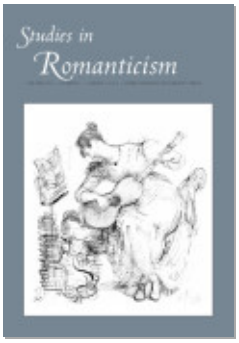
Do Not Say That It is Mine: The Nature of Sound in Shelley's Late Lyrics



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Do Not Say That It is Mine: The Nature of Sound in Shelley's Late Lyrics

"In each resides the secret power of its own"
—Lucretius, *Of the Nature of Things*[1]

Percy Shelley was haunted by nature's "mysterious tongue," by the voices of trees speaking in autumn gusts, avalanches roaring in the night, a wind harp singing without an audience, containing like Jane Williams's guitar "all harmonies / Of the plains and of the skies, / Of the forests and the mountains."[2] These instances of nonhuman communication evoke some sense of what Levi Bryant would call "the democracy of objects," and they repeatedly surface in Shelley's corpus, as Alfred North Whitehead has argued.[3] "We are *within* a world of colours, sounds, and other sense-objects, related in space and time to enduring objects such as stones, trees, and human bodies," Whitehead writes. And "we seem to be ourselves elements of this world *in the same sense* as are the other things which we perceive."[4] His reading highlights "Mont Blanc"'s oscillation between a sort of Berkeleyan idealism and an objectivism that deprivileges the human mind. And it also begins to approach the element of terror that seems to accompany listening to the "unresting sound" (line 33) of the natural

My thanks to Andrew Stauffer for first pointing me to the dilemmas of lyric sound in the Jane poems. Thanks also to Danielle Wiebe Burke, the editors of *SiR*, and my anonymous reviewers for their generous and sharp feedback.

1. Lucretius, *Of the Nature of Things*, trans. William Ellery Leonard (London: J. M. Dent, 1916), 8.

2. Shelley, "Mont Blanc," in Shelley's *Poetry and Prose*, 2nd ed., ed. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat (New York: Norton, 2002), line 76; Shelley, "With a Guitar. To Jane," *Shelley's Poetry*, lines 65–66. Subsequent references to Shelley's works are from this edition and cited by line or section number in the text, with the exception of "On the Manners of the Ancient Greeks" and "Hymn to Mercury."

3. See Bryant, *The Democracy of Objects* (Ann Arbor, MI: MPublishing, 2011).

4. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926), 129.

world that operates "beyond our own personality" in Shelley's poem.[5] For if, as Steven Shaviro explains in a speculative realist reconsideration of Whitehead's philosophy, "things have their own powers, their own innate tendencies," if their vitality is not predicated on human perception, then "we are [often] threatened by the vibrancy of matter," by its independence, its indifference.[6] Something like that threat is registered in "Mont Blanc," a poem in which Shelley approaches but cannot penetrate or organize "the still and solemn power of many sights / And many sounds" contained in the glacial mountain before him (lines 128–29).

As a genre that foregrounds the discursive interplay between sonic and propositional material, lyric calls attention to the nonhuman vitality of objects that Shelley addresses thematically in "Mont Blanc," to the sounds that only relatively depend on those makers who give them "rhythm and order," to borrow from Shelley's description of the poetic process in *A Defence of Poetry* (3). Indeed a lyric poem is an aural event categorically parallel to "the low hum of insects in an August woodland" that "overwhelms us" in Whitehead's thinking—or to the "caverns echoing to the Arve's commotion, / A loud, lone sound no other sound can tame" that Shelley imagines in the gloaming of Chamouni (lines 30–31)—even as it is an index of human attempts to read, order, and tame aurality.[7] In this essay, I argue that the sonic nature of (and in) lyric is a source of secret tension for Shelley that culminates negatively in his late poems to Jane, where the transposition of natural objects into poetic objects, the translation of alien sounds into native sounds, is repeatedly allegorized and performed at a distance. That these studies of poetic animation were kept private—that the poems to Jane Williams were never published in Shelley's lifetime and were likely not intended to be published—not only exposes Shelley's uneasy negotiation between the private and public dimensions of poetic form, it

5. Whitehead, *Science*, 130.

6. Shaviro, *The Universe of Things: On Speculative Realism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 48. For new studies in Romantic materiality (OOO, thing theory, speculative realism), see "Romantic Materialities," ed. Sara Guyer and Celeste Langan, special issue, *Romantic Circles Praxis* (April 2015); Timothy Morton, "An Object-Oriented Defense of Poetry," *New Literary History* 43, no. 2 (Spring 2012): 205–24; Mary Jacobus, *Romantic Things: A Tree, a Rock, a Cloud* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Greg Ellermann, "Speculative Romanticism," *SubStance* 44, no. 1 (2015): 154–74; Evan Gottlieb, *Romantic Realities: Speculative Realism and British Romanticism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016); Amanda Jo Goldstein, *Sweet Science: Romantic Materialism and the New Logics of Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017); Chris Washington and Anne C. McCarthy, eds., *Romanticism and Speculative Realism* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2019); Chris Washington, *Romantic Revelations: Visions of Post-Apocalyptic Life and Hope in the Anthropocene* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2019), 28–65.

7. Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Reality*, ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne, corrected ed. (New York: Free Press, 1978), 176, quoted in Shaviro, *The Universe of Things*, 57.

also reveals his strategic management of what Mutlu Blasing has called lyric's "open secret," its public display of its own sonic and rhythmic otherness.[8] What the "Jane poems" record is therefore not wholly biographical (illicit love, marital jealousy), nor economic (anxiety over authorial control and agency), nor political (a desire for escape, a despair in the face of political upheaval), but rather Shelley's most fundamental attempt to reconcile the nonhuman, recalcitrant sounds of lyric with his own political, economic, and personal motivations.

Preceded by ecological shifts in the early nineteenth century, Shelley's carefully engineered late lyrics reflect the growing tenuousness of Romantic interactions with nature. While recent studies of Romantic ecologies and sound often settle on the stable correlation between the poet and nature, the interfacing of text and environmental context was not always seamless. Climatic changes caused by the eruption of Mount Tambora, as Chris Washington and Anne C. McCarthy remind us, also elicited "awareness of the possibility of a broader subjective extermination," a vision "of things without us."[9] That exposure of the contingency of the subject—vulnerable to the whims of nature—was coeval with Shelley's autumn attempts to restrict the unruly sounds of lyric. The choreographed rhythms and repetitions that theorists of the lyric identify (often with recourse to the Romantics) as a normative feature of the genre were at times, as the Jane poems suggest, mitigating devices that registered and obscured the rising threat of a vibrant environment by regulating its sounds. Listening to the formal shifts leading up to Shelley's late lyrics therefore calibrates our ears to the caprices of sound, the limits of the lyric voice, and the history of a changing climate.

Do not say that it is mine

In the Jane poems, these dimensions of the lyric are disguised under an autobiographical veneer that equivocally represents Shelley's late personal and political moods. Eclipsed by his unfinished masterpiece of political protest *The Triumph of Life*, Shelley's poems to Jane, if not wholly ignored or dismissed, are often hidden in the peripheries of scholarly treatments of his poetry; they live in codas, biographical footnotes, and dismissive observations about Shelley's fading imagination.[10] The poems are posthumously collected epistolary lyrics composed for Jane Williams, an amateur musician

8. Blasing, *Lyric Poetry: The Pain and Pleasure of Words* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 62.

9. Washington and McCarthy, introduction to *Romanticism and Speculative Realism*, 4, 9. For sustained treatments of Mt. Tambora, see Washington, *Romantic Revelations*, and David Higgins, *British Romanticism, Climate Change, and the Anthropocene* (London: Palgrave, 2017), 55–108.

10. Michael O'Neill, for instance, makes no mention at all of the poems in *Percy Bysshe Shelley: A Literary Life* (London: Macmillan, 1989).

who (with her partner Edward) lived with the Shelleys in Lerici.[11] In contrast to the grandiosity of *Triumph*, they are autobiographical and quotidian: they chronicle a walk in the forest, a boat ride accompanied by Jane's singing, Jane's attempt to mesmerize Shelley, and her reception of Shelley's gift of a guitar. As if confirming their abandonment of the world of politics and serious poetry, the manuscript of *Triumph* breaks off with "Alas I kiss you Jane."[12] Readings that take a more serious stance on the poems tend to operate in a tendentious biographical register, beginning with G. M. Matthews's claim that Shelley's relationship with Jane was "the most profoundly disturbing personal experience of [his] whole maturity" and continuing through Judith Chernaik's hypothesis that not only was Shelley "in love with Jane," his love for her evidenced "the deepening pessimism of his vision of life," his desire to have "nothing to do with changing the world."[13]

The fact that little evidence exists beyond the poems themselves to corroborate speculations of romance has not prevented the proliferation of attempts to confirm the poems' fictions. Indeed the absence of biographical "proof" has spawned reading practices similar to those that characterize the reception of Marjorie Levinson's so-called "Romantic Fragment Poems." Like the Romantic Fragment Poem whose "irresolution is," Levinson argues, "discovered by the reader as a determinate or shaped absence," the lacunae in Shelley's poems to Jane and letters about Jane invite a collaboration between reader and poet along delimited biographical and formal vectors.[14] The poems *were* explicitly participatory devices, and in that sense they welcome the sorts of superscriptions and glosses that they often receive. "To Jane" is a song written for Jane to perform. And in the original manuscript "The Recollection" reads, "Less oft is peace in ———'s mind / Than calm in water seen" (lines 87–88), inviting Jane to voice her own name to complete the poem and transgressing, as William Keach has argued, "the boundary separating words from deeds."[15]

The poems' autobiographical and textual controls belie the complexity of the tie between the Shelleys and Williamses, one of shared exile, marital turmoil, and literary ambition. "An extremely pretty and gentle

11. For an early description of their production and circulation, see Henry S. Salt, *A Shelley Primer* (London: Reeves and Turner, 1887), 89–92.

12. Richard Holmes, *Shelley: The Pursuit* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1975), 724.

13. Matthews, "Shelley and Jane Williams," *RES* 12, no. 45 (February 1961): 48; and Chernaik, *The Lyrics of Shelley* (Cleveland, OH: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1972), 163; and for the most recent and self-aware of these biographical readings, see Cian Duffy, "Percy Shelley's 'Unfinished Drama' and the Problem of the Jane Williams Poems," *European Romantic Review* 26, no. 5 (2015): 615–32.

14. Levinson, *The Romantic Fragment Poem: A Critique of Form* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 25.

15. Keach, *Shelley's Style* (New York: Methuen, 1984), 216.

woman, apparently not *very* clever," as Shelley once described her, Jane spent much of her youth in India under the care of her brother, an officer in the British military.[16] Estranged from her first husband and living with Edward Williams, social disapproval drove her to exile in Pisa, where she and Edward first encountered the Shelleys, themselves social outcasts of a sort. It is often forgotten that Edward drew Mary out of seclusion during this time, Joan Rees reminds us, and that he maintained a strong friendship with Percy, who addressed poems to him as well.[17] The two men shared a tragic love for sailing, but they also nursed each other's literary ambitions.[18] Hence Edward's unpublished play, marginally edited by Percy, is "a document of shared exile," Jane Stabler writes, built on mutual "experiences of ostracism."[19] Jane and Mary were close friends in turn, even after their husbands died at sea.[20] These multilateral relationships expose the limits of the schematic projected by the Jane poems, raising the possibility that they may not have been about love, or Jane, at all.

Suppressing the temptation to play biographer, Susan Wolfson has thus argued that while the poems may indicate Shelley's desire for intimacy with Jane, the way that Shelley privately packaged and formed them evidences his deeper desire to control the conditions and horizons of his poetry's reception. Hence Shelley would deliver them to Edward and Jane Williams's apartment one floor below him in Pisa—or hand them to Jane in their shared home at "Casa Magni" in the bay of Spezia—with conspiratorial directive notes understating their poetic worth and enjoining her to claim authorial responsibility for them. "Dear Jane, if this melancholy old song suits any of your tunes, or any that humour of the moment may dictate, you are welcome to it," he writes in one instance. "Do not say it is mine to any one, even if you think so; indeed, it is from the torn leaf of a book out of date."[21] Another note is written in a similarly secretive tenor: "I commit [it] to your secrecy and your mercy, and will try to do better another time."[22] The Jane poems therefore speak to Shelley's discomfort with lyric poetry's "doubleness" as at once private and public; they are "a series of calculated [and controlled] performances," Wolfson argues, a set of phonic fields sounding the conflict

16. Sylva Norman, introduction to *After Shelley: The Letters of Thomas Jefferson Hogg to Jane Williams* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), xv.

17. Rees, *Shelley's Jane Williams* (London: William Kimber, 1985), 53.

18. See Helen Rossetti Angeli, *Shelley and his friends in Italy* (New York: Brentano's, 1911), 193.

19. Stabler, *The Artistry of Exile: Romantic and Victorian Writers in Italy* (London: Oxford University Press, 2013), 149.

20. Their relationship worsened after Jane boasted of Percy's fascination with her. Norman, introduction to *After Shelley*, xxiii.

21. See Holmes, *The Pursuit*, 701.

22. See Holmes, *The Pursuit*, 726.

between Shelley's "self-authorized aesthetics" and the "urgencies of correspondence and response."[23] By displacing creative responsibility onto Jane or disguising his authorial role with gestures toward some mythic maker of his "torn leaf of a book out of date," it would seem that Shelley eschews poetic agency and avoids imbrication in poetry's public game.

Wolfson's conclusion notably parallels Levinson's critique of Romantic ideology, one which Levinson develops in part from her analysis of Shelley's published fragment poems and extends to encompass the entire Romantic era. Though their trajectories diverge—Wolfson emphasizes the politics of gender, Levinson the politics of labor, to put it crudely—in both cases, Shelley is said to repress the public basis of poetic production, to avoid recognizing that poems are consumable and communicable objects, that poets are laborers complicit in the workings of a larger, determining economic or relational system with its own set of intractable conditions for participation. "In order to survive *psychically* in an environment experienced as deeply inimical to their interests," Levinson writes, "the Romantics redefined the traditional actions and effects of the poet in such a way as to liberate the literary process (namely, writers) from extrinsic sources, from the textual artifact, from the audience, and most critically, from the idea of purposiveness."[24] Whether reading a Shelleyan fragment as a shaped plenitude that remains always ever out of its audience's reach, or "With a Guitar. To Jane" as an effort at controlling and condensing that audience down to a truly "select class of poetical readers" in Jane and Edward, Levinson and Wolfson settle on a similar plateau: in Shelley (and, Levinson wants to say, in Romantic poetry), we see a poet struggling to manage, contain, escape the peopled world outside.[25] And to the extent that Shelley's readers continue finishing his Jane poems—describing the conditions of Jane's performance, filling in her name, imagining the love that Shelley must have felt for her—they embrace what they should scrutinize: the mechanisms of control and displacement indexing (by negation) Shelley's resistance to certain socio-historical realities.

23. Wolfson, *Formal Charges: The Shaping of Poetry in British Romanticism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 208–9. While he sets out distinguishing himself from Wolfson, Paul Vatalaro makes a similar argument in *Shelley's Music: Fantasy, Authority, and the Object Voice* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 97–98. The Jane poems, he argues, reveal "Shelley's fantasy of becoming intimate with a musically fluent woman, as the means to capturing and then reintegrating something he lost." For other feminist and psychoanalytic readings, see Thomas R. Frosch, "'More than ever can be spoken': Unconscious Fantasy in Shelley's Jane Williams Poems," *Studies in Philology* 102, no. 3 (Summer 2005): 378–413; and Barbara Gelpi, *Shelley's Goddess: Maternity, Language, Subjectivity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 231.

24. Levinson, *Romantic Fragment Poem*, 213.

25. Shelley, preface to *Prometheus Unbound: A Lyrical Drama in Four Acts*, *Shelley's Poetry*, 209.

Both of these readings treat Shelley's generic decisions as disguised blueprints for his attempt to reconcile private and public personal commitments and the exogenous forces often in conflict with those commitments, but in the process they obfuscate a different and more fundamental doubleness at the heart of Shelley's Jane poems, one more tethered to what the musicologist Christoph Cox has called "the materiality of sound."[26] I'm referring here to the dialectic of relationality and resistance that arises in Shelley's lyric contracts with natural sounds. Catalyzed by ecopoetics, the "organic forms" in Romantic lyric have garnered renewed attention for their alliance of verse to nature, often expressed through semantic and technical conceits that coordinate natural to textual sound.[27] Yet focus has so far been on the relational dimensions of "acoustic ecology." Joanna E. Taylor uses "topophany" to set off "a physical demonstration of the relation between the human and the natural" in Romantic records of the Lake District's acoustics, and Claire Téchené similarly writes that the *topoi* of music and natural sound seal for the Romantics "a new pact with nature."[28] Timothy Morton thinks predicatively about how "the sound in things," rather than sound as such, models the correspondence between nature, the senses, and the mind.[29] Others refer to the "the electric life of auditory affect" interfacing the line and the body, or to poets so "in love with sound" that they "[sweep] up the very ontology of *things*."[30]

In the sense that they are premised on the reliable intercourse between lyric and nature, these Romantic interfaces parallel and enable the alliance

26. Cox, *Sonic Flux: Sound, Art, and Metaphysics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 18.

27. The phrase is from Denise Gigante, *Life: Organic Form and Romanticism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).

28. Taylor, "Echoes in the Mountains: The Romantic Lake District's Soundscape," *Studies in Romanticism* 57, no. 3 (2018): 386, 401; Claire Téchené, "On the Use and Representations of Sound in British Pre-Romantic and Romantic Poetry, or 'On The Power of Sound,'" in "Noise and Sound in Eighteenth-Century Britain," ed. Isabelle Bour, special issue, *Études Épistémè* 29 (2016): https://journals.openedition.org/episteme/1032.

29. Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 43.

30. James Chandler, "The 'Power of Sound' and the Great Scheme of Things: Wordsworth Listens to Wordsworth," in "'Soundings of Things Done': The Poetry and Poetics of Sound in the Romantic Ear and Era," ed. Susan Wolfson, special issue, *Romantic Circles Praxis Series* (February 2008): https://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/soundings/index.html; and Wolfson, "Sounding Romantic: The Sound of Sound," in "'Soundings of Things Done.'" For a more ambivalent study of Romantic correlationism, see Michele Speitz, "Affect and air: The speculative spirit of the age," in *Romanticism and Speculative Realism*, 37. Speitz points usefully to "the material sublime," the effect of an aestheticizing of natural phenomena (air, sound, etc.) but one conscious of the limits of such control.

between lyric and the self that Virginia Jackson identifies as a feature of "the definition of the lyric in modernity." Indeed definitions that identify the "reflexivity" between lyric and speaker as generically paramount often rely on another order of stability, the standardization of sound in verse.[31] Hence Roman Jakobson famously defines the "poetic function" as the "focus on the message for its own sake," which is to say the focus on the "regular reiteration of equivalent units" of sound and sense.[32] Departures from sonic and semantic regulation in this view may occur, but they are anomalies.[33] While sharing Jakobson's focus on reflexivity, Jonathan Culler seems to depart from it by suggesting that "lyrics often [rhythmically] foreground the sense of language at play, shaped as if by forces of its own, independent of any author—by its own phonological and rhythmical structures."[34] "Lyrics are language," he repeats paratactically, "but language shaped in other ways, as if from elsewhere."[35] They draw attention to poetry's almost nonhuman operations by privileging the sonic, rhythmic, and metrical mechanisms of poetic speech. William Blake's "The Tyger" illustrates these claims for Culler; its incantatory rhythm has a somatic effect prior to its semantic value. "Tyger Tyger, burning bright / In the forests of the night," riding on the momentum of a mostly four-beat rhythm while deploying anaphora and parataxis to inculcate a sense of throbbing forward momentum, affords the labile pleasure of a nursery rhyme or charm; its repetitive rhythmical, metrical, and rhyming patterns induce hypnosis first, not "meaningful" discourse.[36]

Yet Culler never relinquishes control of the lyric—like Jakobson he believes that lyric is almost disobedient, that it sounds "as if" it is self-ratifying. In both cases, it obeys its maker. Shelley sought a revolutionary and reliable relation to nature through the energies of lyric sound, but unlike Culler and Jakobson, his thinking sometimes recurs to its non-relationality, to the darker possibility that it lives its own life as a natural object out of range on the mountain. In a context far removed from his discussion of "the sound of things," Morton gestures toward these ulterior properties of sound. Theorizing the unpredictable life of objects, he imagines a glass shattered by an opera singer's voice:

31. Jackson, *Dickinson's Misery: A Theory of Lyric Reading* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 204.

32. Jakobson, "Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics," in *The Lyric Theory Reader: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 239, 240.

33. Jakobson, "Closing Statement," 244–46.

34. Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 136.

35. Culler, *Theory*, 138.

36. See Culler, *Theory*, 140–43; Blake, *The Complete Writings of William Blake with Variant Readings*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 214.

> When an object is born, that means that it has broken free of some other object. . . . An opera singer sings a loud note in tune with the resonant frequency of a wine glass. . . . The singing is a zone, an autonomous level of intensity, opening a rift between appearance and essence. The glass ripples—for a moment it is nakedly a glass and a not-glass—almost as if it were having an orgasm, a little death. It is caught in the rift of the singing. Then its structure can't handle the coherence of the sound waves, and it breaks.[37]

Here the encounter between voice and glass reveals something about transfers among objects, their fragility, and their unpredictable cycles of destruction and generation. But extracted from its immediate context, the scenario also restages the performance of the Romantic lyric, showcasing "feeling confessing itself to itself," perhaps, but displacing ecstasy onto objects, not the lyric subject.[38] Now it is sound-as-object that ecstatically generates an indefinite number of new objects, each made up of other objects *ad infinitum*, by breaking one. The separation of the raw agency of sound from its musical affordances for an audience or a performer suggests that in approaching it we should distinguish between effects and aesthetics. Quentin Meillassoux points up precisely this distinction in his analysis of melody and melodic beauty—secondary and primary qualities, respectively—in order to explain the way objects precede the shapes we give them. "The melodious beauty of a sonic sequence," he writes, "is not heard by the melody."[39] Objects have an "ancestral" reality that has no innate connection to our aesthetic judgments, one that exists apart from and prior to the human.[40] And because of their priority to the human, there is no reason to believe that nature "could [not] actually *change at any moment for no reason whatsoever*."[41] Like any natural object, Meillassoux and Morton would say, sound is autonomous and unpredictable.

As a genre that makes this capriciousness audible, lyric—veering beyond the accounts that Culler, Jakobson, and the Romantic correlationists provide of it—also at times reveals the limits of reciprocity between literary productions and the sounds they denote, and it thus enables the disruption of established cultural codes, the imagination of new personal, social, and political possibilities. Mutlu Blasing makes this argument more explicitly. "Lyric poetry is not mimesis," she writes: "above everything else, it is a formal practice that keeps in view the linguistic code and the otherness of

37. Morton, "Objects as Temporary Autonomous Zones," *Continent* 1, no. 3 (2011): 153.

38. John Stuart Mill, "What is Poetry?," in *John Stuart Mill: Literary Essays*, ed. Edward Alexander (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1967), 56.

39. Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. Ray Brassier (New York: Continuum, 2008), 1.

40. Meillassoux, *Finitude*, 10.

41. Meillassoux, *Finitude*, 83. His emphasis.

the material medium of language to all that humans do with it."[42] And if lyric draws attention to its material otherness, the distinction between itself and its superimposed semantic or anthropomorphic use, it coextensively exposes the historical constructedness of the poetic "I," uncovering the chasm separating the history of the linguistic inscription of subjectivity from the actual human subject.[43] By means of its rhythmic consciousness, it becomes, as Ben Glaser puts it, "a defamiliarized and defamiliarizing force."[44] This is the "open secret" of lyric, Blasing contends, the genre which tells in public "the other history of the otherness of the 'I,' the alien intimacy of the symbolic language."[45] Lyric's public proclamation of this secret, its display of the arbitrariness of meaningful linguistic constructions, is by nature unsettling, engendering terror and hysteria: it exposes the provisionality of personal, social, and political apparatuses, requiring us to remember and rehearse the pleasurable, painful, and capricious process of language acquisition.[46]

Shelley travels inversely from Morton, Meillassoux, and Blasing to Jakobson and Culler as his career unfolds. Just as, in James Chandler's words, the revolutionary Wordsworth is satisfied with the self-sustaining soundscape of the "Intimations" ode, but later, in "On the Power of Sound," cedes his surety in poetry's "secular power" to the "Logos" of God, a proto-Jakobsonian master-template, Shelley, too, recalibrates his theory of the interplay between sound and its textualization in verse.[47] But against Culler's faith in the "as if independent" nature of lyricism, or the later Wordsworth's security in the "Logos," as he approaches the Jane poems Shelley opts to more tightly

42. Blasing, *Lyric Poetry*, 2.

43. Louise Economides finds a similar dynamic in "Mont Blanc" but does not address the poem's ambivalence toward it. See Economides, "'Mont Blanc' and the Sublimity of Materiality," *Cultural Critique* 61 (2005): 99–109.

44. Glaser, introduction to *Critical Rhythm: The Poetics of a Literary Life Form*, ed. Ben Glaser and Jonathan Culler (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019), 2.

45. Blasing, *Lyric Poetry*, 62.

46. See Blasing, *Lyric Poetry*, 106: "Poetic language rescripts the body into verbal language once again, and the language that keeps the pleasures of verbal sound in play courts—explicitly, in incantatory or hypnotic verse—a hysterical regression, jeopardizing the 'I,' the linguistic construct of a psychosocial subject."

47. Chandler, "The 'Power of Sound,'" n.p. In his account of revision in the late Wordsworth, Tim Fulford anticipates this reading but replies that "On the Power of Sound" still offers "intuitions about sound, words and poetry [that] are not reducible to the Anglican orthodoxy for which he [Wordsworth] himself, at the poem's conclusion, settled." Yet his own reading circles back to the correlationist models of Romantic sound discussed by Taylor, Téchené, Wolfson, Morton, and Chandler, commending the poem's "intuitions" of "the lexical and sonic play that links the cell of hearing with the oracular cave and the caves of earth and sky." See Fulford, *The Late Poetry of the Lake Poets: Romanticism Revised* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 237.

regulate the conditions of lyric's production and reception, exhibiting, as Madeleine Callaghan puts it, "increasing command over his intimate lyrics."[48] If like other natural objects lyric at some level functions "away from and beyond our own personality," to recall Whitehead, this doubleness is what he seeks to contain through the avatar of Jane.[49] As an accident of this enterprise, Shelley provides a template not for a formalist reading, a search for sonic and semantic match-making, but for a materialist hearing of lyric form, an endeavor to listen for the quirks, concussions, and silences in the nature of sound.

Nature's Mysterious Tongue

As a poet fascinated by spells, magic, and the ineffable, the alienating effects of lyric that Blasing articulates would not have been lost on Shelley. Indeed in a sense, Asia's descent into the Demogorgon's cave in *Prometheus Unbound* allegorizes lyric's centrifugal disruptiveness. There Asia and Panthea follow the hypnotic echoes of an evanescent dream "down, down" through the cavernous darkness until they reach the "veiled form" of the Demogorgon (2.3.55, 2.4.1). And questioning Shelley's dark repository of political revolution about the name and attributes of God, Asia receives only a set of cryptic responses that negatively gesture toward a transcendent Truth: "God," "Merciful God," "He reigns" (2.4.9, 2.4.18, 2.4.28). Yet somehow after Asia's confrontation with this nullity or void at the political heart of the poem, the Demogorgon rises, the tyrannical Jupiter is deposed, Prometheus is restored: the poem's forceful (or forced?) claim to meaningful political agency might thereby be seen to rest on an implied causality running from Asia's descent through Prometheus's ascent, from an encounter with "alien objecthood" through to a new horizon of meaning.[50]

Shelley's shorter lyric poems often manage poetry's sounds in a similar though more anxious way, providing internal guidelines for incantation that obfuscate the alterity of words. In the concluding canto of "Ode to the West Wind," for instance, deixis interrupts Shelley's extended invocation of his inconstant muse and turns us toward the material of the text, concurrently informing us of its human instrumentality:

48. Callaghan, *Shelley's Living Artistry: Letters, Poems, Plays* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017), 224.

49. Whitehead, *Science*, 130.

50. The 1790s' "climate of political apprehension" prompted experiments with the occult among the Romantics. If at that time "any form of prognostication could be regarded as a dangerously radical act," as Stephanie Elizabeth Churms puts it, Shelley seems to have embraced the valences of radical power previous decades associated with magic. See Churms, *Romanticism and Popular Magic: Poetry and Cultures of the Occult in the 1790s* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 264.

Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is:
What if my leaves are falling like its own!
. . .

Drive my dead thoughts over the universe
Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!
And, by the incantation of this verse,

Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth
Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!
(lines 57–58, 63–67)

If the opening tercet has Shelley demanding to be like a tree in the forest whose leaves produce harmonies in concert with the wind, the following tercets see that demand realized, metaphorizing the poem's words as leaves, sonic instruments charged by the creative conjuncture of poet (lyre or tree) and passing inspiration (wind). And "by the incantation of this verse," the action by which "my words" are spread "among mankind" and kindle "a new birth," these linguistic and aural leaves take on human force and direction. Here the poem recalls the *Defence of Poetry*'s sense of the ephemerality of language and perception, of the need for the constant revitalization of both by poets of successive ages. For if "the mind in creation is as a fading coal which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness," then so too are its formal creations (*Defence*, 39); they are "the wrecks and fragments of those subtle and profound minds" that "obscurely suggest to us the grandeur and perfection of the whole"[51] and that require new articulation and expression, "new and wonderful applications of the eternal truth" (*Defence*, 9). Only now—in "Ode to the West Wind"—Shelley explicitly ties the social and political effects of poetry to its incantation: the re-vitalization of humankind is achieved by voicing the words on the page. In doing so, he assumes that the very act that (as we have seen) exposes the fault-line dividing humans and objects, evoking the otherness of the linguistic "I," effects the ideal blending of poet, nature, and nature's mysterious animating principle. The poem's failure to identify the cantor—is it Shelley or the wind who speaks "this verse"?—reiterates its subterranean message, removing the grammatical barrier separating the voice of nature from that of the poet. Hence according to the poem's hidden syllogism, recitation is a socially regenerative act: it ignites the fading embers of humanity's collective imagination by effectively colonizing the sonic matter of poetry.

51. Shelley, "A Discourse On the Manners of the Ancient Greeks Relative to the Subject of Love," in *Shelley's Prose, or The Trumpet of a Prophecy*, ed. David Lee Clark (New York: New Amsterdam Books, 1988), 217.

Yet the poem's seamless merger of the natural objects of poetry with the poet's voice, its ecstatic claim to a collaboration between sounds and their intended use in social life, bypasses the more dangerous and unsettling aspects of lyric that incantation exposes. There is no "hysterical regression," no alien encounter, no awareness of the division between semantics and sound, of the recalcitrant otherness of vocal matter.[52] At least "Ode to the West Wind" attempts to obviate those sorts of lyric experiences semantically, sedimenting within itself a script for how and why to "incant," one which begs the question of the social viability of words and their attendant sounds. But even though it thematically controls their use, the poem still has the characteristics of charms or spells—structures of repetition that invite somatic rather than semantic engagement. The fifth stanza's trochaic and spondaic substitutions set off a chain of matching imperatives that submerge us in a series of repetitions, a "fearful symmetry" that like "Tyger, Tyger burning bright" induces incantation: "Make me," "Be thou," "Be thou," "Drive my," "Scatter" (lines 57, 61, 62, 63, 66). And if here isocolon and parataxis enfold us in the poem's rhythm of recitation, the patterns of alliteration, internal rhyme, and metrical substitution concurrently draw attention to the material being recited. More precisely, while the stanza begins smoothly with alliteration ("sweet though in sadness"), internal rhyme ("leaves," "harmonies"), and relatively consistent iambic meter, it transitions to two jarring tercets proliferating with spondaic substitutions and halting syntax, a grouping of awkward imperatives made more awkward by heavy punctuation: "Be thou, Spirit fierce, / My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one" (lines 61, 58, 59, 61–62) Hence even as the stanza's metrical and syntactical orchestration reveals its otherness, its mesmeric grammatical form draws us into that otherness. And both processes in unison create an additional tension between two sorts of incantation, the one semantically prescribed, the other somatically instantiated. In these aural corridors, "the materiality of sound," as Cox puts it in a study of sound-art, "its texture and temporal flow, its palpable effect on and affection by the materials through and against which it is transmitted" makes itself known, prompting "not a formalist analysis, but a materialist one."[53] But by preemptively inscribing incantation with social purpose, Shelley disguises (intentionally or not) the latter mechanisms of lyric, those that ironically surface in the actual act of voicing, in the precise moment that his words are supposed to achieve their intended, socially generative end.

"Ode to the West Wind" both measures the distance separating what Blasing calls lyric's "two hemispheres" and exposes Shelley's subordination of the alterity of his medium to the political functions that he imagines for it.[54]

52. See n46.

53. Cox, *Sonic Flux*, 18.

54. Blasing cites scientific studies indicating that "acoustic and phonological phenomena" are processed in separate hemispheres of the brain. See Blasing, *Lyric Poetry*, 49.

That these were important and troubling topics for Shelley is suggested by the *Defence*'s departure from Rousseau's *Essai sur l'origine des langues*, from which Shelley otherwise derives many of his ideas about language's social basis. There Rousseau describes language both as a function of humanity's social needs and as a phenomenon coextensive with the passions. In their earliest and most aural iterations, in primitive cries and grunts, expressions were more intimately and faithfully yoked to their attendant feelings. Yet these more auricular forms of communication have been lost, Rousseau laments, and with them the ability to effectively convey social feelings over and above rational "ideas," the mere attenuated expressions of feelings in script. "Words alone do not carry much emotional or moral impact," but rather "work best when allied with sound," as J. Patrick Dobel paraphrases in his description of the centrality of communication in Rousseau's political theory.[55] Like Rousseau, Shelley valorizes the artistic productions of ancient cultures—particularly, given his classicist predilections, those of Greece—but he differs with Rousseau on the subject of language's gradual regression throughout the ages. This difference is perceivable in the juxtaposition of Rousseau's and Shelley's treatments of nature's "chaos" as it relates to poetry. Rousseau imagines that the language closest to its primal source "would deemphasize grammatical analogy for euphony, number, harmony, and beauty of sounds. Instead of arguments, it would have aphorisms. It would persuade without convincing, and would represent without reasoning."[56] And it would do so through its reliance on "the affective ties that unite the members of a society," as Matthew Voorhees puts it, "rather than [the] rational."[57] Poetry helps us recover these attributes of language, Rousseau explains, for "the chaos that poets attribute to the elements actually reigns in their own productions."[58] While Shelley places a high value on the aural and passionate qualities of poetic speech, especially insofar as both effect human "sympathy," he affixes those attributes more closely to ideation and order (*Defence*, 8). Echoing Rousseau's characterization of poetry's elemental nature, he does observe that "every original language near to its source is in itself the chaos of the cyclic poem" (*Defence*, 3). Yet for Shelley that "chaos" is something that poetry throughout the ages has given greater "rhythm and order" (*Defence,* 3). Hence "the copiousness of lexicography and the distinctions of grammar," the systematization of speech in writing that for Rousseau marks the reification of language into an almost exclusively discursive medium, "are," Shelley continues, "the catalogue of the form of the creations of Poetry"

55. Dobel, "The Role of Language in Rousseau's Political Thought," *Polity* 18, no. 4 (Summer 1986): 639.

56. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Collected Writings of Rousseau*, trans. John T. Scott (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth University Press, 1998), 7:296.

57. Voorhees, "Melodic Communities: Music and Freedom in Rousseau's Political Thought," *History of Political Thought* 32, no. 4 (Winter 2011): 623.

58. Rousseau, *Collected Writings*, 7:312.

(*Defence*, 3). Poetry is emphatically *not* a medium that allows "the chaos" of "the elements" to reign in it; it is rather one that manages that chaos, ordering and motivating Babel's pool of unformed sound.

"With a Guitar. To Jane" is both a variation on the theme of "Ode to the West Wind" and an allegorization of this process of ordering Rousseau's elements. If "Ode to the West Wind" predicates lyric's unformed matter to reason by overlaying incantation with a set of predetermined social meanings, "With a Guitar. To Jane" serves as Shelley's more radical self-distancing from the elemental effects of lyric at play in his poetry. A dedicatory memento that would have been attached to the guitar Shelley gave to Jane Williams in the spring of 1822, the poem begins by casting Shelley's relationship with the Williamses in terms of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.

> *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,
> In which thou can'st, and only thou,
> Make the delighted spirit glow
>
> (lines 1–6)

These observations of Jane's unique ability to draw music from her instrument bookend the poem, concluding its second and final stanza, where Shelley writes that "its answers will / Flatter hands of perfect skill" (lines 87–88)—those of Jane alone. The intervening lines narrate the guitar's construction:

> The artist who this idol wrought
> To echo all harmonious thought
> Felled a tree, while on the steep
> The woods were in their winter sleep
> Rocked in that repose divine
> And dreaming, some of autumn past
> And some of spring approaching fast,
>
> . . .
>
> And all of love,—and so this tree—
> O that such our death may be—
> Died in sleep, and felt no pain
> To live in happier form again
>
> (lines 43–50, 53–56)

Here Shelley reformulates his imperative simile "make me thy lyre," now describing the making of the lyre (or guitar) by an artist from the natural materials of the forest. His narration has its antecedent in his unpublished translation of Homer's "Hymn to Mercury"—completed at the same time as "Ode to the West Wind"—in which Mercury builds a lyre out of a living thing, this time a tortoise: "So come with me, and though it has been said / That you alive defend from magic power, / I know you will sing sweetly when you're dead."[59] As it happens, the lyre does defend Mercury, reconciling him with his brother Apollo, whose sacred cows he has stolen, and staying the judgment of their father Zeus. "By the might / Of winning music" Mercury subdues Apollo "to his mightier will," and in a final conciliatory gesture offers his instrument to Apollo as recompense for his crime, much like Shelley offers the guitar (and poem) to Jane.[60]

As Shelley's appropriation of the Homeric hymn indicates, "this idol" is the literal guitar being given to Jane, but through an implied chain of metonymic substitutions, it is also the fabled lyre of "Ode to the West Wind" and, by extension, the poem itself. The poem thus allegorizes its creation out of the aural world. Like the resonant wood composing the guitar, all of the sounds available to it in its pre-formed state are contained in its formal fabric: they are the potential harmonies to be drawn out by its reader:

> The artist wrought this loved guitar,
> And taught it justly to reply
> To all who question skillfully
>
> . . .
>
> For it had learnt all harmonies
> Of the plains and of the skies,
> Of the forests and the mountains,
> And the many-voiced fountains
>
> (lines 58–60, 65–68)

And even as it narrates its own creation, the poem adumbrates its potential and anticipates its ideal reader: just as Mercury's magic turtle is repurposed for reconciliation, the poem implies that Shelley's gift will at once buttress his friendship with Jane and allow her to voice, like Apollo, "its highest holiest tone" (line 89).

59. Shelley, *Posthumous Poems, 1824* (New York: Woodstock Books, 1991), stanza 6, lines 2–4.

60. Shelley, *Posthumous Poems*, stanza 71, lines 2–3.

This last point bears further consideration. For it no longer seems that Shelley will "by the incantation of this verse" kindle new feeling in his audience. He has surrendered that agential authority to Jane, and he has left it to her to discover the true capabilities of the materials before her. Indeed he may never have even read the poem to Jane: just the opposite, he weaves into the poem a series of displacement mechanisms distancing him from his text and from any implied involvement in authorship or performance. He stages the opening stanza as a reenactment of *The Tempest*; he disguises the process of poetic composition allegorically, casting it as the transmutation of a tree into a guitar at the hands of an unnamed maker; he borrows his materials, like the extant harmonies contained in the tree's fabric, from another poet, namely Homer; and he leaves us to imagine the scene of reconciliation, as well as the moment of performance, that Homer articulates more directly.

Perhaps Wolfson is therefore right in claiming that Shelley's scripting of Jane here, his implicit delimitation of the effects of her performance, and his self-evacuation from the poem's creative site all index his deep anxiety over publicity, over the status of his poems as received and multiply interpreted objects. Yet her hypothesis fails to adequately consider the relationship between the poem's highly wrought form and its fascination with the process by which poetry's natural ingredients become social instruments. After all, Ross Wilson observes, its "imagination of the relation between animating agent, natural material, and artistic work" assumes "the fecundity," the productive, responsive potency, "of mere matter."[61] If poets use rhythm and order to make chaos mean, then both Shelley's "Hymn to Mercury" and "With a Guitar. To Jane" are obvious formal instantiations of that idea. The former is written in ottava rima, and the latter in relatively consistent iambic tetrameter couplets. In both cases, heavily ordered, inherited formal systems carapace an allegory of poetry's (or a poem's) genesis, its derivation from the nonhuman world of objects, its deployment as an instrument for human good still endowed with the (improved) qualities of the natural world that bore it. And as "With a Guitar. To Jane" more obviously shows, both poems are conscious of the extrinsic operations of nature prior to human involvement. Shelley's dual sense that the sleeping trees dream of other natural phenomena and that *the* tree that becomes Jane's guitar "had learnt all harmonies / of the plains and of the skies" is not a mere flight of the imagination in this context. It marks his perception of the otherness of objects, but even as it does so, it *presumes* their responsiveness to human touch. To turn a tree into a guitar or a turtle into a lyre, in Shelley's sense, is not in either case to make the creative tools sedimented in nature mean or do something other than what they do naturally. Rather it is to translate those bits of fiber and sound into a compatible and comparable human idiom.

61. Wilson, *Shelley and the Apprehension of Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 112.

If the metrical and rhyming structure of "With a Guitar. To Jane" complements its thematic content by mirroring the humanizing and re-ordering of nature's instruments, the predominance of lists in the poem renders its controlling allegory still more effective by harnessing what Baudelaire calls poetry's *sorcellerie évocatoire*.[62] It is a poem that "seduces by lists"—to borrow Jonathan Culler's characterization of Gerard Manley Hopkins's "The Golden Echo."[63] Through its mesmeric use of parataxis, anaphora, and isocolon it draws us into a lilting, rhythmic enumeration of the dreams of trees in their winter sleep, of the forest songs that its subject guitar has absorbed. Although this sort of "verbal froth" indexes the "enchantment always at work in lyric, even when poems thematically resist or debunk enchantment," as Culler argues it does in his reading of "The Golden Echo," in this case, Shelley is not resisting so much as directing the sound effects of lyric.[64] The poem turns "the catalogue of the form of the creations of Poetry," the chaos of nature's audible materials ordered by poets throughout history, into an instrument of mesmerization. And in so doing, it conflates the two separate forms of incantation present in "Ode to the West Wind," more intimately fusing lyric's somatic effect with a set of social and political motivations. Yet the fact that Shelley kept this poem private and unpublished—giving it only to Jane, leaving it for her to speak—suggests that he perhaps still sensed the ineluctable otherness of his medium, the way in which even in his most explicit attempt to place them on a human trajectory, the sounds available to him in nature remained resistant. Timothy Morton is therefore right to point out that "like Heidegger's Van Gogh shoes, [Jane's] guitar resonates with other entities," yet "these entities do not illustrate a human world. Rather they evoke the nonhuman: forests wet with rain and dew, the hills from which the trees grow, rain."[65] Nevertheless what Morton identifies as Shelley's observation on a discursive level is more accurately understood as the poem's hidden material agonism. For even as Shelley acknowledges the separate "objecthood" of the natural things conversing behind his back, he attempts to familiarize them formally and semantically, molding the very symbol of their enchanting, lyrical difference into a testimony of affinity. The poem incants against incantation; it hypnotizes us into believing that lyric's fundamental hypnotism bespeaks something other than its essential otherness. In one sense, it thus recalls the history of "resonant object[s]" (among them Jane's guitar itself), which were collected by admirers of the Romantics.[66] These objects, in Judith Pascoe's reading, constantly eluded

62. See Culler, *Theory*, 173.
63. Culler, *Theory*, 179.
64. Culler, *Theory*, 180, 174.
65. Morton, "Object-Oriented Defense," 218.
66. Judith Pascoe, *The Hummingbird Cabinet: A Rare and Curious History of Romantic Collectors* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 2.

attempts at converting them into "definitive evidence."[67] They remind us of "the obduracy of objects," the way they "float free of their possessors and come to exist in inscrutable isolation."[68] Yet the poem at the same time reveals the special dynamism of the textual object: as discursive and sonic, it may thematically suppress its own sonic nature.

As we have seen gifting, translation, formal control, and directed incantation are four key Shelleyan strategies for occluding lyric's evocation of the nonhuman in "Hymn to Mercury" and "With a Guitar. To Jane." Each of these reemerge in condensed form in an often overlooked lyric composed for Jane, "To Jane." The poem describes one of Jane's performances on her guitar through an extended analogy between the moonlight that gives "soft splendour" to "Heaven" and Jane's voice animating the otherwise soulless strings of her instrument. It concludes with these lines:

> No leaf will be shaken
> While the dews of your melody scatter
> Delight.
> 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.
>
> (lines 16–24)

Here Jane's voice is a translating mechanism, mellifluously constellating sights, sounds, and human feelings. Like Shelley's words being scattered among mankind in "Ode to the West Wind," Jane diffuses a pleasure commensurate with her capacity to blend the extrinsic objects of sense into her own voice. Shelley ornaments this act of translation and transmutation metrically, transitioning from a foreign meter typically associated with Greek lyric to one more suited for English, from the anapestic second line marking the first seven tercets ("Sing again, with your dear voice revealing") to the iambic second line in the final tercet ("Where music and moonlight and feeling"). It is in precisely this transition from anapest to iamb, from alien to native meter, that we find an abbreviated, paratactic list reminiscent of the longer tabulation found in "With a Guitar. To Jane," one that again invites us to chant the confraternity of objects and selves: "music *and* moonlight *and* feeling." Thus while Jessica Quillin argues that "though private by design, [the poem] nevertheless

67. Pascoe, *Hummingbird*, 23.
68. Pascoe, *Hummingbird*, 23.

exploits the more public nature of lyric and the communicativeness of music to support [Shelley's] holistic vision of universal change," it is the very question that lyric poses in public that Shelley evades in and through the poem: can the poet's political ideas find a corroborating voice in the alien tongue that mediates them?[69]

While this question is by no means unique to Shelley or his poetry, I have argued that it was nevertheless one that troubled Shelley as he approached his untimely death. It shaped his later lyrics into artifacts of political anxiety, as well as ciphers of a more elemental fear that the medium in which he had placed so much faith might be non-responsive. And so having followed the echo of a dream "down, down" into the lexical heart of lyric, Shelley sought both to humanize and displace "the melodies of birds and bees / The murmuring of summer seas, / And pattering rain and breathing dew" with a guitar, giving the poetic corollaries of those mysterious sounds to Jane to serialize and render sensible (lines 71–73).

Just days before he died Shelley had a vision of Edward and Jane drowned but somehow animate, their voices chanting "get up Shelley the sea is flooding the house & it is all coming down."[70] It is tempting to interpret Shelley's consequent terror—Edward recalls in his journal that Shelley woke "the whole house" with his screams—as evidence that he had seen something more profound in the dead-but-alive, defamiliarized specters of Jane and Edward than the usual biographical glosses have accounted for: perhaps he had been finally forced to watch the performance that he so actively avoided in his poems to Jane, to accept the lyric "I's" demonstration of its difference.[71] In any case, the event provides an apt figure for the drama of witness and avoidance that Shelley's later lyrics stage as they at once conscript and conceal in fable and form their generic secrets. Precisely how Shelley's discomfiture with the alterity and unreliability of lyric affected the overall political, economic, and psychosocial aspects of his life and work remains to be seen. But in identifying the priority of these issues in any "critique of [Shelleyan] form"—to borrow the subtitle to Levinson's *The Romantic Fragment Poem*—I hope to have offered a heuristic model that interrogates the myths of lyric genesis that precede questions of authorial control and readerly complicity in Shelley's poetry, the mechanisms of resistance designed to suppress the voice of a nature that haunted him.

Centuries after Shelley pinned his note to Jane's guitar, the mountain "harmonies" he manipulated continue to change. The Mont Blanc glacier

69. Quillin, *Shelley and the Musico-Poetics of Romanticism* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2012), 144.

70. Holmes, *The Pursuit*, 727.

71. Holmes, *The Pursuit*, 727.

is collapsing.[72] And its imminent disappearance recalls not only the "threat of subjective extinction" Shelley faced in the vale, but also the cycle of death and rebirth implied by the "unresting sound" of nature that he avoided in his later lyrics. The irrevocable altering of the glacial landscape eliminates and introduces sonic textures: the roar not of water, but of glacial implosion, the echoes not of caverns but of exposed rock. These are productions catalyzed by and operating beyond our modes of relating to nature. And they alert us to how lyric, in sequestering the voice from the impingement of the nonhuman, might initiate patterns of destruction even as it offers novel approaches to the nature of sound.

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72. Iliana Magra, "Giant Glacier on Mont Blanc Is in Danger of Collapse, Experts Warn," *The New York Times*, September 25, 2019: https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/25/world/europe/glacier-italy-climate-change.html.

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