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차 례

[illegible] 2004년도 한국학술진흥재단의 지원에 의하여 출판되었음.

leads or lives freely or autonomously as a fully-fledged subject. This poem thereby follows a process not of self-realisation but of self-deprivation: the I of the poem follows the procession of the Chariot of Life that remains indifferent to the needs and desires of the questioning I. The poem as a whole communicates such a sense of disillusionment, such a tragi-comedic irony of life, by performing its own defeat head-on violently. And that is the exemplary "rigour (120; 123)" of Shelley.

Such is the line of reading pursued by de Man, the critic, who approaches and exposes the sequentialised movements, in the target text, of "repetitive erasure (119)", of analytic self-questioning, the movements that remain unstoppable, yet detectable. De Man follows, tracing the thread (111) of the text, the "increasingly violent, trampling (111-3)" movements of the key refrains of the poem such as "what is Life?", "what is this?", "whose shape?", "whence camest thou? And whither goest thou?" and so on: the inexorable, musically measured movements of repeatedly asked questions of origin, identity and destiny, of the past, the present and the future. What we are facing here, as the readers of de Man reading Shelley, is a repetitive pulse of the host text mirrored in the guest text, a kind of "knot that not only arrests the process of understanding (98)" but, as I will stress in this paper, enfolds, enables and engenders a new process of understanding. How did it all begin? And where does it all lead to? These are the questions we are to put not only to Shelley but to de Man the reader who, in the course of reading, "comes close to facing some of these questions about history and fragmentation (*The Rhetoric of Romanticism* ix)" "how and where one goes on from there is far from clear, but certainly no longer simply a matter of syntax and diction". How and where, we will see.

My strategy in what follows is to single out and draw together some discernable strands of reading that de Man weaves throughout his essay which, consequently, builds (or unbuilds itself) on the intersecting planes

of thoughts, especially, on language and the body, viz., figurative language (II) and the dead body (III): to this extent my analysis remains exegetical. To specify further the guiding principle as a way of spelling out the polemical intent of this paper, firstly, both de Man and I will be writing about the headless poet and his last poem, but against what I would term 'the Cambridge Torso,' a headless body erected in the museum of institutionalised texutality: "The sequel, doubtless, *would have added* clearness to a poem which remains one of the grandest, but by no means the least enigmatic, among the torsos of modern poetry (Ward Vol.12: 35, *emphasis added*)." Would it? The question is how or whether it is possible at all to determine or construct, that is, to 'figure out', the identity or origin of a piece of literary work including critical writings about literature. It is a question, as de Man argues, pursued *internally and repeatedly* in Romantic literary texts themselves which, for that reason alone if nothing else, remain dramatically inconclusive, shattered from within. De Man, as we will see, then dehumanises or impersonalises, without simply blotting out, this romantic quest motive (traditionally a marker of the teleological subjectivity of the Romantic hero) into a sheer repetitive, inherently meaningless, linguistic force, thus ironising it by displacement. My analysis focuses on this move: my reading concerns de Man's reading of Shelley. Occasional reference to articles by de Man written before or after, should help us understand where de Man is coming from and moving towards. Secondly, the accent of my reading of de Man reading Shelley will fall repeatedly on the question of subjectivity which seems slighted in de Man's text but is, as I will show, central to it: to jump a bit ahead, what we will find in de Man is the figure of the subject *subject* to the force of language, of fragmentation, of decay, rather than standing free of. In the end, my exposition will turn into an appropriative rewriting in other words, a critical and expansive recasting of de Man's reading of Shelley, rather than a straightforward summary of

it. In a sense, that is precisely what I aim to do.

To start off with: the working premise is this, that 'Shelley(-de Man) Disfigured' is an open invitation to multiple reconfigurations. That openness, if nothing else, as we will see, is the transformative power of de Man's text transferred from that of Shelley.

> *So the ironic stance depends on multiple readings?*
>
> De Man: Yes, precisely. It's the play between the various readings that the ironic disruptions are awakening. One thinks of The Divine Comedy, which is a text, a canonical text. But another way to get at it is to say that irony undoes either canonical, historical patterns, or the deliberate meanings associated with a text, or the specific canonical associations made with a national literature, such as in England with the models of Milton, Spenser, or Shakespeare. It's a quest from then on to "recapture" the work. (Moynihan 138)

The successive stages of reading Shelley la de Man will eventually be "scrambled" into an evocative blackhole, or blankhole, of a Man recalling a Man "allegorising the demise (122)" of a Man the "protagonist *defigur* (100)". Following this, I should be able to demonstrate at least one thing: a way in which we can "make this knot, by which knowledge, oblivion and desire hang suspended, into an articulated sequence of events that demands (further) interpretation (107, "further" added)": unravel the series of flashing blindness and insights intertextually compressed in Shelley's and de Man's work in question. So let us summon the disfigured multiple Shelleys and see how far we can withstand the hermeneutical pressures that both the host text and the guest text impose on us, the post-Shelley-de Manian readers. Let us begin by looking at the startling, inaugural force of the "swift" with which the poem begins: looking at "the sequence [...] punctured by acts that cannot be made a part of it (116)".

II. Repeated Impositions: Language is/as Action

Towards the end of the essay, de Man turns to the opening four lines of the poem:

> 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. (I. 1-4)

Then, he points to the first word, to the abruptness of the word, "swift":

> The most continuous and gradual event in nature, the subtle gradations of the dawn, is collapsed into the brusque swiftness of a single moment. [...] The appearances, later in the poem, of the Chariot of life are equally brusque and unmotivated. When they occur, they are not "descendants" of the sun, not the natural continuation of the original, positing gesture but positings in their own right. Unlike night following day, they always again have to be posited, which explains why they are repetitions and not beginnings. (117)

In the beginning is a repetition: the taking *place* of a repetition, more precisely. The Romantic beginning, according to this positional view of language, which de Man held increasingly firmly from the 1970s onwards while abandoning his previous existentialist interests in the representational inauthenticity of language, is always already a violent event of disruption, in the sense that it breaks open the existing time-line, recovering another line of flight from within, e.g., revolutionary time. Brought into light, repeatedly by the Romantic beginning, is an event of awakening to the outside, a continuation of something else, over which the self of the poem has no cognitive or aesthetic mastery. This something 'else' is allegorised by the Humean Sun that arises, stays and sets,

repeatedly but not causally or dialectically that is, disrelationally. For David Hume, the empirical sceptic whose philosophy Shelley converts into the poetics of Romantic despair, the Sun is neither a proof of eternal life nor a promise for the future, but a human example of inductive habits or mindset among mortal beings. So suddenly,

> [...] the sun, in the opening lines, occurs by sheer imposition. The episode describes the emergence of an articulated language of cognition by the erasure, the forgetting of the events this language in fact performed (118);

> The sequence has to be punctured by acts that cannot be made a part of it. It cannot begin, for example, by telling us of the waning of the stars under the growing impact of the sun, a natural motion which is the outcome of a mediation, but it must evoke the violent "spring forth"of a sun detached from all antecedents. Only retrospectively can this event be seen and misunderstood as a substitution and a beginning, as a dialectical relationship between day and night [...]. The sun does not appear in conjunction with or in reaction to the night and the stars, but of its own unrelated power. *The Triumph of Life* differs entirely from such Promethean or titanic myths as Keats's *Hyperion* or even *Paradise Lost* which thrives on the agonistic pathos of dialectical battle. [...] The previous occupants of the narrative space are expelled by decree, by the sheer power of utterance, and consequently at once forgotten. In the vocabulary of the poem, it occurs by *imposition* (I. 20) (116-7)

The beginning "by imposition" means over-writing. This also is the case on the literal level which might have further interested de Man who, at one point/ (95), briefly mentions the fact that the discarded earlier versions of "Triumph of Life" indicate that Shelley changed his mind over and over again about the exemplary status of Rousseau. My own reference is to the cancelled opening of the poem not appearing in the standard Mary Shelley edition (1824) but published later by Miss M. Blind in *Westminster Review*, July, 1870: "Out of the eastern shadow of the

Earth, /Amid the clouds upon its margin grey/ Scattered by Night to swathe in its bright Birth/In gold and fleecy snow the infant Day [...]". Quite literally, one forgets in order to begin anew or simply to begin at all. Had Shelley kept this old line that opens with the shadow, the perspective of which is the exact opposite of that of the new line, de Man's interpretation and subsequently mine would have been different. Similarly, had Shelley lived longer, the "swift" might have been replaced, swiftly, by something else. The "swift" is the latest Shelley has given us: it is from there that our reading, 'historical' reading, proceeds. The point I am illustrating here, with de Man, concerns not so much the hermeneutic uncertainties of the reader engendered by fragments, or the techno-ideological process of canon-formation that is inevitably selective, as the inscriptive "violence (118-120)" of textual moment. What is being critically observed and thematised here, in other words, is "the erasure (of the precedent, or of knowledge achieved by the previous forgetting) accomplished by a device of language that never ceases to partake of the very violence against which it is directed (119; 120)". Articulation as an act of power, allegorised performatively by the inaugural inscription of the sunrise in the text, is a violence directed against a violence, two homogeneous acts of violence overlapping each other, resulting in a self-reflexive disfiguration of the text, the first violence being hermeneutic (i.e., the imposition of meaning), and the second, material (i.e., the figuration, by the performative metaphor, "swift," of the emerging force of the Sun): "The repetitive erasures by which language performs the erasure of its own positions can be called disfiguration (119)".

Let us return then to de Man's "repetition, not beginnings". Subsequently, he asks:

> How can a positional act, which relates to nothing that comes before or after, becomes inscribed in a sequential narrative? [...] It can only because we impose, in our turn, on the senseless power of positional

> language the authority of sense and of meaning. But this is radically inconsistent: language posits and language means (since it articulates) but language cannot posit meaning; it can only reiterate (or reflect) it in its reconfirmed falsehood. [...] This impossible position is precisely the figure, the trope, metaphor as a violent-and-not as a dark-light, a deadly Apollo. (117-8)

So againwe are told, language is action; action is language. And Shelley's text, de Man maintains, thematises this truth performatively from the start.

To formulate this point differently, the word "swift" is *both* a tenor and a vehicle: it signifies and at the same time itself acts out "the brusque swiftness of a single moment". It is an untameable metaphor, the vehicle that resists stopping or rather, has already 'moved on' again almost literally. Romantic nature imagery, as William K. Wimsatt argues in *The Verbal Icon*, is often "*structurally* (Wimsatt 104)" reflexive in the sense that the tenor and the vehicle are "wrought in a parallel process out of the same material (109)". Examples from Shelley that Wimsatt cites (113)along with some others from Wordsworth or Keats, such as the "Spirit of wind" in *Alastor*, or "My spirit! Be thou me" in *The Ode to the West Wind*support Wimsatt's view that the metaphorising move in Romanticism is a "parallel" appropriation of the natural. On this point, namely that in Romantic poetry the tenor and the vehicle share 'the same material', de Man is with Wimsatt. On the issue, however, of whether the wind therefore resembles the spirit, whether the spirit is swift, whether my spirit can swiftly become 'me', namely, on the resultant iconicity (or figurativity, in de Man's idiom) of Romantic imagery, de Man and Wimsatt disagree sharply.

For de Man, the task of Romanticism is not to create but to *unmask* the iconic powers of language. And that is, as his contention goes, what the text does in and to itself. Taking one step further, de Man starts exfoliating the skin of Romantic imagery. For instance, "The Intentional

Structure of the Romantic Image" (1960) in which de Man's Heideggerian, 'post-war' reading of Hlderlin's flower appears, contends that the English Romantics of the nineteenth century, too, acknowledge melancholically the "ontological primacy of the natural objects (7)", that is, the inevitable defeat of "an intent of consciousness(6)" which they can only chronicle but not overcome. About a decade later in "The Rhetoric of Temporality" (1969) that discards the temporal univocity of symbolist language in favour of the originary equivocality of irony and allegory, de Man again problematises "the stress (199)" that Anglo-Americancriticism tends to put "on the analogical unity of nature and of consciousness": but this time, he pays extra attention to the intratextual "*ambivalences* derived from an illusory priority of a subject that had, in fact, to *borrow* from the outside world a temporal stability which it lacked within itself (200, *emphases added*)". The 1969 essay represents an attempt to 'resist' the post-Revolutionary lapse into melancholia by relying on the very Romantic language responsible for deception, whose prosthetic, literal dimension has therefore become ever more important. What de Man does from then onwards, as exemplified by his reading of Rousseau in *Allegories of Reading*, is to unearth intratextual resources for a renewed reading of Romanticism, "hidden articulations and fragmentations ("Promises" 249)" in Romantic literature: "since deconstruction always for its target revealsthe existence of hidden articulations and fragmentations within assumedly monadic totalities, nature turns out to be a self-deconstructive term. It engenders endless other 'natures' in an eternally repeated pattern of regression. Nature deconstructs nature."

My account above further illustrates the reason why, instead of following the symbolist or unitarian line of reading Romanticism or naturalised Romanticism, de Man moves in exactly the opposite direction. What de Man seeks to unmask is precisely the move towards a fulfilled, seemingly natural reading, be it a reading by others or a self-reading. De

Man makes the triumphant I stop, *in* the same poem, and examine, each time as if for the first time, the grounds of its own articulations: does the sunrise really resemble the spirit?

There is one illuminating paragraph in "Shelley Disfigured" that explores directly and clearly the status of the interrogative subject in the poem, the position marked by its ineluctable subjection to the impositional force of language rather than by an epistemological halo surrounding it. The literal and material aspects of language "musically transfigured into the trampling motions of the feet of the poem", says de Man, "extinguish and bury the poetic and philosophical light (113-4)". This way thequestioning goes on, surviving the empirical death of the questioner. That is how the Rousseauesque language of self-questioning survives its own death: that is the form of a Romantic self-contradiction. The narrator of the story of triumph, coming from the outside, remaining enfolded in the text, passes through a process of inexorable, ineluctable auto-disfiguration. This way, the text undermines itself, throws itself into pieces, pieces that keep cloning themselves through their human hostages known as the writers and readers of literature. The news of "the Triumph" itself, headlined with the proleptic irony of Romantic awakening/shattering, remains therefore fragmentary, heavy with the unresolved, elementary tension existing within. It becomes, in de Man's expressions, "a knot", "a burden" (103), "a radical blockage" in itself "that challenges understanding, demands to be read (122, edited)". The fixed centrality of the Romantic self, traditionally privileged as such for its allegorical superiority or its pathological sublimity, turns, via de Man's reading, into the instrumental possessiveness of the human ego, ultimately a discursive illusion of clarity subject to auto-deconstruction. The voice of authority, existing in the text, comes from a source that remains inhuman or un-anthropomorphically natural, deadly in the literal sense of the word.

The real power of Romanticism lies, then, in that it knows itself to be

a mask: "As I lay asleep in Italy/ There came a voice from over the Sea,/ And with great power it forth led me/ To walk in the visions of Poesy. [] Hypocrisy/ On a crocodile rode by. / And many more Destructions played/ In this ghastly masquerade,/ *All* disguised, *even to the eyes,*/ Like Bishops, lawyers, peers, or spies. [...] ("Mask of Anarchy Written on the Occasion of the Massacre at Manchester 1-29, *emphases added*)". All is disguised to the eyes, even the poet himself. In other words, Romanticism, in its most powerful moments, leaves no room for self-alienated melancholia or the complementary sentiment of object-loss to set in. For de Man, Romanticism is powerful because its facial identity remains unreadable or rather, all too easily readable, alluringly open to anthropomorphic appropriation often called prosopopeia (of authority such as the awe-inspiring figures of poets, Bishops, lawyers, peers, spies, professors, etc.). To push this face analogy further, Romantic text, for de Man, is not so much the sculptural poker face whose capacity for facial control is the source of insurmountable authority, but the flat Oriental face, fetishised, for example, by Roland Barthes in *The Empire of Signs*, which invites all sorts of fluid, calligraphic significations by hiding its originary blankness with its exquisite insubstantiality. Romantic text masquerades and does so often in the form of a dance of death, in the form of necromantic melancholy. Instead of denying or repressing that, de Man gives an ironic twist on the traditional view on Romantic interiority or morbidity. De Man's contention is that Romantic text creates a sense of depth *in* Romantic illusion of interiority, and worst still, often accentuates it. The iconographical *creation* of an illusion of meaning:

> The iconic, sensory or, if one wishes, the aesthetic moment is not constitutive of figuration. Figuration is the element in language that *allows for* the reiteration of meaning by substitution; the process is at least twofold and this plurality is naturally illustrated by optical icons of specularity. But the particular seduction of the figure is not

> necessarily that it creates an illusion of sensory pleasure, but that it creates an illusion of meaning. (114-5, *emphasis added*)

The problem is precisely that figuration as a linguistic prosthesis enables "the reiteration of meaning by (metonymic) substitution"which therefore the reader cannot do without. Ernst Behler's following remark on "the ironic attitude" further illustrates what is meant by the Romantic *accentuation* or creation of illusion of depth:

> More than in any other period of Western literature the ironic attitude appears as the distinctive hallmark of the Romantic generation, deeply affected as they were by the antagonism of heart with intellect, of spontaneity with reflection, of passion with calculation, and enthusiasm with scepticism. It is in this epoch that we encounter individuals who, out of their "ddoublement", engage in infinite reflection that is, in an infinite mental *spiral* in which the individual ego hovers between naive experiences and critical reflection on its experiences while viewing its own passions with disillusioned detachment. Irony and masquerade become the devices for this intellectual attitude which often cloaks a vulnerable personality plagued by melancholy, loneliness, and *profound* suffering. (Behler 43, *emphases added*).

But now, with de Man, I am going further. Let us read further that, in Shelley's poem, "the shape is a figure *regardless* of whether it appears as a figure of light (the rainbow) or of articulation in general (music as measure and language). (115, *emphases added*)". The point is, Romantic-ironic text is not so much hiding something profound or pathetic in the way Behler suggests above, but is standing as it is, as an independent voice of language in which preserved is the "literality or materiality" of language. Literal: note the referential blankness of "A shape all light (II.352)" which remains auto-inscriptive; the word itself remains, for instance, as a pure shape with no concrete signified; what it means remains readable only like the skull of the text. Material: note the

referential violence of language in the "sandy brain" of "Suddenly my brain became as sand (II. 405)", or similarly, the "rolled brain" in the last line of the first round of trance, "And then a vision on my brain was rolled (I. 40)". These lines illustrate, as de Man points out, not so much a figural modification of images in the "centre of consciousness" but a physical, "mechanical metamorphosis", "the modification of a knowledge into the surface on which this knowledge ought to be recorded" (99-100). If, as I have been suggesting, Romanticism is a mask in itself, not of something else, this mask is to be seen as something like a work of kaleidoscopic *origami* (paperfolding) displaying its dazzling, transient manifoldness rather than as a 'masquerade' of the enchained inhabiting the Platonic cave; as "My mind became the book through which I grew", my sandy brain produces a sandy text, so "[...] on the sand would I make signs to range/ These woofs, as they were woven, of my thought ("The Revolt of Islam" VII. 3110-13)". The Shelleyan interplay of shadow and light, of the shore and tides, Humean in its impressionism, lacks the brooding patience of Wordsworth. What it possesses is, however, a phonic drive. As de Man says,

> It is tempting to interpret [...] the shapes "trampling" the fires of thought "into the dust of death (I.388)", as the bifurcation between the semantic and the non-signifying, material properties of language. [...] If, for instance, compelling rhyme schemes such as "billow", "willow", "pillow" or transformations such as "thread" to "tread" or "seed" to "deed"occur at crucial moments in the text, then the question arises whether these particularly meaningful movements or events are not being generated by random and superficial properties of the signifier rather than by the constraints of meaning. The obliteration of thought by "measure" would then have to be interpreted as the loss of semantic depth and its replacement by what Mallarm calls le hasard infini des conjunctions (*Igitur*) (113). (See II. 352-399)

To recapitulate: this "repetitive", musical self-erasure takes place with*in* the text, *The Triumph of Life*. This is to suggest, with de Man, that the text is better read as sequential acts of language's infinite moving-on, formalised through its submission to the law of *terza rima*,a braided repetition of the infinite.

The question then: How exactly does the fragment unfold, relieve and restage its superficial fragmentarity? Why this event of writing, of grafting on, of plodding on, of living on? Where does this rhythm of explosion originate from and flow into? "The rhythm is there, ceaselessly urging consciousness to give itself over; a deliberate act of will may be required forconsciousness to break free from rhythms grasp. Rhythmising consciousness is thus to some degree a prisoner of the rhythm [...]. Rhythmising consciousness thus emerges as a *fascinated* consciousness, subject to a fatal, horizonless future. This fascination admits of degrees, ranging from the normal to the pathological (Abraham 23)". If the madness of words cannot be stopped, we can at least stop and ask ourselves why that is the case: to what are we thus fastened? What is, to use Shelley's image, this car that breaks everything into pieces but itself never breaks down? Time, perhaps; specifically a narrative time - governing, shaping and disrupting the narrated time, a time that travels there*fore* outside time - seems to hold the key. This consideration of the fragmentary, decaying force of time leads us to the next point - on the disjunctive relation between language and the body, which ironic time brings about.

III. The Corpse Unbound: an Untimely Death is/as a Well-timed Event

The previous section (II) argued that "the positing power of language is both entirely arbitrary in having a strength that cannot be reduced to

necessity, and entirely inexorable in that there is no alternative to it (116)". In this section (III), the same thesis on the positional force of language will be re-articulated from the temporal point of view: irony as *an event*, an ontological happening, no longer merely as a complicated bruise in self-consciousness caused by the experience of the limits - of cognition and dialectical speculation. As de Man goes on to write: "It stands beyond the polarities of chance and determination and can therefore not be part of a temporal sequence of events. The sequence has to be punctured by acts that cannot be made a part of it (116)" "The sequence has to be punctured by acts that cannot be made a part of it": the present section rearticulates this thesis, on "punctuation", from a temporal, instead of spatial (positional), viewpoint. For after all, or before all, the sequence, again, "has to be *punctured* by acts that cannot be made a part of it (*emphasis added*)" "It seems that the language is unable to remain [...] ensconed [...], it *has to* turn itself out ("Reading (Proust)" 70, *emphasis added*)".

Now, first, what is meant by "punctuation" (*punctus*, *punctuare* pricking, pointing)? In the opening passage of the first paragraph of the essay that runs three-page long rather breathlessly, de Man quotes Shelley,

> "And what is this?. Whose shape is that within the car? And why (II. 177-8)" later repeated in a more subject-oriented, second-person mode: ' "Whence camest thou? And whither goest thou?/ How did thy course begin," I said, "and why?" (II. 296-97); finally repeated again, now in the first person: "Shew whence I came, and where I am, and why - ..." (I. 398)

and says, "these questions can easily be *referred back* to the *enigmatic* text they *punctuate* and they are characteristic of the interpretative labour associated with romanticism (95-6, *emphases added*)." Another example:

> Lengthy and complex as it is, Rousseau's self-narrated history provides no answer to his true identity, although he is himself shown

> in quest of such an answer. Questions of origin, of direction, and of identity *punctuate* the text without ever receiving a clear answer. They always *lead back* to a new scene of questioning which merely repeats the quest and recedes in infinite regress: the narrator asks himself, ' "And what is this?..." ' (I. 177) and receives an enigmatic answer (' "Life!" ') from an *enigmatic* shape; once identified as Rousseau, the shape can indeed reveal some other names in the pageant of history but is soon asked, by the poet, to identify itself in a deeper sense than by a mere name: ' "How did thy course begin... and why?" '. (97-8, *emphases added*)

To see questions as "punctuations (94, 97, 113)" or "punctual (115)" "punctures (116)"in narrative consciousness is to pay attention to its temporal dimension. Romantic questioning, as a quest for meaning, as discussed earlier in terms of "rhythms" of consciousness, is musical rather than teleological. "To question is to forget"(118). To question is to be punctuated by language; punctuated, not pushed away; used perhaps, but not used up, "for the initial violence of position can only be *half* erased (118, *emphasis added*)", which, in turn, enables a new questioning, a new misunderstanding, a new experience of the text. This explains the resiliency of poetic scepticism which is the lasting, haunting power of the poetry of Shelley. The power of Shelleyan self-reflection lies in its lack of nostalgia, its forgetfulness, its speediness. As Andrew Welburn suggests, without such "fresh", daring "uncertainties" built into and generated from the text paralogically or paratextually, *The Triumph of Life* would have been already dead:

> [...] (I)n accordance with his commitment to the principle of death and rebirth, Shelley still leaves his vision open to fresh uncertainties. Few affirmations seem possible on the subject of Shelley's incomplete fragment *The Triumph of Life*, on which he was working immediately before his unanticipated death. His death added a last irony to the title. In the poem the Triumph is a hideous pageant, like that which the Roman emperors used to celebrate after a victory, driving their humiliated captives and their plunder in procession for all to see; and Life - but it is hard to answer the question which brings to an end the fragment we possess. (Welburn 177-8)

Which triumph does the poem talk about? Which life? Or whose life? One will remain haunted, startled by those knots of unresolved riddles, in the same way the text is. The language of questioning posits, marks and passes over into, a time outside the familiar time. To question is therefore to be able to pause. To read a question is to reciprocate that pause, that atemporal gaze, that unintentional holding of a breath. Such reciprocation is, however, not a docile cloning of the given, but the blasting-open of it. That is to say, pausing itself is a bursting of consciousness into a new temporality of thinking.

What 'punctures' Shelley's text is something entirely different. It is that which *happens* next "swiftly," what 'turns out' to be the next scene, on a temporal plane that signifies and announces pure difference or differentiation: the event of Shelley's boat being turned over; his corpse handed down to us the readers. Quite naturally, this "actual, literal, freak (120-1)" event is that to which de Man turns in the final phase (120-3) of his argument. One blank line (120) with which he "starts from scratch" again would seem a visible pause, a readerly reciprocation of that which remains unrepresented yet still present in the host text:

> This defaced body is present in the margin of the last manuscript page and *has become* an inseparable part of the poem. At this point, figuration and cognition are actually interrupted by an event which shapes the text but which is not present in its represented or articulated meaning. It may see a freak of chance to have a text thus moulded by an actual occurrence, yet the reading of *The Triumph of Life* establishes that this mutilated textual model exposes the wound of a fracture that lies hidden in all texts. [...] The rhythmical interruptions that mark off the successive episodes of the narrative are not new moments of cognition but literal events

> textually reinscribed by a delusive act of figuration or of forgetting. (120-1, *emphasis added*)

A crucial difference between Shelley and de Man is that the first did not live to witness this event, whereas the second did, positioned to see a wider frame of the text: positioned but not privileged, unless by privilege is meant the historically contingent advantage of observation. That is, de Man can read Shelley's "actual" death inclusively as part of alarger text, as the final break-down of Shelley's system inscribed within, allegorised within, because he comes *after* Shelley. Similarly, we can read the textual life of de Man and its internal wounds precisely because we come after. The similarities are too alluring to be ignored.

Observe further the uncanny parallel between the revolutionary time inhabited by Shelley and that by de Man mirrored in what they share on both textual and biographical levels: their readerly loyalty to Rousseau; militant atheism; aggressive scepticism bordering on idiosyncratic radicality; taste for revolution complicated by the propensity for introspection; intellectual commitment to self-analysis manifested in the revisionary nature of their works; posthumous fate their writings bring about proleptically, and so on. Suddenly, de Man seems alive like a flash in the dark. This final "turn" to come, which is not final in the teleological sense of the word, is a future-anterior sequence in the extended text that remains thereby unreadable - that is, readable only after the fact.

Simon Haines (220-1), referring to the passage from de Man quoted above, makes this point that such a "biographicalising" move is tempting but misleading. What is interesting is not the point itself but the reason he provides, which is seminal in a strange sort of way:

> Paul de Man says that Shelley's "defaced body is present in the margins [...]". Bloom remarks that the "Triumph" is "properly Shelley's last work". But all these reflections show how easy it is to slide from an ancillary to a determinist biographicalism. Fascination with fragmented lives and texts tempts us to see Shelley's mood at Lerici not just as a dispositional orientation evident in the poem too but as a kind of final renunciation [...]. The irony in Shelley's quotation, however, is that he did not know he was going to drown.

Precisely: the point, the irony is, Shelley did *not* know he was going to drown. That is, Shelley, the fleshed historical individual, has no control over what happens or is going to happen. To give a slightly silly yet quite sobering example: even a suicide can be meticulously planned, but its success cannot be guaranteed, as numerous cases show, whether fictively or actually. All such failures in and of life, including posthumous surprises, derive from them being judged untimely; but the irony of untimely events derive from them turning out to be actually well-timed, in retrospect. And what de Man means by "hidden articulations and fragmentations" of the text, which he and I have scrutinised slavishly, reciprocating their "madness" (Abraham 23), is such a temporal gap, the folds of time, between what seems to be and what turns out to be. That turn, that gaping (w)hole, remains infinite and infinitely uncontrollable. So the point is, Shelly not only did not know but cannot: "Ask him who lives what is life (Shelley, "On Love" 473)", says Shelley as a way of answering the question, what love is. Then, what does he think life is?

> What is life? Thoughts and feelings arise, with or without our will, and we employ words to express them. We are born, and our birth is unremembered and our infancy remembered but in fragments. We live on, and in living we lose the apprehension of life. How vain is it to think that words can penetrate the mystery of our being. Rightly used they may make evident our ignorance to ourselves, and this is much. For what are we?
>
> Whence do we come, and whither do we go? Is birth the commencement, is death the conclusion of our being? [...] (Shelley, "On Life" 475-6)

> What is the cause of Life? That is, how was it produced, or what agencies distinct from life, have acted or act upon life? All recorded generations of mankind have wearily busied themselves in inventing answers to this question. (458)

Life for Shelley, as Madonna "Don't Tell Me" says, is not something true but something we do or something that "acts upon" us, of which we remain ignorant: he defines it at the very start of the essay as something indefinably powerful, definable simply as "whatever we call that which we are and feel, an astonishing thing (474)", a "startling (476)" force. In short, life does not correspond to anything, but creates itself. And Shelley's view on life is not much different from de Man's: "this perpetual error that we call, precisely, life (*Blindness and Insight* v, a sentence from Marcel Proust)". In the very last lecture de Man gave, he returns to that perpetual terror of "error" he calls life:" [...] a movement of disintegration, of fragmentation. This movement of the original is a wandering, an *errance*, a kind of permanent exile [...] *this illusion of a life that is only an afterlife*, that Benjamin calls history ("Conclusions" 92)".

Again the point is, Shelly not only did not, cannot, know but, in addition, did not think he would know when he was going to drown. The same applies to de Man the fallen star.

Again the point is, Haines does hit the nail on the head but from an incorrect angle, or only a little. When de Man talks about Shelley's "actual" death, he is not standing apart from Shelleys "biography" taken as a temporal or metaphorical object; he is more involved. His focus here, more abstract yet more precise, is on the biodegradable textuality of human time which he arguesfor instance in "Reading (Proust)" originally titled *Proust et l'allgorie de la lecture* is allegorically implicated in "the hour of death": "As a writer, Proust is the one who knows that the hour of truth, like the hour of death, never arrives on time, since what we call time is precisely truth's inability to coincide with itself. A *la recherche du temps perdu* narrates the flight of meaning, but this does not prevent its own meaning from being, incessantly, in flight ("Reading (Proust)" 78)". Why is time, and human time in particular, a marker of truth's failure? Because its essence is change, non-identity, eternal internal dissonance between split seconds, *albeit* enfolded in the freezing terror of the unknown. A reader suffering from the plight of flight of meaning is not exactly an all-knowing allegorist who only needs a case to prove his point. In other words, de Man does not qualify as a determinist, either. The vision I have is rather a man holding, in his hand, a dead body soaked in white blood, without knowing what to do with it. Reading is bodily, visceral, precisely because it is historically rooted: historical in the Benjaminian sense de Man is describing above, that is, in the specifically historio*graphically* material sense of the word. De Man writes in the paragraph that follows the passage quoted earlier,

> In Shelley's absence, the task of thus reinscribing the disfiguration now devolves entirely on the reader. The final test of reading, in *The Triumph of Life*, depends on how one reads the textuality of this event, how one disposes of Shelley's body. The challenge that is in fact present in all texts and that *The Triumph of Life* identifies, thematises, and thus tries to avoid in the most effective way possible, is here actually carried out as the sequence of symbolic interruption, is in its turn interrupted by an event that is no longer simply imaginary or symbolic. The apparent ease with which the readers of *The Triumph of Life* have been able to dispose of this challenge demonstrates the inadequacy of understanding of Shelley and, beyond him, of romanticism in general.
>
> For what we have done with the dead Shelley, and with all the other dead bodies that appear in romantic literature [...] is simply to bury them, to bury them in their own texts made into epitaphs and monumental graves. [...] They have been transformed into historical and aesthetic objects. (121, *emphasis added*)

To read Shelley, I agree with de Man, is to read his corpse, and to read

his corpse is to inscribe its originary disfigurativity *back* into the scene of reading, in other words, to restage that temporal gap between what he seems to be and what he turns out to be, over and over again the gap therefore marked by a strange atemporality of disjunctive repetition.

Terry Eagleton quips in "The Critic as Clown": "It is surely time to move on, rather than remaining like de Man fixated in the moment of bleak recognition that aardvarks are not people, and then repeating that traumatic moment compulsively (Eagleton 158)". Surely, it is time to move on and turn around and say, perhaps that pathetic, compulsive, traumatised clown *is* the critic. This is a Shakespearean spin in another sense. As with *Hamlet*, it is only by means of reading, by means of living by reading, that "the dead are made to have a face and a voice which tells the allegory of their demise (122)", a face and a voice that demand a continual reading that do not neglect to read its own temporal gaps. "To read", that is to say, "to understand, to question, to know, to forget, to erase, to deface, to repeat (122)" is, then, to inhabit that plural time outside the historicized linear time, an unreachable time that is already, indelibly, thankfully, inscribed in historical time mediated not merely through historical and aesthetic museum pieces but more importantly, as de Man emphasizes, through what he designates as the narrative voice of the text. Reading leaves the text changed. But to read is also to leave its autonomy to echo itself: to let the air in, to let it live its own afterlife by making its mortality pertinent to the questions of the contemporary, which is a pressing concern particularly when it comes to reading Romantic texts.

Ⅳ. Conclusion: The Cutting Power of Elliptical Endings

The ironically punctuated, un-Romanticised, reading of Shelley that de Man provides is persuasive in that it shows effectively, first, how poetic figuration de-constructs rather than symbolises itself, and second, how this ironic auto-disfiguration taking place within the text comes into contact with intertexual events such as the literal death of the poet - the inscriptive *accidentality* of time. This way, time remains revolutionary, the very token of unpredictability, in the critical discourse as well as the creative poetics of Romanticism. One of the urgent silences of *The Triumph of Life* demanding careful attention concerns its historical status or exemplarity. If the poem represents, as generally acknowledged, an attempt to rethink the poets previously held positions in *Alastor* or *Prometheus Unbound* (see also 98-9), its "frustratingly inconclusive (Welburn 178)" end itself must also hold some representative value. But that value, with de Man I have been arguing, is unrecognisable or else poses a threat, for the reasons explained above, to the narrative closure of dialecticised or historicized Shelley. And this is the trouble de Man is pointing at, as I have been highlighting it. In other words, the open-endedness at issue is not that of incompletion but that of incommensurability, of indifference, as explained earlier in terms of the eternal, internal dissonance of time. It is as if Shelley's unfinished business with his life or the business with which he finished his life, had slit open a whole new passage of time, had unearthed a radically different plane of time yet to be named and tamed.

Indeed, there is no guarantee that I am moving in the right direction. There is no guarantee, either, that I am not merely being played by something which may well be de Man's hand masquerading as a given text. But such a wild card of reading, of living, must be played; and it has to be played according to the narrative rule imposed by the text, not merely because it is a reflexive cure for boredom but because that seems the most reliable option left to the historical, literary reader who has no direct access to time other than through the textured, i.e. rhetoricised, timethe pressure of punctuations, for instance, as I thematised it in this

essay. To read is then to gamble. The same point has been already made, just to give one good example, by Rodolphe Gasch in the introduction to his volume on de Man, *The Wild Card of Reading* (1998), where he says in reference to the *Resistance to Theory* from which his title has been taken:

> Let's bear in mind that literary theory, or theory for short, in that essay, but elsewhere, is the theory of the rhetorical, or tropological, dimension of language, a dimension that can be adequately coped with only in and through reading. Yet, what is a wild card? In a card game the wild card is the card able to represent any card designated by the holder, or the highest-ranking card. The joker--the descendent of the fool, and one of the twenty-two unnumbered wild cards in the atouts or trumps in the tarot deck--can be a wild card in card games. However, under certain circumstances, the joker is merely an odd card, carrying no value whatsoever, and hence not wild. [...] If only one wild card is played, the tricking occurs within certain rules; yet, if more than one card is wild, only chance prevails. [...] (Gasch 7)

"The abyss does tend to yawn", warns Stuart Curran (658) of the Romantic acceleration of reflexive uncertainty, who is far from being foolish but obviously did not bear in mind what Gaschhas to say. For he allowed himself to be bored with de Man's close attention to the intratextual workings of language. Curran is quite right about this symptom of myopic post-structuralism; but again and again, the point is, the abyss *is* hypnotic and the point of reading is to stay awake. As Shoshana Felman says, looking back about "the knot of (de Man's) friendship and of influence (Felman 56-8)", "the inextricable knot [...] that his extraordinary presence has inscribed in my (her) life and work", more specifically, "the point of failure built into his teaching", the point of mutual contact that "*revolutionises* one's thought":

> Reading is an attempt [...] to set ourselves free of this signifying chain--of our entrapment in linguistic structure, to catch up with, and cancel out, the foolishness unwittingly exhibited by reading. Catching up, however, is impossible, because the act of catching up itself *repeats the difference* it attempts to read and cancel out. The attempt to catch up stumbles, thus, again, on the impossibility of reading, which de Man transforms into something like a philosophical imperative to irony. (55)

Time and again, like Jean-Jacques Rousseau in both the *Social Contract* and *The Triumph of Life,* the free man is found everywhere, chained everywhere. Thereby, the question of reading becomes that of life. Time permitting *The Triumph* can make a fantastic pastime. But the point, the hidden irony, is that the vacation comes also in the form of a vocation, in a similar manner that the English man writing against England did not live and die in Italy simply for funded pleasure but out of necessity. A similar thing can be said about the Belgian intellectual writing against Europe, living and dying in the brave new world. Here, the task would be not merely to undo, but to redo, that notorious knot of incompletion, that wild jungle of foolish readings.

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Shelley-de Man Unbound; Or, The Knot of Revolutionary Irony

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Abstract

This essay thematises, and further radicalises, textual materialism in Paul de Man's 1979 essay on Shelley's *The Triumph of Life*, "Shelley Disfigured", where Shelley's poetics of despair and ironic scepticism is approached from the viewpoint not of dialectical self-consciousness but of inscriptive language. Ultimately, the present work argues in support of de Man's often-trivialised or misunderstood contention, that such performativity of irony is to be understood ontologically rather than hermeneutically: Romantic irony, as exemplified in Shelley's last poem as well as de Man's critical disclosure of its textual mechanics, is a revolutionary event in itself that allows a different line of time to be drawn, rather than an aesthetic dissolution or consummation of teleological consciousness. The opening (I) discussion of the constitutive fragmentarity of *The Triumph of Life* seeks to reveal the extent to which the standard, unity-driven, ideologically saturated readings of Shelley tend to repress and even disguise the 'originary' incompletion of Romantic literature, which is in fact its very resounding force. Part II that deals with language, especially 'phonic drive', then focuses, with de Man, on the musical autonomy of Shelley's language, separate from consciousness, as a marker of such material forces at work. Part III reinforces the key contention by highlighting repetition as the temporal mode of ontological irony, time taken here as the Benjaminian signature of the bodily disruption of history itself, i.e., as the very possibility of revolution, which, with de Man the essay affirms, is inscriptively (or performatively) embodied in the fragment, *The Triumph of Life*.

[Key Words: de Man, Shelley, Irony, Language, Materialism, Time]

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