something akin to a Beethoven who is not played but read.

Zizek, also remarks on the quality of Romantic music. “musical modernity” (that is, early nineteenth-century Romanticism) designates the moment when music renounces the endeavour to provoke the answer of the Other.⁴⁵ Further, the failure to access an other is something inherent in romanticism, and romanticism only reaches its potential if “this failure is included in and becomes a positive factor of the desired effect.” This failure, like those in *Adonais*, is dependent upon loss. Romantic music, he writes, is characterized by a new type of memory and of loss: what are lost are memories of memories of ‘absence,’ of ‘that which never was,’ of the “loss of what one never had. “in the double renunciation, the subject loses that which he does not possess.” There is no evading that in poetry, but in music, the fact that this Beethoven *isn't* heard is what lets it keep its animating potential, so that it is not, like poetry, immediately lost to time. For Yeats, too, this loss is the death is both the human absence that generates the anticipatory or retrospective mourning of poetry and the absence within poetry within itself.”

In a second connection between the form of *Adonais* and music, Albright makes a suggestive but convincing argument for the function of the “mode” of lyricality in *Adonais*.⁴⁶ For Albright, Shelley’s project is that of a “deconstructive poet”: he deconstructs the corporeal while constructing the incorporeal. The poet might withdraw from lyric construction as he finds himself amid uncontrollable emotion. In *Adonais*, I argue, Shelley prosecutes the construction of the incorporeal to its furthest reaches of deconstructive-construction: the entire elimination of the ugly / gravity / nonlyrical. Lyricality, Albright claims, is the ideal which enacts the “Defence” –

⁴⁵ Slavoj Žižek. *The Plague of Fantasies*. London: Verso, 1997.

⁴⁶Albright.

the status of poetic language as “vitally metaphorical; that is, it marks the before unapprehended relations of things and perpetuates their apprehension” is only possible in the abstract.⁴⁷

However, metaphor that is *too* vital can erode into meaningless. My theories of music prevent this slippage from fully destroying meaning. The entire purpose of the romantic music I consider is that it is unintelligible and cannot be constructed either intellectually or sensually. “If music is order, that order is not like our order; if music is chaos, that chaos is not like our chaos”⁴⁸. If the music that comprises this order or chaos – or that we use to represent it – is audible, intelligible, comprehensible to us, the endeavor has already failed. Like Barthes’ unheard Beethoven, “the lyrical mode abandons dealing with actual sounds in favor of unheard melodies, the operations of the mind, grows self-involved, self-admiring. This is not speech intended to be sung but the speech of Song itself... subvocal inflections of thought.”⁴⁹

As lyricality is pursued, words “lose consciousness of their own verbality;” they become blank, arbitrary and reference-less, so that the function of lyrical language shifts from any actual linguistic function, and its interpretation depends heavily upon its relationship to time.⁵⁰ The non-lyrical, governed by space and time, has been abandoned in favor of lyrical, imaginative profusion. “The lyric poet deliberately contrives the ruin of language, the destruction of denotation and reference, so that his singing will be all the purer.” For Albright, this is the furthest extent of lyricism: “We have crossed the line from the unapprehended relation to the nonrelation, and that, I believe, is the realm of the lyrical, for musical notes have just such an arbitrary and undiscursive relation to each other.”⁵¹

⁴⁷ Shelley, “A Defence of Poetry.”

⁴⁸ Albright.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

Both Yeats and Shelley associate the lyrical with death. While both use lyricity to address death, and both depend upon “the music of death for the aesthetic life of poetry,” their remains a paradox of lyricity which hinders its expressive capacity poetry: in extreme conditions, the expressive and the inexpressible converge.⁵² In music, however, this is not a hindrance; something that was never semantic doesn’t lose anything in the absence of discursive meaning. Music’s mode of expression is more fundamental than that. It is, simultaneously, wholly sensuous intensely embodied and abstract to the point that it is in excess of our capacity of conceptualization. In either case, however, its capacity for excess is more important than the specific emotion that is excessive-- grief, agony, ecstasy, and joy all converge in music. The expression of lyric poetry depends upon the fact that it “remains involute, half-expressed, unexpressive, teasing;” music, entirely unexpressed and unexpressive, does not tease with its inexpression but revels in it.⁵³ It is often argued that music, because it is non-semantic and non-representational, cannot perform the same type of work that poetry does. However, in the specific case of lyric elegy as I have described, music’s non-specificity is what lets it bleed into poetry. Music is, simultaneously, both essentially expressive and essentially non-expressive; that it suggests or gestures toward something but is ultimately unspecific; this is exactly what draws Albright – and Shelley and Yeats, in their elegies – toward music in the face of death; the nature of musical time is that music, more than poetry, can create the suggestion time might be suspended. me, Beethoven is at his most beautiful at these sorts of moments. For example, consider the opening of the ninth: anticipatory trembling, punctuated by the two-note figure, delaying the introduction of a real melody as long as it possibly can. The style of this piece

⁵² Jahan Ramazani. *Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

⁵³ Daniel Albright. *Panaesthetics: On the Unity and Diversity of the Arts*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014.

serves the sense that time stops. In poetry, death is that closest approximation, the best way the elegist might get outside time. The sense of stopped time is, in music, not a function of imagination or aesthetic representation, and certainly not of sensory input. The mind can structure, formulate what it hears in ways that push against the confines of teleology, but ultimately, what creates our sense of time in music is the something that incorporates and then *transcends* both intellectual and sensory experiences of musical time. In Beethoven, we only feel that time stops because *we know* it doesn't; the knowledge that the music will leave this moment *is* what makes it feel like a suspension; it won't feel suspended if there is nothing to suspend it *from*. Any given moment in music is entirely dependent upon all of the other moments that have past and that *will* pass.

It is possible to read the passing of time in poetry be an unequivocal evil, a pain so great that it cannot be evaded or circumvented or even wholly felt. In music, though, that reading doesn't hold; the nature of time's motion is the source of music's beauty. The loss that is Shelley's poetic inspiration, the distance between self and other, between living and dead, between the known and the desired, comprises a distance expressible not in space but in time, and, by the fact that music is not expressive, it cannot possibly fail as expression in the ways that poetry might. For the same reason, music and lyrical poetry remain not only inward-directed and involute, as Albright wrote, but inviolable. There remains, within the faculties of synthesis and imagination, "a soul within our soul that describes a circle around its proper paradise which pain and sorrow and evil dare not overleap."⁵⁴

⁵⁴Shelley, "On Love" in *Shelley's Poetry and Prose: Authoritative Texts, Criticism*, eds. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat. 2nd ed. New York: Norton, 2002.

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