

Shelley's Late Lyric Style

This brief paper will introduce some newly emergent features of Shelley's developing lyric style in the poems he was writing during the last five months of his life, February to July 1822. These features include a continuing impulse to experiment with variation within metrical pattern, and the elaboration of a range of loosely connected images and motifs, all apparently connected with his strengthening feelings for Jane Williams. Examples will be drawn from short lyrics drafted by Shelley in his notebooks; in addition to those already circulated, the following will be discussed (it will be helpful to have a copy of all the circulated poems to hand during the discussion):

1

Far far away, O ye
Halcyons of Memory,
Seek some far calmer nest
Than this abandoned breast —

5

No news of your false spring
To my heart's winter bring,
Once having gone, in vain
Ye come again. —

10

Vultures who build your bowers
High in the Future's towers
Wake, for the spirit's blast
Over my peace has passed —

15

Wrecked hopes on hopes are spread,
Dying joys choked by dead,
Will serve your beaks for prey

Many a day.

2

The hours are flying

And joys are dying

And hope is sighing

For there is

5

Far more to fear

In the coming year

Than desire can bear

In this.

10

Might I say that sorrow

Joy's mask could borrow

If today like tomorrow

Would remain,

And between what is bliss

And a state such as this

15

Would [the lyric is unfinished]

To Jane. The invitation

Best and brightest, come away —
Fairer far than this fair day
Which like thee to those in sorrow
Comes to bid a sweet good-morrow
5 To the rough year just awake
In its cradle on the brake. —
The brightest hour of unborn spring
Through the winter wandering
Found it seems the halcyon morn
10 To hoar February born;
Bending from Heaven in azure mirth
It kissed the forehead of the earth
And smiled upon the silent sea,
And bade the frozen streams be free
15 And waked to music all their fountains
And breathed upon the frozen mountains
And like a prophetess of May
Strewed flowers upon the barren way,
Making the wintry world appear
20 Like one on whom thou smilest, dear.

Away, away from men and towns
To the wild wood and the downs,
To the silent wilderness
Where the soul need not repress
25 Its music lest it should not find
An echo in another's mind,
While the touch of Nature's art
Harmonizes heart to heart. —
I leave this notice on my door
30 For each accustomed visitor —
'I am gone into the fields
To take what this sweet hour yields.
Reflection, you may come tomorrow,
Sit by the fireside with Sorrow —
35 You, with the unpaid bill, Despair,
You, tiresome verse-reciter Care,
I will pay you in the grave,
Death will listen to your stave —
Expectation too, be off!
40 Today is for itself enough —
Hope, in pity mock not woe
With smiles, nor follow where I go;
Long having lived on thy sweet food
At length I find one moment's good
45 After long pain — with all your love
This you never told me of.'

Radiant Sister of the day,
Awake, arise and come away
To the wild woods and the plains
50 And the pools where winter-rains
Image all their roof of leaves,
Where the pine its garland weaves
Of sapless green and ivy dun
Round stems that never kiss the Sun —
55 Where the lawns and pastures be
And the sand hills of the sea —
When the melting hoar-frost wets
The daisy-star that never sets;
And wind-flowers, and violets
60 Which yet join not scent to hue
Crown the pale year weak and new;
When the night is left behind
In the deep east dun and blind,
And the blue noon is over us,
65 And the multitudinous
Billows murmur at our feet
Where the earth and ocean meet
And all things seem only one
In the universal Sun. —

To Jane — the Recollection

Now the last day of many days,
All beautiful and bright as thou,
The loveliest and the last, is dead.
Rise Memory, and write its praise!
5 Up to thy wonted work! come, trace
The epitaph of glory fled;
For now the Earth has changed its face
A frown is on the Heaven's brow.

1

We wandered to the pine forest
10 That skirts the Ocean foam;
The lightest wind was in its nest,
The Tempest in its home;
The whispering waves were half asleep,
The clouds were gone to play,
15 And on the bosom of the deep
The smile of Heaven lay;
It seemed as if the hour were one
Sent from beyond the skies,

20 Which scattered from above the sun
A light of Paradise.

2

We paused amid the pines that stood
The giants of the waste,
Tortured by storms to shapes as rude
As serpents interlaced,
25 And soothed by every azure breath
That under Heaven is blown
To harmonies and hues beneath,
As tender as its own;
Now all the tree-tops lay asleep
30 Like green waves on the sea,
As still as in the silent deep
The Ocean woods may be.

3

How calm it was! the silence there
By such a chain was bound
35 That even the busy woodpecker
Made stiller with her sound
The inviolable quietness;
The breath of peace we drew
With its soft motion made not less
40 The calm that round us grew. —
There seemed from the remotest seat
Of the white mountain-waste,
To the soft flower beneath our feet
A magic circle traced,
45 A spirit interfused around,
A thrilling silent life.
To momentary peace it bound
Our mortal nature's strife; —
And still I felt the centre of
50 The magic circle there
Was *one* fair form that filled with love
The lifeless atmosphere.

4

We paused beside the pools that lie
Under the forest bough —
55 Each seemed as 'twere, a little sky
Gulfed in a world below;

A firmament of purple light
Which in the dark earth lay
More boundless than the depth of night
60 And purer than the day,
In which the lovely forests grew
As in the upper air,
More perfect, both in shape and hue,
Than any spreading there;
65 There lay the glade, the neighbouring lawn,
And through the dark green wood
The white sun twinkling like the dawn
Out of a speckled cloud.

5

Sweet views, which in our world above
70 Can never well be seen
Were imaged in the water's love
Of that fair forest green;
And all was interfused beneath
With an Elysian glow,
75 An atmosphere without a breath,
A softer day below —
Like one beloved, the scene had lent
To the dark water's breast,
Its every leaf and lineament
80 With more than truth expressed;
Until an envious wind crept by,
Like an unwelcome thought
Which from the mind's too faithful eye
Blots one dear image out. —
85 Though thou art ever fair and kind
And forests ever green,
Less oft is peace in —————'s mind
Than calm in water seen.

'When the lamp is shattered'

When the lamp is shattered
The light in the dust lies dead —
When the cloud is scattered
The rainbow's glory is shed —
5 When the lute is broken
Sweet tones are remembered not —
When the lips have spoken
Loved accents are soon forgot.

As music and splendour

10 Survive not the lamp and the lute,
 The heart's echoes render
 No song when the spirit is mute —
 No song — but sad dirges
 Like the wind through a ruined cell
15 Or the mournful surges
 That ring the dead seaman's knell.

 Where hearts have once mingled
 Love first leaves the well-built nest —
 The weak one is singled
20 To endure what it once possessed.
 O Love! who bewailest
 The frailty of all things here,
 Why choose you the frailest
 For your cradle, your home and your bier?

25 Its passions will rock thee
 As the storms rock the ravens on high —
 Bright Reason will mock thee
 Like the Sun from a wintry sky —
 From thy nest every rafter
30 Will rot, and thine eagle home
 Leave thee naked to laughter
 When leaves fall and cold winds come.

'One word is too often profaned'

 One word is too often profaned
 For me to profane it,
 One feeling too falsely disdained
 For thee to disdain it.
5 One hope is too like despair
 For prudence to smother,
 And Pity from thee more dear,
 Than that from another.

10 I can give not what men call love, —
 But wilt thou accept not
 The worship the heart lifts above
 And the Heavens reject not?
 The desire of the moth for the star,
 Of the night for the morrow,
15 The devotion to something afar
 From the sphere of our sorrow.

With a guitar. To Jane

Ariel to Miranda; — Take
This slave of music for the sake
Of him who is the slave of thee;
And teach it all the harmony,
5 In which thou can'st, and only thou,
Make the delighted spirit glow,
'Till joy denies itself again
And too intense is turned to pain;
For by permission and command
10 Of thine own *prince Ferdinand*
Poor Ariel sends this silent token
Of more than ever can be spoken;
Your guardian spirit Ariel, who
From life to life must still pursue
15 Your happiness, for thus alone
Can Ariel ever find his own;
From Prospero's enchanted cell,
As the mighty verses tell,
To the throne of Naples he
20 Lit you o'er the trackless sea,
Flitting on, your prow before,
Like a living meteor.
When you die, the silent Moon
In her interlunar swoon
25 Is not sadder in her cell
Than deserted Ariel;
When you live again on Earth
Like an unseen Star of birth
Ariel guides you o'er the sea
30 Of life from your nativity;
Many changes have been run
Since Ferdinand and you begun
Your course of love, and Ariel still
Has tracked your steps and served your will.
35 Now, in humbler, happier lot
This is all remembered not;
And now, alas! the poor sprite is
Imprisoned for some fault of his
In a body like a grave. —
40 From you, he only dares to crave
For his service and his sorrow
A smile today, a song tomorrow.

The artist who this idol wrought
To echo all harmonious thought
45 Felled a tree, while on the steep
The woods were in their winter sleep
Rocked in that repose divine

On the wind-swept Apennine;
And dreaming, some of autumn past
50 And some of spring approaching fast,
And some of April buds and showers
And some of songs in July bowers
And all of love, — and so this tree —
O that such our death may be —
55 Died in sleep and felt no pain
To live in happier form again,
From which, beneath Heaven's fairest star,
The artist wrought this loved guitar,
And taught it justly to reply
60 To all who question skilfully
In language gentle as thine own;
Whispering in enamoured tone
Sweet oracles of woods and dells
And summer winds in sylvan cells;
65 For it had learnt all harmonies
Of the plains and of the skies,
Of the forests and the mountains,
And the many-voicèd fountains,
The clearest echoes of the hills,
70 The softest notes of falling rills,
The melodies of birds and bees,
The murmuring of summer seas,
And pattering rain and breathing dew
And airs of evening; — and it knew
75 That seldom heard mysterious sound,
Which, driven on its diurnal round
As it floats through boundless day
Our world enkindles on its way —
All this it knows, but will not tell
80 To those who cannot question well
The spirit that inhabits it:
It talks according to the wit
Of its companions, and no more
Is heard than has been felt before
85 By those who tempt it to betray
These secrets of an elder day. —
But, sweetly as its answers will
Flatter hands of perfect skill,
It keeps its highest holiest tone
90 For our beloved Jane alone. —

'The keen stars were twinkling'

The keen stars were twinkling
And the fair moon was rising among them

Dear Jane.

5 The guitar was tinkling
But the notes were not sweet 'till you sung them

Again. —

As the moon's soft splendour
O'er the faint cold starlight of Heaven

Is thrown —

10 So your voice most tender
To the strings without soul had then given
Its own.

The stars will awaken,
Though the moon sleep a full hour later,

15 Tonight;
No leaf will be shaken
While the dews of your melody scatter

Delight.

20 Though the sound overpowers
Sing again, with your dear voice revealing

A tone

Of some world far from ours,
Where music and moonlight and feeling
Are one.