In Defence of *Hellas*:
An Analysis of Shelley's *Hellas*
and Its Reception.

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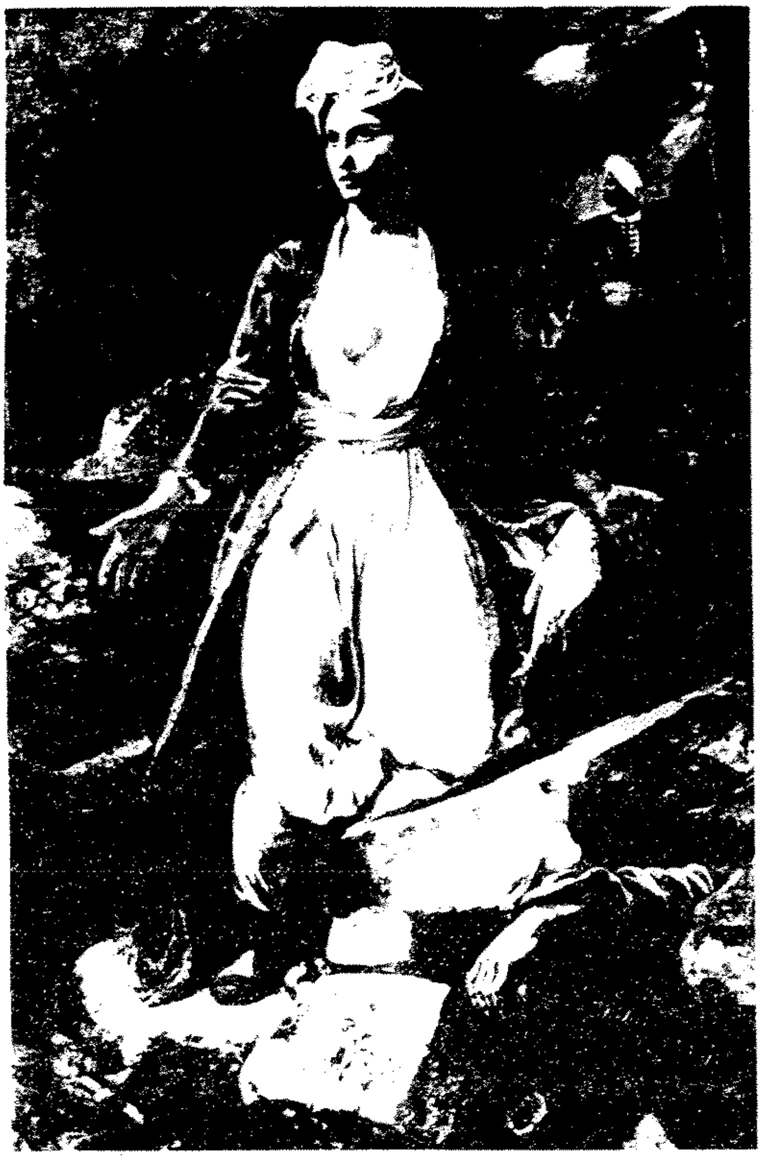
What is life? A frenzy. What is life?
A shadow, an illusion, and a sham.
The greatest good is small; all life, it seems,
Is just a dream, and even dreams are dreams.[1]



Greece on the Ruins of Missolonghi, 1826. Delacroix.[2]

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[1] From Act 2, Scene 19 in Calderon's *La Vida Es Sueño*.

[2] The illustration shows a Greek soldier, 'appealing for help with an open-armed gesture, palpitating with life, and personifying the triumph of the spirit of liberty over disaster' (Honour, 230-31)

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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

When a poem has been much neglected by critics and the reading audience alike, this may be cause for an investigation. The reasons why one literary work writes itself into history and stays there whereas another work, seemingly similar, is born into silence, may be various. While working with Shelley's *Hellas* I naturally asked myself why the work more or less has been ignored since its day of publication. I therefore set out to explore the external and internal features of the poem's life. By external features I mean the aspects surrounding its publication and reception, while by internal features I refer to the poem itself, its form, structure, and themes. My purpose in this project is thus to study the ways in which *Hellas* has been received, primarily among critics, and then to show how the poem, as a designed whole, belongs within the Shelley canon, both structurally and thematically.

My dissertation is divided into two main parts, beginning with the reception of the poem and ending with my analysis of it. Before this, however, I have included a short chapter on what I regard as the most important sources of *Hellas*, attempting to illustrate how three major writers influenced Shelley in his work. The reason why I have done this is to substantiate my claim that the poem neither is a mere improvise (at least in our sense of the word) nor a mere propagandistic call for freedom in Greece. In my opinion, the influence on Shelley of these and other writers gives the poem texture and unity, and creates a link between *Hellas* and literary history.

My next chapter is inspired by Hans Robert Jauss's theory on the reader's active participation in the reception of a work. From the more general ideas of reception I then proceed to a survey of the criticism on *Hellas*, in which I will comment on the nineteenth and twentieth century criticism. My main focus will nevertheless be on this century's critical approaches to the poem. In doing so, I have gathered what I hope is a representative collection of essays and articles on *Hellas*, giving a short presentation of each, with the intention of elucidating the poem's value according to its criticism. I conclude with an analysis of the poem, in which I put extra focus on the character analysis since *Hellas* is a drama of little external action. I find that a closer look at the four main characters reveals the thematic pattern of the poem. I also emphazise how motifs recur in the different parts of the poem, and how all the seven parts are woven together by one theme, thus creating unity.

Shelley first heard about the insurrection in Greece in the spring of 1821. Some months later, during the autumn, he wrote *Hellas*, and in the beginning of November he sent it off to his publisher in England. The poem was written, Shelley tells us, 'at the suggestion of the events of the moment' (Preface, 407),[1] and was an attempt to direct England's attention towards the war between Turkey and Greece. The drama focuses on the sultan, Mahmud, who controls the Turkish attacks on Greece. His sleep is restless and his mind worried by a recurring nightmare. He seeks help from the Wandering Jew, Ahasuerus, whom he believes has magic powers and can interpret his dream. During their conversation, Mahmud sinks more and more into despair as he, in spite of reports of Turkish victories, realizes that he has lost the war. Alternating between the three dialogue parts, is a chorus of Greek, enslaved women who furnish the drama with hope and aspirations for freedom's victory. Their participation is not directly connected to the insurrection in Greece, but rather expresses a universalized view of the futility of war. The action is seen from the Turkish point of view, which makes it possible for Shelley to focus both on Turkish defeat, via Mahmud, and Greek victory, through the Chorus.

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[1] All my references to *Hellas*, including the Preface, are taken from Reiman & Powers: *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*. When I have used other sources this will be indicated in the text.

The insurrection in Greece was important to Shelley because it, among other things, could be used symbolically as well as politically. This is because the history of Greece has such close ties to the development of freedom, art, and knowledge, and because it was the 'cradle' of European civilization. In this way the drama affects the reader on more than one level of perception. Of course, the obvious intention might be to awaken England to fight for a Greece freed from tyranny, but another, and perhaps more important level, is turning our thoughts to our own minds. At this level, the whole drama itself takes on the role of Ahasuerus, and we, as readers, are all 'Mahmuds', subjected to our own tyranny of thoughts that we must rescue and liberate.

I have chosen to exclude the fragment called *Prologue to Hellas* from my analysis. I have two main reasons for doing this, its unfinished and fragmentary state being one good reason. It is short and has a different style than the rest of *Hellas*, and I found it difficult to relate to it as part of the whole poem. Secondly, the fact that Shelley never attempted to complete it for publication later may account for its dissociation with *Hellas*. The Prologue has indeed many interesting aspects, but for the purpose of this essay I find it of little relevance.

Furthermore, the form of the work invites a few introductory comments. The subtitle of *Hellas* is, as we know, *A Lyrical Drama*, the same as that of *Prometheus Unbound*. Critics that have discussed the poem's dramatic qualities seem to agree that it is unsuccessful as such. Its genre did not, however, seem very important to Shelley if we are to believe the Preface, where he hesitates to call it a drama; 'if drama it must be called' (Preface, 408), he writes. He further explains that he called the poem a drama because it is composed in dialogue, and he refers to *Hellas* both as a drama and as a poem. I wish to follow his example in my dissertation, as it clearly is both dramatic and lyrical. Some may argue that the dramatic form of the poem is not representative of Shelley, but as Stuart Curran has pointed out, 'the great bulk of what [Shelley] himself published before his death is narrative and dramatic' (Cave, 62). I have therefore chosen to concentrate my dissertation on one of Shelley's lyrical dramas, both because it is representative of Shelley's last years, and because it, being one of Shelley's more neglected poems, deserves greater attention. That the poem often has been regarded as mediocre in academic circles has perhaps made this task more interesting than it would otherwise have been. I found it very challenging to work with a poem that only relatively few have written about before me. I could thus be freer in my own assertions and interpretations, avoiding to be too influenced by previous critics.

CHAPTER TWO

THE SOURCES

Shelley chose to model *Hellas* on ancient Greek drama. *The Persae* by Aeschylus has influenced the form, and partly also the content, of Shelley's poem about Greece and her fight for freedom. Apart from this openly acknowledged source of inspiration, one should perhaps be careful to search deliberately for other influences on Shelley in this period. I will nevertheless mention a few works that seem obvious to me when reading *Hellas* and when studying what Shelley himself read before and during writing this poem.

Pisa in 1821 saw the performance of the *Improvvisatore*, Tommaso Sgricci's 'quasi-classical tragedy on the death of Hector, in which he played all the parts' (Cave, 66), which Shelley witnessed and reviewed. Stuart Curran, along with Paul Dawson, suggests that 'these improvised classical tragedies, with their interpolated choruses, influenced the nature and form of *Hellas*' (Cave, 66). This may certainly be right in that Shelley called his poem a 'mere improvise'. Mary seemed to have been very impressed by Sgricci's performances, but Shelley, according to his letters, was less enthusiastic, and the Italian's influence on *Hellas*, seems to me to be minor. There are many opinions about which literary works may have inspired Shelley. Critics list works by Lord Byron, Virgil, Shakespeare, and Wordsworth (Bush, 165), but a detailed investigation of these sources clearly lies beyond the scope of this project. It is not difficult to see the influence of some of the mentioned artists, especially Shakespeare, but I have instead chosen to focus on the three I find to have had greatest and the most interesting impact on *Hellas*: Aeschylus, Milton and Calderon.

I will begin by pointing out some of the aspects of *Hellas* which are influenced by Aeschylus's *The Persians* or Greek tragedy in general. In

Michael Scrivener's words, one of the sources to *Hellas* is 'Shelley's Hellenism, which is a love not simply for Plato and Homer, but for an entire democratic culture' (286). In the Preface to *Hellas*, Shelley wrote that '*The Persae* of Æschylus afforded [him] the first model of [his] conception, although the decision of the glorious contest now waging in Greece being yet suspended forbids a catastrophe parallel to the return of Xerxes and the desolation of the Persians' (Preface, 408). In John S. Flagg's opinion, Aeschylus was more than a source of inspiration. Basing *Hellas* on *The Persians* was an 'act of reviving classical Greek tragedy', which for Shelley was 'part of the very process of regeneration which the poem itself prophesies' (Flagg, 193).

Apart from the tragic ending of *The Persians*, there are many similarities between the two plays. Both stories involve Greece at war, seen from the perspective of the enemy. Both involve a form of foreshadowing in the shape of dreams and the invocation of ghosts. In *The Persians*, the queen, Atossa, has a bad dream which is interpreted as an allegory of the battle between Persia and Greece, and which foretells the victory of the latter. This parallels the nightmare that haunts Mahmud. As Mahmud, with the help of Ahasuerus, summons the phantom of his forefather, so Atossa converses with the ghost of her dead husband, Darius, in search of knowledge about the future and the outcome of the war. This feature is important to both *Hellas* and *The Persians*. Shelley himself mentions the main difference between the two plots in the Preface. Aeschylus wrote his play some years after the war, whereas Shelley wrote *Hellas* in the beginning of what was going to be a long war, so he could only express his hopes for the outcome of the war, and not describe it, as Aeschylus did. The ending of *Hellas* is therefore left open to interpretation.

Historical studies of the civil war in Greece have shown that Shelley was more influenced by Aeschylus's presentation of the battle of Salamis, around

480 BC, than the battles reported to him through newspapers and Prince Mavrocordato and his friends in 1821. In the poem, 'Greek valor and success are magnified or invented, and Greek cowardice, fraud, and barbarity are glossed over, with the selective instinct and transforming power of impassioned idealism' (Bush, 163). The true face of what Shelley named a glorious war was rather sordid, on both the Greek and the Turkish side. Reports of slaughter and illness echoed from both parts of the conflict, and Greece had long ago fallen far from its ancient splendour.[1] Shelley probably knew parts of the truth, but as an artist his task was not to deal with historical facts, but to stir people's emotions in favour of Greece. That is why he found it more suitable to deviate from the facts and try to recreate the glories of the past by drawing on battle descriptions from Aeschylus.

The use of a chorus is central in both plays. It both opens and ends the plays, and is thus important to the reader's perception of the mood and atmosphere of the drama. Using a chorus enables the poet to create a distance between the actual plot and a more universal view of the action. Two of the main functions of the Chorus in *The Persians* are to comment upon the action and enhance the emotional effect of the play (Heath, 140), and these functions have been strengthened in Shelley's use of the Chorus. In *Hellas*, the lyricism of the Chorus increases the effect of Mahmud's personal defeat. The Chorus in Aeschylus, however, is more intertwined with the rest of the action. In the ending, for instance, Xerxes speaks directly to the Chorus, whereas Shelley's Chorus largely does not interfere with the other characters. Nevertheless, both plays are examples of how the Chorus occupies a double role, in being both inside and outside the action (Kraggerud, 85). The Chorus can comment on and even be part of the action, but never actively participate in or change the plot. This helps to emphazise the inherent movement in Shelley's *Hellas*. Our attention as readers shifts from focusing on the Chorus to the characters and back again. Our pity is at the same time directed towards the enslaved women in the Chorus and towards Mahmud.

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[1] For an account of the actual war between Greece and Turkey, I refer to William St.Clair's *That Greece Might Still Be Free: The Philhellenes in the War of Independence*. London: Oxford UP, 1972.

The Chorus of Shelley, however, differs from Aeschylus's in one important aspect. Whereas it in *The Persians* consists of old, wise men, 'venerable Councillors of the Persian king' (Aeschylus, 122), the one in *Hellas* consists of captive Greek women. The very important role assigned to the Chorus in *Hellas* is thus given to the oppressed part of the conflict. They thus greatly contrast with the old, respectable men, forming the Chorus of *The Persians*, and who are safe from danger, belonging as they do, to the attacking part. Because of this, Shelley's Chorus makes a much stronger impression than that of Aeschylus. The distance between the Chorus and the other characters is also increased by this move. The Chorus is therefore free to express the strong hope and belief in freedom that the other characters lack. Shelley's drama thus contains greater contrasts than *The Persians*.

Both dramas contain little action, which should imply that the plot itself is not the most important issue, but rather the suffering and feelings expressed through the characters. This is given extra emphasis as both dramas are presented from the perspective of the enemy. This device 'is meant to compel the audience to think primarily not about the victors but the defeated, not about triumph but about devastation' (McCall, 44). The lack of action is thus compensated for by letting the audience take part in the feelings of loss and defeat that mark the characters. At the same time, the feelings connected to the victory of Greece are never completely left out. Aeschylus 'presents both the Athenian and the Persian perspectives simultaneously in a way that creates a basic tension or irony throughout the play' (Gagarin, 30). Shelley adopts this perspective in *Hellas* to increase the movement in the lyrical drama.

As the war between Greece and Turkey was not yet ended, Shelley could only present his hopes for the outcome of the war. By making Mahmud a very humane character, the readers would be emotionally touched by his hopelessness and despair, even though he was the tyrant who bereaved Greece of her freedom. Gagarin argues that by using such a focus or perspective the audience would realize that 'victory and defeat in a battle are directly related: the greater the one, the greater the other' (53). This view is partly expressed by Mahmud too, when he exclaims:

> Woe to the wronged and the avenger! woe
> To the destroyer and the destroyed!
> Woe to the dupe; and woe to the deceiver!
> Woe to the oppressed; and woe to the oppressor!
> Woe both to those that suffer and inflict,
> Those who are born and those who die! (894-99).

Gagarin further argues that this

> comprehension of complementary, opposed viewpoints within a single play is a fundamental aspect of Aeschylus's dramatic technique. Indeed the overall unity or coexistence of opposites is a common element in early Greek thought (54).

I will later show how Shelley employs exactly this technique to create movement and tension in a play that otherwise would be static, due to the lack of external action.

The next author I want to mention is John Milton, whose influence on Shelley can be clearly documented in many of his works. Shelley's relationship to Milton was, however, ambivalent. His admiration for him is reflected in remarks like 'Milton stood alone illuminating an age unworthy of him' (*Defence*, 491)[2] and, the view from the Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*,

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[2] All my references to *A Defence of Poetry* (abbreviated to *Defence*) are taken from Reiman and Powers.

'the sacred Milton was, let it ever be remembered, a Republican, and a bold enquirer into morals and religion' (Reiman/Powers, 134). In *A Defence of Poetry* he argues that 'Milton's poem contains within itself a philosophical refutation of that system of which, by a strange and natural antithesis, it has been a chief popular support' (*Defence*, 498). Shelley thus chose to (mis)read Milton 'as his own image of . . . [a] philosophical radical' (Brisman, 135). By doing this he avoided the ethical problems in Milton that he objected to, for instance, his revengeful God[3] and the separation of 'fallen from unfallen angels' (Hoagwood, 1986, 35). He also doubted 'whether Milton was a Christian or not at the period of the composition of *Paradise Lost*' ("Essay on the Devil and Devils", *Prose*, 267).[4] Terence Allan Hoagwood has considered the influence of Milton and *Paradise Lost* on Shelley and refers to the relationship between the two authors as complex: 'Shelley appropriates Milton, in a *Defence*, as a spokesman for his own camp, making it impossible henceforward to simplify his opposition to Milton's creed' (Hoagwood, 1986, 27).

In his own works, Shelley revises and rewrites Milton's poetry, adapting it to his own ideals. The Prologue to *Hellas* is one example. Shelley wrote most of the Prologue in Miltonic blank verse, and in many instances he echoes the different characters in Milton's poem. What is more interesting, however, is the way Shelley rewrites Milton's work. In Hoagwood's words this revision is distinct on two levels. First, he argues, Shelley revises Milton by adopting elements from his poetry. Then, secondly, Shelley revises Milton by 'deleting the Miltonic passages altogether' as he does in *Hellas* by cancelling the Prologue (Hoagwood, 1986, 33). Milton is thus represented in *Hellas* by way of his absence. Any reader of Milton will, however, trace him in the works of Shelley, including *Hellas*, where according to John Sewell Flagg, he 'draws specifically on the Miltonic theme of Christ regaining the paradise which Adam lost' (Flagg, 193).

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[3] Shelley particularly objected to Milton's portrayal of God as a superior being:

> Milton's Devil as a moral being is as far superior to his God as one who perseveres in some purpose which he has conceived to be excellent in spite of adversity and torture, is to one who in the cold security of undoubted triumph inflicts the most horrible revenge upon his enemy, not from any mistaken notion of inducing him to repent of a perseverance in enmity, but with the alleged design of exasperating him to deserve new torments. Milton has so far violated the popular creed (if this shall be judged to be a violation) as to have alleged no superiority of moral virtue to his God over his Devil. And this bold neglect of moral purpose is the most decisive proof of the supremacy of Milton's genius. (*Defence*, 498).

[4] My prose references are taken from David Lee Clark's *Shelley's Prose*.

Like Milton, Shelley frequently draws on Biblical myth and Biblical symbolism in *Hellas*. Thus Shelley often uses 'thrice', a number with overt references to the holy trinity of the Bible[5]. This matches Milton's use of the same number in *Paradise Lost*, for instance in 'Thrice he assayd, and thrice in spite of scorn, / Tears such as Angels weep, burst forth' (I,619-120), and elsewhere.[6] Furthermore, Shelley gives Ahasuerus god-like qualities. Milton's God sees and knows everything, and from his throne 'past, present, future he beholds' (*PL*, III. 78). Ahasuerus does not have a throne, but 'from his eye looks forth/ A life of unconsumed thought which pierces/ The present, and the past, and the to-come' (*Hellas*, 146-48). One of the lines in *Paradise Lost* describes Satan as 'a vulture on *Imaus* bred' (*PL*, III, 431). In Shelley's poem, the 'banded anarchs fled/ Like vultures frighted from Imaus' (49-50). The similarity between the two poems is perhaps most distinct in the war-scenes; the scenes reported by Hassan and those in Mahmud's vision share some of the atmosphere of Raphael's account of the battle in Heaven on his warning visit to Adam and Eve.[7] That the vocabularies of these passages are similar may of course be a coincidence, but it may also be that Shelley had *Paradise Lost* in mind when he wrote *Hellas*. His letters, his prefaces, and his prose works all show that Shelley admired the style of Milton, and considered him one of England's best poets. It is therefore reasonable to believe that Milton had a major impact on Shelley's poetry, and a closer analysis will inevitably reveal distinct Miltonic elements.

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[5] Examples of this are given in ch.5.2.

[6] Further examples are found in for instance

> 'And thrice threefold the Gates; three folds were Brass,
> Three Iron, three of Adamantine Rock' (II, 645-646)

and

> 'Thus while he spake, each passion dimm'd his face
> Thrice chang'd with pale, ire, envie and despair' (IV, 114-115).

[7] Examples are given in the Appendix.

I will conclude this section by arguing that *Paradise Lost* is indeed a suitable point of departure for an analysis of *Hellas*, not only on stylistic grounds, but also thematically. Liberty seems to be an important theme in Milton's poem, and some of both Satan's and Adam's thoughts relating to this theme are relevant to *Hellas*, especially the choral passages. Milton's Satan also expresses thoughts similar to those of Ahasuerus, when the former describes himself as:

> One who brings
> A mind not to be chang'd by Place or Time.
> The mind is its own place, and in it self
> Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n.
> . . . Here at least
> We shall be free . . . (*PL*, I. 252-59).

His reflections are thus quite similar to those of Ahasuerus, who asserts that:

> The future and the past are idle shadows
> Of thought's eternal flight - they have no being.
> Nought is but that which feels itself to be. (783-85)
> . . . - what has thought
> To do with time or place or circumstance? (801-2)

That this idea is taken from *Paradise Lost* is clear from *A Defence of Poetry*, where Shelley himself compares the above quoted passage from Milton to his own idea, 'All things exist as they are perceived - at least in relation to the percipient' (Preface, 505).

When exploring further, one finds in *Hellas* a motif that is used frequently by Shakespeare, but which is perhaps more pronounced in the works of the Spanish dramatist, Calderon; the dream, or what Neville Rogers terms the dream of life. Shelley's preoccupation with this Baroque artist was quite marked during his years in Italy. He was introduced to the works of Calderon in 1819 by Maria Gisborne, a friend of his and Mary's, and she also taught him Spanish. He frequently referred to this Spanish dramatist and poet in his letters, and he translated parts of his plays. Richard Holmes suggests that the different translations made by Shelley during his last years show his

> need to draw support and stimulation from more purely literary sources. In the last eighteen months of Shelley's writing, these foreign literary presences become more and more important in his work. Dominant are the figures of Dante, Calderon, and Goethe. They stand as powerful if shadowy figures behind his original poems (Holmes, 612).

Of the three poets mentioned by Holmes, Calderon is without doubt the most prominent one in *Hellas.* Shadowy he may be, but Stuart Curran describes Calderon as perhaps having 'crucial influence on [Shelley's] notions of drama' (Cave, 64). When reading Shelley's correspondence with his friends, one is particularly struck by the pleasure he finds in Calderon's works, comparing the plays to both Goethe and Shakespeare. In a Letter to Thomas Peacock, he writes:

> [Spanish] is a most powerful & expressive language & I have already learnt sufficient to read with great ease their Poet Calderon. I have read about 12 of his Plays; some of them certainly deserve to be ranked among the grandest & most perfect productions of the human mind. He exceeds all modern dramatists with the exception of Shakespeare; whom he resembles however in the depth of thought & subtlety of imagination of his writings, & in the rare power of interweaving delicate

> & powerful comic traits with the most tragical situations without diminishing their interest. (*Letters* II. 120)

As we can see, Shelley had read about twelve of Calderon's plays, and this influence is seen in several passages of Shelley's works. One particular play by Calderon seems to have made an impression on Shelley when writing *Hellas*. Even though we cannot prove positively whether Shelley read it, *La Vida es Sueño* was almost certainly one of the twelve plays referred to.[8] Among the papers containing Shelley's translation of *Faust*, some lines were found that had a striking similarity to one of the passages in *La Vida es Sueño*. It was written in the handwriting of Edward Williams, but as he probably didn't know Spanish, Neville Rogers believes the passage to be a translation from Calderon made by Shelley (Rogers, 167-189). This impression is shared by other critics, for instance Stuart Curran (Cave, 69), and Eunice Joiner Gates, who as early as in 1937 found passages in *Hellas* reminiscent of Calderon, especially the parts presenting 'man's eternal struggle to distinguish what is reality and what is illusion, to determine whether or not life is a dream, from which one awakens to face disillusionment and possibly despair' (Gates, 54). The passage that Gates referred to here is the conversation between Ahasuerus and Mahmud.[9]

The dream motif is present in Aeschylus's *The Persians,* too, but in Shelley's drama it is much more significant, as it makes Mahmud realize that victory and defeat are closely connected. He asks himself whether he is awake or dreaming, and thus reveals a fundamental doubt in what he used to believe his world was founded on. Order is no longer relevant if one loses one's basic security in life. Through the illusory meeting with his forefather, his whole life seems to him an illusion, including the war he is waging against Greece. Curran writes that the 'sense that everywhere you look in the world you are victimized by your own illusions as well as the illusions of others is characteristic of Shelley's late poems' (Cave, 69), and in my own analysis I will return to the idea of life as a dream and an illusion, as expressed by Calderon, arguing that this is a central aspect of *Hellas*, too.

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[8] Constance Walker has also noticed the influence of Calderon on *Hellas*:

> Although Shelley never refers to Calderon's Auto, *La vida es sueño*, it is likely that he was familiar to the play, as *Hellas* reworks its central theme that if the mutable world is a dream, one must strive for what is immutable and eternal; as Timothy Webb observes, 'it is almost certainly his reading of Calderon which gave unity and force to his conception of the world as transient, a bubble, an empty vision' ' (Walker, 40n). Walker here refers to Webb's *The Violet in the Crucible*, p.220.

[9] The passage Gates refers to and the fragment that Neville Rogers believes Shelley to have translated from Calderon are given in the Appendix.

I have here tried to trace the influence of three great writers on Shelley; Aeschylus, Calderon, and Milton. These are very different poets, separated in time (Milton and Calderon, however, were contemporaries) and place, and all greatly admired by Shelley. I have chosen to give this brief presentation of some possible sources of influence on Shelley when he wrote *Hellas*, because I believe it will be helpful in my further analysis of the poem. My emphasis will of course be on the distinctly Shellyan parts and aspects of the poem, but it is important to bear his sources in mind. By indicating how Shelley repeats the literary past by using formal, stylistic, and thematic features from other major writers, I hope to have shown that *Hellas* is a part of 'that great poem, which all poets, like the co-operating thoughts of one great mind, have built up since the beginning of the world' (*Defence*, 493).[10]

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[10] This is, of course, the same idea that T.S. Eliot was to express almost a hundred years later:

> No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead. ("Tradition and the Individual Talent," 1274)

CHAPTER THREE
RECEPTION

As I will argue in my analysis, *Hellas* is a highly complex literary work, and as such, rather typical of Shelley's style of writing. Complexity is not the only familiar trait of the work. The form of lyrical drama had also been used before, in *Prometheus Unbound*, where his choice had been received quite well among his critics and audience. The theme of freedom, too, figures prominently in Shelley's other works, both in his prose and his poetry. All this raises an interesting question: Why has so many critics ignored this particular poem? Naturally, it is not possible to find an exact answer why this is so, but some indications can be made, for example by looking at what the different critics have said about it. Other answers can be found by exploring historical and political circumstances connected to *Hellas*.

Shelley was very eager to have *Hellas* published as soon as possible upon its completion. His publisher, Ollier, was however reluctant to do this, as he feared some passages to be too radical for the British audience of the 1820s. Five months later, however, the poem was published, but was met with indifference. Only one critic wrote anything about it, and that response was almost completely negative. One should however expect critics of our century to have paid more attention to the poem as it is one of Shelley's major works, but this is not the case. Its first reception has somehow set the standard for later treatment. This is a typical situation according to Hans Robert Jauss in his account of Reception Theory. One of his main theses is

> that the first reception of a work by the reader includes a test of its aesthetic value in comparison with the works which he has already read. The obvious historical implication of this is that the appreciation of the first reader will be continued and enriched through further

> "receptions" from generation to generation; in this way the historical significance of a work will be determined and its aesthetic value revealed (Cohen, 12-13).

A work's first reception, in other words, determines its later receptions.[1] If a work is to 'survive' throughout the literary history or fall into oblivion, as Shelley would have put it, depends very much upon the audience's experience of it. According to this theory, the low status of *Hellas* has its origin in the early reactions to it. Because the first reception of the poem was hostile, later critics have continued to treat the poem that way, giving it a low reputation. In the evolution of literary history, then, *Hellas* lost towards the more popular works of that age.

I will now try to explore some of the reasons for the lack of attention paid to *Hellas*. First, this may have something to do with Shelley's death not long afterwards. This can be exemplified by one critic who had planned to review *Hellas*, but because of Shelley's death wrote a sympathetic obituary instead. The poem was thus overshadowed by the poet's death and was in a way buried with him. Carlos Baker explains Shelley's failure with the fact that his Italian exile prevented him from keeping in touch with the English political scene. As a result of his stark criticism of English politics, his words

> either went unprinted because of the publishers' understandable fear of prosecution and imprisonment; or, if printed, were immediately suppressed by the Vice Society; or, if not suppressed, were too little read or too little understood to be of any practical political consequence at that time (Baker, 188).

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[1] Shelley touches upon the role of the readers in his *Defence* when he writes that:

> Veil after veil may be undrawn, and the inmost naked beauty of the meaning never exposed. . . . after one person and one age has exhausted all [a poem's] divine effluence . . . another and yet another succeeds, and new relations are ever developed, the source of an unforeseen and an unconceived delight. (*Defence*, 500)

Shelley's lack of support and success became especially clear to him during his last years. Baker refers to the sense of failure that is expressed in some of Shelley's letters, and finds it 'remarkable that he continued to write at all' (188). This was perhaps partly why Shelley, after *Hellas*, largely gave up writing political poems about the victory of freedom, and turned his creativity to the eternal realm of thought instead.[2] A third problem was perhaps the form of the poem. Shelley was, at that period, very attracted to the dramatic form. In *A Defence of Poetry* he argues that 'the connection of poetry and social good is more observable in the drama than in whatever other form: and it is indisputable that the highest perfection of human society has ever corresponded with the highest dramatic excellence' (*Defence*, 492). It was thus only natural that Shelley chose to clothe his poetry in dramatic form.

The subject matter might be another reason for the lack of interest in the poem. *Hellas* was not designed as a poem for the 'masses'. The style is too exalted and the language too complex to be of any taste to them. Paradoxically, perhaps, it is the common people who are most in need of an incentive for liberty. To the intellectuals, on the other hand, *Hellas* was maybe of too little interest, as the radical and liberal newspapers had cried out for Greek support since the outbreak of the war. Their sympathy was thus already directed towards the Insurrection in Greece. When it comes to style, Shelley gave his readers a mixture of choral passages and dialogue, though at times, a rather exalted dialogue. If the reigning ideal was one of 'harmony and easiness of thought' (Barcus, 320), *Hellas* represented complexity and demanding thought. Still, these are but minor causes for the little response on the poem.

In my opinion the main reasons reside in the political content and the difficult language employed. To illustrate the latter, we must take a closer look at the first review of the poem, where an anonymous critic states that 'the ideas [of *Hellas*] are neither original nor poetical, the language obscure and frequently unpolished, and although the poem undoubtedly possesses some beauties, yet its defects as certainly predominate' (Barcus, 317). The critic further observes that 'the ear is tired by the monotonous repetition of "keep," "deep," and "sleep," and the senses bewildered in a maze of inexplicable thought' (317). His reaction to the poem is probably exactly what Shelley intended it to be. The function of the Chorus's use of rhyme is to entrance the reader early in the poem. In the same way that Ahasuerus leads Mahmud into another world, the opening Chorus allures the reader into a deeper perception of the poem. The critic is thus quite right when he describes it as a 'maze of inexplicable thought'. But Shelley's view of poetry is not 'easiness of thought'. In his *A Defence of Poetry* he argues that harmony is not necessarily preferable:

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[2] An exception to this is of course "The Triumph of Life" which is a political poem, though a pessimistic one.

> it is by no means essential that a poet should accommodate his language to this traditional form, so that the harmony which is its spirit, be observed. The practice is indeed convenient and popular, and to be preferred, especially in such composition as includes much form and action: but every great poet must inevitably innovate upon the example of his predecessors in the exact structure of his peculiar versification.
>
> (*Defence*, 484)

Shelley here encourages the poet to break with traditional norms if art demands it. It is therefore reasonable to believe that Shelley meant *Hellas* to be more than mere propaganda for the Greek cause, and that the difficult and 'obscure' language was indeed intended. The critic of June 1822, however, failed to recognize the depth of the drama when he acknowledged Shelley's literary ability in general, but truly dismissed *Hellas*. His conclusion was as follows:

> We have given 'Hellas' more attention than it deserves, but the former celebrity of the author occasioned us to dwell so minutely upon the work before us, which upon the whole, though not entirely devoid of merit, is but a bad specimen of Mr. Shelley's powers, and but ill calculated to increase the former fame of its author. (321)

His suggestion is thus that Shelley can do better than this. It seems that this criticism is mostly directed at the incomprehensiveness of the poem. This is something he shares with later critics, and it must be admitted that *Hellas* is not an easy poem to understand. Many of Shelley's major works are, however, characterized by a certain degree of difficulty, but that does not necessarily turn them into failures.

The critic expected harmony, but instead got an intricate poem demanding more of the reader than would the average popular poem. One of the key elements of Jauss's Reception Theory is the concept of 'horizon of expectations'. According to him, the distance between the expectations of the first readers and the actual text is vital to the further reception of the work. The lesser the distance, the more 'popular' is the work. As is the case with *Hellas*, the distance is obviously greater than what has been favourable for the poem. In Jauss's words, 'the opposition between the new work and the expectations of its first readers, can be so great that a long process of reception is necessary in order to catch up with what first was unexpected and unusable' (Cohen, 30). One could thus argue that the process of reception accompanying *Hellas* has lasted long into this century, and may still be working. Since Shelley scholars have neglected the poem for so long it is now about time that it is included among his major works.

What further needs to be considered is the literary canon of this century, which has much to answer for regarding the question of Romantic poetry. When Shelley and some of his fellow Romantics were left out of the literary canon at the beginning of the century, this resulted in a long disappearance of the Romantics in colleges and universities. This was very unfortunate, because it is mostly in academic circles that a foundation is laid for further research on an artist or art form. Shelley's poetry was essentially found to be too wavering, too emotive, and too personal, and not consistent with the new literary ideal of impersonal art. 'The ideas of Shelley (including, presumably, his critical ideas) seemed to Eliot "always ideas of adolescence" ' (Lobb, 75). Poetry, according to T.S. Eliot, is 'not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality' (Eliot, 1275). Fortunately the situation gradually changed, and the last three or four decades have seen a renewed interest in Shelley and his works.

As I will argue later, there is nothing haphazard in Hellas. The symbolism is carefully matched with the characters and the events. Still, Shelley called it 'a mere improvise' in his Preface, and, as Flagg argues, 'in general, critics have seconded Shelley's own apparent low estimation of *Hellas* as a drama' (188). In my opinion, Shelley's 'improvise'-label is rather a deliberate underestimation of his own work, a common topos of humility. In a way, he is shielding himself against a possible hostile reception by telling the audience that he spent little time on this piece of work. His letters and other documents show us that Shelley was very eager to be read, and liked as well. He was, for instance very concerned about the reception of *Adonais*, which he had written in June 1821, and which treated the death of Keats: 'How is Adonais *liked*? I should be glad to see what the reviews may say - having attacked them' (*Letters* II, 357).[3] Some weeks later, in another letter to Ollier, he is still anxious to hear about the reception of the poem: 'I am especially curious to hear the fate of Adonais. - I confess I should be surprised if *that* poem were born to an immortality of oblivion' (*Letters* II, 365). Statements like these clearly show a true interest in the poems after they left the poet's hands. In Shelley's own words, writing a poem is similar to giving birth. In a letter to John Gisborne in April 1822, he asks: '... who acted as midwife to this last of my orphans, introducing it to oblivion, & me to my accustomed failure? May the cause it celebrates be more fortunate than either!' In the next paragraph he wants to know Gisborne's opinion of *Hellas*, and, in a way, excuses himself by admitting that it 'was written without much care, in one of those few moments of enthusiasm which now seldom visit me, & which make me pay dear for their visits' (*Letters* II, 406). His expectations regarding *Hellas* and the other poems he wrote during the last years of his life thus tend towards a mixture of failure and hope. He hopes for success and fears disappointment at the same time, which surely is a common feeling among artists. Michael Scrivener writes that as a 'public author, whose poetry and prose were intended to educate a living audience, [Shelley] resorted to the hope of posterity's appreciation as a defence against feeling utter futility (282). Shelley's aim with *Hellas*, Scrivener continues, was to 'try again to reach a sympathetic audience in order to educate it effectively, but without compromising his ethical idealism' (287). It is thus a myth that the Romantics did not care about their audience, only the poetry in itself. Shelley several times tried to reach an audience of 'common people', stretching far beyond the little circle of poets and artists that daily surrounded him.

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[3] Ollier, Shelley's publisher, in fact, never published *Adonais*. A critic, however, got hold of a copy, and wrote a very abusive attack on Shelley.

An important aspect when treating the reception of *Hellas* is the historical situation in England and Europe in the early 1820s. The stated goal of Jauss, one of the major reception theorists, 'is to help to restore history to the center of literary studies' (Holub, 53). History may not be necessary for all kinds of literary studies, but in this case I find it relevant. *Hellas* was conceived during a time in European history, marked by strong religious and political dissent between and within nations, and it is against this background we must study *Hellas*. Robert Holub declares that:

> the literary work ... is received and evaluated "against the background of other art forms as well as the everyday experience of life".[4] In this capacity a work has the possibility of playing an active role in its reception, of calling into question and altering social conventions through both content and form' (Holub, 68).

Shelley constantly tried to influence public opinion through his works, but with varying success. Usually he was considered too radical, and this was also the case with *Hellas*. Because of his religious and political ideas, he often had to suffer hostile reviews of his works. The public reviewers, like today's tabloid press, seemed to be much more interested in Shelley's personal life than in his works. He continued, however, to speak his mind as freely as ever, which gave him a bad reputation among his critics, and made him an easy target.

His outspokenness also resulted in the censuring of several of his poems. Some of them were even considered unfit for publication, *The Mask of Anarchy*, written as a reaction to the Peterloo Massacre in 1819, being a case in point. Shelley's friend, Leigh Hunt, was to publish it in the *Examiner*, but he had already been prosecuted for libel once, and did not risk another imprisonment.[5] The poem thus was not published until 1832, when the events of Peterloo no longer would cause anger and rebellion among the people. The sonnet "England in 1819" shared the same fate. Among the poems that Ollier refused to publish were for instance "Julian and Maddalo" and "The Witch of Atlas". It was imperative to Shelley that *Hellas* was published as soon as possible, and this he told Charles Ollier in a letter of November 11, 1821: 'I send you the Drama of Hellas, relying on your assurance that you will be good enough to pay immediate attention to my *literary* requests. - What little interest this Poem may ever excite, depends upon it's [sic] *immediate* publication' (*Letters* II, 365). *Hellas* was published less than six months after it was completed. In Shelley's opinion this was a bit late,[6] but when he finally saw the printed poem, he was quite satisfied with the result. It was 'prettily printed, & with fewer mistakes than any poem I ever published' (*Letters* II, 406), he wrote.

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[4] Holub quotes from p.41 in Jauss's *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*.

[5] Hunt had good reason to be afraid. Richard Holmes comments on the censorship of that period and writes that '1819 marked the height of the government's attack on the free press' (Holmes, 540).

Shelley probably predicted that parts of *Hellas* were too revolutionary. This is clear from the letter to Ollier of November 11, where he allows him to suppress the passages in the notes that might alarm. The poem, however, 'contains nothing of a tendency to danger' (*Letters* II, 365), he continues. Ollier obviously was of a different opinion as he suppressed parts of both the Preface and the poem itself. Of the Preface, the second but last paragraph was left out. In that passage, Shelley accuses the people of England of not being free, her leaders are dubbed murderers and swindlers, and the Holy Alliance branded as despots. Accusations like these were of course too strong for England, then marked by reactionary politics, increased censorship, and a constant fear that the English people too should rise in rebellion against the government, as had happened in France, Italy, Spain, and now in Greece. The political situation thus seriously limited his freedom of expression, the result being that the audience was prevented from seeing the full picture of Shelley's literary ability. The Preface was not published in its original form until 1892, but from then on the political content would not have been an obstacle to its popularity. Some may argue that the poem lost its interest after the Graeco-Turkish War ended, and that this is the reason for its neglect in literary history. As I will argue, however, the deep structure of *Hellas* contains more than political propaganda, so the question of the lacking reception it has met with is still open.

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[6] In another letter to Ollier, 11 Jan, 1822, Shelley complained about the delay:

> I had exceedingly desired the immediate publication of 'Hellas' from public no less than private reasons; but as post-day after post-day passes and I receive no proofsheets of it as I had requested, I suppose I might as well not have relied upon your spontaneous offers to execute my commissions. (*Letters* II, 372)

What remains to investigate then is whether there is a discrepancy between Shelley's poetic practice elsewhere and in *Hellas*, and whether the poem was executed in accordance with his declared intention or not. I am, however, aware that the author's intention not necessarily need to be reflected in the poem, and that a work may have many more interpretations than the artist ever thought of. Bearing in mind the risks of making the 'intentional fallacy', I will nevertheless explore the relationship between Shelley's intentions with *Hellas* and the actual poem because it might make an interesting point. When investigating Shelley's own statements on the poem, the Preface is a natural place to start. As to the form, he writes that the subject 'is insuceptible of being treated otherwise than lyrically' (Preface, 408). He had used the form, lyrical drama, successfully some years earlier, and it seems to have been a natural choice of his when celebrating an important cause like the revival of freedom in Greece. The form is thus in harmony with the subject, and 'purely Greek ..., observing perfectly the unities of time (twenty-four hours), place (the Sultan's palace in Constantinople), and action (news of the fortunes of war between the Greeks and Turks)' (Preface, 407). Besides, since he had used it before, the audience was already familiar with the form.

The model of *Hellas* is, as he tells us, *The Persians*, by Aeschylus. He does however stress, with a remarkable modesty, that his poem will never match or compete with the great Greek classics. His intention was thus not to write a new masterpiece moulded on the old classics, but to exhibit 'a series of lyrical pictures' suggesting 'the final triumph of the Greek cause' (Preface, 408). Nor was, in his own view, his intention to give an exact picture of the actual war. As a poet, he allows himself certain liberties, as when he predicts a triumphant ending for Greece and adds a considerable amount of glory to the Greek soldiers and their fight:

> Common fame is the only authority which I can allege for the details which form the basis of the poem, and I must trespass upon the forgiveness of my readers for the display of newspaper erudition to which I have been reduced. Undoubtedly, until the conclusion of the war, it will be impossible to obtain an account of it sufficiently authentic for historical materials; *but poets have their privilege*, and it is unquestionable that actions of the most exalted courage have been performed by the Greeks, that they have gained more than one naval victory, and that their defeat in Wallachia was signalized by circumstances of heroism, more glorious even than victory.
>
> (*Defence*, 408; my italics)

In this way he distances himself from historical reality to justify his own hopes and beliefs in the 'regeneration of mankind', as Mary Shelley puts it in her note on the poem (*Works*, 482).[7] He also uses the Preface to establish a link between ancient Greece, the present Europe, and the future, an important factor in the poem itself. All this, then, would indicate that Shelley's intention with the poem went far beyond mere propaganda. Also, it seemed impossible for a poet like Shelley to avoid philosophical reflections about mankind, about the human mind, and about good and evil, themes that have permeated most of his works. As Wasserman puts it, only 'in a nearly trivial way is *Hellas* a propagandistic call to rally to the Greek cause; in its true scope, it centers upon the Greek revolution to validate Shelley's confidence in an imminent and ineluctable universal reformation' (Wasserman, 375).

In trying to answer whether Shelley deviates from his usual poetical practice in *Hellas*, it will be helpful to look at the other lyrical drama Shelley wrote, *Prometheus Unbound*. This is a particularly interesting task, as the amount of attention given the two poems differs enormously. Where *Hellas* is neglected, *Prometheus Unbound* has caused dozens of books and articles to be published in various attempts to explain the work. The two poems based on plays by Aeschylus are very often compared, both thematically and generically. Even though they constitute two different lyrical worlds, at a certain level they both treat a process of liberation of the human mind, which is a strong Shellyan theme. They also present a confrontation with the past as necessary to improving the future. Newell F. Ford also sees a connection between the endings of the two dramas: '[a]ct IV of *Prometheus* is a hymn of rejoicing, but its conclusion is darkened by the recognition that man, once emancipated, may fall back into the pit' (Ford, 652). The same feeling is present in the last chorus of *Hellas*, where the enslaved women lament that a resurrection of the past would mean a return, not only of ancient glory, but also of wars and sufferings. Another example of the coherence of Shelley's works is his use of characters that return in several of his poems, for instance Ahasuerus, whom we first meet in "The Wandering Jew" (from 1809-10), then in *Queen Mab*, before he returns in *Hellas*, albeit slightly changed.

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[7] *Works* refers to *Shelley: Poetical Works*, edited by Thomas Hutchinson.

These few examples should indicate that *Hellas* can be seen as further developing themes that are embodied in most of Shelley's major works. Many critics would argue, and I tend to agree with this, that all of Shelley's works are woven together by similar thematic threads. My argument is that *Hellas* is not left out of this weave, but is connected to the rest of Shelley's production, from *Queen Mab* and *Laon and Cythna*, to the "Ode to Liberty" and "The triumph of Life". Carlos Baker is one of the critics who see *Hellas* as a continuation of Shelley's other works on liberty, and argues that it is 'part and parcel of his protracted effort to glorify the spread of liberty across the continent' (Baker, 183). I am thus left with no viable explanations for why *Hellas* almost virtually was 'introduced to oblivion', to use Shelley's own words. It seems that its only failure was to be written at the wrong time, published in the wrong country, and aimed at the wrong audience. If Shelley's sole intention was to raise sympathy for the Greek cause, it certainly failed. But, as I have argued, the underlying universal theme of freedom of mind is not directly tied to the Greek cause, but has meaning at any time in history, and at any place. As the next chapter will show, this is a view held by many of the more recent critics.

CHAPTER FOUR

HELLAS AND THE CRITICS

A general critical survey is always interesting in that it reveals the status, and perhaps a change in status, of a text throughout a certain period. Judging by available written material on *Hellas*, the work clearly does not belong to the most popular part of Shelley's literary production. A view like: 'There is scarcely anything in this drama that has any interest to-day' (Bannerjee, 6) seemed to be a representative comment on *Hellas* until quite recently. Still, the first impression that strikes one is the conspicuous lack of attention it has attracted.[1] Only one contemporary review of it was published, and in critical works treating Shelley's major poetry, the play is either ignored completely or dismissed with only a few sentences. Very often it is mentioned with the more famous of Shelley's lyrical dramas, *Prometheus Unbound*, which has received far more attention, but without specific explanations about what made this drama so much more popular than *Hellas*. There has however been a slight, but noticeable change of attitude towards *Hellas* during the last few decades. I will here try to show what the different critics have found interesting in this poem, and how the work slowly is being brought back to its proper place in the Shelley canon. I am of course unable to give a complete survey of its criticism, but I will cover the most important views in chronological order, ranging from 1822 till today, concentrating on the period from 1970 and onwards.

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[1] In his book, *A Bibliography of Shelley Studies: 1823-1950*, Clement Dunbar lists more than 3200 items of reviews, criticism, and other publications on Shelley. *Hellas* is mentioned in only ten of these.

4.1 The Early Reactions: 1822 - 1900.

When Hellas was published in March 1822, it met with scepticism and bewilderment. The only contemporary review appeared in *The General Weekly Register of News, Literature, Law, Politics, and Commerce* on June 30, 1822, where an anonymous reviewer laments the lack of order and harmony in the new poetry of the age:

> [By] constantly aiming at novelty and originality [the poets] become obscure and unintelligible, and by the misapplication of words, and the misconception of ideas, they lead the imagination into a labyrinth of thought from which it is with difficulty disentangled (Barcus, 316).

Shelley is accused of being 'inharmonious and much too obscure' and one part of *Hellas* is characterised as absurd (317).[2] The critic obviously had difficulties understanding parts of the drama and was shocked by the way Shelley uses language. Some of his rhymes were, for example, reckoned to be 'originalities quite beyond our comprehension' (318). The 'very essence [of lyric poetry] ought to be harmony and easiness of thought' (320), and this is where Shelley fails according to what has been termed a 'stupid and hostile' review (White, 1968, 433).

This is of course a completely different view on Shelley's poetry than the one presented by his most faithful critic, Mary Shelley, when she seventeen years later (in 1839) published Shelley's complete works. In her "Note on *Hellas*" she writes that it 'is among the most beautiful' of his works and that the 'choruses are singularly imaginative, and melodious in their versification' (*Works*, 481). Where the anonymous reviewer had clear difficulties with Shelley's style, Mary claims that there 'are some stanzas that beautifully exemplify Shelley's peculiar style' and she deems the imagery 'distinct and majestic' (*Works*, 481-82).

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[2] The passage referred to as absurd is Hassan's description of Ahasuerus, ll.137-148.

Victorian critics were usually quite one-sided in their views on Shelley, and prevailingly focused on the lyrical fragments. An example of this view is Walter Bagehot, who in 1856 asserted that it 'is absurd to expect from a man who died at thirty a long work of perfected excellence. All which at so early an age can be expected are fine fragments, casual expressions of single inspirations' (Swinden, 60). Shelley, he claims, is best in the lyrical fragments, some of which are quite perfect, but apart from these he did not achieve much. Bagehot, Browning, and others created the well-known myth of Shelley as the skylark among poets, who 'rushes away among the stars' (Swinden, 64), creating abstract poetry in divine moments of inspiration without any grip of reality. Shelley was the 'beautiful angel' or 'mad Shelley' or something in between, 'the mad skylark'. This myth lasted long into this century, and has perhaps harmed more than helped the reputation of Shelley's poetry. The result was that, for a while, his longer works, his dramas and his proseworks, were viewed as less representative of Shelley than the shorter poems, and therefore neglected. Critics, both in America and England, tended to praise his lyricism, pity his religious views and ignore the social message (Dunbar, xxxiv). Clement Dunbar, in his introduction, assigns much of the blame for this to the well-meaning, devout 'Shelleyans' who, trying to improve Shelley's reputation, avoided his radical doctrines and longer works, and emphasized his short and emotional lyrics (Dunbar, xxiv-xxv).

4.2 1900 - 1970.

My main emphasis will be on the criticism of this century, the first part of which shows little interest in this play, or rather in Shelley and the other Romantics in general. This situation was a result of the exclusion of the Romantics from the literary canon as advocated by F.R. Leavis and T.S. Eliot, which was to dominate university syllabuses for a long period.[3] According to Newell Ford, Eliot particularly objected to 'Shelley's personal conduct and his "repellent," "shabby" beliefs' (Ford, 648n). Ford claims that the criticism against Shelley was not based on his poetry, but arose because a scapegoat was needed. In 'the campaign . . . to establish a new idiom in poetry and to obliterate all traces of the nineteenth century' (Ford, 649-50), Shelley's reputation and his radical lifestyle made him an easy choice for this role.

As late as in 1972, Weaver and Reiman, in *The English Romantic Poets: A Review of Research and Criticism*, could record that apart from a few minor exceptions, 'there are no substantive studies in English centring on *Hellas* alone' (373). Newman Ivey White is no exception to this, but he has written extensively on Shelley, especially during the 1930s and 1940s. His contribution to *Hellas* may not have been particularly exciting, but as early as in 1921 he acknowledged that 'the poem has generally been somewhat neglected by critics' (White, 1921, 52). He points to the obvious contrast between the Greeks in Shelley's poem and in reality. The lyrical pictures in the poem, 'examined in the light of history, are rather visions than pictures, and throw a more accurate light upon the author than upon the scenes they were designed to present' (53). White believes that *Hellas* and the enthusiasm for the Greeks are simply a result of Shelley's constant need to idealize something, in this case Greece, more specifically the ancient Greece of Plato and Aeschylus.[4]

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[3] Ford writes: 'Most of the charges against the Romantics have echoed in one way or another, T. S. Eliot's dogma that the Romantics, the Victorians, and everyone from Milton onwards lack "wit" - wit being a product of the "mechanism of sensibility which could devour any kind of experience" '. (Ford, 648n)

[4] In the 1940s, White published a two-volume biography, *Shelley*, and a shorter version, *Portrait of Shelley*, neither of which are particularly interesting in the light of *Hellas*. The few pages on the poem represent a mixture of historical background and biographical facts. He repeats the main focus of the 1921 article, and reads the poem as a 'union of two of [Shelley's] greatest passions, liberty and Greece' (*Shelley*, p.330).

Another early approach to *Hellas* examines the different extant manuscripts. Because of Shelley's sometimes illegible handwriting, he often had others transcribe his poems before sending them off to his publishers. In 1932, Bennet Weaver published "The Williams Transcription of *Hellas*" where he compares the original text transcribed by Shelley's friend, Edward Williams, to the first published edition. By doing this, he hoped to reach a new and better understanding of the drama. He also hoped to elucidate how Shelley worked and prepared his manuscripts, and furthermore, how the publisher could affect the work. As we know, Shelley's publisher, Ollier, left out parts of the notes and the Preface, and also lines from the poem itself, passages that later have been restored to the text. Judging by his letters, Shelley himself was quite satisfied with the published edition of *Hellas* and accepted the deletions made by Ollier. After reading the proof sheets sent to him in Italy, Shelley posted a letter to Ollier containing a list of seven errors, where only one was important, indicating that Williams's transcription was fairly correct.

Weaver concentrates on three main aspects of the manuscript, which he deals with in turns, starting with punctuation, then going on to what Shelley himself added to the manuscript, and ending with a survey of the passages that Ollier omitted. Such a close observation of the manuscript clearly shows us Shelley, the poet, at work, or as Weaver put it: 'How this Transcription affords us a promontory from which we may study the sea changes that flush and fail in the rich imagination of Shelley' (162).

Quite typical of its time, around the middle of this century, is Carlos Baker's *Shelley's Major Poetry: The Fabric of a Vision*. In a work claiming to cover Shelley's major poetry, *Hellas* is slighted with only a few pages. According to him, *Hellas* is Shelley's last major political work, directed at a political, an ethical, and a metaphysical aim. Baker places *Hellas* as the last of several poems celebrating liberty. As the war still was not ended, Shelley could only express his hope for liberty's victory, which did not occur until several years after Shelley's death. By doing this, Baker sees Shelley as 'trying to fulfil one of the functions of the poet as defined in his own *Defence of Poetry* of the preceding March: to be . . . one of the "mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present..." ' (Baker, 185).

Greece in *Hellas* was primarily the idea of ancient Greece and its traditions of art and liberty, representing 'a romantic apotheosis of the Hellenic ideal as Shelley saw it' (Baker, 186). Whereas modern history is a 'history of titles', ancient Greece presents 'the history of men' (186). In other words, to Shelley, ancient Greece was more real than the present Greece. But *Hellas* is also a poem about thought's precedence over mutability. Ahasuerus, Baker argues, serves 'as the mouthpiece for Shelley's metaphysic' (Baker, 187). Both Calderon and Shakespeare (in the words of Hamlet and Prospero) are echoed in Ahasuerus's assertion that life is but a vision (187), and in my view this interpretation of the poem is far more challenging and interesting, than reading it as a promotion of Greek political freedom.

Writing at about the same time as Baker and partly on the same theme is G. Wilson Knight with his *The Starlit Dome: Studies in the Poetry of Vision*. The attention given *Hellas* is similar to that given by Baker, only a few pages, describing the poem as 'realistic in theme, though universalized in treatment' (246). Knight repeatedly refers to the 'Shakespearean reminiscence' of the drama, but without questioning the 'Shellyan authenticity' (247). With *Hellas*, he writes, 'Shelley's intuition grows more inward' (Wilson, 247). His language also became more complex, and, Wilson writes, '[w]ords clearly tangle us in paradox' (247). Besides paradox, the drama bristles with conflicts of the 'good-versus-evil kind', for instance Mahmud's curse, 'Woe to the wronged and the avenger! Woe / To the destroyer; woe to the destroyed!' (894-5). Knight's main focus throughout, however, is on the 'architectural' perspective of poetry, for example domes and pyramids. He concludes with a comment on the last choral part which he thinks is 'one of the most powerful song-lyrics in our language' (250). Knight reads this passage as an example of Shelley's tendency 'to proceed through repetition and expansion, as in a widening spiral' (251):

> Time and eternity are blended through a statement of *eternal* recurrence similar to that celebrated in Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*. Imagine Coleridge's mazy river [in *Kubla Khan*] coiling round and lifting itself to form a spiral and thereby generating, in the mathematical sense, our dome-formation' (250).

This spiral configuration formed part of Shelley's philosophy of life, and, as I will return to in Chapter Six, implied a strong hope in a society moving closer and closer towards perfection, (but without merging with the ideal).

Critics have had a tendency to compare a work to other works by the same artist, a practice that sometimes can give fruitful results, but which also can be exaggerated. The consequence may then be that some works risk being overshadowed by others and perhaps lose their distinctive features. Very often, *Hellas* is compared and contrasted with *Prometheus Unbound*, and frequently, the latter is held up as the more successful work. In *Shelley and the Romantic Revolution*, F.A. Lea even claims that Shelley, in *Hellas*, is merely 're-writing *Prometheus Unbound*' (228). This is explicit in the 'strangely sympathetic' (229) way Mahmud is portrayed in the play, and the fact that Shelley was more concerned with a return to the harmony with nature that only could derive from forgiveness, than the actual battles in the Greek War of Independence. *Hellas* is also seen as a continuation of the Platonism that is only partly reflected in the philosophy of *Prometheus Unbound*. 'The inevitable reunion of the One with the Many is the Destiny of Shelley's Aeschylean drama - and the impossibility of it is the tragedy' (230). This tragedy is reflected in the despair of the last chorus, which is 'a metaphysical despair, occasioned by the idea of the everlasting recurrence' (230). Lea then redefines the philosophy of *Hellas* as a 'Platonization of Rousseauism', dividing the development of mankind into three phases: 'a phase of union with the One, of divorce from it, and of eventual reunion' (231). This last phase is however, only another attempt of Shelley's to escape 'that part of reality in which he did not wish to believe' (234), Lea claims. Thought and the One are the only realities Shelley allows in *Hellas*. The rest is an illusion.

Milton Wilson has presented a very interesting study of *Hellas* from the perspective of Chaos and Time. Chaos is especially interesting in relation to the main conflict of the work, which I will deal with in Chapter Six. Wilson draws comparisons to both Milton and Shakespeare in Shelley's use of Chaos, but Shelley's Chaos is, however, highly ambivalent. 'We shall never be certain in *Hellas* whether to expect Chaos founded on Thought or Thought founded on Chaos' (Wilson, 182), he writes. In one of the central passages in the Prologue, Greece rises out of Chaos, as the world once did, and this passage is paralleled in the first choral songs of the poem. Wilson reads the Prologue as a background for *Hellas* and sees many similarities between the two in their emphasis on the limitations of time.[5] According to him, it is in the world of flux and mutability that Mahmud is trying to preserve his empire, and only when faced with Ahasuerus and the phantom of Mahomet the Second, who are both beyond Time and history's cycles, does Mahmud realize that he has lost the war, whatever its outcome.

When Mahmud has left, the stage more or less belongs to the Chorus, who yearns for a new and better Greece. Wilson does, however, point to what he sees as a discrepancy between Shelley's prose passages on the outcome of the war and the Chorus. Where Shelley's prose passages very often express a strong belief in the improvement of the world, the Chorus seems less certain about such improvement, expressing hopes that are more visionary than realistic, he argues (191-2). He concludes, however, by emphasizing that Shelley's own hopes for the victory of liberty cannot be rejected.

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[5] Wilson gives several examples of this. The Prologue and *Hellas* both emphasise, for instance, 'historical cycles, rolling worlds, ebb and flow, thrones or buildings on Chaos, crystalline floors paving Chaos, foundations solid or fluctuating, and the like' (Wilson, 186).

4.3 1970 - 1994.

From the 1970s and onwards there is noticeably an increased interest in Shelley, which is also reflected in the amount of criticism devoted to *Hellas*. Earl Wasserman is one of the most influential and respected critics of Shelley, and is also one of the few who have given *Hellas* proper attention. In his *Shelley: A Critical Reading*, he interprets the drama as part of a universal cyclical pattern, seen both from a literary and a historical perspective. In the same way that the revolt in Greece is an inevitable turn of history's cycle, in the sense of participating in "eternal truth" (Wasserman, 376), so the drama itself is a small part of a larger universal poem, also expressing infinite truth.[6]

At this point Wasserman turns to the Aeschylean background of *Hellas*. By keeping close to *The Persians*, Shelley is trying to show how the current conflict between the Greeks and the Turks is a repetition of the ancient battle of Salamis. The 'assimilation [of these two dramas] is the literary analogue of history's cyclical repetitions, on which Shelley now based his earthly optimism' (378). Shelley's adaptation and rewriting of Aeschylus's play is one reason why Wasserman tries to modify Shelley's words in the Preface, when claiming that *Hellas* was a 'mere improvise'. An "improvise", he argues, 'is no more spontaneously haphazard than the *commedia dell' arte*, which depends on the actor's rigorous training in all the conventions of his role. It is made possible by the extemporizer's intimate knowledge of a large body of literature' (379-80). This is exactly what Shelley exhibits in *Hellas*. The poem reflects his extended knowledge of the Bible, the Greek classics, Milton, etc., 'all asking, under the inspiring pressure of the rising spirit of liberty, to re-emerge in a shape relevant to the moment' (380). Shelley, by placing himself and his works in a literary tradition like this, also situates himself within the historical-literary cycle when repeating, or letting a literary tradition 're-emerge' in his *Hellas*.

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[6] See the end of Chapter Two.

Wasserman then goes on to clarify the conflict between lyric and drama in *Hellas*. His argument is that both genres are important. The drama's role is to depict the action of the battle, whereas the lyrics can present ideals. As the war was far from completion in 1821, the only way that Shelley could suggest the outcome of the war would be through the lyric genre:

> [S]ince the lyric is the medium of prophecy, as drama is the medium of history, Shelley substituted for Aeschylus' chorus of Persian counsellors a chorus of Greek captive women so that the oppressed Greeks, whom the chorus represents, are shown not as reflecting upon vanquished enemies but as having knowledge of all time's cycles and hence being capable of prophesying the coming era of freedom. (Wasserman, 383)

This division between drama and lyric, Wasserman argues, also reflects two different time dimensions in the play, one being the reports brought by the messengers about the events on the battlefield, the other being the decline of Mahmud's spirit, a decline which eventually will result in liberty's victory. Mahmud's resignation in the end is seen as a closing of the circle that started with his ancestor's victory over Greece several centuries earlier. A cyclical worldview like this is supported in the imagery[7] used by Shelley, and Wasserman thus argues that all the elements, the action, the metaphors, and the literary tradition of the poem, communicate a cyclical view of history.

Some passages later, however, Wasserman modifies his argument of *Hellas* as representing history as a closed circle. The poem expresses the view, he argues, that only thought 'the act of self-awareness' is immortal

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[7] Especially the 'cosmic metaphors of cyclical change, like the waning and renewed moon, that make their appearance in Mahmud's speeches of despair' (Wasserman, 388).

(Wasserman, 393). But souls are also immortal, because they are 'endlessly reincarnated in mutability and returned to eternity [cf. *Hellas*, ll. 202-3], . . . and invested with increasingly greater purity or stain in proportion to the conduct of each previous mortal life they have led' (Wasserman, 401). The last chorus clearly implies a wish that the world should renew itself, but start at a higher point than the previous time. Wasserman thus concludes that the poem ends, not with resignation, but with hope that man will be able to renew himself, and reach closer to perfection for every 'circle', and he is with that, reasonably in agreement with many other critics (including myself), who tend to read Shelley's attitude to history as a spiral, rather than a closed circle. His explanation is that 'each successive culture degenerates from its prime and returns to a new state of possibility, but with each return Spirit gains new strength and greater purity', enabling the world to move recurrently 'closer to perfection without actually attaining it' (Wasserman, 411). This is certainly a very optimistic view of life but not totally utopian as Shelley simultaneously managed to uphold the rather realistic view that man would never reach absolute perfection. If this should happen, man would, in a way, lose his purpose. As my analysis will show, without the constant movement towards this something called perfection, *Hellas* would lose its 'purpose', too. If Shelley had not kept the ending of the drama open, he would have limited the reader's perception of it, and thus limited the freedom inherent in it.

In his *Prometheus Unbound and Hellas: An Approach to Shelley's Lyrical Dramas*, John Sewell Flagg[8] discusses the importance of the dramatic form of *Hellas* to decide whether *Hellas* functions as a tragedy or a mere melodrama. The basis of his argument is an analysis of the cyclical view of history that dominates the poem. According to Flagg, Shelley uses Aeschylus's *The Persians* as a model to imply 'a prophecy of the outcome of the Greek war' (190) and a hope that history will repeat itself. This is a fundamentally Greek view of history, he writes, and an underlying theme in Greek tragedies. To Flagg, *Hellas* is a drama about Liberty and its position in society, independent of the actual war in Greece. There is a clear sense of predestination in Shelley's dramas, a superhuman "Power", associated with the historical process (216), where freedom and Greece are fundamentally intertwined. The drama does, however, present us with an ambivalent attitude to history. On the one hand there is a hope that history will repeat itself, that freedom again will rule, and that Greece will return to its ancient glory. But it also inspires fears that if history repeats itself, the future will bring new tyrannies and new wars, and Greece will fall again. This is realized by both Mahmud and the Chorus towards the end. According to Flagg, the ending implies a kind of death-wish, a wish that not only tyranny, but the whole world will sleep. The ending is in other words presented as pessimistic and a turning back in resignation. Flagg links this to his argument that *Hellas* is generically a tragedy. He is certain that the view of history expressed in the drama is Greek and cyclical, not linear or progressive (228). Mahmud's dream and vision seem to teach him that the 'future must become the Past', which in other words corresponds to Satan's history-lesson in the Prologue, where Christ accuses Satan of only seeing 'the Past in the To-come' (*Works*, 160). It is this knowledge that is represented in Mahmud's final defeat. Whether the drama generically is a tragedy or not, depends on Mahmud's success as a tragic protagonist. His suffering invokes pity in the reader, and this makes Flagg conclude that Mahmud succeeds in being a tragic character.

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[8] Among the material I have used, Flagg's analysis is, together with Wasserman's, one of the most extensive. He furthermore acknowledges the worth of the drama, writing that '[s]tructurally, Shelley brings his form of lyrical drama to an almost classical perfection in *Hellas*, no longer fusing the Elizabethan mode of drama with the Greek, but choosing the formal compression of the latter, especially in the drama's lyricism itself' (p.vi).

Another critic who has given *Hellas* substantial attention is Kenneth Neill Cameron. In his *Shelley: The Golden Years* he gives a thorough analysis of the whole drama, reading the drama as part of the movement called philhellenism that influenced artists and radicals in Europe in the 1820s. Both newspaper-editors and poets wrote enthusiastically about the Greek War of Independence, and *Hellas* was this movement's greatest work of art (Cameron, 376). Cameron concentrates on the historical facts of the war, which was a war of the people, not only the Greeks, but all the oppressed in Europe. Part of Cameron's intention is to show how Shelley builds his drama on what he called 'newspaper erudition'. By means of the four messengers, 'Shelley is surveying the four main events[9] of the early months of the war' (Cameron, 387). The news that reached the rest of Europe concerning the war was, however, strongly glorified.

The issue most critics disagree on is whether *Hellas* manages to express Shelley's optimism. Cameron refers to the Preface for evidence that Shelley has preserved his faith in a better world, and he describes the last chorus as a 'final message of hope' (388). Even though Shelley feared that England, and the other great powers in Europe, would fight on the Turkish side of the war, his conclusion was optimistic. A 'new race has risen throughout Europe, nursed in the abhorrence of the opinions which are its chains, and she will continue to produce fresh generations to accomplish that destiny which tyrants foresee and dread' (Preface, 410). In Cameron's opinion, the poem is more than a poetic drama. It 'has a dramatic structure, formed by Shelley's central purpose, namely, to rally English public opinion behind the Greeks'. This structure contains two movements, one depicting Greek triumph and Turkish disintegration, and the other the cowardice and treachery of the Holy Alliance (381). Cameron furthermore points out the main similarities between Aeschylus's *The Persians* and *Hellas*, for instance the gloomy mood of

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[9] These events were, according to Cameron, 'the Ypsilanti campaign in the north, the uprising in the Morea, the successes of the Greek navy, and the revolt in the Turkish Empire' (387).

Mahmud and the invocation of Mahomet the Second, both mirroring episodes in *The Persians*.

Moving on to the 1980s, the interpretations become more politicised. Michael Scrivener, like Cameron, emphasizes Shelley's Hellenism, and he clearly sees *Hellas* 'as a political action designed to promote the Greek war for independence' (Scrivener, 287). The poet's role in a historical event like the Greek rebellion was to keep the ethical ideals alive; 'Creative, imaginative human beings have to breathe life into the libertarian ideals which otherwise would not exist' (291). Tyranny will always succumb to its own transience, whereas the Ideal is omnipresent and can be 'resurrected by successive generations' (293). The purpose of *Hellas* is thus not only to gain support for the Greek cause, but also to 'engage the reader in a process of libertarian revision, perceiving the cultural past, the historical present, and the future in new ways' (291). Scrivener argues that Shelley's ethical idealism derives from a struggle to find a balance between the Ideal and the historical world.

Scrivener's main focus is on the Chorus and Ahasuerus, who represents 'the poem's libertarian vision' (296). He concentrates his analysis on keeping the drama 'on the ground', as he puts it, avoiding the many metaphysical and mystical interpretations. One instance of this is the last part where the Chorus sings of a "brighter Hellas". This passage is not mystical, he argues, 'but altogether social in the sense that the new Hellas will be a genuine perception of the living imagination, thus necessarily different and better than the old Hellas' (296). Mahmud and his soldiers will eventually lose, whatever the outcome of the war 'because they do not perceive history in its true, dialectical light, as an ever-changing process that dooms whatever is not based on eternal foundations' (297). Mahmud's 'moral deterioration' increases as he gains self-knowledge, and is a result of Shelley's idea of 'the self-destructive nature of tyranny' (297). As despotism disintegrates, freedom's cause can more easily win through, and *Hellas* is in this way an optimistic poem, Scrivener concludes.

Sharing Scrivener's interpretation of the poem as optimistic, is Constance Walker. She concentrates on the different kinds of opposites in the play, both in structure, language, and theme, and how these interplay. Very interestingly she also shows how Shelley deliberately works ambiguity and confusion into the play to blur distinctions, limits, and other signs of order in language. Part of this impression may be assigned to the Calderonian influence of the poem. Ahasuerus and Mahomet the Second confirm Mahmud's 'growing sense that life may be only a dream'. The imagery of clouds, mists, dreams and visions substantiates Mahmud's experience of illusion as his mental fixities are dissolved into chaos and confusion (40). In a way, Walker emphasizes some of the same aspects as the earliest critics did, but she presents them as the strength of the play, not its weaknesses. She argues that Shelley uses ambiguity deliberately, for instance in the ending of the poem, to increase its propagandistic effect (46). If Shelley had made a very clear-cut optimistic or pessimistic ending, the drama's function as propaganda for the Greek cause would not have worked.

Some critics seem to trace a clear development towards an acknowledgement of 'the authority of verse' --as Archer puts it-- in Shelley's later works, a development starting with the *Defence of Poetry*, and ending with the unfinished *Triumph of Life*. John Archer uses this development as a background in his discussion of "Authority in Shelley". His argument is that the authority of of the writer is linked up with political authority: 'the use of poetry to criticize tyranny made an immanent critique of the poet's own position possible' (260). When considering one of the choral passages in *Hellas*, lines 225-38, Archer draws our attention to two dimensions of the past, one is the historical past, the other is the textual past. The chorus expresses a longing 'for pre-Christian paganism which greatly exaggerates the slight nostalgia for poetic classicism in Milton's *Nativity Ode*, the textual past which is contained in the present of this passage' (265). In his use of Christianity, Shelley reverses many of its usual associations, managing to link it with Hellenism rather than Hebraism, and 'paganism rather than Judaism' (268). In this way he presents Christianity in a positive way, without betraying his own atheism, Archer concludes.

Characteristically, much of what is written on *Hellas*, considers only a small part of the drama or a certain aspect of it. One such critic is Gordon Spence, who mainly discusses a speech of Ahasuerus, lines 766-85. His chief aim seems to be to trace the sources of Shelley's / Ahasuerus's conception of 'the One'. In this speech, Ahasuerus asks Mahmud to 'look on that which cannot change - the One, / The unborn and the undying' (769-70). In trying to answer what the 'One' is, Spence starts by refuting earlier critics's explanations of Ahasuerus's speech. He claims it is neither influenced by 'the One of Parmenides as found in Drummond' (263) as Cameron suggests, nor the Platonic One, as James Notopoulos saw it.[10] What we see in *Hellas*, he concludes, is a development in Shelley's poetry from one system of thought to another one. 'Ahasuerus carries readers of Shelley from the system of Plotinus, used in *Adonais*, to an approximation to that of Parmenides' (273). The essence of his speech is central to the rest of the poem in that it contrasts 'the reality of the One and of thought with the illusoriness of the visible universe' (270). The poem does, however, give room for a contact between the Ideal and the real by 'showing that a return to the One in contemplation is possible even for the Sultan' (270).

The ideas of Ahasuerus are frequently echoed by the Chorus, a part of the poem that many critics have found particularly interesting. One important feature of the Chorus is that it consists of women. J.A. Kearney has examined Shelley's use of female characters in Shelley's four major dramas.[11] Her purpose is to see the female dramatic characters in relation to patriarchal tyranny as presented in these plays. In *Hellas*, the Chorus contrasts with the external action, and gives the play a universal and philosophical dimension that would have been difficult to achieve through the direct action. The Chorus's function is thus to present tyranny from a different view than that seen from the perspectives of war (Kearney, 95). What is significant about the Chorus's presence in the play is that 'one gradually becomes aware that these enslaved women are, paradoxically, free in spirit to renew and celebrate the ideal of freedom while, on the other hand, their oppressors' ruin becomes manifest even at the moment of apparent triumph' (95). In this way, the Chorus has a unique ability to turn the play upside down in that who seems to be in captivity is in fact free, and vice versa.

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[10] Notopolous has written a major work on the influence on Shelley by Platonism, called *The Platonism of Shelley: A Study of Platonism and the Poetic Mind*. The book does not specifically deal with *Hellas*, and I have therefore not used it in my discussion.

Kearney also emphasises the belief, frequently used by Shelley, that the recovery of freedom depends, not on the oppressor, but on the oppressed (97). The Chorus being slaves and women makes it 'doubly apt as a means whereby Shelley can dramatically evoke the rekindling and sustaining hope in humanity' (97). Kearney does however criticize Shelley for failing to individualise the women. They are, typically, presented to us as a 'special category of humanity with a greater responsibility than men for the creation or restoration of freedom' (97), she concludes.[12]

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[11] These dramas are *Prometheus Unbound*, *The Cenci*, *Swellfoot the Tyrant* and *Hellas*.

[12] Kearney's concluding comments show signs of trying to apply modern conceptions of feminism to a text from the 1820s, an attempt which in my opinon is unsuccessful, especially when she concludes that:

> Far-reaching, then, as is Shelley's vision of humanity freed from the chains of the past and, in particular, his sense of the potential equality of men and women, my claim is that he does not succeed in freeing himself entirely from traditional hierarchical and absolutist conceptions of women. (Kearney, 97)

Another political aspect of the drama is presented by Mark Kipperman in "Macropolitics of Utopia: Shelley's *Hellas* in Context". There is a debate among Marxist and historicist critics about where 'the great utopian propaganda of Shelley's *Hellas*' (Kipperman, 86) should be situated in political history. Kipperman suggests that the answer to this depends on 'the degree to which ideological elements disguise or distort its overt historical commitment' (87). The question arises whether Shelley's utopian language falls into the traps of escapism, or not, as Kipperman believes. It is not true, he argues, that Shelley's poetry is utopian and politically disengaged. Quite on the contrary, in 1821, 'Shelley's idealism was *both* temporal *and* rooted in historical progressivism in a way that only art and not politics can be' (91). Kipperman is trying to show how historicity and ideality not necessarily are opposites, but rather interwoven (94), and how '[h]istory and ideality converge for Shelley in a moment of political choice' (95). Kipperman concludes by stating that *Hellas* clearly expresses radicalism and not an escape from radicalism.

In his "*Hellas* and the Historical Uncanny", William Ulmer tries to place the poet in history. To him, Shelley made *Hellas* an exercise in writing history. Shelley's Chorus 'helps transform politics into history by assigning contemporary occurrences their future' (612). His main concern is to 'read' history as a narrative, and he sees language and lyrical devices as important in this process of understanding history. Ulmer also works on *Hellas* from a psycho-analytical point of view. '*Hellas* everywhere insists on the psychological dimensions of its historical drama' (622). He does not, however, detect any hope in the last stanzas of the poem. To Ulmer, the lack of hope in these last lines gives the whole poem a pessimistic tone (Ulmer, 621).

As I have touched upon earlier, Shelley's treatment of Christianity has engendered some interest. Bryan Shelley has located around sixty references to the Bible in *Hellas*, which should be sufficient evidence to show that

Shelley, not surprisingly, knew his Bible well, and frequently made use of it in his works in some form or other. In his *Shelley and Scripture; The Interpreting Angel*, Bryan Shelley claims the Bible as one of the three most important sources for *Hellas*.[13] The Book of Daniel, like the Chorus of *Hellas*, he argues, 'relates the transfer of power through a succession of world empires' with a 'panoramic vision' (B. Shelley, 157-8). Both *Hellas* and the Book of Daniel see monarchies as 'impermanent' (160), and he argues that Shelley's view of the world as transitory is taken from the latter. He sees *Hellas* as an apocalyptic drama anticipating 'the coming of a new spiritual order. Poets can "prophesy" such developments because they discern the recurrent cycles of history' (159). The question of Christianity is especially connected to Ahasuerus because of his role as poet-prophet.

According to Bryan Shelley, the Book of Daniel provides a 'superficial structural parallel to *Hellas*', but he also points to some notable dissimilarities between the two. Ahasuerus does not, like Daniel, interpret dreams, though this is what Mahmud believes. *Hellas*, furthermore, lacks an omnipresent God controlling the insurgent. Another major difference between Daniel and Ahasuerus is their perspectives on what Bryan Shelley calls 'earthly events'(161). Where Daniel interprets life from a supernatural view, Ahasuerus forwards thought as the only reality.

As this survey will have indicated, opinions on Shelley's works differ widely. The only thing most critics seem to agree upon is the fine poetry of the choral passages. Even though it is difficult to generalize in this case, I would say that the different critiques fall into two opposite groups, those who read the poem as pessimistic and those who read it as optimistic. A further opposition can be seen in the treatment of the work's themes, where critics either find the poem to be political propaganda or to be an expression of Shelley's metaphysics.

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[13] The two others are *The Persians* by Aeschylus and Byron's *Sardanapalus*.

Neither of these approaches are in any sense wrong, but I prefer to see the poem as containing both political and transcendental aspects. The poem cannot comfortably be situated at either extreme, but somewhere in between. As I have mentioned earlier, there is also a notable tendency to concentrate only on certain parts or aspects of the poem, as for example Kearney and Spence have done, instead of looking at it as a whole. As in the case of other literary works we notice a movement away from biographical explanations, towards a focus on the underlying themes and structures of the poem, as exemplified by Earl Wasserman and John Sewell Flagg. There is still, however, a predominance of political readings of the poem. These are without doubt fruitful and interesting interpretations, but I have here chosen to give them secondary emphasis, for the benefit of Shelley's literary design which I find more useful in my own discussion. In my next chapter I will perform a closer analysis of the characters and themes of *Hellas*, and I hope to show that the poem is indeed more than a piece of propaganda cast as art, and that its value lies, not in its political aspects, but rather in its structure, diction, and poetic themes.

CHAPTER FIVE

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

As I have already mentioned, *Hellas* is a drama of little external action, and I therefore find it extra relevant to make a close analysis of the different characters. The lack of action in a play is, according to Stuart Curran, an advantage, and constitutes 'the power and potential significance of English Romantic drama (71). . . . It is a dramaturgy not of action but of psychology, not of doing but of being' (Cave, 73). It is on this basis that I will now explore the major characters of *Hellas*.

5.1 Do I wake and live?

Mahmud is the central character in *Hellas*. His internal struggle parallels the war between Turkey and Greece. He struggles to free his mind from the nightmare that has been haunting him, and in the same way, Greece is fighting for freedom from slavery and tyranny. Thus, the real action of the play is not that on the battlefield, but rather the awakening of Mahmud's self-awareness and his insight into man's role in the cycles of history. This concurs with Curran's assertion that 'Shelley's drama is a drama of character, but of character grappling with thought' (Cave, 74).

As a character, Mahmud starts out as an average tyrant, preoccupied with war and victory, but he seems torn between tyrannical order and the chaos of dreams and visions. Three times a nightmare has disturbed his sleep.

> Thrice has a gloomy vision hunted me
> As thus from sleep into the troubled day;
> It shakes me as the tempest shakes the sea,
> Leaving no figure upon memory's glass. (128-31)

We understand that an element of disorder, a disturbing vision, has entered his world and is troubling his internal state, as does the war in the external world. In his constant search for order he wants to understand this dream, so he summons the Wandering Jew, who belongs to a tribe of 'wise interpreters of dreams' (136). Mahmud realizes that his understanding of this vision will be crucial to the outcome of the war. Ahasuerus, however, presents him with another vision, a meeting with his forefather, Mahomet the Second. Constance Walker suggests that this meeting 'provide[s] him with an education in Shelleyan egalitarianism and metaphysics' (Walker, 39). This education causes his tyranny to crumble as he discovers it to be a system of mental enslavement in which he himself is trapped, 'one based on a desperate need for order which gives rise to rigid demarcations and vastly oversimplified categories' (39). The 'mental restoration of despotic order' (39) that Mahmud seeks from Ahasuerus, however, turns out to have the opposite effect, that of confusion and doubt.

Shelley has made his figure into more than a traditional tyrant. Mahmud is not a static character, but a well rounded and rather a complex one. He is not completely a representative of evil, but has rather human features, especially towards the ending. This is one example of Shelley's unwillingness to create one dimensional characters in *Hellas.* Without such a description of Mahmud, this would have been a drama of opposites only, but instead it is a drama about the movement between, or perhaps the 'removement' (removal) of, opposites. G. Wilson Knight claims that this is an attempt of Shelley in 'trying to *understand* his tyrants' (Knight, 245). He even suggests that the characterization of Mahmud reveals a 'sympathy with evil', but this is perhaps to take it too far. Mark Kipperman, on the other hand, describes Mahmud as 'a type of the romantic border-figure, signaling a transition from one stage of consciousness to another' (Kipperman, 93). His change is clear throughout the play as he develops to be less aggressive and more reflective. Flagg contrasts Mahmud with Shelley's other tyrants, and compared to these, 'Mahmud appears weak almost to the point of helplessness and therefore far more human' (Flagg, 243). Very often, his speeches start out in anger and violence to end in resignation, and sometimes even in bitterness, as the following example will show:

> Silence those mutineers - that drunken crew.
> That crowd about the pilot in the storm.
> Aye! strike the foremost shorter by a head. -
> They weary me and I have need of rest.
> Kings are like stars - they rise and set, they have
> The worship of the world but no repose. (191-6).

This shift from violent language to a reflection on his own position is quite typical of Mahmud and draws our attention to his complex character. Likewise, in the next dialogue he asks, 'Are there no Grecian virgins / Whose shrieks and spasms and tears they may enjoy? / No infidel children to impale on spears?' (242-44). Some lines later, his anger has faded, and given way to resignation:

> Ruin above, and anarchy below;
> Terror without, and treachery within;
> The chalice of destruction full, and all
> Thirsting to drink, and who among it dares
> To dash it from his lips? and where is hope? (268-72).

These passages show how Mahmud often changes quite dramatically. Unlike another Shellyan tyrant, Count Cenci, Mahmud loses many of his original, evil qualities, and develops into a character that manages to create sympathy in the reader. The main reason for this is perhaps his search for knowledge, his desire to understand his dreams as part of reality. It is not the war, but his dreams that cause his fear. The dreams are a substantial threat to the order and stability of Mahmud's mind. He is used to being in control of his life, and is thus 'shaken' when he has to confront an area where he has no power. He therefore seeks help from the Jew, Ahasuerus, who removes the 'veil' from his eyes and enables him to converse with the phantom of his dreams, Mahomet the Second. When his own perception of reality begins to collapse, Mahmud realizes that his empire will crumble, too. Ahasuerus suggests that what Mahmud calls reality is perhaps a dream, even more of a dream than his vision is (841-44). When the phantom has disappeared, this leads Mahmud to ask himself, 'Do I wake and live?' (917).[1]

The external action of the drama is indeed kept at a minimum. Mahmud, for instance, is a very passive character, who most of all wants to avoid any kind of change in his present condition. He is asleep when the play starts, and is reluctantly woken by the Chorus. Flagg is quite correct when he writes that the 'tragedy of [Mahmud's] life as he himself seems to view it is that the affairs of the world continue to break in upon his repose . . . Mahmud does not break things, he simply lets them fall apart' (Flagg, 253). Mahmud's sleep, and his wish to talk to Ahasuerus, whom he believes to have magic abilities, is a way of distancing himself from the outside world. Unfortunately for Mahmud, however, he is forced to realize that kings have the 'worship of the world, but no repose' (196). His resignation in the end might be seen as a sign of his choosing repose instead of worship. There is thus a discrepancy between his position as a sultan and his personal desires. As head of state, he is associated with the laws of tyranny, and thus obliged to continue the war. But because of his troubled mind he, more than anything else, wants rest.

Most of the action of the drama exists in the language of the characters. Mahmud's speeches are very often short and limited. It is actually Hassan, a seemingly unimportant character, who delivers the longest speeches. Mahmud's inability to find suitable words or to complete his sentences might be seen as a sign of the confusion he feels, or it might be a result of his limiting mental capacity. His speeches are, of course, characterized by authoritarian language, and he often speaks in the imperative mood. He frequently gives orders, as in 'Go! bid them pay themselves / With Christian blood!' (241-42), or just 'Cease!' (527), or 'Approach' (861). He also repeats certain words, as if to give them extra emphasis, as when he tells Hassan to 'Live! O live! outlive / Me and this sinking Empire' (458-9). Contrasting his authoritarian stance and speech acts, however, are several incomplete sentences, a sign of insecurity and doubt. From the very beginning, he is incapable of finishing his sentences. 'And I am Mahmud, still, -' (123), these are his fumbling words when waking up from the nightmare. A few lines later he opens 'Would that --- no matter' (132), thus changing his mind in mid-sentence. His linguistic ability is thus marked by two opposing features: order and insecurity. His propensity for giving orders furthermore contrasts with the increasing number of questions he asks. His conversation with Mahomet the Second is a typical example of Mahmud's development and his search for self-knowledge. This vision is introduced with reference to an order, and concludes with questioning, not so much whether he will be victorious in the war, but how he will be defeated, signifying that he already has realized his future downfall:

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[1] Similar questions were raised by, for example, Calderon's Segismundo and Holberg's Jeppe.

> but say,
> Imperial shadow of the thing I am,
> When, how, by whom, Destruction must accomplish
> Her consummation? (899-902).

He then starts questioning the values he earlier believed in, and his strong faith in his empire is wavering as the lines between visions and reality are fading:

> Do I wake and live?
> Were there such things or may the unquiet brain,

Vexed by the wise mad talk of the old Jew,
Have shaped itself these shadows of its fear? (917-20)

We can observe a clear tension in the words he uses, as in line 919, where the 'mad talk' of Ahasuerus is described as 'wise', thus creating an oxymoron of great suggestive power.

Light is another related symbol in the drama. Mahmud seems to exist in a state of twilight. He looks at the crescent moon, the symbol of Islam, as a '[w]an emblem of an empire fading now' (340), as it is being replaced by the evening star, Venus, a strong symbol in the play, and whose Latin name, Lucifer, means light-bringing. As a king, he compares himself to the stars; 'they rise and set, they have / The worship of the world, but no repose' (195-6). Even though they have fixed orbits, the stars constantly change positions, and like a star can fall, so can his kingdom, thus reflecting his growing awareness of the instability of his power. Similarly, words like shadow, mist, and veil are frequently used by Mahmud, and are all pictures of change and unreality, limiting a clear perception of truth, as in this passage where he talks to Ahasuerus:

What meanest thou? thy words stream like a tempest
Of dazzling mist within my brain - they shake
The earth on which I stand, and hang like night
On Heaven above me. What can they avail?
They cast on all things surest, brightest, best,
Doubt, insecurity, astonishment. (786-91).

It is interesting to see that Ahasuerus's words exert the same effect of confusion and insecurity on Mahmud, as the nightmare referred to in the beginning of the play.

In all aspects, Mahmud is characterized by restrictive features. The words he uses and the ways he expresses himself by means of questions, commands, and unfinished sentences, are all signs of restricted or diminishing mental powers. He is himself a slave, perhaps to a greater extent than the women in the Chorus, since his own mind is commanded by mutability and '[a]ll that it hath dominion o'er, worlds, worms, / Empires and superstitions' (800-1). Because he fails to 'look on that which cannot change' (768), he and his empire, inevitably, will fall. Significantly, the play ends with reports of Turkish military victories. The irony is, however, Wasserman argues, that 'convinced of the inevitable dissipation of his power . . . Mahmud senses that his victory verges on defeat, and he sinks to his lowest point of despair' (Wasserman, 389).

5.2 Your heart is Greek, Hassan

Hassan is in many ways very different from the other characters. He is Mahmud's closest associate, but in spite of his loyalty to Mahmud, he doesn't seem to belong to either of the parties in battle. He seems to be capable of sharing a Turkish, but also a reasonably neutral opinion of the war. Also, he is different in that Shelley has made him a very talkative person. In the play, he is the one character who has been given the longest speeches. He clearly is more communicative than Mahmud or Ahasuerus, and I see this as a sign of him being a more important character than he seems at first, if we judge by rank.

In his behaviour, Hassan is a typical servant, in being both humble and submissive. He addresses Mahmud with phrases like '[y]our sublime highness' (123-4) and is very careful to obey every order that Mahmud utters. He has great respect for Mahmud, and could, in this matter, be compared to the Indian slave we meet in the very beginning of the play, who would give all her/his joy for Mahmud to have 'one hour of quiet sleep' (26). The Indian slave is the counterpart to the Greek captive women who form the Chorus. The Indian and Hassan both try to comfort Mahmud, Hassan during the daytime, and the Indian at night during Mahmud's restless sleep. Hassan is also highly informative, and this is another of his important functions. He is the one who informs us and Mahmud about the Wandering Jew, Ahasuerus. It is Hassan's description of how Ahasuerus looks, where he lives, and how to reach him that we have to relate to. Also, we are presented to his reports from the battlefield. He shares this function with the several messengers who constantly interrupt the dialogue, but unlike Hassan, however, the messengers manage to give clear, objective reports from the war.

What makes him different from the typical servant characters, is his attitude to the war and the language he uses, which is both philosophical and lyrical. His speeches are long and coloured by lyrical imagery, and he often uses features found in fairy-tales. He frequently uses the number three, as in the three heroic Greek soldiers who committed suicide rather than surrendering to the Turks, constituting a Trinity of heroic deaths, and 'thrice their keen wedge of battle pierced our lines' (376). This number is used elsewhere too. Mahmud, for example, has the same nightmare three times.[2] Also, the way he describes Ahasuerus is indeed more in keeping with a fairy-tale than with descriptions of reality. The same can be said about his instructions of how to reach the Jew:

> He who would question him
> Must sail alone at sunset where the stream
> Of ocean sleeps around those foamless isles,
> When the young moon is westering as now
> And evening airs wander upon the wave;
> And when the pines of that bee-pasturing isle,
> Green Erebinthus, quench the fiery shadow
> Of his guilt prow within the sapphire water. (165-72)

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[2] The number is also much used in Christianity in for instance the Holy Trinity, in Peters denial of Christ in Luke 22:34, and in Christ's resurrection on the third day.

Throughout this deliberately indefinite description, Hassan creates a sense of mystique around Ahasuerus, associating him with the unreal. As a clear contrast to the facts of war and battles, Hassan draws the reader's attention away from the war, and leads it to a world of dreams and visions:

If his prayer
Be granted, a faint meteor will arise
Lighting him over Marmora, and a wind
Will rush out of the sighing pine forest
And with the wind a storm of harmony
Unutterably sweet, and pilot him
Through the soft twilight to the Bosphorous (175-81).

Line 179 is especially interesting as it contains the ambiguous passage 'storm of harmony', another example of oxymoron. As his language wavers between harmony and storm, his heart flickers between the Greek and Turkish side of the war. This is particularly obvious in the way he talks about the heroic Greek soldiers when trying to comfort Mahmud. After a victorious Turkish battle the few surviving Greeks are told to surrender;

"Slaves,
Render yourselves - they have abandoned you,
What hope of refuge, or retreat or aid?
We grant your lives." "Grant that which is thine own!"
Cried one, and fell upon his sword and died!
Another - "God, and man, and hope abandon me
But I to them and to myself remain
Constant" - he bowed his head and his heart burst.
A third exclaimed, "There is a refuge, tyrant,
Where thou darest not pursue; there we shall meet again."
Then held his breath and, after a brief spasm
The indignant spirit cast its mortal garment

Among the slain; - dead earth upon the earth!
So these survivors, each by different ways,
Some strange, all sudden, none dishonourable,
Met in triumphant death; (385-401).

Because of his way of portraying the battle, Mahmud accuses Hassan of having a Greek heart. Hassan agrees, but tries to excuse himself:

It may be so:
A spirit not my own wrenched me within
And I have spoken words I fear and hate;
Yet would I die for - (455-58)

It seems that something beyond his control is speaking through him. According to Earl Wasserman, the spirit of freedom is diffusing itself throughout tyranny's veins. As 'dawn floods night, the spirit of freedom breathes through the unwilling but powerless oppressor, whose own true voice is displaced' (Wasserman, 387). To soothe Mahmud, Hassan apparently is trying to say that he would die for his country, but is stopped by Mahmud, who tells him to live instead, so, as readers, we are left with his sympathizing picture of the Greek fight for freedom. It is because of this we feel that Hassan functions somewhat as the consciousness of the play. He is, in a way, a mediator between Mahmud and the Greek Chorus. If Hassan thus is the door between tyranny and freedom, then Ahasuerus is or possesses the key that will enable Mahmud to open this door and enter into the other 'room'. In other words, Ahasuerus is the catalyst in this drama.

5.3 The Wandering Jew

The origin of the Wandering Jew goes far back in history, and the image has changed throughout the centuries. Shelley used this figure earlier in his poetry, but its importance as a poet-prophet has never been as strong as it is in this drama. Hassan gives us three explanations of the origin of Ahasuerus:

> Some say that this is he whom the great prophet
> Jesus, the Son of Joseph, for his mockery
> Mocked with the curse of immortality. -
> Some feign that he is Enoch - others dream
> He was preadamite and has survived
> Cycles of generation and of ruin. (149-54).

Typically, Hassan describes him with a sense of uncertainty and unreality, as seen in the verbs he uses to explain the origin, some 'say', some 'feign', some 'dream'. Shelley also manages to let his own view of Jesus shine through as the 'Son of Joseph', not the son of God. According to the traditional legend of the Wandering Jew, Ahasuerus was punished because he denied Jesus a cup of water on the way to the Crucifixion. His punishment was, as we know, to wander the earth until Judgement Day. As a mythical character he has some similarity with Prometheus, a figure used in another play that Shelley adapted from Aeschylus. One of Shelley's notes, however, warns us against interpreting Ahasuerus as a supernatural being:

> I could easily have made the Jew a regular conjuror, and the Phantom an ordinary ghost. I have preferred to represent the Jew as disclaiming all pretension, or even belief, in supernatural agency, and as tempting Mahmud to that state of mind in which ideas may be supposed to assume the force of sensations through the confusion of thought with the objects of thought, and the excess of passion animating the creations of imagination. It is a sort of natural magic, susceptible of being exercised in a degree by any one who should have made himself master of the secret associations of another's thoughts. (*Prose*, 334)

Shelley thus demystifies his character, but at the same time manages to keep the reader's fascination by referring to Ahasuerus's magic as 'natural'.

Ahasuerus is nevertheless described as neither human nor prophet, though he describes himself as '[n]o more' than man (739). The somewhat vague picture of Ahasuerus is mainly created by Hassan and Mahmud. Hassan's fairytale-like description of him very early in the play colours both Mahmud's and our own idea of him as superhuman. Hassan tells us that Ahasuerus seems older than the world itself;

> The hoary mountains and the wrinkled ocean
> Seem younger still than he - his hair and beard
> Are whiter than the tempest-sifted snow.
> His cold pale limbs and pulseless arteries
> Are like the fibres of a cloud instinct
> With light, and to the soul that quickens them
> Are as the atoms of the mountain-drift
> To the winter wind - but from his eyes looks forth
> A life of unconsumed thought which pierces
> The present, and the past, and the to-come. (139-48).

This could as well be the traditional Christian notion of God, who has the knowledge of past, present, and future, and Ahasuerus certainly has some Christ-like qualities. Mahmud tells him: 'Thou art as God whom thou contemplates' (761). As God is omnipotent and knows everything from the start of history till the end of time, Ahasuerus can see both the future and the past. Furthermore, Wasserman argues, as 'Christ was for Shelley a man who most fully developed the divine human powers and virtues in himself, so Ahasuerus is a man who has most fully developed his inherent powers of thought, not one supernaturally gifted' (Wasserman, 390). Alluding to the gospel, Ahasuerus takes on the role of Christ in lines 803-6:

> Would'st thou behold the future? - ask and have!
> Knock and it shall be opened - look and lo!
> The coming age is shadowed on the past
> As on a glass.[3]

---

[3] The passage it echoes is from St.Matthew, and Christ's sermon on the mount:

These images are typological and based on passages from the New Testament, indicating that Ahasuerus functions as a type of Christ-figure. What separates Ahasuerus from the Christian view of a god, however, is the role he ascribes human beings. His doctrine is that Liberty can only be created from the inside of mankind, not by anything external. Man must win the war inside himself before he can call himself free. Between the lines in Ahasuerus's speeches one can quite easily discern Shelley's contempt for organized religion, where individual thoughts are slaves to the tyranny of external action. According to Ahasuerus, thought is what matters, and what men must build their world on. In this way, he embodies the doctrines of Christ on earth, and at the same time rebels against contemporary conceptions of Christianity.[4] When not echoing specific Biblical passages, Ahasuerus follows the thoughts and ideas of, for instance, Prospero in *The Tempest*. To illustrate the similarity between the two characters, compare these passages from *The Tempest* and *Hellas*, respectively:

> These our actors,
> As I foretold you, were all spirits:
> And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
> The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
> The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
> Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
> And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
> Leave not a rack behind. (*The Tempest*, iv. 148-56).

> Ask, and it shall be given you; seek
> and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be
> opened unto you (Matt. 7:7).

[4] These ideas are also expressed in Shelley's *Essay on Christianity*. In a fragment called "The Doctrines of Christ", connected to this essay, Shelley asks us to 'beware, if we love liberty and truth . . . that mankind may not be everlastingly condemned to the bondage of their own passions' (*Prose*, 213).

Shelley formulates the idea in this way:

> this Whole
> Of suns, and worlds, and men, and beasts, and flowers
> With all the silent or tempestuous workings
> By which they have been, are, or, cease to be,
> Is but a vision - all that it inherits
> Are motes of a sick eye, bubbles and dreams; (*Hellas*, 776-81).

As we can see, both these passages express the transience of the universe, using much the same imagery.

Ahasuerus represents Mahmud's opposite. Scrivener asserts that 'Ahasuerus has achieved his wisdom by retreating from the world of illusions and conquering his own passions' (Scrivener, 294-5). His 'empire' is built on thought, whereas that of Mahmud is built on physical power and material goods. In fact, Ahasuerus is almost thought and knowledge personified, a talking prosopopeia. As wisdom can be difficult to attain, so is Ahasuerus. He is 'less accessible / Than thou or God' (164-65), Hassan tells Mahmud, and he is described as having a light inside (142-44). His function in the poem is, as I have mentioned earlier, to open up the doors of Mahmud's mind and set his thoughts free. He represents 'the dramatic climax of the poem' and his speeches echo the songs of the Chorus (Scrivener, 294). He is the key to freedom, he is that 'something' that 'doesn't love a wall' as Robert Frost put it in his "Mending Wall". He removes the boundaries and limitations that Mahmud's world entails. When these disappear Mahmud's world falls apart. Ahasuerus builds his world on thoughts and a mind, continually pushing against or breaking limits. That thought is the only thing eternal in a world of mutability is one of the lessons he teaches Mahmud. Mahmud is fighting for the one empire he cannot gain by power, namely the empire of thought and wisdom:

> Thought
> Alone, and its quick elements, Will, Passion,
> Reason, Imagination, cannot die; (795-97).

In these sentences, Ahasuerus expresses the truth of the drama, Stuart Curran asserts. The idea that Shelley expresses here, he writes, is that if men started directing their power toward thought and imagination instead of war and violence, no tyrannies would survive.

Ahasuerus masters both imagination and wisdom, and his role as poet-prophet in this play is significant in the way Shelley combines poetry and knowledge. Usually, knowledge associates with science and reason, whereas poetry links with creativity and the imagination, the very opposite of science, but to Shelley these are two closely connected objects, as this passage will illustrate:

> [Poetry] is at once the centre and circumference of knowledge; it is that which comprehends all science, and that to which all science must be referred. . . .
>
> [Poetry] awakens and enlarges the mind itself by rendering it the receptacle of a thousand unapprehended combinations of thought. Poetry lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world, and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar (*Defence*, 503, 487).

In other words, poetry enables the mind to receive more knowledge. It stretches the mind's boundaries, because poetry itself has no limits and is eternal:

> All high poetry is infinite; it is as the first acorn, which contained all oaks potentially. Veil after veil may be undrawn, and the inmost naked beauty of the meaning never exposed. A great Poem is a fountain for ever overflowing with the waters of wisdom and delight; and after one person and one age has exhausted all its divine effluence which their peculiar relations enable them to share, another and yet another

> succeeds, and new relations are ever developed, the source of an unforeseen and an unconceived delight. (*Defence*, 500).

Interestingly, Ahasuerus uses the same image of the acorn:

> All is contained in each.
> Dodona's forest to an acorn's cup
> Is that which has been, or will be, to that
> Which is - the absent to the present. (792-95).

Ahasuerus thus functions to draw attention to the universality of thought and poetry. Like the acorn's nut contains the whole tree, one thought contains all thoughts. The punishment of the traditional Wandering Jew has here been turned into something positive. His eternal wandering is more a question of a mental journey than anything else, and this has enabled Ahasuerus to gather knowledge and insight into the human mind.

5.4 The Chorus; The free heart, the impassive soul

Whereas Ahasuerus represents the poet, the Chorus provides the poetry. The language is soft and flowing, and, as in very much of Shelley's poetry, it works almost like an incantation. This is clearly shown in the early passages, where the repeated end-rhymes, 'sleep - deep - weep' give us the impression of a lullaby, and in that way, enhancing the effect of the content, which is to lull Mahmud to sleep. Because of this, the Chorus is associated with the chaos of dreams that troubles Mahmud's sleep. Another example of the melodious monotony of repetitions in some of the choral passages is lines 27-33:

> Breathe low, low!
> The spell of the mighty mistress now
> When Conscience lulls her sated snake
> And Tyrants sleep, let Freedom wake.
> Breathe! low - low
> The words which like secret fire shall flow

Through the veins of the frozen earth - low, low!

Towards the end of the first choral part, the swift exchange of lines between Semichorus I and II, increases the drama's tempo significantly, from a state of sleep to an awakening, or from dream to reality. This point can also work as an anticipation of the awakening of freedom and the stirring of Mahmud's mind. Shelley's Chorus differs from the Chorus as used, for instance, by Aeschylus in being revolutionary instead of conservative (Flagg, 201). The captive women of *Hellas* herald change and liberty and function as adversaries to Mahmud, thus breaking with the classical choruses whose main role often were to support the existing regime or the divine order.

The opening Chorus establishes the scene of captivity and introduces the important theme of freedom. This is seen, not only by the fact that the Chorus consists of Greek captive women, but also in the verse chosen, as the very form of the Chorus follows a strict rhyming pattern. The words are thus constrained by the rigid poetic form, as the women are restricted by Mahmud's tyranny. Their prayers for freedom are shaped by a pattern of order. However, the message of the Chorus pulls in the opposite direction, breaking away from such restrictive patterns. It is evident therefore, that the same conflict as observed in the rest of the poem, that between order and disorder, or stability and change, is represented in the Chorus, too.

The poetic form and the language are not the only elements to separate the Chorus from the rest of the drama. It is also different in content. Whereas Mahmud and Hassan talk much about so called worldly matters, the Chorus sings about more essential factors of life, like love, hope, truth, and liberty. By centring on these themes, the Chorus gives the drama the necessary universal dimension that enables us to read it in other than directly political/historical ways. It is not war, or a specific war, that is the focus of the Chorus, but freedom, and the lack of freedom. The overplot, the external war between Greece and Turkey, is not mentioned by the Chorus even once.

Instead, it presents us with the fate of freedom throughout world history. It is quite clear that the freedom they sing about is not necessarily physical, but the freedom of a liberated mind. Because of the lyrical form in which it is presented, it is significant that it is the Chorus that represents this view. As seen in the quoted passage from *A Defence of Poetry*, it is poetry that enables man to see through the veil of limitations that hinders a perception of love and truth.

Indirectly, the Chorus both mirrors and comments upon the rest of the play. Some of the same imagery is used, especially the Calderonian pictures of mutability, as when worlds are '[l]ike the bubbles on a river / Sparkling, bursting, borne away' (199-200). The passage contrasts man as a living, thinking being with the different shapes offered in laws, religion, and philosophy. Man clothes his flight in 'dust and light' (205), the latter being associated with both Freedom and knowledge, and he is thus made immortal through his thoughts. Again we see that Shelley forges a strong link between liberty and light, which clearly indicates that the way to true freedom is not through power, but through enlightenment.

By mirroring his speeches, the Chorus thus provides a lyrical expression of what Ahasuerus says elsewhere in the play. The Chorus also has an important function in relation to some of the other characters. It has the same informative function as Hassan, but where Hassan talks about the history of war and the Turkish empire, the Chorus sings about freedom and Greece. In relation to Mahmud, however, the Greek captive women have opposite roles. The women are slaves of the Turkish tyranny, but their hearts and souls are still free. Defiantly they sing:

> O Slavery! thou frost of the world's prime,
>   Killing its flowers and leaving its thorns bare!
> Thy touch has stamped these limbs with crime,
>   These brows thy branding garland bear,

But the free heart, the impassive soul
Scorn thy controul! (676-81)

Mahmud, on the other hand, has the freedom to put other people in chains, but his own mind is paradoxically imprisoned.

The Chorus thus binds all the characters together while it at the same time exists at a distance from the actual events, being, in a way, both present and absent at the same time. When the women sing about empires falling, it is as much about Mahmud's empire as about all other empires in history which had been built on the same foundation as Turkey, a foundation of blood and hate.

I hear! I hear.
The hiss as of a rushing wind,
The roar as of an ocean foaming,
The thunder as of earthquake coming.
I hear! I hear!
The crash as of an empire falling,
The shrieks as of a people calling
"Mercy? Mercy?" how they thrill!
Then a shout of "Kill! Kill! Kill!"
And then a small still voice, thus - (719-28).

The Chorus in this way echoes the news of defeat brought by the messengers earlier. The women hear the liberating sound of all tyrannies falling apart. It is the captive women who represent hope in the poem, but whether their last song is to be seen as hopeful or not, is something critics of Shelley heartily disagree upon, as shown in the previous chapter.

The final Chorus contains one of the most important passages in the play. Shelley here reflects Godwin in his hope for the possibility of a new age. In between the choral passages, shouts of Turkish victory are heard from outside. They are, however, toned down to virtually nothing in comparison with the strong belief in Freedom's victory expressed by the Chorus. In a way there is a verbal war going on between the "Voice without" and the Chorus, a war, in my opinion, won by the Chorus. Because of this strong hope I read the ending as optimistic. It is not the Chorus, but Mahmud, who resigns. John S. Flagg expresses the same thoughts when he asserts that 'Shelley's chorus in *Hellas*, in celebrating human creativity and resistance to tyranny, is positive and essentially optimistic, despite the intimations of disaster, the "bitter prophecy" from which it shrinks in the end' (Flagg, 205). That the drama is open ended, as I see it, is more a result of the war not being finished, than a pessimistic Shelley not being able to create a 'happy ending'. The last stanza is dominated by the almost existential questions, 'O cease! must hate and death return? / Cease! must men kill and die?' (1096-97). The very ending is a plea for breaking the eternal cycle of things so that the past will not return. The world would then start anew, but with a better starting-point than before, moving like an upwards going spiral, and ending in perfection. The Ideal, symbolized by Venus or Hesperus, is strongly represented in these last choral stanzas. Instead of despairing, Shelley thus ends his lyrical drama in a note of hope.

What strikes me is how Shelley has provided each character with conflicting traits. Mahmud has both tyrannical and human features, Hassan has both Turkish and Greek sympathies, Ahasuerus is both man and prophet, and finally, the Chorus is both free and enslaved. It is this pattern I will pursue in my next chapter. My purpose is to show that this unification of opposites is one of the central properties of the poem.

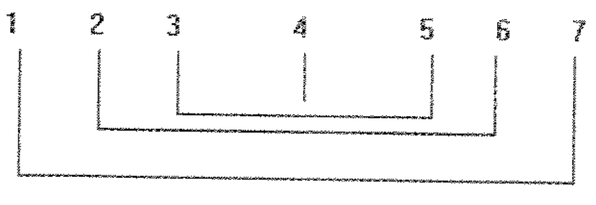
CHAPTER SIX

A STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS

Amid the flux of things only thought is eternal[1]

Hellas is characterized by the way opposite qualities are at war one with the other: motion confronts stasis, dream interfuses with reality, war contrasts with peace, and chaos with order. 'Motion is ever at war with stillness, and time with eternity' (655), Newell Ford argues in his investigation into paradox and irony in the works of Shelley. In trying to show the many ambiguities and paradoxes in Shelley's poetry, he draws attention to the immanent movement in many of Shelley's major works, which I will now try to develop in relation to *Hellas*. I will not, however, discuss how the above mentioned pairs of opposites work one against the other, but, on the contrary, how they work towards each other, creating unity. My emphasis will thus be on the separate opposites and the movement between them. I will look more closely at Shelley's use of language, symbols, and poetic form, drawing on my findings to support my argument.

When discussing the thematic patterns that I find important in *Hellas*, I will focus on the poem's own structure. I see the seven parts of the poem as forming a symmetrical structure:



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[1] Carlos Baker, p.186

Parts one and seven, the opening and the ending, introduce hope and a wish for sleep. Parts two and six are dramatic dialogues where Ahasuerus is central. Parts three and five concentrate on the eternity and permanence of thought over the mutability of the world. The structure's centre, part four, contains the war descriptions and Mahmud's reaction to them. The war is thus surrounded, and, as it were, overpowered by a far more spiritual theme of thought's precedence over the body, as shown in this tabular form:[2]

a Hope for freedom
b Mahmud; description of Ahasuerus
c The immortality of the human soul; history of religions
d The war descriptions
c The immortality of thought and of Greece
b Mahmud and Ahasuerus
a Hope for freedom

This design is particularly interesting in view of the poem's sources. Since Shelley based his poem on a classical Greek tragedy, a pattern of order is almost inevitably to expect. According to Alastair Fowler, a recessed symmetry like this is the 'classical pattern for textual arrangements' (Eriksen, 1987, 104), and it was, moreover, widely used in the Renaissance. The ten books of *Paradise Lost*, for example, form such a structure, which would further emphasize the influence of Milton on Shelley's later poetry. In Milton's poem too, the war is at the heart of the structure.[3]

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[2] The pattern is taken from Fowler.

[3] A graphic illustration of the structure of *Paradise Lost* is given by Røstvig in her *Configurations*, pp.464-465.

I owe part of my argument to Constance Walker, who claims that it is the lyric pictures that 'lend the poem dramatic structure insofar as they present a chain of actions and reactions, alternating between the perspectives of the Greeks and of their oppressors, the Turks' (Walker, 37). The dynamic of the drama is formed by playing the 'generic opposites against one another to heighten the contrast of the contradictory forms and of the inimical mental attitudes that they express' (Walker, 37). I will now look at each of the seven[4] parts of the drama, and try to show how they all contain and relate to the same thematic pattern, that of the motion or flux of opposites in a unifying process.

6.1. Be thy sleep / Calm and deep

The poem's opening introduces a seemingly calm atmosphere of sleep and inactivity. We do however sense that a storm is about to break loose. The increasingly dramatic language of the Chorus contrasts with the Indian's soothing words to Mahmud. Both the Greek women and the Indian are trying to make Mahmud sleep, but to the captive slaves, sleep equals death, whereas the Indian merely wishes Mahmud to be calm and have some rest. Within the first twenty lines, then, the poem has already posed a problem to the reader, as it is very difficult to distinguish between the two kinds of sleep. The Indian's purpose of lulling Mahmud to sleep is to secure him against his own self-awakening, and in that prevent the fall of his empire. The Chorus serves a different purpose, that is, to cause the fall of the Turks; when 'Tyrants sleep, let Freedom wake' (30) they sing. It is perhaps ironic, then, that it is because of their song for freedom, that Mahmud awakens. Thematically, the opening passage thus sets the scene for the rest of the poem. All through *Hellas* words and phrases are given different and often opposite meanings,[5] the result being that the reader's mind is kept in constant movement, following the flux of the various meanings.

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[4] As Constance Walker correctly points out, seven is a 'significant number in prophetic tradition' (Walker, 38).

The other function of the Chorus in this first part is to give a historical, almost Genesis-like, account of the origin of Freedom. Like once, 'The spirit of God with might unfurled / The flag of Freedom over chaos' (47-8), freedom will again return to the devastated Greece of Shelley's own time. I want to dwell upon the word chaos for a while, as its mythological history is interesting in relation to *Hellas*. Chaos, more than simply disorder, is especially fascinating because of the ambiguous ways it is described and defined throughout history. It has a central place in various mythologies, usually indicating what existed before the earth was created, or as Shelley put it, what existed before freedom. But this also implies that freedom must have been created *from* chaos. In Hesiod's mythical narrative, chaos existed before the world, and before tyranny, hate, and slavery. Tyranny and war are thus not necessarily a sort of chaos, as contemporary usage often indicates.

The difficulty in trying to define chaos in relation to *Hellas* is obvious, as Shelley's use of the term varies between the mythical and the contemporary definition. In the Prologue we read that the floor of the senate-house, where God, Satan, Christ, and Mahomet meet, is Chaos (*Works*, 448, 1-4). Some lines later, the Chorus sings about a 'chaos of light and motion' (71). When Christ speaks, however, he refers to 'Chaos and Death' (85), with a clear negative meaning. In my opinion it is the 'chaos of light and motion' that most suitably describes the thematic pattern of *Hellas*, with its strong emphasis on dreams and illusions.

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[5] Røstvig argues that this was typical of Renaissance epics; 'one way of establishing linkage between between parts is to take the same "sign" (or topos) in a good and bad sense' (Røstvig, 136).

Even though it is not contemporaneus with Shelley, I want to quote a late 19th century definition of chaos:

> **Chaos**, ...*n*. lit. a wide gap; a confused, shapeless mass; disorder; the state of matter before it was reduced to order by the Creator.[6]

In my further discussion of chaos, I will continue from the myth created by Hesiod, who directly or indirectly might have influenced Shelley's presentation of Chaos.[7]

In the *Theogony*, the original name of Chaos is Chasm, meaning "gap". The meaning did however change throughout the centuries, and in Ovid, for instance, Chaos is a disorderly mass, where the elements were at war with each other, as, in a way, the elements of *Hellas* are at war with each other. Earth was created from Chaos. Then 'came Erebos and dark Night, and from Night in turn came Bright Air and Day, whom she bore in shared intimacy with Erebos' (Hesiod, 6).[8] In other words, 'Bright Air and Day' are the "grandchildren" of Chaos! This is important in two ways. First, that Earth was created out of an empty gap, out of Chaos, even if it indeed needed the help of a Creator, or in Ovid's words, 'a natural force of a higher kind' (Ovid, 29). Furthermore, it is important that light was created from darkness, which also might explain Shelley's juxtaposition of chaos and light in the Prologue. This exemplifies my argumentation above, that seemingly opposite elements may be closely inter-related. The implications of Hesiod's and Ovid's myths of creation to Shelley's *Hellas* should now be clear to the reader. It is indeed possible to create something fruitful from seeming disorder and emptiness. In the same way, Freedom will rise from the ashes of the war.

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[6] *Chambers Etymological Dictionary of the English Language*, 1880.

[7] We know that Shelley himself read Hesiod's *Works and Days*, and it is not unreasonable to believe that he also read the *Theogony* about the origin and genealogy of the gods, even though this is not documented in any of his or Mary's letters or journals.

[8] Erebos is the realm of darkness, often associated with Hades.

The Greek insurrection is presented as the Chaos of the drama, implying that after this chaos there will be peace. Chaos, as used by Hesiod, represents an infinite and empty space, a gap, or a place in darkness. That Chaos is described as infinite is significant in this connection, as it implies the total lack of limits and boundaries that Shelley assigns to poetry.

6.2. The first awakening

The second part of the poem, which relates to the sixth, is characterized by Mahmud's nightmare and the presence of Ahasuerus. Mahmud's first speech is delivered before the dream lets go of him, and is thus as confused as after his meeting with Mahomet. Shelley describes a state that is neither dream nor reality, but something in between. Mahmud is seemingly glad to awaken from that 'gloomy vision', but the seeds of doubt have already been sown in him, as we notice when he tells Hassan that 'I am Mahmud, still, -' (123). He does not finish his sentence so we never get to know what that 'still,-' referred to, but the uncertainty it signals prevails throughout the rest of the poem. One may only guess that Mahmud, perhaps unconsciously, sensed that the vision he awoke from is no different from the nightmare he awoke *into*. That the dream of life is a nightmare is also suggested by Ross G. Woodman, who writes that 'man is liberated from the world's contagion only when he awakens from the dream' he calls life (Woodman, 180). Mahmud thus lives in a nightmare, both by day and night.

Mahmud's confusion is further signalled by his inability to find suitable words, or to complete his sentences. The dialogue parts spoken by Mahmud are very often formed as questions or as orders, and the imagery used is marked by transitoriness and inconstancy.[9] Constance Walker claims that this kind of imagery 'depicts the dissolution of political and mental fixities into chaos and confusion' (Walker, 40). It is central that it is especially Mahmud that employs this kind of language, as it emphasizes his own mental bewilderment. The same function is held by the celestial bodies which Shelley frequently refers to in his lyrics. Both the moon and the stars are central images in the poem, representing different states of being, as Flagg has pointed out:

> In contrast to the stars which Shelley follows poetic tradition in regarding as emblems of fixity and permanence (and therefore of eternity), the moon is for Shelley, as for the Elizabethans, "the inconstant moon," symbol of all that is impermanent, changeable and mortal. (Flagg, 262)

The crescent moon of Islam is Mahmud's emblem, whereas the Chorus follows Hesperus, the evening star, a permanent sign of liberty and love.

When I referred to the presence of Ahasuerus in this section, I mean that we here meet him indirectly, through Hassan's description of him. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, Ahasuerus is surrounded by an aura of infinitude and immortality. Hassan's description of him situates him on the edge of what is real and what is not, and in this respect presents a continuance of my argument so far. In a way, Hassan is merely conjuring up the idea of Ahasuerus, as Ahasuerus conjures up the vision of Mahomet the Second.

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[9] Examples of such imagery are: moon, clouds, mist, the cycles of the year, the repetitive patterns of history, etc.

6.3. Worlds on worlds are rolling ever

The third part of the drama is a celebration of permanence over transience, and about the place of religion in history. The universe and all it contains are depicted as slaves of mutability:

> Worlds on worlds are rolling ever
>   From creation to decay,
> Like the bubbles on a river
>   Sparkling, bursting, borne away.
>   But *they* are still immortal
>   Who through Birth's orient portal
> And Death's dark chasm hurrying to and fro,
>   Clothe their unceasing flight
>   In the brief dust and light
> Gathered around their chariots as they go; (197-206).

Kenneth Neill Cameron points out that Shelley was ahead of his time in many aspects, including scientific matters. The 'Worlds on worlds' passage conveys 'in one compact image . . . something of the fluid essence of the universe as modern astrophysics has revealed it, a picture very different from the static, mechanical one common in the encyclopedias of Shelley's day' (383).[10]

This picture of the fluidity of the universe, of movement and change instead of stasis, is equally important in *Hellas* as in other works of Shelley. The movement "to and fro" (203) between 'the transience of material bodies' and 'the continuity of mind', Cameron terms transmigration. Shelley discusses this theme in one of his early letters to Elizabeth Hitchener, where he states 'that everything appertaining to nature, consisting of constituent parts infinitely divisible, is in a continu{a}l change' (*Letters*, 110). Cameron sees the concept presented in this letter as

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[10] Cameron refers to another Shelley scholar, Desmond King-Hele, in connection with this passage.

> that of the individual mind at death going back into a general mind substance, from which it may again emerge, retaining its individuality but without any recollection of its past existence. The concept in *Hellas* is similar. Matter is everlasting, although its individual parts - "the worlds" - perish (Cameron, 384).

In a note to the 'Worlds on worlds'-chorus, however, Shelley 'hesitates to make a clear affirmation that he is depicting transmigration in the poem' (384), he argues, suggesting that Shelley may have feared the reviewers' scorn. Also, he interprets the last lines of the 'Worlds on worlds'-stanza as expressing a progressive view of history.

New shapes they still may weave,
New Gods, new Laws receive,
Bright or dim are they as the robes they last
On Death's bare ribs had cast. (206-10)

These lines suggest that mankind can in each 'incarnation take up from the point at which they had previously arrived' (Cameron, 384). What he in fact presents here is Shelley's view of the evolution of mankind as a spiral. Earl Wasserman has reached the same conclusion regarding this passage, where the immortal human soul is contrasted with the mutability of the world.[11]

As an introduction to the central scene of the poem, the Chorus tells us that

The moon of Mahomet
Arose, and it shall set,
While blazoned as on heaven's immortal noon

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[11] See chapter 4.3, or p.401 in Wasserman.

> The cross leads generations on. (221-24).

As the following scene will show, the Chorus's prophecy was right, and the image of the cross in the sky is repeated by one of the messengers, claiming that '[o]ne saw a red cross stamped upon the sky' (603).

6.4. And where is hope?

In this central, and longest, scene there is a linguistic tug of war between Hassan and Mahmud, Hassan trying to comfort Mahmud, who is sinking ever more into despair. The Sultan starts out as aggressively as ever, but when the scene ends, his defeat is certain. In a way, this scene belongs to Hassan, rather than Mahmud. His long speeches and field-reports increasingly come to represent the Greek mind, not the Turkish. The whole poem is making a slow U-turn. Hassan's reports of Turkish victories are full of signs expressing that the Turks in fact will lose. The 'lofty ships' of the Turkish fleet 'wait at Scala' like 'vapours anchored to a mountain's edge' (284). Vapour is yet another image of the transitory in this world, indicating that the Turkish victory will evaporate like a cloud. Furthermore, the 'Anarchies of Africa' 'sweep the pale Ægean' as 'sulphurous clouds half shattered by the storm' (302). Hassan's attempts to convince Mahmud of their certain victory do not succeed. His whole-hearted attempt is strikingly contrasted by his very words, and Mahmud does already see his defeat in the image of the trembling moon, being struck to death by the 'keen beams' (345) of Venus, the evening star. His world seems turned upside down, and familiar conceptions of the past, like victory and defeat, danger and security are reversed. Constance Walker has argued that:

> the ambiguous and insubstantial nature of even such seemingly clear-cut polarities as victory and defeat is repeatedly underscored throughout, most conspicuously by the gradual psychological collapse of

> the military victorious Turks, who are defeated from within by the very hatred and fear that fostered their tyranny (Walker, 38).

When Mahmud asks 'What were Defeat when Victory must appal? / Or Danger when Security looks pale? (359-60), he does not expect Hassan to answer, as he knows there is no answer. Mahmud's anger is thus quenched already, before Hassan delivers his 'Greek' speech, where he glorifies a Greek defeat. The last survivors of the Greek soldiers

> each by different ways,
> Some strange, all sudden, none dishonourable,
> Met in triumphant death (399-401).

Hassan then retells the defiant and proud speech of 'One' who 'rose out of the chaos of the slain' (405), cursing the Turks, and threatening that:

> Famine and Pestilence
> And Panic shall wage war upon our side;
> Nature from all her boundaries is moved
> Against ye; - Time has found ye light as foam; (439-42).

The vapour image is now, by this Greek soldier, turned into foam, another transitory element. Mahmud's reaction is the well-known 'Your heart is Greek, Hassan' (456) which is another indication of the blurring of opposites in this drama. Hassan is both Greek and Turkish, like England, some lines later, is 'at once slave and tyrant' (557). Hassan himself embodies the struggle between Greece and Turkey, and Mahmud's comment shows that Greece will be victorious. Greece has conquered his heart and his soul, and Turkey is left with his body.

Hassan's further reports are coloured by the Turkish defeats. Again, the Turkish fleet is described as clouds, this time flying from the Greeks. 'The fleet which like a flock of clouds / Chased by the wind flies the insurgent banner' (460-

1). The Greek fleet, on the other hand, is as 'cranes upon the cloudless Thracian wind' (480). The Turkish clouds are being blown away by the wind of freedom without any control of their own, whereas the Greek cranes can fly wherever they want. The image is continued throughout the poem, together with the mingling of opposites into one. The battling armies are described as one entity, not two conflicting parts:

> In the brief trances of the artillery
> One cry from the destroyed and the destroyer
> Rose, and a cloud of desolation wrapt
> The unforeseen event till the north wind
> Sprung from the sea lifting the heavy veil
> Of battle-smoke - then Victory - Victory!

It is not easy to decide which of the parties the shout of victory belonged to. Moreover, it seems as if the Turks thought they had won, but discovered they were wrong:

> For as we thought three frigates from Algiers
> Bore down from Naxos to our aid, but soon
> The abhorred cross glimmered behind, before,
> Among, around us; and that fatal sign
> Dried with its beams the strength in Moslem hearts,
> As the sun drinks the dew - What more? We fled! - (493-504).

Moslem strength is here compared to dew, dried by the sun's beams, as the beams of Venus earlier killed the moon of Islam. The Shelleyan imagery is consistent throughout the poem, though it at times is difficult to decide who or what or which of the parties it refers to, thus, perhaps deliberately, making the line between good and evil, tyranny and freedom, dream and illusion, invisible or vague.

As a foreshadowing of the meeting with Ahasuerus, the messengers' reports from the battlefield get more and more removed from reality.

> Ominous signs
> Are blazoned broadly on the noonday sky.
> One saw a red cross stamped upon the sun;
> It has rained blood, and monstrous births declare
> The secret wrath of Nature and her Lord. (601-5).

The dying Greek's threats have here come true. Nature is in fact waging war against the Turks, if we are to believe the third messenger's report. The army, we are told

> Was roused last night by the alarm of battle
> And saw two hosts conflicting in the air,
> The shadows doubtless of the unborn time
> Cast on the mirror of the night; - while yet
> The fight hung balanced, there arose a storm
> Which swept the phantoms from among the stars. (607-12).

The fourth and last messenger finally tells us what one of the soldiers has seen in the sky

> two adverse fleets
> Stalk through the night in the horizon's glimmer,
> Mingling fierce thunders and sulphurious gleams,
> And smoke which strangled every infant wind
> That soothed the silver clouds through the deep air.
> At length the battle slept, but the Sirocco
> Awoke and drove his flock of thunder clouds
> Over the sea-horizon, blotting out
> All objects - save that in the faint moon-glimpse

> He saw, or dreamed he saw, the Turkish admiral
> And two the loftiest of our ships of war
> With the bright image of that Queen of Heaven
> Who hid, perhaps, her face for grief, reversed;
> And the abhorred cross- (625-38).

The line between what is real and what is not seems to be more and more blurred throughout the drama. This is all made complete by Ahasuerus's invocation of Mahomet the Second and Mahmud's conversation with this phantom. In the mean time, the Chorus continues to present their prophecy of the fall of the empire and the triumph of liberty.

6.5. The crash as of an empire falling

The fifth part of the poem presents a clear intensification of the Chorus's foreshadowing. Kenneth Neill Cameron states that the 'object of this chorus, coming immediately after the successive reports of Greek victories, is to foreshadow the drama's final message of hope' (Cameron, 388). By doing this, the succeeding shouts of Turkish victory will be of little consequence to Mahmud and the readers. To emphasize the universal role of the Chorus, Shelley again uses the Bible as a point of reference, transforming Genesis to a resurrection of Greece:

> Let there be light! said Liberty,
> And like sunrise from the sea,
> Athens arose! - around her born,
> Shone like mountains in the morn
> Glorious states, . . . (682-86).

As the following passage will show, Liberty, Greece, and light are interconnected with thought and eternity. The Chorus thus not only foreshadows a message of hope, but also the ideology of Ahasuerus who will appear in the next scene:

> Greece and her foundations are
> Built below the tide of war,
> Based on the crystalline sea
> Of thought and its eternity (696-99).

We are again presented to the eternity of thought, echoing the 'Worlds on worlds' chorus where the immortality of souls are contrasted to the mutability of the world. A third kind of foreshadowing prophesies the fall of Mahmud's empire:

> I hear! I hear.
> The hiss as of a rushing wind,
> The roar as of an ocean foaming,
> The thunder as of earthquake coming.
> I hear! I hear!
> The crash as of an empire falling (719-24).

These words, the hiss, the roar, the earthquake, and the fall, are echoed by Mahmud himself under the influence of Ahasuerus, when he hears:

> The sound
> As of the assault of an imperial city -
> The hiss of inextinguishable fire, -
> The roar of giant cannon; - the earthquaking
> Fall of vast bastions and precipitous towers (814-18).

It is clear from these examples that even though the Chorus is given a universal role in the poem, its songs have an evident influence on the dramatic dialogues. The Chorus constantly moves between geographical, historical, and oracular images in their songs, commenting upon the action at the same time as distancing itself from the action. During this part of the poem, the Chorus comments upon the birth of Athens, their own enslaved situation and the coming fall of tyranny. In a few stanzas Shelley outlines the full range of the play. The strong sense of prophecy and foreshadowing presented in this section leads up to the main dramatic scene and the final turning point for Mahmud.

6.6. The second awakening: Mahmud and Ahasuerus.

In one of the notes to this passage Shelley disclaims any pretension of supernatural agencies in Ahasuerus. Cameron suggests that what Shelley here is expressing is that 'sometimes the visions of the imagination are so vivid that the distinction between sensation and thought is obscured' (Cameron, 389). This is one of the main themes of the poem; there exists no clear-cut boundaries between black and white, good and evil, etc. These are, like Mahmud's world and ideas, just visions. This theme is present from the very beginning of the poem where the lines between dream, sleep, and death are wiped out, reaching its fulfillment in this section where the 'dazzling mist within' Mahmud's brain breaks down all his fixed visions of reality, and where he realizes that, in the end, his position as tyrant is not different from the slave's position, as Constance Walker also notices:

> The interchangeability of monarch and slave, of victory and defeat, reinforces the central idea that such dichotomies are both falsely imposed and meaningless: they define the difference between a world in which history can only take the form of oscillation between ruin and renovation, and the timeless world symbolized by Hellas (Walker, 38-9).

Mahmud wakes up from one dream and is led into another vision by Ahasuerus, who claims that these dreams and visions are still more real than what Mahmud calls reality. There is no longer a clear distinction between what Mahmud believed to be permanent polarities like dream and reality, chaos and order, freedom and tyranny. This explains his hesitant line 'I am Mahmud, still, -', where he unconsciously senses that everything is not what it seems in his eyes. His second awakening in the poem, that from the vision of his forefather, is thus both similar and different from his first awakening. When the *Voice without* breaks Mahmud's 'mighty trance' his reaction is not a sigh of relief like the 'Ha! what! / The truth of day lightens upon my dream' (121-2) encountered in the opening. Instead he reacts as if his vision actually represents reality, and thus cries in despair and resignation: 'Victory? poor slaves!' (930) to the shouts of Turkish victory. The Turkish soldiers, including himself, are in fact slaves, in spite of their military victories. Triumph and defeat are no longer meaningful words to Mahmud.

Mahmud's dream and vision represent chaos, or a world where disorder and unreality rules. It is when he is able to understand his own dream that he realizes that his tyranny must fall. According to Stuart Curran, '*Hellas* . . . is deeply concerned with how minds structure - or how they stage - reality' (Cave, 74). Dreams are important because they represent a sphere without control and without limits, and where reality has to give way to fantasy and imagination. It is the realm of the unknown, the human subconscious. The reason for Mahmud's uneasiness in the beginning of the drama is a nightmare that has 'hunted' him 'thrice'(128). He feels threatened by the confusion of the dream, perhaps because he is unable to control it. It is his wish to gain total control of *himself* that makes him seek help from the prophet- or poet-like Ahasuerus. His mistake is believing in the illusion that Ahasuerus has magic powers.

The dreams, visions and unnatural occurrences are all forces involved in trying to break down the established order, Mahmud's tyranny. These phenomena represent a sort of chaos to Mahmud's world of law and order, making him doubt about what is real and what is not, as the foundation of his power seems to dissolve. When we first meet him the whole nation is shaking because of his dream. The established world order is breaking down. The previously secure boundary between reality and the chaotic world of dreams is fading. Mahmud realizes that he must seek the knowledge of understanding reality by interpreting his dreams. In other words, the chaos of dreams is necessary to understand truth. We are again reminded of the close link existing between opposites, where the one is necessary to the other. Ahasuerus then points out the unreality of Mahmud's reality:

> this Whole
> Of suns, and worlds, and men and beasts, and flowers
> With all the silent or tempestuous workings
> By which they have been, are, or cease to be,
> Is but a vision - all that it inherits
> Are motes of a sick eye, bubbles and dreams (776-81).[12]

As argued in Chapter Two, these sentences contain a Calderonian echo. Inevitably, Stuart Curran writes, one is also reminded of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and 'Prospero who creates dramatic illusions to edify or educate or terrify his audience and who knows that it is all an "insubstantial pageant" that will melt "into thin air" ' (Cave, 70). In the same way, Mahmud's empire will collapse into ruins. In his last speech he asks himself:

> Do I wake and live?
> Were there such things or may the unquiet brain,

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[12] A little later he repeats the message of this passage, but in other words:

> What thou see'st
> Is but the ghost of thy forgotten dream.
> A dream itself, yet, less, perhaps, than that
> Thou callest reality.(841-44).

Vexed by the wise mad talk of the old Jew,
Have shaped itself these shadows of its fear? (917-20).

It is interesting to notice how Ahasuerus's 'mad talk' is described as 'wise'. Usually these states of mind are contrasts, but here they are used together. Shelley clearly manages to show how dichotomies become parallels, how positions change, how the world view can be turned upside down, and how and why this is important for our comprehension of ourselves.

Summing up, freedom, chaos and dreams all contain elements of movement, whereas order, tyranny and reality designate something fixed and permanent. Shelley, however, breaks down these elements when he portrays reality and the established order as neither fixed nor permanent. Freedom on the other hand is permanent and undying. Thus, the way Shelley creates an inert movement in the poem is closely knit to both form and content. Stuart Curran argues that:

> what drew Shelley to drama was the very idea of motion, because drama is the literary form whose very essence is in motion. It creates objectivities but not fixities. Drama, in this conception, is like the process of thought itself, which is, as Ahasuerus asserts, the only constant there is, but whose constancy is an absolute paradox, apparent in its never stopping, being always in movement (Cave, 77).[13]

What is real and permanent, in short, is what Mahmud judged as dreams and visions. His empire, his position, his soldiers, have no meaning in the world of Ahasuerus, where only thought matters. The flux and motion connected to

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[13] This is a conception of literature that has occupied many modern writers, expressed very fascinatingly in a recent play by Hålogaland Teater, called "Med Øynene Lukket," a surrealistic synthesis of different writers and different genres. In the play's programme we are told that '[U]ntil we know where we are going, we must keep moving' ('Inntil vi vet hvor vi skal, må vi holde oss i bevegelse'), emphasizing the importance of motion as opposed to stasis.

Mahmud's dream become signs of reality, but reality is in itself nothing but a vision.

6.7. O might it die or rest at last!

The poem concludes a seemingly circular movement, by ending in the same manner as it started, with a wish for sleep or death. Here too, death is ambiguous, but this time the ambiguity is centred around, not death itself, but what is to die. The last lines make it difficult to decide what is the subject of the Chorus's death-wish:

> The world is weary of the past,
> O might it die or rest at last! (1100-1101).

Is it the past or the world that the Chorus wishes should die? This question has preoccupied many critics of Shelley and *Hellas*. The function of such an ambiguity is however to create confusion, not to provide fixed answers. I prefer thus to leave the ending as it is; open for each reader to seek his or her own interpretation. Leaving the poem's ending open for further interpretation also avoids the circularity it would otherwise have represented. Instead, we are faced with an upward-going spiralling movement, where the ending has reached a higher level than the beginning, in that its prophecies of Mahmud's fall have come true. This kind of spiral is the 'theme of the play's conclusion', Wasserman argues:

> Shelley is asking that the world begin all over, but at a point higher above the idle foam of Time than before. Although eternity expresses itself in time as a circle, his hope is that the cycles of time may be made to spiral upward, each cycle returning to the original age before mutability marred it, but making it progressively less likely that this primordial state will be touched by time (Wasserman, 406).

Human society has thus progressed one step closer to perfection, though many steps will remain. The world still has 'miles to go' before it can sleep peacefully without the nightmares of tyranny. In another of Shelley's fascinating letters to Elizabeth Hitchener he admits that perfection is unattainable, but argues that 'the nearer Society approaches towards this point the happier will it be' (*Letters* I, 125).

As I see it, this open ending leaves more room for hope than for despair, and some critics agree with this, for instance Constance Walker, who argues that Shelley asks his readers to 'provide a resolution for the poem's dilemma by defying its bitter prophecies of a future based upon the past through responsible political action' (Walker, 36). The last stanza of the poem is moreover characterized by exclamation- and question-marks, which supports both Walker's and my own reading of it, though hers, unlike mine, is a political viewpoint. A question normally demands or presupposes a response, and likewise, a command, too, expects or implies some kind of action. The stanza's last exclamation thus urges the reader to action, whether it be of a political or mental kind. By letting the past sleep, or die, society would rid itself of its 'bitter prophecy' and then start afresh in 'a diviner clime'. This does not mean that Shelley believed in a perfect utopian society. The poem rather suggests that by aspiring towards the Absolute, man can 'bend the unavoidable circles of time, like a helix, asymptotically toward the Absolute in the realm beyond life and mutability' (Wasserman, 409). This implies that even if man gets ever so close to perfection he will never fully achieve it. It is the aspiration and hope, the reaching for the unattainable, that is important, not actually achieving it. If man and society were to attain the Absolute, there would be nothing more to thirst for; the purpose of living would be lost.[14] The poets are 'trumpets which sing to battle' (*Defence*, 508), and are thus part of the 'unceasing approach' towards perfection. If the world's aspiration towards perfection should end; if the world should reach its higher goal, poets, in Shelley's definitions, would no longer be necessary.

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[14] Wasserman explains that this is a way of balancing what Shelley felt to be a conflict between the Ideal and reality:

> The teleology of Shelley's history provides for neither utopia nor millennium, but for the world's unceasing approach to an absolute perfection that must ever elude it; and in that way he brought into reasonable harmony the conflict that had always beset him between his aspirations to a perfect world and the perfect immortality. . . . The Absolute forever remains a promise of afterlife; but the world recurrently moves closer to perfection without actually attaining it (Wasserman, 411).

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

As seen so far, the conflicts in the poem are all closely interwoven. The action itself is built around the struggle between tyranny and freedom in the Greek war against Turkey. Within the drama, we are presented with a conflict between visions and reality. We are also presented with a temporal conflict between the past, the present and the future. Finally, the poetic form itself represents a conflict between drama and poetry, dramatic dialogue versus choric parts. The most obvious symbol of conflict in the poem is the war itself which Shelley uses as a frame for his drama. The very basis of war is, one the one hand, a struggle to hold on to an existing system, and on the other, to break out of that system. In *Hellas*, that existing system is tyranny, which Turkey tries to preserve, and from which Greece tries to break out.

Freedom, or the lack of freedom, is at the core of the Greek insurrection. In a way, freedom is the object of desire for both parties, but it has a different meaning to each of them. To Mahmud, freedom is defined in terms of his position as the master of an empire. In other words, freedom is connected to the physical victory of a battle, and to preserving the Turkish empire. Obviously, this is not the same kind of freedom that the Chorus is longing for. The slaves are singing about a more profound kind of freedom, connected to the realm of mind, not body. The freedom that the Chorus sings about is independent of time and history. It cannot be quenched, but will rise again and again till it has gained the strength never to disappear again. Paradoxically, the Chorus experiences freedom in the midst of tyranny. Mahmud on the other hand, experiences tyranny in the midst of freedom. A close reading of Mahmud reveals that he, too, is enslaved by tyranny, and seeks freedom. The Chorus and Mahmud, starting out as adversaries, seem to move closer to each other in the course of the drama.

My argument is that the war is seen, symbolically, as an act of breaking the existing order of tyranny. It is also an act of breaking the patterned order of time and history. This can happen because the weakness of tyranny lies in its foundation on violence and lack of freedom. In the end, all tyrannies contain their own self-destruction. Thus, when Mahmud hears the shouts of victory from outside, he knows it will not last, sighing '[w]eak lightening before darkness! poor faint smile/ of dying Islam!' (915-16). Mahmud's empire, like his mind, is founded upon certain rules and restrictions, limiting the freedom of the individuals. His ability to see through and understand the dream in which he is living is thus obstructed by a fixed belief in truth, one system of thought.

Mahmud's encounter with Ahasuerus enables him to see into his own mind, and thus the mind of man, which contains everything that is, has been, and will be. He can now see what Ahasuerus sees, or at least part of it, and he loses faith in the things he earlier believed in. He seems to realize that the cycle of time cannot be broken, and this is perhaps partly why he resigns in the end. He is unable to see that his problems can only be solved provided these cycles can be broken, which is what the Chorus hopes for. According to Earl Wasserman,

> Shelley's impulse had always been to break free from the limits of time and to inspect human history from some transcendent, God-like position. . . . to belong to the human world of mutability and yet escape into a transcendent eternity, to see as both man and God see, in time and out of it. (Wasserman, 395)

This feeling is prevalent all through the poem. We are constantly met with the desire of being both in something and out of it; the Chorus is both in the action and out of it, Hassan is both celebrating the Turks and the Greeks, Mahmud's vision is both illusion and reality, Ahasuerus is both man and prophet, he is both of this world and a diviner world. It is this strategy of breaking down contraries and opposites, not only the temporal ones, but literary, geographical, and poetical ones, that creates the blurred division between tyrant and slave, and illusion and reality in the poem.

Constance Walker argues that linguistically, the theme of *Hellas* is connected to an 'opposite rhetorical strategy'. The 'lyric and dramatic passages frequently echo one another, using similar words and phrases informed by diametrically opposed points of view' (Walker, 42). As I have tried to show, Shelley's 'rhetorical strategy' has an important role in breaking down the meaning of words and opening the poem to 'infinite' interpretations. Opposites like dream and reality, 'dupe' and 'deceiver', oppressed and oppressor have lost their function as opposites, and instead have become correlational and unified. Words like freedom and death offer confused signals to the readers. The poem does in fact present itself as a 'maze of inexplicable thought', as one of the critics so fittingly phrased it. What I have argued throughout does clearly demand active participation and discrimination from the reader. Sadly, however, the poem has met with little such attention from the critics, the result being that this demanding poem is less known than one would have expected, especially when compared to the rest of Shelley's production.

I have suggested various reasons for why *Hellas* still is among Shelley's less read poems. The neglect it was met with after its first publication might have influenced later responses, and this agrees with the reception theory of Hans Robert Jauss. Its complexity is probably one of the more obvious reasons. It is difficult to read, and demands patience and knowledge from the reader, features which perhaps have made it unsuitable for use at colleges and universities. The result of this would naturally be that the poem is less familiar among students and critics than Shelley's more 'easy' poems. Similarly, because of the new literary ideals that appeared in the first half of this century, Romantic poetry became 'unfashionable', and this fact has of course added to its neglect. Furthermore, it might be that the political aspects of the poem have been overemphasized, and that readers therefore have avoided it.

During my study of this poem, I have found nothing that dramatically separates *Hellas* from the rest of Shelley's production. Neither have I found anything indicating that Shelley departed from his usual style or themes when writing the poem. My analysis has showed that *Hellas* is in accordance with Shelley's literary design, and does not deviate in any major aspects. It seems to me that those who criticize *Hellas* for lack of harmony or being confusing, have failed to see the thematic and structured unity of the poem. Only very few critics have mentioned the drama's structure and the unifying force of the different parts. As soon as the symmetrical structure reveals itself to the reader, the poem takes on a new and different dimension. As the survey of criticism showed, however, there is an increased interest for Shelley's poetry, including poems like *Hellas*, that earlier were neglected. This will, I believe, produce a more complete picture of Romantic poetry and the brilliant workmanship that lay behind much of the period's greatest works of art. The poetic ideal of a 'spontaneous overflow of feelings', which became a hallmark of Romantic poetry, probably explains why Shelley called his work an improvise. My study has showed the opposite, namely that *Hellas* is a carefully designed and planned whole, where theme and structure are interwoven.

APPENDIX

1. Shelley and Milton

The following verses will illustrate how Milton and Shelley render the sounds of war. Milton first:

Amazement seis'd
The Rebel Thrones, but greater rage to see
Thus foil'd thir mightiest, ours joy filld, and shout,
Presage of Victorie and fierce desire
Of Battel: whereat *Michael* bid sound
Th' Arch-angel trumpet; through the vast of Heav'n
It sounded . . .
. . . now storming furie rose,
And clamour such as heard in Heav'n till now
Was never, Arms on Armour clashing bray'd
Horrible discord, and the madding Wheeles
Of brazen Chariots rag'd; dire was the noise
Of conflict; over head the dismal hiss
Of fiery Darts in flaming volies flew,
And flying vaulted either Host with fire.
So under fierie Cope together rush'd
Both Battels maine, with ruinous assault
And inextinguishable rage (VI, 198-204, 207-17)

Compare this to Mahmud's vision where he hears:

The sound
As of the assault of an imperial city -
The hiss of inextinguishable fire,-
The roar of giant cannon;- the earthquaking
Fall of vast bastions and precipitous towers,

The shock of crags shot from strange engin'ry,
The clash of wheels, and clang of armed hoofs
And crash of brazen mail as of the wreck
Of adamantine mountains - the mad blast
Of trumpets . . .
. . . and now more loud
The mingled battle-cry,- ha! hear I not
"Εν τουτω νικη-" "Allah-Illa, Allah!"[1] (*Hellas*, 816-23, 827-29)

2. Shelley and Calderon

Gates[2] contracts the conversation between Ahasuerus and Mahmud as follows:

[*Ahasuerus*:] .... this Whole
Of suns, and worlds, and men, and beasts, and flowers,
With all the silent or tempestuous workings
By which they have been, are, or cease to be,
Is but a vision; all that it inherits
Are motes of a sick eye, bubbles and dreams;
Thought is its cradle and its grave, nor less
The future and the past are idle shadows
Of thought's eternal flight - they have no being;
Nought is but that which feels itself to be. . . .
What thou seest
Is but the ghost of thy forgotten dream;
A dream itself, yet less, perhaps, than that
Thou calls't reality. . . .

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[1] 'The war cries of the Byzantine Greeks ("In this [sign], Victory") and the Turks ("There is no god but God!").' (Note to *Hellas*, p.433)

[2] Gates, p.55.

[*Mahmud*:] Do I wake and live?
Were there such things? or may the unquiet brain,
Vexed by the wise mad talk of the old Jew,
Have shaped itself these shadows of its fear?
It matters not! - for nought we see or dream,
Possess, or lose, or grasp at, can be worth
More than it gives or teaches. Come what may,
The future must become the past, and I
As they were, to whom once this present hour.
This gloomy crag of time to which I cling
Seemed an Elysian isle of peace and joy
Never to be attained. - I must rebuke
This drunkenness of triumph ere it die,
And dying, bring despair. Victory! poor slaves!

The essence of these lines is the same as that of the passage from *La Vida es Sueño* Neville Rogers suggests that Shelley has translated:

It is a singular world we live in.
Experience has taught me one thing, that life
Is made up of strange and unconnected dreams.
Man thinks he is - and dreams of that he is
And never wakes to know he does but dream
Some dream, they're kings and in a vain delusion
But to tyrannise to serve - and the applauses
Of men are written in the clouds, and death
Scatters the breath to less than air, the Miser
Consumes his life in dreaming he is rich
His golden dreams but add unto his cares
The poor man dreams he suffers from the scorn
Of the world and calls it misery to live.

And all, to sum up all, dream that they are
None understanding what or why he is.
What is this life that we should cling to it?
A phantom-haunted frenzy, a false nature,
A vain and empty shadow, all the good
We prize or aim at turns to evil -
All life and being are but dreams, and dreams
Themselves are but the dreaming of other dreams. (Rogers. 176-77)[3]

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[3] Calderon's Spanish text goes like this:
. . . estamos
en mundo tan singular,
que el vivir sólo es soñar;
y la experiencia me enseña
que el hombre que vive, sueña
lo que es, hasta despertar.
Sueña el rey que es rey, y vive
con este engaño mandano
disponiendo y gobernando;
y este aplauso que recibe
prestado, en el viento escribe;
y en cenizas le convierte
la muerte (¡desdicha fuerte!);
. . .
Sueña el rico en su riqueza
que más cuidado le ofrece;
sueña el pobre que padece
su miseria y su pobreza;
. . .
y en el mundo, en conclusión,
todos sueñan lo que son,
aunque ninguno lo entiende.
. . .
¿Que es la vida? Un frenesí.
¿Que es la vida? Una ilusión,
una sombra, una ficción,
y el mayor bien es pequeño;
que toda la vida es sue¨no,
y los sueños, sueños son. (Rogers, 178-9)

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