

THE TRIUMPH MOTIF IN SHELLEY'S *TRIUMPH OF LIFE*

By

WENDY LOZANO

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This thesis examines how Percy Shelley uses the Roman triumph motif in the poem *The Triumph of Life* to criticize religious and monarchical institutions of power. The Roman triumph's social and political ideals provide the framework for Shelley's criticism of life in nineteenth century Europe. The poem itself, following the model of Petrarch's *Trionfi*, depicts a triumphal procession with a personified figure of Life, who represents the negative effects of institutional power, in a horse drawn chariot parading her victory over humanity to a single bystander in a dream vision. Shelley divides his poem into five dream narratives or "triumphs." This thesis argues that each narrative constitutes part of a journey that the poem's narrator takes to challenge and usurp Life's victory over humanity. Each narrative imaginatively mimics the order of a Roman triumphal procession, from the narrator's perspective, and parades the narrator's triumph symbolically to the reader as if he or she were witnessing a procession in progress. The triumph was such a large part of Roman life that when Christianity became the established religion in the late Roman republic, Christians adapted it and its complex ideals to celebrate god as conqueror and savior of humanity. Shelley's poem critiques Christianity, but the poem's underlying humanitarian focus can be understood through the triumph's later, secular adaptation into Carnival parade *tableaux vivants* which became the inspiration for the Tarot in

the late Middle Ages. Shelley's cosmic symbolism in the poem draws from the same tradition of symbolism that comprises the Tarot. This thesis uses the twenty-two trump cards of the Tarot ("Major Arcana"), whose symbolism deal with the underlying questions of human existence, to essentially "read" the narrator's journey in the poem, from the dawn awakening that floods the landscape with light at the beginning to the vale of shadows that ends the poem in a simulation of the sacrifice that occurred at the end of a Roman triumph.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Thomas Payne, in *The Roman Triumph* (1962), describes a Roman triumph as a combination of “[m]yths, superstitions, strange religions from abroad, traditions so old that no one knew their origin, [and] customs so ancient that men could hardly understand why they existed” (14-15). Percy Shelley’s poem *The Triumph of Life* embraces the cultural history of the Roman triumph and the thirteen hundred year period separating the last official triumph from his life in nineteenth century Europe. The subject of Shelley’s poem is human life and the myriad of old and new influences that compete to give it meaning. Life, the poem’s personified subject and conqueror, is a shrouded figure with no conscious engagement with the effect she has on humanity. Seated in her horse-drawn chariot, she embodies the social influences that control human life. Shelley emphasizes her passivity to depict a similar passivity in humanity’s response to her influence through her nemesis, the narrator, whose presence in the poem challenges her victory. The theme of Life’s triumph is intimately associated with sleep, death, memory, and a sense of inescapable renewal (related to history, literature, and the power of the imagination), all of which intermingle spatially and temporally in the poem. Shelley notably combines Petrarch’s six triumphs—Love, Chastity, Death, Fame, Time, and Eternity—into the narrative development of the poem using the power of symbolism and metaphor exclusively to convey meaning. He uses the Roman triumph “and the thousand fantasies [that] . . . subtly influenced it” (Payne 15) to elevate the impact of his symbolism and to criticize the triumph’s social and political ideals as they have filtered through history. Shelley’s conqueror, unlike the personified figures in Petrarch’s *Trionfi*, has already fought the war on life, won, and is on display in celebrating her victory and its spoils to an empty arena that ambiguously privileges the ramifications of the aftermath of her battle in the narrator’s dream.

Shelley, following Petrarch's model, manipulates the medieval practice of a narrator having a revelatory moral experience in a dream vision to emphasize Life's domain over thought in the poem. The narrator and Life are the only physically passive figures at the beginning of the poem. They both represent two different aspects of thought: Life's is her use of arbitrary symbols of glory and power to control the human mind—"Mitres and helms and crowns, or wreathes of light, / Signs of thought's empire over thought" (211)—and the narrator's is the battleground of Life's victory over humanity and the realms of memory, hope, dreams, beliefs, and the imagination—all of which are subordinated into passivity by Life and the social structures she represents that codify human experience. The narrator's dawn "waking dream" (42) represents the lifespan of humanity in the implied course of a day, from sunrise to sunset. From the empty dawn landscape at the beginning of the poem to Shelley's continual revision of the dawn theme in his use of similes and questions and answers, his own manipulation of symbolism in the poem is Life's—and by implication, the narrator's (and modernity's)—battle weapon. Symbolism, in all its manifestations, is the source of both good and evil in the poem. In its negative form, it defers the positive relationship between reality and imagination to a controlled, idealistic place outside of an individual's control, and it creates mental passivity. Shelley allies this type of symbolism with the falsehoods of institutions and figures in social positions of power. In its positive form, symbolism helps to preserve the relationship between reality and imagination and can be the vehicle for the return to classical ideals and human creativity. The larger framework of the Roman triumph and its numerous cultural influences hold this interplay of diametric forces in place for every image in the poem subject to the play of differences between each positive and negative extreme. The *Triumph of Life* ultimately criticizes institutions in positions of power for harnessing and corrupting symbolic power to

advance their own aims. Shelley, an atheist, deeply concerned with the social ills of nineteenth century life under the control of religious institutions and monarchical rulers, specifically criticizes Christianity and its appropriation of the triumph's ideals and pagan motifs. The poem's brilliance, however, is that Shelley adopts the same practice to advance his cause of shedding light on the problems humanity faces. He uses the mysterious ritual of the triumph as a catalyst to unleash its creative forces in the dual and dueling triumphs between Life's hold on human thought and the narrator's efforts to dislodge it with a truth whose source is the power of the human will, imagination, allegory, and myth.

Even when the Romans stopped believing in their gods, the Roman triumph was so deeply entrenched in popular culture that its transition from a religious ritual to a secular celebration in the late Middle Ages was partly advanced by the “[p]apal processions[, which] consciously imitated it” (Payne 213) and the church's adaptation of the triumph using the pagan practice of personifying moral concepts in allegorical battle scenes between virtues and vices. Later adaptations of the Roman, Christian, and allegorical triumphs became associated with the merriment of carnival parades, where actors and acrobats performed biblical scenes (known as morality plays) in moving *tableaux vivants* that replaced the banners depicting battle scenes in the original triumphal procession and were, in fact, as Gertrude Moakley in *The Tarot Cards Painted by Bonifacio Bembo* explains, the inspiration for the twenty-two trump cards (Major Arcana) in the Tarot (originally called “triumphs” (*trionfi*)) (13). Carnival morality plays combined Christian and pagan themes with celebration. When these plays were embodied visually in the Tarot in the late Middle Ages, they became a divinatory tool for revealing the universal forces that govern peoples' lives. The Roman triumph motif, like Life's guided chariot

in the poem, is Shelley's own divinatory tool for displaying its problematic combination of ideals as they have filtered through history into western society.

Shelley's poem, while it criticizes any institutionalized representation of power, clearly borrows from the Christian doctrine of a savior arriving to guide humanity to salvation in his early imagery of the dawn landscape opening up to deliver the narrator, as if he is the figure of Christ and successor of god (the sun), before he falls into the visionary dream comprising the rest of the completed poem. The battle scene in *The Triumph of Life* is the struggle of the equivalent of the human soul against the social forces of power that govern and mold life. Shelley's poem aspires to the revolutionary social change that fueled much of his earlier poetry, but, like the allegories of virtues battling vices in Christian iconography and the dueling forces of symbolic meaning underlying the Tarot, he creates a moving procession of scenes and images ("triumphs") to tell a story about a historical battle between the negative social influences of institutional power and the strength of the human will and imagination to resist them. Shelley imaginatively models his procession of "triumphs" in *The Triumph of Life* on the Roman and Christian triumphs and Carnival parade *tableaux vivants*, with metaphor performing the amazing feats of the actors and acrobats who called out to characters in different scenes and jumped from stage to stage to play different roles as the procession passed on.

CHAPTER 2  
SHELLEY'S TRIUMPHAL ICONOGRAPHY: THE TRIUMPH OF SUN AND NIGHT

Although the details of triumphal processions changed over time, as Mary Beard in her study *The Roman Triumph* (2007) explains, the triumphal route began early in the morning outside of Rome's city limits in a region called Campus Martius (meaning "Field of Mars")—an area officially outside of the lawful jurisdiction of the city (the *pomerium*). The procession then passed through the triumphal arch (*porta triumphalis*) and into the city, where it followed a prescribed route that ended at the Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus on the Capitoline hill for an animal sacrifice and religious ceremony to honor the gods. The conqueror himself wore a purple *tunica palmate* with palm leaves embroidered on it and a "*toga picta* emblazoned with stars" (Payne 41) to signify his authority as conqueror. The procession was headed by senate officials, followed by musicians, the spoils of war and sacrificial animals, then the captives and their relatives (arrayed in rich attire to emphasize the extent of the conqueror's conquest). After the captives, the conqueror rode in his chariot with a slave holding "a gold crown above his head and whisper[ing] into his ear 'Remember that you are mortal'" (Payne 41) to remind him that his power was not in league with the gods. The male children of the conqueror and high ranking army officials followed immediately behind the conqueror's chariot. The soldiers, wearing civilian togas, were the last figures on display in the procession.

While Shelley doesn't follow all the details of a Roman triumphal procession, his poem clearly begins in an open plane, outside of a city or town, much in the same manner as a Roman procession began outside of Rome's city limits on the Campus Martius. Shelley imagines the gathering of a triumph's participants (his army of characters, as such) on the Campus Martius as the cosmic forces of the sun and night—with the stars, Venus, and the moon, playing subsidiary

roles—and with the earth itself in the position of the protected jurisdiction of the *pomerium*:

Swift as a spirit hastening to his task  
Of glory and of good, the Sun sprang forth  
Rejoicing in his splendour, and the mask

Of darkness fell from the awakened Earth. (1-4)

The sun in these lines is an idealistic expression of power with all the trappings of “splendour” (3) and “glory” (2) that define power and its influence. Donald H. Reiman, in *Shelley’s ‘Triumph of Life’: A Critical Study*, explains that Shelley differentiated between the sun within and outside the earth’s atmosphere in his poetry: “At the universal level the Sun signifies the Deity; in the world of human experience it represents Imagination, the divine in man (15). Shelley’s cosmic imagery clearly identifies the sun with the image and power of a universal god. The personified sun gains power, presence, impetus, and a sense of inertia that contains these forces because of Shelley’s energetic description and the lack of a narrating presence to put the scene in relative perspective “in the world of human experience” (Reiman 15). David Fontana in *The Secret Language of Symbols* (1993) explains that the sun symbol in ancient civilization was worshipped as a divinity:

The skies, for ancient people, were a screen on which they projected their most profound speculations and spiritual needs. . . . Its active, creative energy was considered to be a male attribute, and because of its high position in the heavens and the clarity of its light, the sun was regarded as all-seeing, and was worshipped as a (mostly masculine) god in a number of civilizations. . . . Even in Christianity the sun was felt to be a worthy symbol of God, standing for the impartiality with which he bestows gifts on all people (‘He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good’). (120)

Shelley’s combination of pagan and religious themes in the personified sun as deity, at “the universal level” (Reiman 15), can be interpreted as setting the stage for the upper scope of associations he addresses in the poem, which deal with time, speed, eternity, and a new awakening for humanity.

The interplay between the sun, its purpose, the night, and the sense of speed that manipulates both in the first four lines is reinforced and focused by the division between its two tasks “Of glory and of good” (2). The sun, elevated and personified as a symbol of “glory” (2), can be associated with the negative effects of pride or, more specifically in Shelley’s poem, evil. Shelley highlights the potentially negative connotations of its power with the fleeing night and the majesty of the sun’s implied ability to cause its fall; as if the night is the Roman slave holding the golden crown above the sun-conqueror’s head to remind him of his mortal task of “good” (2). The sun’s task of performing “good” (2) is an opposing personification—a moral one—which draws it and its influence into the realm of humanity, and the opposite idea of mutual engagement and propagation attached to Shelley’s later description of the sun breaking over the horizon to give birth to light (“the birth / Of light” (6-7)) on earth. The position of the rising sun is the first scene in the poem where the metaphorical forces of light and darkness gather their might for display in the events (or “triumphs”) that follow. In this vein, Shelley’s sun and night (and their attributes, light and darkness) could be interpreted as parental figures that hold in reserve all the participants of Shelley’s triumph waiting to enter Rome’s city limits (the narrator’s mind) and expand into metaphor through the narrator and his “waking dream” (42): the senators are the universal laws of the cosmos; the musicians are the waking elements of the earth; the captives are the night as a metaphor for thought, the domain of Life’s victory; the conqueror is, at this stage of the poem, god; and his whole army is the collective effect of the sun’s might and the implied “good” (2) it represents. Shelley sets his procession in motion by imagining the sun lighting “The smokeless alters of the mountain snows” (5) on earth and waking the Ocean, who, in turn, sings an “orison” (7) to spur the birds into singing a “matin lay” (8), as the musicians and trumpeters that began a traditional triumph celebration.

The sun's power in the first scene (or "triumph") of Shelley's poem can also be interpreted in relation to the first trump card of the Visconti-Sforza Tarot, known as tarocchi (the zero numbered card), where the Carnival King—the first "and least of the [twenty-two] triumphs" (Moakley 13)—used to be paraded in procession on the last day of medieval Carnivals. The whole Carnival procession's goal was "to lead [the Carnival King] to his mock execution. Moakley explains that the execution "is a vestige of the ancient Saturnalia, when the man who had acted as king of the revels was actually put to death at the end of his reign. This practice continued in part of the Roman army well into Christian times" (55). The later adaptation of the Carnival King into The Fool, in other Tarot trump card designs, Theodor Laurence states in *How the Tarot Speaks to Modern Man* (1972), designates The Fool as

'the Beginning of All Things.' It is the initial and final balance of opposites" (Laurence 26). The Fool is portrayed as about to step off a cliff. He, therefore, "symbolizes the Spirit of God about to descend into nothing—falling from the cliff—at the beginning of creation. . . . The Fool-nature commences at the moment when a man enters upon the quest for a fuller life and a deeper understanding of life. The Tarot speaks of this quest. (26-27)

The symbolism of Shelley's sun in the position of the first Tarot trump card is also related to the wheel of fate, which The Fool breaks out of by taking the next step into the chaos of nothingness, where "[o]rder proceeds from chaos in an orderly fashion, but not without the active participation of man himself. . . [, who has the power to break free] in the form of will and power of choice" (Laurence 27). Shelley's overt presentation of the sun's glory at the beginning of the poem—whether on purpose or simply through the sun's symbolic history—significantly draws from its Tarot symbolism as the first trump card, which, chronologically, lays the foundation for the remaining twenty-one cards, particularly when "will and the power of choice" (Laurence 27) become attributes of the narrator who succeeds the sun.

By portraying the sun as having tasks and not embodying them as external attributes until they take effect inside the earth's atmosphere, Shelley is adapting ancient beliefs of the sun's ambivalent nature to carry that ambivalence into his poem, and he is giving his symbolism a will and purpose to act with in the poem. The night plays a similarly ambivalent but crucial role in its absence in the poem. Shelley, for example, refers to the night as a "mask" (3) (the "mask / Of darkness f[a]ll[s]" (3-4)) rather than the physical phenomena of night, which allows for the possibility that night is still present despite its physical absence in the poem, and that the light of the sun is unmasking something dark and hidden that already exists in the light of day. The night is obviously the counterpart of day in the poem. It, and all of its figurative manifestations, like the sun's refracted light within the earth's atmosphere, competes with day in every image in the poem. For example, the narrator identifies with the night by falling into a "waking dream" (42) in the next scene of the poem. Night is also a symbolic allusion to the thoughts the narrator hides when he introduces himself by announcing that his "thoughts . . . must remain untold" (21) at the apex of the dawn. It is also the substance of the shadows that emanate from Life's victims in the narrator's dream. Night, Matilde Battistini explains in *Symbols and Allegories in Art*, "is the primordial mother of the cosmic principles" (68):

According to the *Orphic Hymns*, she joined with the wind and laid a silver egg (the moon), out of which was born Eros-Phanes, the desire that propels the universe. Sky, Earth, Sleep, and Death are considered her children. As the universal womb, Night is linked to the watery element and the world underground, where seeds germinate. Because of these qualities, it is the wellspring of possibilities, which are only fully realized in the light of day. Night is portrayed as a woman wrapped in a black veil and surrounded by sleep-inducing poppies. Night also represents the dimension of dream and Eros and is the portal of the realm of fantasy and the occult. (Battistini 68)

Shelley clearly draws from classical mythology in his images of the sun and night to open up "the wellspring of [their] possibilities," which, the poem implies, can only be "fully realized in the light of day" (Battistini 68) and the revelation of truth that they, together, can reveal. The

“desire that propels the universe” (Battistini 68) and is hidden (like night) is a key aspect of the narrator’s “thoughts which must remain untold” (21) as they unfold in his “waking dream” (42). Shelley represents the two opposing images of light and darkness side by side in the heavens, outside the jurisdiction of earth’s atmosphere, in direct relation to the triumphal procession beginning outside the protective walls of Rome, to create a gateway out of their combined power into the meaning of the poem, in the same manner that Christians and Carnival *tableaux vivants* channeled stories through figures representing social hierarchies (kings or lords, queens or ladies, emperors, knights, knaves, merchants, etc.) to depict (and promote) the moral ideals of medieval life.

The image of half day and half night that appears at the exact moment that the sun triumphs over night becomes the equivalent of the triumphal arch (*porta triumphalis*) that was the passageway into the city in a Roman triumph. The narrator comes into existence in the poem as the sun’s Christ-like successor at the exact moment that night and day form an arch over him at dawn. The narrator, as successor of the sun, is part of the “mortal mould” (17) who

Rise[s] as their father rose, to bear

The portion of the toil which he of old  
Took as his own and then imposed on them. (17-19)

After the narrator appears in the poem to take on his “portion of the toil” (18) passed on to him, he immediately allies himself with the night by stating that his “thoughts . . . must remain untold” (21). He also identifies those thoughts with the stars that have been newly laid to rest (I “Had kept as wakeful as the stars that gem / The cone of night, now they were laid asleep” (22-23)) when he adopts a reclined position, as if to rest, next to “an old chestnut” (25) tree. His passivity perhaps enacts the toil passed on to him (“Of glory and of good” (2)) physically, but it also opens up the possibilities that lie in his unconscious through sleep. Battistini states that

Christ can be “represented in the garb of a Roman emperor, as the Good Shepherd, as the judge of his throne, or in the guise of a warrior struggling with the demon” (108). The narrator perhaps plays all of these roles in Shelley’s poem, but it is his identification with night, rest, and the history of events that kept him awake at night, which he cannot tell the reader about, that can be interpreted as a resistance to his role as the successor of the sun in the image of Christ bearing the “toil which” the sun “imposed on” him (18, 19). Shelley implies that he is both the successor of the sun and child of night (Sleep). He embodies the narrator’s resistance symbolically to emphasize the new path that the narrator is indeed taking in the space of the fallen night—this path is a physically passive path, which also allies him with Life who is equally passive in her triumphal chariot and outwardly hidden in black robes, as if she were also one of Night’s children (Death). The narrator, however, is guiding his thoughts in his “waking dream” (42) into Life’s representative domain of control (thought)—he is carrying on the will of the sun (the Carnival King or The Fool) and exercising his “power of choice” (Laurence 27) by identifying with the night. He will not tell his thoughts, Shelley implies; he will show and suggest them, so the reader, too, can think for him or herself and make his or her own associations from the images and their meaning in the poem.

The metaphorical figure of the cross that Shelley presents of the narrator between heaven, earth, night, and day, solidifies his role in the poem as a Christ-like savior of humanity in the implied form of a sacrifice:

before me fled  
The night; behind me rose the day; the Deep  
  
Was at my feet, and Heaven above my head  
When a strange trance upon my fancy grew. (26-28)

In these lines' obvious adaptation of Christ on the cross, Shelley suggests, that the narrator is a sacrifice. His sacrifice can therefore also be interpreted as the sacrifice at the end of the first "triumph" of the poem: the sun delivering his successor, the narrator, to humanity. The image of Christ, Battistini states, represents many "ancient esoteric traditions and cosmogonic symbols from prior eras . . . . His appearance on Earth coincides with the beginning of a new spiritual order. . . . As redeemer, he symbolizes the triumph of life over death, eternal salvation, and the liberation from Original Sin" (108). This "new spiritual order," Shelley clearly implies through the narrator's "waking dream" (42), is the realm of thought that Life has some role in restricting. The narrator's role in Tarot symbolism would be The Magician, the second trump card (identified by the number one), who represents the values of The Fool or Carnival King as well as his own:

absolute being, which contains—and from which emanates—the infinity of all possibilities. . . . The commencement of all work is its formulation. Before the universe became manifest it was conceived with the spaces of the Divine Mind. Then it was launched into objective evolution by the power of creative thought. (Laurence 145)

The narrator as The Magician is precisely in the role of using his creative thought, literally, within the trance-like state he falls into to challenge Life's victory, and when he falls into the realm of dreams in the next "triumph" of the poem. The Magician card

is a dual sign [which] shows the descent of power and light, drawn from things above and animating things below. The ensemble suggests the possession and communication of the powers and gifts of the Spirit. It shows man as the link between the spiritual and the physical. Thus does The Magician card represent the creative energy being directed intelligently. (Laurence 146)

The basis of the narrator's ability to link "the spiritual and the physical" is his ability to direct his creative energy intelligently (Laurence 146) when he is able to both dream and be conscious in his "waking dream" (42).

This directed “creative energy” is also represented by the narrator’s ability to combine the experiences of the past with the present in preparation for the future. Shelley accomplishes this formally with his use of *terza rima*. Narratively, however, he binds the past to the future by preceding every new stage of the narrator’s dream with a recollection of the previous one. Shelley establishes a pattern of transitions, in this manner, between new developments and completions in the narrator’s understanding four times in the poem. These transitions simulate triumphal arches offering passageways into the next “triumph.” In the first transition, the narrator’s identification with night is realized when he falls into “a strange trance” (29) and begins to see everything through a “transparent” “shade” (31, 30) that “glimmer[s]” (33) like a “veil of light . . . drawn / O’er evening hills” (32-33). His reality before the dawn then becomes a recollection that he needs to affirm to himself: “I knew / That I had felt the freshness of that dawn, / Bathed in the same cold dew my brow and hair / And sate as thus upon that slope of lawn” (34-36). This recollected reality seems to be the impetus for moving from a trance-like state—which he refers to as “that trance of wonderous thought” (41)—to a “new Vision” (40) that is passively “rolled” on the narrator’s “brain” (40). This “new Vision” (40) is ironically passive in relation to the narrator’s assertive recollection of the dawn in the preceding lines. Shelley suggests that the combination of the narrator’s identification with the sun, the night sky, his memories, and his sleep-like state have opened up his mind to the prophetic forces of dreams: “involuntary products of the psyche” (Fontana 46). Fontana writes that the “communicative power of dreams has been acknowledged for millennia: the ancients credited them with power of prophecy, and in Egypt the gods were believed to speak through the dreams of the Pharaohs” (46). Shelley’s reference to a “new Vision” (40) suggests that the narrator’s “waking dream” (42) is prophetic, but this idea is complicated by the narrator’s obvious, directed, consciousness

and the transitions which bind the past to the present and future between each narrative “triumph” and serve to emphasize the importance of history in decisions made for the future. The narrator’s new vision is the transition that leads to the second “triumph,” where the rest of the events in the poem occur. In the second “triumph,” Rome is the narrator’s mind in his “waking dream” (42). The cast of characters can be imagined as moving through the triumphal arch of night and day into his dream, with the accompaniment of the “Ocean’s orison” (7) and the birds’ “matin lay” (8), where Rome, its laws, its glory, and its problems, as they have filtered through history, become the creative space of the narrator’s prophetic vision and Shelley’s imaginative triumphal procession. The second “triumph” displays the wonder and confusion of the narrator’s spoils of war (Life’s captives) and the figures who will be sacrificed in honor of the gods at the end of the poem.

CHAPTER 3  
SECOND TRIUMPH: LIFE'S CAPTIVES AND THE NARRATOR'S SPOILS OF WAR

In his “waking dream” (42), the narrator experiences

a great stream  
Of people there . . . hurrying to and fro  
Numerous as gnats upon the evening gleam  
All hastening onward, yet none seemed to know  
Whither he went, or whence he came, or why  
He made one of the multitude. (44-49)

These people represent all levels of society: “Old age and youth, manhood and infancy” (52).

Their collective confusion describes a chaos that Shelley allies with death in his similes of the crowds being as “Numerous as gnats” (46)—Petrarch refers to crowds of people as “gnats” in “The Triumph of Death” (Reiman and Fraistat 485n)—and individuals gliding in a collective sway of movement like “One of the million leaves of summer’s bier” (51); an obvious allusion to Dante’s metaphor of the dead souls descending like leaves in Canto III of *Inferno*. The people in the crowd are passively moving with the rhythms of the people around them. Shelley implies that they are not thinking for themselves. Rather than notice the peaceful natural scenery around them that could offer them some relief, they travel along unnatural paths, which, Shelley implies, are the paths of modern society

where flowers never grew;  
And weary with vain toil and faint for thirst  
Heard not the fountains whose melodious dew  
  
Out of their mossy cells forever burst  
Nor felt the breeze which from forest told  
Of grassy paths, and wood lawns interspersed  
  
With overarching elms and caverns cold  
And violet banks where sweet dreams brood, but they  
Pursued their serious folly as of old. (65-73)

The narrator presents an idyllic natural world as an alternative for the crowds’ “vain toil” (66) in these lines. The crowds, however, are too busy in their fight with their fears and their overall

confusion in the mournful “gloom / Of their own shadow” (58-59) or “the shadows the clouds thr[o]w” (63) over them to notice. Shelley addresses the social confusion he depicts poetically in these lines in a letter to Horace Smith (22 June 1822), written during the time he was working on the poem:

It seems to me that things have now arrived at such a crisis as requires every man plainly to utter his sentiments on the inefficacy of the existing religion, no less than political systems, for restraining and guiding mankind. Let us see the truth, whatever that may be. The destiny of man can scarcely be so degraded, that he was born only to die; and if such should be the case, delusions, especially the gross and preposterous ones of the existing religion, can scarcely be supposed to exalt it. If every man said what he thought, it could not subsist a day. But all, more or less, subdue themselves to the element that surrounds them, and contribute to the evils they lament by the hypocrisy that springs from them. (*Letters II*, 470)

The topic of the collective blindness of society bending to the will of figures in positions of power and the social order they impose on humanity is a common theme in Shelley’s letters and in poems such as *Epipsychidion* and *Alastor*. Shelley saw these influences as falsehoods that made humanity complacent. The peoples’ preoccupation with “shadows” (59) in the poem, Shelley suggests, become the sole preoccupation of their lives. These shadows overpower any possibility of relief that might be found in the peaceful confines of nature that the crowds of people are desensitized to in the poem.

The only influence that the multitude seem to be attuned to is the “cold glare” (77) of light “intenser than the noon / But icy cold” (77-78) on a chariot that appears in the narrator’s dream, which, like the people being passively “borne amid the crowd” (50), appears “on the silent storm / Of its own rushing splendor” (86-87). Shelley’s notably combines the themes of light, darkness, and passivity that represent the implied positive influences of the narrator in his “waking dream” (42) into the image of the chariot and its passenger and charioteer in order to represent their power over humanity and life. Life and her chariot, mimicking the role of the conqueror and his pride in a Roman triumph, represent the glory run amok that Shelley criticizes

in “the existing religion” and “political systems” (*Letters II*, 470) of nineteenth century life. The chariot’s light is stronger than the sun’s light at the beginning of the poem: it “obscure[s] with [ ] light / The Sun as he the stars” (78-79). Its excessive light usurps the power that drives mortal life on earth (the sun’s life-giving power) because its light represents the greater influence institutional powers (such as religion and politics) have over humanity. Shelley’s chariot of Life, therefore, represents the power of a conqueror, who has taken on the power of god—the unchecked power that the slave warned of when he held a crown over a conqueror’s head and whispered, “Remember that you are mortal” (Payne 41) in a Roman triumph. The chariot and its light, appropriately out of chronological sequence with the narrator’s journey in the poem, can be likened to The Tower trump card (card sixteen), whose image of flames, a falling crown, and two figures against a black cloudy background obviously depict ruin and chaos. The Tower, however, “is not a material building. Rather, it is the rending of the House of Life, when evil has reigned supreme therein. . . . [I]t is the House of Falsehood which must be destroyed, if a foundation of truth is to be laid” (Laurence 68). Laurence states, on a spiritual plane, “The Tower card expresses the chastisement of pride, the exhaustion of the mind which attempts to penetrate the mystery of God, and the ruin of fortune” (180). Arthur Edward Waite in *The Pictorial Key to the Tarot* suggests it is the “rending of a House of Doctrine” (132). The Tower card also alludes to the Old Testament’s tower of Babel and the consequences of humankind’s attempt to reach heaven. The chariot’s symbolic relationship with The Tower card’s symbolism has significance because it is out of sequence with the path the narrator is following in the poem (the numbers in Tarot symbolism and their sequence are just as important as the symbols themselves), which can be translated to mean that its effect of chaos on the crowds is partially due to its lack of grounding in an identifiable past.

The “mask / Of darkness” (3-4) that the sun usurps in the introduction takes form in the figure of Life and her chariot’s excessive light representing the false guidance of institutional power. The chariot’s excessive light emphasizes the darkness of Life’s “deform[ed]” (88) figure hiding behind “a dusky hood and double cape” (89). Shelley implies that her figure itself is the darkness (or evil) that the sun unmasks at dawn and that the narrator sees in his prophetic vision. Shelley updates the purple regalia of a Roman conqueror, the *tunica palmate* and a “*toga picta* emblazoned with stars” (Payne 41), to two black garments in order to ally her figure with the night and a darkness devoid of stars, with the implication that she is devoid of thought because the narrator’s “thoughts . . . untold” (21) are related to the stars that the sun lays to rest at the beginning of the poem. She resembles Night (in the form of its association with death) wrapped in a black veil and surrounded by sleep-inducing poppies” (Battistini 68). Her dark figure essentially complements the light that the chariot brandishes to excite the crowds into a collective frenzy of adoration, visually, because she represents the death itself of active thought that the crowds emulate by worshipping the glory of her light in a drug-like craze. Her crown is “the cloud like crape” (91) that bends a “faint aetherial gloom / Tempering the light” (92) of the chariot, as if the equivalent slave holding it over a conqueror’s head in a Roman triumph is, here, the natural element of the air, whose whispers, “Remember that you are mortal” (Payne 41), take the form of the “aetherial gloom” that hangs over her. Life’s path in the poem is intricately associated with the narrator’s (they are both Night’s siblings with different relationships to day and its light—the narrator shuns it; Life embraces it). Life’s journey in the poem begins with The High Priestess card, the third trump in a Tarot deck (identified by the number two). The High Priestess is seated and facing forward. A lunar crescent lies among the folds of her robe at

her feet. The breast of her gown has a solar cross, and she wears a crown with a globe in the middle. Laurence states that in

in the ancient Egyptian Tarot, this card is named Veiled Isis—concealed wisdom and knowledge. . . . [Her seated position indicates that she is] seated at the threshold of higher knowledge. The white column to the right of her signifies the power of enlightened will over physical obstacles. The black column represents man’s bondage to his more base nature. The scroll half hidden within the folds of her mantle signifies that only half the truth can be discerned by the physical senses. That ‘there is more to life that meets the eye’ is one of the High Priestess’ messages. Reason, the Tarot speaks, divorced from intuition, can discern only in the realm of effects. Nature’s mysteries are revealed when reason is rewed [sic] to intuition. (34)

In *The Tarot of the Bohemians* (1892), Papus writes that “this second card of the Tarot will express all the ideas of the first [The Magician (the narrator)] conceived negatively” (113). The idea that Life is the negative form of the narrator, with his ability to direct his intelligence between “the spiritual and the physical” (146), in an image of the “sun [his] father” (18), is coincidentally represented in her black robes and hidden figure. The narrator, by contrast, is physically present in the daylight but mentally identifying with night. Life’s role in balancing the disparity between reason and intuition is obviously offset by the beam of her chariot and the “banded” (100) eyes of its charioteer. The High Priestess card’s meaning builds on the previous two trump cards which describe the narrator’s journey. Because Life’s journey begins in the poem with this card, her reason and intuition (according to the lacking influence of The Magician card) are out of balance; therefore, she “can discern only in the realm of effects” (Laurence 34). The narrator’s journey, by contrast, represents The High Priestess card’s positive balance between reason and intuition because his past influences enable this balance—the narrator is not an “Actor or victim” (306) of Life’s triumph, so his experience of her is not governed by her power. The High Priestess’ relationship with the Temple of Isis—Papus describes her as “the

picture of Isis, of Nature, whose veil must not be raised before the profane” (113)—ties her figure with the “shape all light” (352), who appears as her creative counterpart later in the poem.

The moon simile Shelley uses to introduce Life and her chariot is important because the light of the chariot, he implies, derives from the borrowed, reflected light of the sun. This relationship is significant because it combines the symbolism of the sun and the moon to essentially create the vehicle for Life’s victory, suggesting that the sun and moon give birth to Life’s chariot and her power. The chariot is:

Like the young Moon

When on the sunlit limits of the night  
Her white shell trembles amid the crimson air  
And whilst the sleeping tempest gathers might

Doth, as a herald of its coming, bear  
The ghost of her dead Mother, whose dim form  
Bends in dark ether from her infant’s chair. (79-85)

Battistini states that

The moon represents the feminine, passive principle, which is the opposite and complementary to the sun. It is the second most important orb in the universe and governs, with its magnetic powers, the earthly waters and the growth cycles of nature. . . . [T]he virgin Diana (crescent moon) embodies its celestial, ordering function, the queen of Hades, Hecate (new moon), is a negative force, subterranean and aquatic; and two-faced Jana, wife of Janus, guards the gates of Heaven and Hell. (194)

Shelley blends the opposition between the narrator and Life (and male and female) in his simile of the moon and “the dead Mother” (84), who represents the larger black shadow above the lit crescent comprising the chariot. The simile impresses the image of the mother into the space where Life’s figure appears, as if Life’s figure is cut out from the black space that the dead mother occupies. The crescent moon’s association with the goddess Diana also coincides with the Virgin Mary. And, as “the queen of the Apocalypse, the Virgin also expresses the lunar aspect associated with death” (Battistini 194). Additionally, the moon symbol in ancient Egypt

was devoted to the worship of Isis (Battistini 194), who, as the “divine mother and protector” was “the greatest of Egyptian goddesses and possessed immense magical powers” (Fontana 109). The new moon, specifically, symbolizes “the ascent from the underworld (the three days of the dark moon)” (Fontana 121), which seemingly confirms that Shelley is imagining the unconscious influences of Life’s domain over thought, as a form of death, in the light of a day that she also monopolizes, emphasizing the full impact of her control over death and life—later in the poem, Rousseau suggests that the difference between the two states is hard to distinguish, he doesn’t know if life is “The Heaven which [he] imagine[d], or a Hell” (333). Although the events in Shelley’s poem appear to occur in the course of a day, Life’s triumphal procession repeats three times in the poem (from different perspectives), suggesting that Shelley is playing with the details of his symbolism and temporality very subtly in the poem.

Shelley draws out the metaphor of the shadow of the earth on the moon to bind the earth with darkness and death and the sun with misguided power (and life) in the chariot image in order to make Life the inexperienced (virgin) product of their interaction. Shelley packs his image of the chariot and Life with such an abundance of meaning that its excessive light can also be interpreted as an expression of that symbolic excess, historically, in life. The symbolism of the chariot’s new “cold glare” (77), and its supernatural strength, represents a new, but negative, view of reality (or reason) in the speaker’s dream landscape. The chariot and its light redefines the idea Shelley establishes of the sun’s remote power in the introduction to emphasize representation itself as a vehicle for wielding power and authority over humanity on earth. The chariot’s light represents the opposite of the life-giving light that Shelley associates with the imagination, “the divine in man” (Reiman 15). The Moon Tarot card, also appropriately out of sequence with the narrator’s journey in the poem, is the eighteenth card in the Tarot, which

represents a combination of the sixteenth card (The Tower, the chariot and its light) and the second card (The High Priestess, Life):

In divination, The Moon card symbolizes deception, secret enemies, and false friends. Those who respond negatively to the Tower card [the chariot's influence and symbolism] phases of life see enemies all around them. At every turn they blame, accuse, curse, and denounce, but rarely does the accusing finger point to themselves.

The moon card shows two columns flanking a road, forming an entrance. The moon above sheds a pale twilight on the area beyond the gate. In the foreground are a dog, a wolf and a crayfish emerging from the depths. The road leads from the foreground (the world of appearances) to distant heights (the world of reality). The canines typify animal nature and the fears of man in the presence of that entrance when there is only reflected light to guide him. (Laurence 74)

The combination of pagan, Christian, and Tarot symbolism in Shelley's moon simile combines the symbolism of the sun, the narrator, the chariot's light, the figure of Life, and the captive multitude of people in the narrator's vision to express the complexities of "glory" (2) as it manifests itself in society in the mechanic, passive state of the chariot that moves purely on the motion of its visual power and borrowed light, the foregrounded "world of appearances" (Laurence 74).

Life's charioteer, the "Janus-visaged Shadow [that] did assume / The guidance of that wonder-winged team" is a direct reference to the Temple of Janus in ancient Rome, whose doors were kept open in times of war and closed in times of peace. Janus is also the Roman god of "beginnings and endings" (Reiman and Fraistat 486n) and the figure that "guards the gates of Heaven and Hell" (Bastistini 194). Shelley's Janus figure is a "Shadow" (94), which could be an extension of the cloud that hangs low over Life's shape in the implied form of the slave holding a crown over her head. The "Janus-visaged" shadow has four faces with all four sets of eyes banded: "All the four faces of that charioteer / Had their eyes banded" (99-100). The banded eyes imply that the compromised consciousness of the shrouded figure of Life (her

passivity), the narrator's bewilderment at the scene he is witnessing, and the collective disarray of people representing humanity are related. The charioteer's banded eyes also mean that he is directing the chariot aimlessly, with no purposeful beginning or end in sight—implying, also, that Life's rule is similarly baseless and in stasis in its timelessness. Additionally, the banded eyes, in reference to the closed doors of the Temple of Janus, are significant because Shelley is ironically implying that the exterior representation of peace in everyday life is masking an inner turmoil that is very much alive and conscious. Battistini explains that

Quadricephalic [four-headed] beings express either the four-part division of the year into seasons and the correspondence of solstices and equinoxes, or the division of the earth's surface among the four cardinal directions. (166)

The idea that the banded eyes of the charioteer are holding in place the highest point and lowest point of the sun at noon across the summer and winter solstices and the two times in the year when day and night are equal in the spring and late summer equinoxes has fascinating interpretative ramifications for Shelley's manipulation of temporality in the poem, which constantly switches from dawn to noon to evening in each "triumph" to signify the span of human life and history, and Life's timeless authority. Additionally, the cardinal points of north, south, east, and west, that the narrator makes into a cross vertically spanning "Heaven" (28) and "the Deep" (27) and horizontally spanning night and day in the introduction, could also ironically mean that the "Janus-visaged" figure is similarly holding in play the opposing forces of power that glide on the merit and splendor of their representation. In terms of his underlying criticism of the church, Shelley writes, in *A Defense of Poetry*, that "all religions are allegorical or susceptible of allegory, and like Janus have a double face of false and true (4).

Shelley addresses the representational power of the chariot's movement and criticizes it by suggesting that its forward movement has no bearing if the charioteer (with the implication that he is also referring to humanity) cannot see where it came from: "little profit brings / Speed in

the van and blindness in the rear” (100-101). Without hindsight and foresight, Shelley suggests, the charioteer cannot guide Life adequately through time (“of all that is, has been, or will be done” (104)), nor can it “avail the beams that quench the Sun” (102) and direct the chariot’s light in a purposeful manner. Instead, it moves on the motion of its “splendor” with the strength of the “wonder-winged team” (95) of horses, like the collective motion of the crowds move in the suspended stun of the chariot’s light—“Raging around” (111) the chariot captured in a trance of “fierce song and maniac dance” (110). The narrator likens the crowd of people around the chariot to a “jubilee / As when to greet some conqueror’s advance / Imperial Rome poured forth her living sea” (111-113). The “Year of Jubilee was the ‘year of release’ in which slaves were freed [Deuteronomy 15]” (Reiman and Fraistat 487n) and pardoned for their crimes or debts. Shelley likens the jubilation of the crowd ironically to the relief of freedom that slaves felt when pardoned by the church, but the term “those” in the sentence “When Freedom left those who upon the free / Had bound a yoke which soon they stooped to bear” (115-116) refers to Rome itself losing its freedom in the implied history of violence and imprisonment of captives which “bound a yoke” of responsibility to the Romans that “they [and we, Shelley implies,] stooped to bear” (116). The “captive multitude” (119) that energetically follow the chariot are the victims of Life’s triumph, in a simulation of “a triumphal pageant” (118), and they are under the spell of the trappings of her power: “for where’er / The chariot rolled a captive multitude / Was driven” (118-120). They include “those who had grown old in power / Or misery,—all who have their age subdued, / By action or by suffering” (120-122). The captives are those who have held positions of power and influence. The imagery of the chariot moving on the formal volition “Of its own rushing splendor” (87) mimics the volition of human life under her power: the frame of the social statuses of the individuals she rules outlast their mortality—“the trunk survived both

fruit and flower” (124). Shelley includes all figures in positions of power as Life’s captives other than those who resisted “the Conqueror” (129) and “those who put aside the diadem / Of earthly thrones of gems” (132-133) and resisted the glories of authority and wealth. Shelley’s exclusion of figures that resisted the trappings of power—including “they of Athens and Jerusalem” (134)—emphasize his criticism of the trappings of institutional authority and wealth, because, he implies, they have no history beyond the glory of their authority and no “tasks” (2) other than maintaining the trappings of that authority.

The crowds following the chariot also have no real purpose, Shelley implies. The captives “Mix with each other in tempestuous measure” (141) and they “Convulse[] . . . on the rapid whirlwinds spun / Of that fierce spirit” (144-145) “tortured by the agonizing pleasure” (143). Shelley’s imagery coincides with the “carnal sinners of the Second Circle in Dante’s *Inferno*” (Reiman and Fraistat 488n). In a letter to John Gisborne (16 November 1819), Shelley expresses his disdain of the social prejudices that confuse individuals and promote the immoral activities which he embodies in the poem:

As it is, all of us who are worth anything, spend our manhood unlearning the follies, or expiating the mistakes, of our youth. We are stuffed full of prejudices; and our natural passions are so managed, that if we restrain them we grow intolerant and precise, because we restrain them not according to reason, but according to error; and if we do not restrain them, we do all sorts of mischief to ourselves and others. Our imagination and understanding are alike subjected to rules the most absurd. (Letters *II*, 344)

The restrained passions of the “Maidens and youths” (149) when acted upon, Shelley implies, die out just as quickly as they begin: “the fiery band which held / Their natures, snaps” (157-158) and they fall “Senseless” (160) to the ground leaving no “other trace . . . / But as of foam after the Ocean’s wrath / Is spent on the desert shore” (162-165). Shelley’s imagery articulates the errors that society perpetuates in its youth. The “fiery band” (157) of Life’s restrictive and manipulative control leaves nothing but dissolving foam on dry, porous sand. The older figures

in the crowd strain their “limbs decayed / To reach the car of light which leaves them still / Farther behind and deeper in the shade” (167-169) despite their efforts. These figures are consumed with the “shadows that interpose / Round them and round each other” (172-173). Lucretius’ *De Rerum Natura* is a clear influence on Shelley’s conception of shadows emanating from the captives in the crowd. Lucretius describes shadows cast off from people as idols:

there are what we call idols of things; which, like films stripped from the outermost body of things, fly forward and backward through the air; and they too when they meet us in waking hours affright our minds, yea, and in sleep too, when we often gaze on wondrous shapes, and the idols of those who have lost the light of day, which in awful wise have often roused us, as we lay languid, from our sleep; lest by chance we should think that souls escape from Acheron, or that shades fly abroad among the living. (Lucretius IV.II.26-58)

Lucretius’s shadows are exact replicas of the “films” or “rinds” of the outer appearance of living beings in reality. Shelley’s similar shadows represent the accumulations of negative influences that gather in a person over his or her lifetime and “stuff[ them] full of prejudices” (*Letters II*, 344). The older figures in the crowd, due to their age and experience in Life’s domain of control, Shelley implies, have more obstacles to overcome with their shadows than the young.

When the narrator reaches an apex in his tolerance of the scene of Life’s destructive influence on humanity, he breaks the narrative pattern by speaking: “Half to [him]self [he] said, ‘And what is this? / Whose shape is that within the car? & why’— / [He] would have added—‘is all are amiss?’” (177-179). All the imagery so far in the poem, other than the sun conquering night in the introduction, has been delivered to the reader through the narrator’s thoughts. When the narrator reaches a seeming threshold state of feeling (he is “Struck by the heart by this sad pageantry” (176)) due to his lack of knowledge, his speech itself indicates a new course in his journey. The narrator’s speech is the trigger for extending his knowledge. It perhaps even creates the “Grim Feature” (190)—the figure of Rousseau—who responds to his questions to answer, “Life” (180). The figure of Rousseau embodies (symbolically) the narrator’s shift away

from the vivid, visual realm of effects (Laurence 34) into an analysis of the reasoning behind them because he represents the knowledge and understanding that the narrator lacks. The narrator only speaks “Half to himself” (177); the other half, Shelley could be suggesting, is already an acknowledged presence, like the shadow of the earth on the moon—the “ghost of [the moon’s] dead Mother” (84)—needs to exist in order to create the sliver of reflected light in the crescent moon that becomes Life’s chariot. The notion of presence and absence with regard to representation is key in Shelley’s imagery, especially when absence is embodied, as this new figure of Rousseau, resembling the shadows emanating from the crowds, is. The narrator, therefore, literally divides and reconstitutes himself with his speech and Rousseau’s reply. The sun imagery in the introduction acts as a model for the narrator’s actions: he extends his thoughts (which have been idealized by his refusal to reveal them) by using speech to bring them into the light of day and life (literally in the figure of Rousseau). The half spoken question represents the darkness that falls (4) to bring speech and shared knowledge into consciousness for the narrator and reader in the figure of Rousseau. Following Shelley’s adaptation of the Roman triumph, the half stated question (inside and outside the narrator at the same time) initiates the knowledge that ensues and is the metaphorical arch for the new figure of Rousseau and the narrator to pass through into the next stage of the poem. The “grim Feature” (190) of Rousseau, in this manner, following the model of the narrator’s transition into his “waking dream” (42), is the outcome of the second transitional phase of the poem when he answers the narrator’s question and tells the narrator that he is an aspect of his past and his present because he is “of [the narrator’s] thoughts aware” (190)—they both move together through the metaphorical arch they create, into Shelley’s third “triumph.”

CHAPTER 4  
THIRD TRIUMPH: THOUGHT'S CAPTIVES

The narrator's question, "First who art thou?" (199), begins the third "triumph." The third "triumph" displays Life's captives again for the reader, but without the narrator's confusion. Rousseau, in the act of educating the narrator in this scene, creates the metaphorical equivalent of the display of captives in a Roman triumph that come after the spoils of war and the sacrificial animals. The questions and answers between the narrator and Rousseau present Life's captives in the full array of their follies to emphasize the glory of the narrator's own triumphal conquest over thought in the poem. The third "triumph" represents the narrator's triumph over knowledge and displays that triumph in progress to the reader as the captives were displayed in a Roman triumph. The narrator learns why and how the figures in Life's triumph have been defeated, starting with Rousseau himself, who "Before [the narrator's] memory / [] feared, loved, hated, suffered, did, and died" (200). The dialogue between Rousseau and the narrator is purely factual in this scene in order to emphasize its portrayal of knowledge. Shelley withholds from using figurative language for the effect of clarity that adorns the captives' crimes for the reader. The narrator learns through Rousseau that the figures "chained to the car" (208) are "The Wise, / 'The great, the unforgotten" (208-209) who "did not know themselves; their might / Could not repress the mutiny within" (212-213)—when faced with truth, "they feigned, deep night" (214-215). Donald Reiman states that Shelley divides the pageant of figures in this part of the poem "historically . . . by the same chronological epochs into which Shelley divided European history in *A Philosophical View of Reform*" (50): the first group represent "the leaders of the Enlightenment and Napoleon, representatives of a new age" (Reiman 50): "Voltaire, / Frederic, and Kant, Catherine, and Leopold" (235-236), and Bacon. The second group represent the Hellenic period (Reiman 50): Plato (conquered by love "which gold or pain / Or age or sloth or

slavery could subdue not” (258-259)), Aristotle, and Alexander the Great. In the third group, Shelley “shows how . . . seeds of tyranny” (Reiman 50) were sown in the Roman conquerors, from Caesar (who held the most extravagant triumphs) to Constantine (who gave Christianity free reign under his rule and “protected Christians . . . [and] pagans” (Payne 211)). Reiman divides the influences of Roman rule after Christianity became the established religion in medieval society into two groups:

a secular one comprising the ‘Anarchs’ who founded the dynasties of Medieval Europe . . . and, on the ecclesiastical side, ‘Gregory’ (the pontifical name taken by Hildebrand [Gregory VII], who established the power of the papacy), and John (the name most frequently used by popes), representing the establishment that in Shelley’s view exercises an unbroken tyranny over thought throughout the Middle Ages. (Reiman 50)

Shelley describes “Gregory and John and men divine” (288) as figures who corrupted the relationship between humanity and god in their hold over thoughts and actions using the elements of light and darkness. These figures

rose like shadows between Man and god  
Till that eclipse, still hanging under Heaven,  
Was worshipped by the world o’er which they strode

For the true sun it quenched” (289-292)

Shelley’s sober metaphor, in terms of the poem’s previous use of metaphor, of the ecclesiastical rulers “Gregory and John” (288) eclipsing the sun clearly suggests that his chariot imagery is a direct criticism of the church’s hold on thought. Light, as a metaphor, signifies clarity, seeing, making reasoned decisions, and being able to discern truth; but, in the narrator’s dream, that light has been exhausted and bears its strength only from the borrowed light of the past which fuels all of its demons and shadows and perpetuates them in the present for humanity. Shelley’s criticism of the church’s power over humanity couldn’t be clearer in these lines—the church and any

institutional power dulls the life in humanity, making a person's inner life an image of Life in her chariot: a sort of death.

Rousseau, for the narrator in the third "triumph," plays both the role of the Death trump card, the thirteenth card of the Tarot, and The Empress, the third trump card. The Death card combines The Magician card (the narrator; number one) with The Empress card (number three) and represents two autonomous sides of death: the "malefic side" and the "benefic side" (Laurence 59). The Tarot draws meaning from added numbers and the presentation of numbers side by side—the Death card can therefore be read as the combination of the first trump card (the Magician) and the third trump card (the Empress), as "1" and "3." The malefic side of Death can be associated with Life's dark figure, the shadows that appear in the collective frenzy of the crowds the narrator experiences in the second "triumph," and the misdeeds that make Rousseau a victim of Life: his publication of *Confessions*, which Shelley referred to as "the only things of the kind that have appeared, & they are either a disgrace to the confessor or a string of falsehoods, probably the latter" (*Letters I*, 70). This aspect of death represents "those who waste their lives and their energies in the pursuit of sensual gratification. These either die of dissipation or fall victim to lawful death when their crazed passions cause death to others" (Laurence 59). Rousseau appears to be associated with the "benefic side of the Death card, [which] by Tarot definition, signifies transformation, transition, change. Its message is: 'The new cannot live until the old has died.' The card speaks of the transformation energy undergoes when it is consciously redirected from animal to higher than animal pursuits" (Laurence 59). The Death card

depicts a knight on horseback. The horse, it should be noted, is moving. Before the horse are a child, a virgin, a priest, and a fallen monarch. The message is clear: 'All things, no matter how eternal they may appear, must change.' The progression of the knight symbolizes perpetual destruction and rebirth of all things, even

thoughts, thought patterns, and ideals. Human understanding and human works all pass away to make room for the new. The radiant sun in the background promises new efforts, thought patterns and knowledge in a higher superior realm of action. (60)

The symbolism of the Death card addresses the underlying meaning of Shelley's use of darkness and light as symbolic themes in his poem: the narrator's identification with the night sky and his "thoughts . . . untold" (21), the shadow of the earth on the moon (the "ghost of [the night's] dead Mother" (84)) that creates the young chariot of light, the shadows that emanate from Life's captives, and Rousseau (a historical figure) all combine into a message that life is being and has been lived in a form of passivity, with old systems and rules being regenerated to perform the same acts from generation to generation with little or no underlying change. Rousseau's role in the poem, and all the factors that lead up to his creation, represent a challenge to the existing social order and the enactment of change.

The Empress Tarot trump card complements the beneficent aspect of the Death card that Rousseau represents because it signifies the need for action—the narrator's choice of speaking out loud to create the figure of Rousseau through his confusion and distaste as a bid to the future is one such action. The will, Laurence explains through The Empress card, is "incomplete without enlightenment, so the enlightened will is incomplete without action. This stage of man's development requires action on his part. He must do something with all that has gone before in his life" (36). Rousseau, in his role as the narrator's guide and shadow, does in fact "do something with all that has gone before in his life" (36) in his acknowledgement of the corruptive influences that led to his downfall, which he passes on as knowledge to the narrator.

The Empress card symbolism

teaches that new action springs from new knowledge. When the trickster (Fool [the sun]) wills (Magician [the narrator]) to learn of his own dichotomy (High Priestess [Life in her chariot]), his actions (Empress [Rousseau]) change. He begins to see himself in a new light, realizing that the unconscious contains germs of future

psychic ideas and situations. Thoughts and ideas that have never been conscious before grow up from the dark depths of the mind and present themselves from the unconscious. (Laurence 96-97)

Papus writes that the “hieroglyphic meaning of the [Hebrew] letter Gimel” (115)—the number three—on The Empress card, is related to the throat and the act of speech that gives material form to thoughts (“spiritual forms”):

[T]he throat [is] the hand of man half closed to the act of prehension. Hence it signifies all that encloses, all that is hollow, a canal, an inclosure. The throat is the spot where the words conceived in the brain are formed, or I might also say embodied, therefore the Gimel is the symbol of the material envelopment of spiritual forms, of organic generation under all its forms, of all the ideas springing from the corporeal organs or their actions. (115)

The action of speech itself, in Shelley’s poem socializes the narrator and gives form to Rousseau, who embodies, etched into his bodily disfigurement, the good and bad of his past, the social influences that affected him, and the time that has passed since his death. Papus’ explanation of the significance of the number three coincides with Laurence’s idea of unconscious thoughts coming into being in the symbolism of The Empress (Rousseau), and the narrator’s dream is enabling the exchange from “spiritual forms” to personified forms in the knowledge the narrator gains through Rousseau. The Empress also carries a shield bearing the symbol of Venus. Laurence states that the card signifies the negative union that Eve’s desire for “material experience” achieves, “but also the resulting enlightenment. After their union, Adam and Eve discerned they needed clothing, and the serpent of desire, through desire’s fulfillment, became the serpent of wisdom” (151)—Rousseau’s symbolism corresponds exactly with the serpent figure in the poem. He fell victim to his desires and by fulfilling them made himself receptive to a higher knowledge—historical Rousseau’s *La Nouvelle Héloïse* represents this outcome for Shelley. Rousseau realizes his fulfillment of wisdom later in the poem in his experience of the “shape all light” (352).

The third “triumph” ends when the narrator again reaches a threshold of knowledge and tolerance of humanity’s follies and he breaks the narrative with the questions “‘Whence camest thou and whither goest thou? / How did thy course begin . . . and why?’” (296-297). These questions create the transitional phase that introduces the next, fourth, “triumph.” Without his former hesitation, the narrator commands Rousseau to answer his questions, “Speak” (300). Shelley also anticipates the underlying meaning of the poem’s next triumph in this transitional phase when the narrator explains that his “heart [is sick due to] one sad thought” (299). His earlier untold “thoughts” (21), the reader learns, are now seemingly reduced to one thought which Rousseau proceeds to embody in the next scene, where the narrator’s silence indicates either avid attention, prior knowledge, or both. The narrator and Rousseau begin to merge in the poem when Rousseau suggests that the narrator already knows where he came from: “how and by what paths I have been brought / To this dread pass methinks thou mayst guess” (301-302). Rousseau himself only “partly . . . seem[s] to know” (300) where he came from. Shelley, in these lines, seems to confirm that Rousseau is a physical embodiment of the narrator that belongs to his past and to history—that he is the narrator’s beneficent shadow. Rousseau doesn’t know where he is going (“Whither the conqueror hurries me still less” (304)), but his suggestion that the narrator “turn / Actor or victim in this wretchedness / And what thou wouldst be taught I then may learn from thee” (305-308) is creating a circular relationship between the two figures. In this transitional scene, the foundation for the future rests on the narrator’s untold thoughts as they meet, metaphorically, through Rousseau’s literary past and join with the narrator’s present in Rousseau’s account of a dream that tells where he came from. The triumphal arch in this scene is formed by the unknown future for a past that both the narrator and Rousseau share. The past,

Shelley implies, is being fortified with the impetus of a revealed truth for movement into a new future.

CHAPTER 5  
FOURTH TRIUMPH: CONQUEROR'S ALLEGORY

The fourth “triumph” is Rousseau’s recollected memory of an idyllic dream in a grove-like natural paradise that the crowds in the second “triumph” (Life’s triumph; the narrator’s spoils of war) ignore because they have become “weary with vain toil and faint for thirst” (66). This triumph represents the narrator paraded as conqueror (through Rousseau)—of his desire—in Shelley’s imaginative triumphal procession. Rousseau’s allegory binds classical themes with historical Rousseau’s *La Nouvelle Héloïse* (a significant influence on Shelley’s conception of this part of the poem), Shelley’s own preoccupation with “observing in statuary and painting the degree in which, and the rules according to which, that ideal beauty, of which we have so intense yet so obscure an apprehension, is realised in external forms” (*Letters II*, 333), and the biographical influence of his friend Jane Williams, which suggests that Shelley makes “a [romantic] parallel between Rousseau’s situation in 1756 and [his own] in 1822” (Reiman and Fraistat 482n) in the poem. Rousseau finds himself in a deep, pleasant sleep in a “cavern high and deep” (313) with a stream running through it. The calm grove’s gentle sounds erase unpleasant thoughts: “which all who hear must needs forget / All pleasure and all pain, all hate and love, / Which they had known before that hour of rest” (319-320). The power of the grove and its “oblivious spell” (331) erases Rousseau’s memories—he can’t recall “Whether [his] life had been before that sleep / The Heaven which [he] imagine[s], or a Hell / ‘Like this harsh world in which [he] wake[s] to weep” (332-334). He describes waking up from a dream and witnessing the “bright omnipresence / Of morning” (343-344) shining through the cavern:

I arose and for a space  
The scene of woods and waters seemed to keep,  
  
‘Though it was now broad day, a gentle trace  
Of light diviner than the common Sun  
Sheds on the common Earth. (335-339)

The morning Rousseau experiences in these lines actually happens at midday (“it was now broad day” (337)). The representation of noon in classical allegory, Battistini explains, has

a two-fold aspect: It is the hour of divine inspiration and mystical union in which the full symbolic power of the Christ-Sun become manifest, and it is also the moment of epiphany of the midday demon, the fantastical personification of the deadly sin of sloth. In the Middle Ages, the demon was identified with the Greek god Pan, the expression of demonic forces and panic. Noontime, when the sun is at its zenith (its highest point on earth), is also a symbol of eternity, represented by the total absence of change and imperfection (shadow). (64)

Rousseau describes the morning sunlight reflecting from the stream into the cavern as “the Sun’s image radiantly intense / ‘Burn[ing] on the waters of the well that glowed / Like gold” (345-347). The light of the noonday sun added to this radiant light of morning shining through the cavern combine into an image that, Shelley implies, is as strong as the beam of Life’s chariot. The source of light “diviner than the common Sun” (338) joins the harsh noonday sun with the “bright omnipresence / Of morning” (344-345) and embodies their combined effect into one figure:

there stood

“Amid the sun, as he amid the blaze  
Of his own glory, on the vibrating  
Floor of the fountain, paved with flashing rays,

“A shape all light. (348-352)

In addition to allying her noonday presence with a new morning, Shelley compares “the shape all light” (352) to the sun in “the blaze / Of [its] own glory” (349-350) at dawn before and after its light breaks into the earth’s atmosphere—she “fling[s] / Dew on the earth, as if she were the Dawn” (352-353) propagating life. The “shape all light[’s]” (352) physical power is the same as the “cold glare” (77) of the chariot’s light, but she represents the “good” (2) and eternal aspect of the dawn sun’s attributes because she, like the dawn sun, is perpetuating life around her and in

Rousseau's mind, not destroying it. Her figure represents "the total absence of change [positively] and imperfection (shadow)" (Battistini 64) because her divine light is stronger than the light of "the common sun" (338). It combines the shadowless noon's vertical light with the propagating, horizontal light of morning, both of which (together) eliminate all possibility of shadow and mimic the cross motif Shelley uses in the poem.

The "shape all light" (352), Shelley implies, is the equivalent of the sun's positive power on earth—the power that represents the "Imagination, the divine in man" (Reiman 12). The excessive light of the chariot that sends the crowds into a "maniac dance" (110) is her negative counterpart. She combines the Egyptian tradition of "Isis, High Priestess, conceiv[ing] immaculately [to] give birth to Horus, the sun god" (Laurence 34)—the Immaculate Conception in the Christian tradition—with the dualistic nature of desire and love. Love is symbolized by the image of Venus on The Empress card's shield, representing Rousseau as he is conceived through the narrator. Rousseau, therefore, brings his desire—and, by implication, the narrator's—into fruition in the forth "triumph." The Empress card (Rousseau)

signifies the door or gate by which an entrance is obtained into this life, as into the Garden of Venus; and then the way which leads therefrom, into that which is beyond, is the secret known to the High Priestess: it is communicated by her to the elect. (Waite 83)

Interestingly, Shelley's combination of Life's light, in his allusion to the noonday sun behind the "shape all light" (352), places Life in the position of the "ghost of [the young moon's] dead Mother" (84) and the "shape all light" (352) in the position of Life in her chariot with very different consequences for humanity, which, here, is represented by Rousseau and the weight of the future which is implicated in his actions. Rousseau is the elected figure to receive the "shape all light[']s" (352) secret because he has fallen victim to the desires of life and is in the position

to overcome his desires and achieve a higher form of gratification—what Laurence describes as “through desire’s fulfillment, bec[o]m[ing] the serpent of wisdom” (Laurence 151).

Rousseau’s experience with the “shape all light” (352) represents the Lovers trump card, the sixth card, which, in Tarot symbolism, can also be understood as the third trump card (The Empress; Rousseau) twice. The Lovers card interpreted as The Empress twice means “two actions . . . but actions in constant vacillation . . . with no equilibrium, but rather uncontrolled and ill-directed forces vacillating between action and re-action” (Laurence 43). The “shape all light” (352) is the figure of desire in Rousseau’s dream. She is composed of the combination of dew and light in Rousseau’s noonday morning as she is perceived from the protection and darkness of a cave (“a feminine symbol . . . [that] can represent the heart of the world, the unconscious, the entrance to the underworld, initiation, or esoteric wisdom” (Fontana 114)). The combination of dew and light creates a rainbow “on the dusky grass” (356) next to the figure. She carries a “chrysal glass / Mantling with bright Nepenthe [a drug of forgetfulness as a remedy for grief]” (359). Shelley presents her image with the same excess as the chariot’s light and Life’s power, but in a positive, idealistic sense. For example, when she bends “her / ‘Head under the dark boughs, till like a willow [] / Her fair hair swept the bosom of the stream” (363-365), she “assumes the shape of a rainbow” (Reiman and Fraistat 495n), creating a double rainbow of herself and the natural rainbow that appears on the “dusky grass” (356), in an image of duality that represents male and female counterparts (in the Lovers trump card)—one in an implied physical form (subject to the laws of nature) and the other spiritual (subject to the laws of the imagination, the “desire that propels the universe” (Battistini 68). The combination of her figure and the colored space of the rainbow (“Iris’ . . . many coloured scarf” (357)) relate to the symbolism of the cup that she holds full of nepenthe. Fontana states that the cup symbol

“illustrates that form cannot exist without space, and vice versa. The sides of the cup belong to the world of form, while the space they contain belongs to the world of emptiness. Form and space together are expressions of the fundamental unity of the cup” (34). Rousseau describes her gliding figure and “sweet tune” (382) that accompanies her movement, like the effects of the nepenthe in her chalice: “her feet . . . / . . . seemed as they moved, to blot / The thoughts of him who gazed on them” (381-382). Her feet and her bodily movement literally erase Rousseau’s thoughts by emptying his mind, but, in doing so, she also creates a vessel out of it and a space for something new. Shelley combines the sun’s triumph over night in the introduction and the “fires” (388) of desire that drive “the fiery band which held / [the] natures” (157-158) of Life’s captives, and reverses them, in the effect that the “shape all light” (352) has on Rousseau’s thoughts:

she, thought by thought,

‘Trampled its fires into the dust of death,  
As Day upon the threshold of the east  
Treads out the lamps of night, until the breath

‘Of darkness reilluminates even the least  
Of heaven’s living eyes—like day she came,  
Making the night a dream. (387-393)

By “Making the night a dream” (393), the “shape all light” (352) in Rousseau’s story literally becomes the narrator’s dream within his own “waking dream” (42). She brings a true light to the darkness that Life makes of the light of day. If the “shape all light” (352) makes “the night a dream” (393), she can therefore be interpreted as slowly treading out the shadows that Life creates in humanity (“thought by thought” (387)), as “Day” (rather than the sun) “Treads out the lamps of night” (389) in this scene, leaving the spaces for “the breath / Of darkness” (390-391), rather than “the mask / Of darkness” (3-4), to “reilluminate[]” (391) even the most distant of stars

in the night sky at the break of day. The stars are the lesser characters in Shelley's imaginative triumph, but they play a central role despite their minor presence. Shelley plays on the night's relationship with the wind ("the breath / Of darkness" (390-291)) in the *Orphic Hymns*, in these lines, and the product of their encounter: "Eros-Phanes, the Orphic principle of creation, [who] embodies the desire that gave birth to the world" (Battistini 334). The "desire that gave birth to the world," Shelley implies, is the force in humanity underlying the shadows of Life's influence—the corruptive influences of society that the "shape all light[']s" (352) gentle presence reveals by illuminating "even the least / Of heaven's living eyes" (391-392) in the consciousness of day.

The "shape all light[']s" (352) powerful presence creates a contradictory vacillation between desire and shame in Rousseau, which is similar to the confusion that forces the narrator to speak earlier in the poem. The Lovers trump card, Laurence explains, "speaks of resolution; the resolve to pursue the austere beauty of virtue in the face of the greater fascination of the allurements of vice. Indecision is worse than a bad choice. This is the message of The Lovers card. . . . At this point of man's development, he must [make a decision] to advance or recede" (42). Rousseau chooses to move on and learn from his encounter—to follow the pursuit of wisdom after having overcome his desires rather than succumb to vice:

as one between desire and shame  
Suspended, I said—'If, as it doth seem,  
Thou comest from the realm without a name,  
  
'Into this valley of perpetual dream,  
Shew whence I came, and where I am, and why—  
Pass not away upon the passing stream.' (394-399)

Rousseau's speech and the series of questions that repeat the narrator's questions to Rousseau earlier in the poem are the questions, Shelley suggests, that need to be asked to enact change—

they articulate the need to examine the past in order to realize the present, and pave the way for the future. The questions themselves asked by Rousseau in the role of The Empress (doubled in The Lovers card scene he is participating in), create a vessel with words to present a space to hold (or fill with) the unknown answers. Rousseau's speech also derives meaning from the "hieroglyphic meaning of the letter Gimel [the third Hebrew letter associated with The Empress (Rousseau)] [which] is the throat, the hand of man half closed to the act of prehension" (Papus 115). This half closure, doubled and widened in The Lovers card, can be interpreted in the form of a larger vessel which Rousseau opens himself with the questions that take the form of an answer through the cup that the "shape all light" (352) proceeds to present to Rousseau to "material[ly] envelop[e] [her] spiritual form[...]" (Papus 115) in him:

"Arise and quench thy thirst," was her reply.  
And as a shut lily, stricken by the want  
Of dewy mornings vital alchemy,

'I rose; and, bending at her sweet command,  
Touched with faint lips the cup she raised. (400-405)

The simple touch of Rousseau's lips to the "shape all light[']s" (352) cup initiates the reality of a new dawn that her figure only represented previously through metaphor against the false backdrop of the harsh noonday sun. The new dawn occurs in the form of "a new Vision never seen before" (411) that "Burst[']s" (411) upon Rousseau's sight. Having "tread[ed] out the lamps of night" (390), the "shape all light"

waned in the coming light  
As veil by veil the silent splendour drops  
From Lucifer, amid the chrysolite

'Of sunrise ere it strike the mountain tops—  
And as the presence of that fairest planet  
Although unseen is felt by one who hopes

‘That his day’s path may end as he began it  
In that star’s smile. (412-419)

Rousseau, resembling the narrator’s experience in Petrarch’s “Triumph of Chastity,” achieves the higher knowledge he seeks by restraining his desire with reason and moving into a realm of higher wisdom.

The symbols on the Lovers trump card depict the sun at its zenith. Centered underneath the sun, a winged figure with arms outstretched is crouching or meditating above a dark cloud—a figure that Shelley seemingly embodies in the rainbow symbolism of the fifth “triumph.” Underneath the winged figure stand a naked male and female. The “Tree of Life, bearing twelve fruits” (Waite 92) is behind the man, and the “Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil is behind the woman” (Waite 92) with a serpent wrapped around its trunk. Laurence states that “there is a dual interpretation of the nakedness of the human figures—[their nakedness] signifies vice and virtue” (43). The serpent, in its baser interpretation, tempts the woman and man and “represents the conscious unheeded and sex for the sake of sex. On the other hand, the female signifies enlightened femininity, enlightened by the sacred serpent (mystically the serpent signifies both evil and good). She thus personifies virtue. . . . The Lovers card’s message is that the result of [the] struggle [of competing desires], one way or another, commences a new epoch in life” (43). Rousseau comes out on the virtuous side of his desire in his encounter with the “shape all light” (352), who, the reader newly learns, is related to the morning and evening star “Lucifer” (414)—the “fairest planet” (416), Venus. Her “silent splendor drops” (413) in the dawn light of his “new Vision” (412) and she becomes newly present in the absence formerly occupied by the masked night and the narrator’s “thoughts which must remain untold” (21).

The transition between the fourth and fifth “triumphs” occurs when Rousseau overcomes his “desire and shame” (394) and, with a clear mind (whose fires have been trampled out (388)), free from the “vain toil[s] and faint[ness] for thirst” (66) that make Life’s captives oblivious to the comforts of nature, he begins again with the “shape all light” (352), who is “unseen [but] felt” (417), by his side. The transition itself does not, however, manifest itself as a progression because the renewed Rousseau, at this stage of the poem, is also the narrator. There is no formal progression because the movement has already occurred. Rousseau has articulated the narrator’s “thoughts . . . untold” (21)—which are associated with the night sky, the stars, and the planet Venus—in his allegory. The allegory is where the narrator and Rousseau temporally and spiritually meet in the poem; the last “triumph” of the poem is therefore both of theirs. They have both found a source within human life that can compete with Life: a revealed wisdom rather than the negative “concealed wisdom” (Laurence 34) that the High Priestess Tarot card, representing Life and her chariot, represents. Rousseau, according to his Tarot journey, has essentially bound his reason to his intuition and can now see “Nature’s mysteries (Laurence 34). His relationship to the Death trump card “signifies [the] transformation, transition, [and] change” (Laurence 59) that needs to occur for the “rebirth of all things, even thoughts, thought patterns, and ideals” (Laurence 60). His role as The Empress “teaches that new action springs from new knowledge” (Laurence 96). Adding the Lovers card to Rousseau’s and the narrator’s journey (through Rousseau) emphasizes the action that Rousseau needs to take as well as the card’s message “that the result of [the] struggle [of competing desires], one way or another, commences a new epoch in life” (Laurence 43). Rousseau’s own intellectual transition coincides with the narrator’s “thoughts . . . untold” (21) and creates the passageway into the last, fifth, “triumph,”

where the vestiges of Rousseau's dream vision and his clear mind competes with the reality of the "sick day in which we wake to weep" (430).

CHAPTER 6  
FIFTH TRIUMPH: SACRIFICE AND THE ‘MOVING ARCH OF VICTORY’

The fifth “triumph” represents the sacrificial rights performed at the end of a traditional Roman triumph at the Temple of Jupiter Capitolinis—coincidentally the fifth planet away from the sun. Shelley arguably replaces the Temple of Jupiter, in his imaginary triumph, with the “moving arch of victory” (439) in the form of a rainbow that bends high over Rousseau’s vision:

‘A moving arch of victory, vermilion  
And green and azure plumes of Iris had  
Built high over her wind-winged pavilion. (439-441)

Shelley’s imagery implies that the “arch of victory” (439) is fully present throughout the triumph Rousseau witnesses rather than being part of a ceremonial entrance to it, suggesting that his sacrificial temple is the Greek goddess Iris’s, whose augury is the symbolism of the rainbow in the poem. The ancients believed that

all celestial phenomena were signs of divine activity, the appearance of a rainbow in the wake of a fierce storm signified the presence of a benign deity. . . . [The] winged goddess Iris [she is perhaps the winged figure above the male and female in the Lovers trump card] . . . carried messages from the gods on Mount Olympus to the mortals below. . . . In the Christian world, the rainbow symbolizes God’s forgiveness and his covenant with mankind, because it appeared in the sky after Noah’s ark came to rest on dry land following the deluge. (Fontana 115)

The rainbow is so high in the sky that it is not influenced by the chariot’s light; it clearly represents the universal and consistent power that Rousseau discovers in himself through the “shape all light” (352).

Rousseau, inspired by love with the additional confidence of the dimmed “shape all light” (352) above him (in the embodied form of a rainbow and the present but hidden evening star), embodies the universal “desire that propels the universe” (Battistini 68) in his efforts to challenge the chariot’s light. As if reestablishing his identity anew after having had its “fires” trampled “into the dust of death” (388), he challenges the chariot’s light: “Me not the falling

stream's Lethean song, / Me, not the phantom of that early form / Which moved upon its motion (463-465). Rousseau "plunge[s], and bare[s] [his] bosom to the clime / Of that cold light" (467-468) in a manner that reflects a willful yearning to compete with the "cold glare" (77) of light—or to conquer it with the new truth that he recognizes in his reality. Shelley's description is so vivid that he presents Rousseau's efforts as a challenge of wills. The power of his renewed confidence seems to actually have an effect on the chariot's power. Before it "had begun to climb / The opposing steep of that mysterious dell" (469-470) a scene unfolds which Shelley compares to Dante's in *Divine Comedy*:

Behold a wonder worthy of the rhyme

'Of him who from the lowest depths of Hell  
Through every Paradise and through all glory  
Love led serene, and who returned to tell

'In words of hate and awe the wondrous story  
How all things are transfigured, except Love. (471-476)

The scene that ensues, as if Rousseau himself, and his show of strength and guided will, is a catalyst that has a greater effect than the chariot's light on the crowds, results in the dell growing "dense with shadows to its inmost covers" (481). Rousseau's battle of wills, Shelley's imagery suggests, releases the shadows from the crowds. The relationship of this image with the winged figure on top of a dark cloud in the Lovers trump card is uncanny. Rousseau compares the shadows that fill the air with "A flock of vampire-bats before the glare / Of the tropic sun, bringing ere evening / Strange night upon some Indian isle" (484-486). The shadows, representing the accumulation of falsities Life perpetuates in individuals, are so numerous and integrated into the human psyche that Shelley's exaggeration is pointed: some even "fling shadows of shadows" into the air. The "Strange night" (486) that exists in day time is the literal realization in the poem of the mask that "fell from the awakened Earth" (4) in the introduction—

signifying that the narrator has changed the course of his inherited tasks “Of glory and of good” (2) by identifying with the night and has achieved his goal of shedding light on humanity’s plight through Rousseau. The shadows take the form of “chattering . . . restless apes” (493) that mimic the original figures they emanate from, as if they cannot exist without the frame of power that they feed from. They also make “cradle[s] of the ermined capes / ‘Of kingly mantles” (495-496) and make nests in the crowns that “girt with empire / ‘A baby’s or an idiot’s brow” (498-499). The “old anatomies” (500) “laugh from dead eyes / To reassume the delegated power” (502) and others, “more / Humble, like falcons sate upon the fist / Of common men” (505-507): “lawyer[, statesm[e]n, priest[s] and theorist[s]” (510). Shelley emphasizes the extent of Life’s corruption in the shadows that cling to the remaining vestiges of the trappings of power attached to ideas, ceremony, costumes, and the crowns of conquerors and kings. The chariot’s light in Rousseau’s vision carves the shadows that the “crowd sent forth incessantly” (527) with its “creative ray” (533), like “the sun shapes the clouds” (535), so that “long before the day / ‘Was old” (537-538) “Mask after mask [had] f[a]ll[en] from the countenance and form of all” (536-537).

The people in “the oblivious valley” (539) who die after all their shadows leave them are those who are sleeping in life because their wills are utterly subordinated to the trappings of power and authority that Life’s shadows represent. The figures who “grow weary of the ghastly dance” (540), like Rousseau, are “Those soonest, from whose forms most shadows past / And least of strength and beauty did abide” (542-543). Shelley’s imagery implies that these figures that survive the extermination of shadows are the figures who are partially awake to the corruptive influences of life, like the narrator is in his “waking dream” (42). When the narrator interjects with the question “‘Then, what is Life?’” (544) and the poem ends in mid reply, Shelley transfers the full impact of the question into the empty space he creates for an answer,

not so much for the poem's completion but the sense he gives to the importance of achieving ours.

## CHAPTER 7 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Reading the narrator's role in the poem as a journey using the symbolism of the Tarot trump cards and the archetypal symbols they draw from provides a fascinating insight into the underlying meaning of Shelley's difficult poem and the symbolic forces that he taps into to guide his imagery—"the desire that propels the universe" (Battistini 68). The poem covers so much interpretive ground that it is difficult to tie together all of its strains of meaning into a unified whole. The Tarot helps to understand the narrator's dream vision as a journey by controlling this dream space on its own terms, in the form of a pictorial narrative and a collective history of ideas, against the background of the triumph—which serves as a guiding path (ironically) to a form of symbolic salvation. At first, I was suspicious of the connections that I was making with the Tarot trump cards and Shelley's symbolism, but it soon became obvious to me that I had tapped into a literal wellspring of interpretive possibilities that had previously been closed off to me in my former interpretations of the poem. The most fascinating insight the Tarot gave me in this study is my new understanding of the fourth and fifth "triumphs" through the Lovers card. The Lovers trump card helped me to understand not only Shelley's use of allegory to emphasize his point about the need to draw something original and positive about classical ideals into modern life, but it helped me to understand how Shelley saw those ideals as an impetus for revolutionary change. *The Triumph of Life* is, ultimately, a demonstration of what happens when people remain passive to their own ideals. Shelley's poem leaves a fabulous image with us, with hope etched in its patterns across the course of human history, and an opening for another story—another answer, perhaps—whose form and likeness he challenges us to imagine.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Wendy Lozano returned to school in 2004 to complete her bachelor's degree in English at Wellesley College. After graduating from Wellesley College in 2007, she returned to work in Washington D.C. In 2009, she was accepted into the English Department's graduate program at the University of Florida. She received her M.A. from the University of Florida in the spring of 2012.