



## Romanticism on the Net

### “[L]ife among the dead”: Translation and Shelley’s “On a Future State”

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#### Abstract

Shelley’s much-neglected prose fragment, “On a Future State,” considers a future state after death in shifts between scepticism and idealistic pathos that owe more to the poet’s readings and translations of Plato’s dialogues than has been previously recognised. Following Alan Weinberg’s redating of the fragment’s composition to the winter of 1818-19, “On a Future State” looks before and after to Shelley’s translation of Plato’s *Symposium* in July 1818 and the *Phaedo* in May 1820. Centring upon “On a Future State” and Shelley’s persistent interest in “a future state,” this article explores how the fragment connects disparate modes of composition, where prose becomes an intermediary form linking translations to original poetry. “On a Future State” adumbrates Shelley’s thoughts upon translation and futurity in *A Defence of Poetry* (1821), embodying the poet’s claim that “the popular division into prose and verse is inadmissible in accurate philosophy.” By considering Shelley’s poetry alongside his translations of Plato, this article explores how the meditation upon death in “On a Future State” blends poetry and prose with an indebtedness to Plato’s poetic prose and his dialogue upon Socrates’ death, the *Phaedo*. “On a Future State” evidences how the vitalising act of translation breathes new life into the dead.

#### Biographical Note

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1. Despite the canonical status of Shelley’s philosophical prose fragments “On Love” (1818) and “On Life” (1819), “On a Future State” (c.1818-19) remains largely neglected. Contrary to Harold Bloom’s claim that “‘On Love,’ like all of Shelley’s philosophical fragments, is

thirdhand stuff and without literary or philosophical value,” “On Love,” “On Life,” and “On a Future State,” like *A Defence of Poetry*, vitalize Shelley’s poems and, as Madeleine Callaghan writes of the *Defence* and *The Witch of Atlas*, “dazzle in their exploration and embodiment of Shelley’s ideas” (Bloom 206; Callaghan 200). Callaghan’s assertion that, in the *Defence*, “Shelley challenges himself to embody the spirit of poetry in his prose” can be extended to “On a Future State,” which sees the poet wrestling moments of poetic splendour into the fragment’s otherwise prosaic substance (Callaghan 172). “On a Future State” embodies Shelley’s claim in the *Defence* that “the popular division into prose and verse is inadmissible in accurate philosophy” (*Major Works* 678),<sup>1</sup> where Plato’s poetic prose dialogues are models to which Shelley cleaves.<sup>2</sup> Alan Weinberg’s redating of “On a Future State” to the winter of 1818-19 situates it amongst Shelley’s early compositions in Italy, especially *Prometheus Unbound*, and Bysshe Inigo Coffey’s discussion of the fragment alongside *Alastor* underscores how readings of “On a Future State” are enriched by Shelley’s poetry. This article calls for renewed attention to “On a Future State” by exploring the prose fragment’s poetic periods and Platonic cast, noting Michael O’Neill’s attention to Plato’s influence upon Shelley’s “development of an original poetic prose” (*Shelleyan Reimaginings* 28); Shelley’s multifaceted idea of a future state; and the importance of a hereto unstudied influence upon “On a Future State”: Shelley’s reading and translation of Plato’s *Phaedo* in 1820.<sup>3</sup>

2. In recently returning critical attention to “On a Future State,” Weinberg describes the fragment as being “positioned between sceptical idealism on the one hand and sceptical materialism on the other,” and he identifies David Hume as “almost certainly a primary

source of reference” (Weinberg 57 and 56). Anthony Howe, too, affirms that Shelley’s essay on a future state after death “takes Hume’s argument as its model” (Howe 105). Acknowledging but broadening his scope beyond Hume, Coffey’s analysis of “On a Future State” alongside *Alastor* introduces John Mason Good and Henry More as formative influences upon Shelley’s materialism. For Tim Milnes, “On a Future State” “promulgates the Lucretian lesson that death lurks everywhere in nature, and that only immortality is atomic,” while Milnes identifies in later works, such as *A Defence of Poetry*, Shelley “synthesizing the psychology of Humean sympathy with the erotic metaphysics of alterity in Plato’s *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*” (Milnes 10 and 13). Coffey and Milnes attend to the kaleidoscopic range of Shelley’s readings and influences, as well as the multifaceted shifts between materialism and idealism that propel his philosophical thoughts. Rather than being immersed in Hume during the winter of 1818-19, Shelley’s readings during this period are predominantly classical. They include Plato, Euripides, and Livy alongside Montaigne, so much so that Montaigne’s essays and his responses to Plato are a direct influence on Shelley’s own philosophical prose and his interest in Plato.<sup>4</sup> “On a Future State,” then, is a composition markedly influenced by Shelley’s readings and translations of his favoured “philosopher-poet” (Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley* viii).

3. Plato, in Shelley’s unfinished preface to his 1818 translation of the *Symposium* as *The Banquet*, is exalted as “exhibit[ing] the rare union of close and subtle logic, with the Pythian enthusiasm of poetry:” a combination that infuses the philosopher’s prose with a vitalising, poetic spirit. The poet’s “dialogic response” to Plato in his preface, Howe emphasises, is “inseparable from Shelley’s estimation of Plato as a pre-eminent *literary*

writer” (Howe 102). Although Plato’s “theories respecting the government of the world, and the elementary laws of moral action, are not always correct,” in Shelley’s view “there is scarcely any of his treatises which do not, however stained by puerile sophisms, contain the most remarkable intuitions into all that can be the subject of the human mind” (Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley* 402). Plato’s inward vision, or “remarkable intuitions,” anticipates a Romantic mode of insight, where, as Jerrold E. Hogle writes, “[w]hat Shelley values more in Plato is what seems to the latter the most uncertain of foundations: the ‘intuition’ of Socrates” (Hogle, *Shelley’s Process* 267). In the *Phaedo*, Socrates’ conviction in the soul’s immortality is met with sceptical circumscription by his interlocutors. “[T]hose expressions of doubt and uncertainty concerning the immortality of the soul, which occur in the course of this dialogue,” Thomas Taylor explains in the preface to his 1793 translation of the *Phaedo*, a formative influence upon Shelley’s interest in Plato, “are to be considered as arising from a deep conviction in Socrates” (Taylor 191n). Ultimately, Shelley’s attraction to Plato is “as a poet of the unknown and unknowable and as a forerunner of the sceptical point of view in philosophy,” C. E. Pulos affirms (Pulos 88). More than a Humean tract,<sup>5</sup> “On a Future State” draws upon the line of enquiry into a future state after death as it is addressed in the *Phaedo*, blending Socratic intuition with his interlocutors’ scepticism. Shelley enlivens his prose by translating Plato’s poetic periods into “On a Future State.”

4. Shelley’s translation of the *Phaedo* builds upon the inspirational act of translating the *Symposium* in 1818. In “translating into my fainting & inefficient periods the divine eloquence of Plato’s *Symposium*” (*PBS Letters*, 2: 20 and 26), Shelley finds in translation

a vehicle of inspiration that etymologically blends the physical and the figural, being at once “a breathing or infusion into the mind and the soul” and also “a drawing in of air” (*OED*). Shelley’s breath-like “periods” of translation channel the “divine eloquence” of Plato’s long-dead mind through the mortal poet’s living body,<sup>6</sup> drawing upon Plato’s dialogues as texts that embody and bestow new life into dead and aged figures. Consequently, Jeffrey C. Robinson describes “the value of poetic translation” in Shelley’s *oeuvre* as being “a gain of other voices” and “a source of vitality” (Robinson 108). Shelley’s oracular channelling of the “divine” Plato is recast in *A Defence of Poetry* where the outpourings of the inspired poet of the *Ion* become in Shelley’s poetically-inflected prose “a magnet the invisible effluence is sent forth which at once connects, animates and sustains the life of all,” containing the “seeds” of “renovation” (*Major Works* 687). As Michael Rossington writes, “translations can indeed work if and only if they constitute a new beginning—a fresh creation from a ‘seed’ implanted in a different language” (Rossington 548). Shelley’s translations work in just such a way: his translations of Plato are vitalising acts wherein the translator gives new life to the dead. Translation’s threat of destruction, of “cast[ing] a violet into a crucible,” is redeemed through creative translations such as Shelley’s wherein new life is conferred as one text passes into another. As much as Shelley despairs of “the vanity of translation” (*Major Works* 678), the inspiring, life-giving act of translating still imbues his prose with the quality of poetry and enlivens his verse, as “On a Future State” demonstrates.

5. Along with pushing the parameters of poetry and prose as they are explicated in *A Defence of Poetry*, “On a Future State” is attuned to the philosopher-poet’s affinity for metaphor.

In his dialogues, Plato's "language itself fluctuates between extremes of fine-spun or even laboured prosaic argumentation, and colourful or metaphorical descriptions of high poetic quality," John Hartland-Swann writes (Hartland-Swann 9). "On a Future State" embodies this fluctuation between poetry and prose while translating Plato's poetic metaphors for life's endurance beyond death into its own poetic prose. Shelley's prose lilts into poetry as he translates Plato's metaphor of the broken lyre from the *Phaedo* in "On a Future State:"

When you can discover where the fresh colours of the faded flower abide, or the music of the broken lyre, seek life among the dead. (*CWPBS* 207)<sup>7</sup>

Shelley translates into prose poetry the following passage from the *Phaedo*, wherein Simmias voices his doubt in Socrates' conviction in the soul's immortality through the metaphor of the broken lyre:

harmony is something invisible and incorporeal, all-beautiful and divine, in a well-modulated lyre: but the lyre and its chords are bodies, and of a corporeal nature; that they are composites and terrestrial, and allied to that which is mortal. When any one therefore shall either have broke the lyre, or cut and burst the chords, some person may contend from the same reasoning as yours, that it is necessary the harmony should yet remain, and not be destroyed. (Taylor 192)

The empirical overtones of the fragment give way to poetic meditation as Shelley translates Plato's metaphor of the broken lyre into his own composition.<sup>8</sup> The prose poetry of this

translation projects Plato as “essentially a poet,” as Shelley asserts in his *Defence*: “the truth and splendour of his imagery and the melody of his language is the most intense that it is possible to conceive” (*Major Works* 679). Shelley’s translation of Plato’s broken lyre becomes a vehicle of poetic immortality in “On a Future State,” echoed in *A Defence of Poetry* as the poet who can “touch the enchanted chord, and reanimate in those who have ever experienced these emotions the sleeping, the cold, the buried image of the past” (*Major Works* 698). The translation of the broken lyre metaphor in “On a Future State” carries across Simmias’ sceptical disbelief, but it also self-reflexively recalls “the omnipotence / Of music, when the inspired voice and lute / Languish” in *Prometheus Unbound* (l. 802-804). In so doing, “On a Future State” bridges Shelley’s poetry of idealism and desolation, connecting the meliorism of *Prometheus Unbound* with the increasingly sceptical and embittered strains of Shelley’s poetry in 1820.

6. Influenced by Plato’s dialectic, Shelley’s meditation upon death is enlivened by moments of poetic enthusiasm that transport, through translation, the philosopher-poet’s metaphor for the soul’s immortality in “On a Future State.” The fragment gives new life to Plato’s poetic language in English, minding metaphor’s rootedness in the Ancient Greek *μεταφέρω* as a “carrying across.” Shelley’s translation of Plato’s metaphor of the broken lyre is a twofold one; as David K. Simpson affirms, “[m]etaphor, the identification or substitution of one thing as or for another, is a form of translation” (Simpson 144). In the metaphor of the broken lyre, Shelley recognises that poetic life is a product of death. “On a Future State” looks toward the poet’s translation of the *Hymn to Mercury* in the summer of 1820, where

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Shelley describes the jovial god's glee at capturing and killing a tortoise in order to create a lyre:

“So come with me, and though it has been said  
That you alive defend from magic power,  
I know you will sing sweetly when you're dead”

*(Hymn to Mercury, 6. 42-44)*<sup>9</sup>

“On a Future State,” in its incorporation of the broken lyre and meditation upon death from the *Phaedo*, foregrounds translation as a “reanimat[ion]” of “the cold, buried image of the past.” The prose fragment’s struggle against the materialistic rejection of life after death also draws upon the doubt in Socrates’ interlocutors about the soul’s immortality.<sup>10</sup> “[M]etaphor does make us live both ‘in the future and in the past’,” Jerrold E. Hogle writes; “it strives to rename something to which it would return as to a center, yet it only repeats with a difference, looking ahead to another translation that may complete its effort even as it looks back to what seems a lost origin” (Hogle, “The Power as Metaphor” 167). “On a Future State” offers insight into Shelley’s experience of translation as a vitalising power, which turns out to be surprisingly similar to Socrates’ chiasmic account in the *Phaedo*, wherein “[f]rom the dead...living things, and men who are alive, are generated” (Taylor 166).

7. Translation is, like Socrates’ estimation of the living being generated from the dead, a vitalising cycle that, in Shelley’s prose poem “On Life,” “look[s] before and after” (*Major*



*Works* 634).<sup>11</sup> Rather than reviving a text by way of “transfus[ing] from one language into another the creations of a poet,” translation is an act of regeneration: “The plant must spring again from its seed or it will bear no flower,” Shelley writes in *A Defence* (*Major Works* 678). In translating Greek authors, Stuart Gillespie writes, English poets such as Shelley are not merely “reviving a past work, but...passing on life, or conferring new life (‘inspiration,’ in the bodily sense, is a condition of all human life),” and acts of inspired translation possess a “creative power...by virtue of their effects on English writing of the future” (Gillespie 32). Translation is a reciprocal act whereby past life is transfused into the present, and where the present translation anticipates a future reception. Writing of Shelley’s translation of the *Symposium* to Maria Gisborne, Mary Shelley remarks that “no one can be a reader of the works of antiquity unless they can transport themselves from these to other times” (*MWS Letters*, 1: 77). Mary’s decision to write “*other* times,” rather than “past times,” creates a curious ambiguity, and looks ahead to her expectation of her Victorian audience’s own capacity for mental transportation by publishing Shelley’s translation of the *Symposium* as *The Banquet* in 1840. As both of the Shelleys are aware, translating “the works of antiquity” into the present necessarily requires an anticipation of the text’s reception in the future.

8. “On a Future State,” as a composition influenced by the *Phaedo*, couples Socrates’ interlocutors’ sceptical view upon the soul’s immortality with idealistic pathos. Considering a corpse, Shelley shifts from an objective description of material decay to an unexpectedly emotional meditation upon human loss:

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The body is placed under the earth, and after a certain period there remains no vestige even of its form. This is that contemplation of inexhaustible melancholy, whose shadow eclipses the brightness of the world. The common observer is struck with dejection at the spectacle. He contends in vain against the persuasion of the grave, that the dead indeed cease to be. The corpse at his feet is prophetic of his own destiny. Those who have preceded him, and whose voice was delightful to his ear; whose touch met his like sweet and subtle fire; whose aspect spread a visionary light upon his path—these he cannot meet again. (*CWPBS* 275-276)

This passage, blending present dejection with memories of delight, ripples with the “unusual mixture of pleasure and grief” identified as intrinsic to the dialogue’s importance by Thomas Taylor (Taylor 145). Shifting from its Humean mode of enquiry, Shelley’s prose pivots into poetry in the moment that it subtly echoes Coleridge’s “Dejection: An Ode.” Shelley’s “common observer [who] is struck with dejection” at a loss likened to a “shadow eclips[ing] the brightness of the world” recalls the “phantom-light” (10) that obscures the moon in Coleridge’s conversation poem.<sup>12</sup> Shelley’s prose moves forward by way of this increasingly communicative poetic mode where, as Howe observes, “Shelley suddenly becomes bound up in the thoughts and feelings of a man confronted with the passing of a loved one,” continuing: “He becomes him, finding in the poetry of memory a moment of genuine rather than prejudiced human connection and recognition that overpowers initial purpose” (Howe 106-07). Propelled by this Wordsworthian shift into “the poetry of memory,” the body of Shelley’s text eschews its form as a prose essay in the moment that the decaying body under scrutiny is described as bearing “no vestige even of

its form.” Jilting the strictures of its prose form, “On a Future State” becomes enlivened through Shelley’s experimental mode, where the internal off-rhyme of “vain” and “grave” unsettles the previously espoused conviction in death as an end of life. The lilting assonance of “the dead indeed cease to be” jests, through its buoyant rhyme, with the very idea of death as a terminus. The succession of long “e” sounds surpasses “the dead,” and the line’s ending with “to be,” rhyming with “indeed,” forefronts *being* as a condition that extends past and is involved within death. In evidencing the soul’s immortality in the *Phaedo*, Socrates affirms “that as the dead are generated from the living, so also the living from the dead” (Taylor 164), positing immortality as a cyclical, regenerative process that encompasses both life and death. Shelley’s translations of Plato, in their creative regeneration of the ancient philosopher’s “dead thoughts” (*Ode to the West Wind*, 5. 63), dynamically replicate this process.

9. Within *A Defence of Poetry*, futurity’s shadowy influence upon the present is repeatedly approximated to the metaphor of a flower or seed, ranging from “the future is contained within the present as the plant within the seed” (*Major Works* 675) to Shelley’s much contested description of “the vanity of translation”:

it were as wise to cast a violet into a crucible that you might discover the formal principle of its colour and odour, as seek to transfuse from one language into another the creations of a poet. The plant must spring again from its seed or it will bear no flower. (*Major Works* 678)

This analogy of the faded violet is transferred from “On a Future State,” in its life-in-death description of finding where the “fresh colours of the faded flower abide.” Composed in March or April 1820, soon before his translation of the *Phaedo* in May, *The Sensitive-Plant* playfully weaves between the material and the ideal while incorporating Shelley’s translations of Plato and Calderón—divine influences upon the poet’s writings in 1820—into its fabric.<sup>13</sup> In contrast with the overtly female Mimosa of Erasmus Darwin’s *The Loves of the Plants*, a notable influence upon Shelley’s poem, Shelley’s sensitive-plant is left ambiguously ungendered even though it is clearly approximated to the male *erōs* of the *Symposium*, looking towards the abolishment of distinctly “male” and “female” categories hoped for in Shelley’s androgynous “future state of being” (*PBS Letters*, 1: 195). Following his transmutation of Agathon’s poetic speech in *The Banquet* into periods of *Prometheus Unbound*,<sup>14</sup> Shelley moulds Socrates’ prosaic response to Agathon into jubilantly musical poetry in *The Sensitive-Plant*:

It loves, even like Love, its deep heart is full,

It desires what it has not—the beautiful!

(*The Sensitive-Plant*, 1. 76-77)

Beyond this allusion to the *Symposium*, the poem’s focus is upon states of life and death and the sceptical searching of a future state beyond death. *The Sensitive-Plant* shares its similarity to the *Phaedo* through these themes and its near contemporaneity to Shelley’s translation.

10. Structurally, the poem moves through three distinct parts and a conclusion, where Part First introduces an Edenic garden wherein the *erōs*-like sensitive-plant embodies intermediary states between love and lack, day and night. Part Second introduces the Lady—“An Eve in this Eden” (2. 2)—who, like a mortal proxy of the sensitive-plant, is companionless but filled with love and light. However, with near-comical spontaneity, “ere the first leaf looked brown—she died!” (2. 60). Part Third introduces a changed world of material decay, wherein

The garden once fair became cold and foul  
Like the corpse of her who had been its soul,  
Which at first was lovely as if in sleep,  
Then slowly changed, til it grew a heap  
To make men tremble who never weep. (3. 17-21)

Shelley’s extant transcriptions of the dialogue from his Bipont edition of Plato share striking similarities with *The Sensitive-Plant* while also recalling the *Phaedo*-inspired poetic periods of “On a Future State.” The shifts in perception within *The Sensitive-Plant*’s constituent parts echo the shifting perspectives that are spotlighted in Shelley’s transcriptions of the *Phaedo*:

Now there are many wonderful regions of the earth, and the earth itself is neither in size nor in other respects such as it is supposed to be by those who habitually discourse about it, as I believe on someone’s authority.

The second transcription also centres upon perception, where death is contemplated as a future state.

I cannot persuade Crito, my friends, that the Socrates who is now conversing and arranging the details of the argument is really I; he thinks I am the one whom he will presently see as a corpse, and he asks how to bury me.<sup>15</sup>

Shelley's extant transcriptions of the *Phaedo* reveal the way in which the prose fragment serves as a bridge between translations and original poetic compositions. Drawing upon Simmias and Cebes' sceptical undermining of Socrates' speech on the soul's immortality, *The Sensitive-Plant* sketches a vision of the soul's decay following the body's demise. The garden becomes overrun by weeds, themselves "forms of living death" (3. 98), where

thistles, and nettles, and darnels rank,  
And the dock, and henbane; and hemlock dank  
Stretched out its long and hollow shank  
And stifled the air, till the dead wind stank. (3. 54-57)

The "dead wind" threatens an end to the gusts of poetic utterance that empower and enliven, driving the poet's "dead thoughts over the universe" in *Ode to the West Wind* (5. 63), and the appearance of hemlock foregrounds the act that ends the *Phaedo*: Socrates' execution. But it is *Phaedo*'s recollection of Socrates' death that allows for his textual reanimation, and following these images of the material soul's decay and Socrates' death, a vital

transformation looms, “as if the decaying dead / With a spirit of growth had been animated!” (3. 64-65). The lines’ emphatic outburst mimics a reversal of the Lady’s sudden death, anticipating the Conclusion’s sceptical speculation that “death itself must be, / Like all the rest,—a mockery” (Conclusion, 15-16). The editors of *The Poems of Shelley* insightfully note of the poem’s Conclusion that “[t]he sense of the word *mockery* in these lines recalls that of *mimosa*, imitation or mimic,” gesturing towards the Sensitive-plant’s etymological character.<sup>16</sup> “‘If nothing is—but all things seem’ (Conclusion 11), then Death itself may also be an illusion. In a letter of 26 November 1811 to Elizabeth Hitchener,” the editors continue, “S[helley] conjectures: ‘perhaps a future state is no other than a different mode of terrestrial existence to which we have fitted ourselves in this mode’ (L i 193)” (*Poems of Shelley*, 3: 315-16n). This sense of mimicry and illusion is recast in the deathless Witch of *The Witch of Atlas* and her own mockery of mortality, her creation of “A mimic day” within the “deathly nook” of the grave, and her casting of a coffin “with contempt into a ditch” (*The Witch of Atlas*, 70. 604; 608). The resigned detachment of the Conclusion’s narrator is repeated in epyllion, where the poem’s conclusion is left open to the future, to “another time” (*The Witch of Atlas*, 78. 669), recalling Mary Shelley’s description of Shelley’s translation of the *Symposium* as enabling, and necessitating, mental transportation to “other times.”

11. A future state is recognised and anticipated in the act of translation, and in *The Sensitive-Plant*, in translating Plato and Calderón, Shelley, Prospero-like, weaves a world “Where nothing is, but all things seem, / And we, the shadows of the dream” (Conclusion, 11-12). The final stanzas of *The Sensitive-Plant* dazzlingly interweave Plato and Calderón into one

another as Shelley wins poetic vitality out of the inspiring and creative act of translation. He embraces both, not as philosopher or priest, but as fellow poets. Michael O'Neill announces that "[t]he affirmations shape themselves out of the intuition, more Calderonesque than Platonic, that we are merely 'shadows of the dream'" (O'Neill 119). But the Platonic shadows in *The Sensitive-Plant* are transmuted through Calderón's own use of allusion in *La vida es sueño*, or *Life is a Dream*, where Jackson I. Cope notes that "[t]he structure of the entire *Republic*...is that of dreams within dreams," "metamorphosed by Calderón into *La vida es sueño*" (Cope 230 and 229). The Platonic tones of Shelley's poem recognise and delight in Calderón's own allusions to Plato's texts:

And all this stage of earth on which we seem  
Such busy actors, and the parts we play'd,  
Substantial as the shadow of a shade,  
And Dreaming but a dream within a dream! (3. 1)

Calderón, "a kind of Shakespeare" (*PBS Letters*, 2: 115), blends the shadows and dream-state of the *Republic* with the substantial, earthbound soul of the *Phaedo*. *The Sensitive-Plant* is witness to Shelley's ongoing immersion in Greek and Spanish, and demonstrates how contemporaneous acts of translation inspire and vitalise his original poetry.

12. "On a Future State" intimates the tension between hope and sceptical resignation that occupies Shelley in his final year of life, where the poet intuits that "[t]he destiny of man can scarcely be so degraded that he was born only to die" (*PBS Letters* 2.442) and is yet



“content to see no farther into futurity than Plato and Bacon” (Trelawny 78). Adopting the *Phaedo*’s image of the soul shedding its bodily sheath, Trelawny’s recollection of Shelley continues: “In our present gross material state our faculties are clouded;—when Death removes our clay coverings the mystery will be solved” (Trelawny 78). In interrogating “the secret persuasion which has given birth to the opinions of a future state,” the idea of life after death, as founded upon the “desire to be for ever as we are; the reluctance to a violent and unexperienced change” (280), the final lines of Shelley’s fragment subtly invoke, through the “birth” of a future state, Socrates’ self-identification as a midwife and Socratic dialectic as the encouragement of new life. The prose fragment embodies the poetic transmutations of Plato’s *Phaedo* that invigorate images of poetic inspiration in *A Defence of Poetry*, where Shelley “beholds the future in the present” (*Major Works* 677). Translations vitally bridge prose and poetry in Shelley’s works, and “On a Future State” looks before and after to Shelley’s Platonic translations by transporting through poetic prose the generation of the living from the dead.

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<sup>1</sup> Shelley's works are quoted from *The Major Works* unless stated otherwise.

<sup>2</sup> On Shelley's "basic divergence from Plato" in matters of philosophy and moral governance, see in particular Pulos, *The Deep Truth*, pp. 73-88, and Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley*. Ultimately, Shelley is attracted to Plato "as a pre-eminent *literary* writer," as Howe emphasises, p. 102. For Shelley's original translations of Plato's dialogues as prose poems, see O'Neill, for whom "Shelley became Shelley through his immersion in Plato, a writer who influenced not only his thinking but also his style, and not only his poetic style, but his development of an original poetic prose," *Shelleyan Reimaginings*, p. 28.

<sup>3</sup> Shelley's lost translation of the *Phaedo* was likely composed in May 1820, when Mary Shelley notes in her journal: "S. reads Phaedon having read Phaedrus," *MWS Journals*, 1: 317, although Webb suggests that "[t]he *Phaedo* was probably translated in September/November 1820," *The Violet in the Crucible*, p. 31n3. But Shelley had read the text earlier in translation while at Oxford; Thomas Jefferson Hogg recalls that "Shelley was never weary of reading, or of listening to me whilst I read, passages from the dialogues...and especially from the 'Phaedo,'" *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 1: 103.

<sup>4</sup> Notopoulos writes of Shelley's first readings of Montaigne in 1816: "Montaigne must have acted as a stimulus to read Plato directly," *The Platonism of Shelley*, p. 114. On Montaigne's readings of Plato, see Kellermann, "Montaigne, Reader of Plato" and Pulos, p. 72.

<sup>5</sup> Weinberg contends that "On a Future State," rather than an essay, "might more properly be considered a tract," p. 55. Coffey, noting the overt didacticism that "tract" implies, prefers instead to consider the prose fragment an "unfinished essay," *Shelley's Broken World: Fractured Materiality and Intermittent Song*, p. 62n25.

<sup>6</sup> Coffey considers the implications of Shelley's "periods," including breath and voice, in "Shelley's *Alastor* and 'On a Future State'" and Robinson notes that Leigh Hunt "emphasized Greek (and some Latin) poetry because he saw it as 'breathing' the life of poetic authenticity and, by extension, the life of a vital community," p. 106.

<sup>7</sup> "On a Future State" is quoted from *The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, vol. 6, pp. 205-209.

<sup>8</sup> Shelley's image of the broken lyre, Notopoulos confirms, "is a direct echo of *Phaedo*, 86c," "New Texts of Shelley's Plato," p. 343.

<sup>9</sup> *Hymn to Mercury* is quoted from *The Poems of Shelley*, vol. 3, pp. 508-43.

<sup>10</sup> Notopolous suggests that these "clear references" place Shelley's composition of "On a Future State" "to a time when the subject matter of the *Phaedo* would be fresh in Shelley's mind," "The Dating of Shelley's Prose," p. 495. For Shelley's extant transcriptions from the *Phaedo*, see Notopoulos, "New Texts of Shelley's Plato," pp. 111-12.

<sup>11</sup> Shelley's allusion to *Hamlet* (4. 4. 27) reappears, blended with Plato's *Philebus* (27e), in "To a Skylark," lines 86-90.

<sup>12</sup> "Dejection: An Ode" is quoted from *Coleridge's Poetry and Prose*.

<sup>13</sup> "Plato and Calderon have been my gods," *PBS Letters*, 2: 245. For a detailed discussion of Shelley's translations of Calderón, and the breadth of his translations more broadly, see Webb, *The Violet in the Crucible: Shelley and Translation*.

<sup>14</sup> Notably the Sixth Spirit's speech in Act 1, as Zachary Leader, Michael O'Neill, and Timothy Webb have observed. See *The Major Works*, p. 747n and Webb, *Shelley: A Voice Not Understood*, p. 117.

<sup>15</sup> Translated by Notopoulos, "New Texts of Shelley's Plato," p. 111.

<sup>16</sup> The mimosa is a "sensitive plant," as Darwin notes in *The Botanic Garden*, ii, p. 27n.