

Lamb Unslain: Nonhuman Animals and Shelley's Panentheism

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This essay examines Percy Bysshe Shelley's poetical rewriting of some animal symbols that are central to Christian theology and literature, especially the lamb and the snake.¹ I suggest that through this rewriting, Shelley adumbrates an alternative theology based on what one may term Romantic panentheism, drawing on Hindu sources among others.

Shelley's view of the universe not as the creation of one God but rather as animated by universal spirit is perhaps the most important dimension of his thinking that distinguishes him from socialist-leaning materialists. Robert Southey recounted how, when he met Shelley in 1812, and told the younger man that he was not an atheist but a pantheist, Shelley, who had not heard the word, "seemed much pleased at discovering what he really was."² Shelley's discontent with the exclusiveness of mainstream Christian theology had led him to embrace atheism in a reactive gesture; Henry Salt perceptively remarks, "it was not the presence but the absence of spirituality [in the Anglican Church] that made Shelley an unbeliever."³

As Ellsworth Barnard points out, although Shelley considered "religion as a historical fact ... largely a series of perversions and abuses," he was deeply involved with the question of human connections with invisible forces in the universe.⁴ Senior Romantic poets had begun to develop a theology, most notably Wordsworth through Deistic ideas of universal oneness in such poems as *Tintern Abbey*, and Coleridge in his radical re-visioning of snakes as inefably beautiful stimuli to love in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. Shelley takes these theological suggestions much further, both critiquing and demys-

tifying established Judeo-Christian notions of salvific sacrifice, and also evolving a vision of spirituality that hinges on nonviolence.

In a 1960 essay, John Holloway argued that “leading attitudes and feelings of earlier times ... have in many cases entirely disappeared from the modern mind ... [but] the ideas and attitudes and emotions which the Romantic movement minted ... have now penetrated down into every corner of modern life and modern awareness ... have descended to ubiquitous banality.”⁵ While it is true that many of Shelley’s concerns, such as republicanism, women’s rights, and freedom of speech, have become commonplace in the modern West, other aspects of his thinking (such as his arguments against killing for food and his advocacy of releasing snakes and insects rather than killing them) remain marginal and are often still viewed as embarrassing eccentricities.

Recent examinations of Shelley’s politics and his relationship to India tend to focus on imperialism and colonialism, failing to even mention his vegetarianism or his concern with the lives of animals.⁶ In this respect, they follow earlier studies which approached him as a political radical or a proto-Marxist.⁷ Remarkably, even Harrington-Austin, who integrates Shelley’s indebtedness to Hindu thought into her analysis of his attitudes to colonialism, ignores his deep commitment to respect for nonhuman life.⁸ The couple of scholars who focus on the issue of animal life constitute the exception that proves the rule in Shelley studies.⁹ At first, it seems puzzling that major studies of Shelley as poet and thinker, and even studies of his religion either reduce to a footnote or a sentence his preoccupation with the shared condition of human and nonhuman creatures, or ignore it altogether.¹⁰ But this is consistent with the modern world’s emphasis on human equality and human rights which has developed on the basis of a Cartesian divide between human and nonhuman creatures. The medieval and Renaissance idea of the great chain of being gives animals a place as lesser beings, while Descartes reduces them to machines that do not feel pain and that exist not to manifest God’s glory but solely to serve human purposes. The English Romantics were critical of this as of many aspects of Cartesian thinking.

Modern academics’ generally dismissive, even contemptuous, attitude towards vegetarianism reproduces the dominant views of Shelley’s time; thus, Meena Alexander, noting Shelley’s central influence on Gandhi’s vegetarian doctrine, writes: “If this were all, one might have let it drop, writing off Gandhi’s pleasure in Shelley as part of the eccentricity of a vegetarian vision, its meatless quest fit fulfillment of an ideality that flees the bodily realm.”¹¹ In this odd formulation, an opposition to killing nonhuman bodies is framed as a desire to flee the bodily realm, and nonviolence to animals is viewed as eccentric, as distinct from nonviolence to humans, which is laudable.

Likewise, the consistent neglect of the influence of Hindu thought on

Shelley has continued for over a century, and through the ups and downs of many critical approaches, which is suggestive of the Christian underpinnings of even non-Christian writers' thinking. Thus, a rare essay on Shelley's vegetarianism nowhere mentions Hindu thought, treating the practice as a product of individual psychopathology rather than of a philosophy with an intellectual genealogy.¹²

For that genealogy, one has to return to Keith Thomas's monumental work, which demonstrates that eighteenth-century England saw a rapid spread of sentiments against cruelty to animals, and a shift away from a purely anthropocentric view of nonhuman life.¹³ Some of these sentiments derived from older traditions, such as Greek and Christian debates on vegetarianism, and early as well as medieval traditions, such as the Manichean and the Franciscan. Despite the new sentiment against cruelty, vegetarianism continued throughout the nineteenth century to be viewed as highly eccentric if not completely mad. The late Victorian anti-imperialist and vegetarian movements that Leela Gandhi examines remained marginal in British society.¹⁴

In a rare exception that proves the rule, John Drew, in *India and the Romantic Imagination*, demonstrates that Hindu philosophy had much to do with Shelley's laying aside his gun and turning vegetarian in 1812.¹⁵ Hindu ideas of the oneness of all life, mirrored in the worship of cows, snakes, monkeys, rats, elephants, peacocks and swans, as deities and in association with deities, and Hindu symbols of oneness, such as Krishna the divine cowherd, were introduced into eighteenth-century England via translations such as Charles Wilkins' widely discussed and reviewed *Bhagavad Gita* (1785). Other such translations were Wilkins' *Hitopadesha* (1787), and William Jones' *Shakuntala* (1789) and *Gita Govinda* (1792). Raymond Schwab, in his path-breaking book *The Oriental Renaissance*, demonstrates the tremendous impact these translations had on the European literary scene, especially on Romantic writers.¹⁶

In his excellent though neglected study of Shelley and Hindu thought, S. R. Swaminathan presents perhaps the only extensive analysis of Shelley's 1812 reading of Edward Moor's *Hindu Pantheon* (1810), and the influence of Hindu iconography on the poet's animal symbols.¹⁷ The 300 illustrations in Moor's book abound in vividly rendered images of animals, both lifelike and symbolic, as companions to anthropomorphic Gods as well as Gods themselves, agents as well as subjects.¹⁸

At the time Shelley ordered Moor's book, he had just been expelled from Oxford in 1811, and was "feverishly reading religious, metaphysical, and scientific writers, and formulating his own philosophy of life."¹⁹ In 1812 too, Swaminathan points out, Shelley was converted to vegetarianism by his friend

Frank Newton, who had himself been converted while living in India. Newton was the author of a book entitled *Return to Nature or Defence of Vegetable Regimen*, wherein he propounds the same ideas that Shelley later does, with regard to flesh-eating as the cause of both physical and mental disease.²⁰ This was in keeping with trends of the time; as Kenyon Jones notes, “Pythagorean” and “Brahmin” were the two most common epithets for vegetarians in England during the Romantic period.²¹

Hinduism has been aptly described as panentheistic (God both in and beyond the universe) rather than pantheistic (God in and coterminous with the universe); Shelley’s argument for nonhuman life as an indicator of the universe being an animate entity inclines in the same direction:

I think that the leaf of a tree, the meanest insect on which we trample are themselves arguments much more conclusive than any which can be adduced that some vast intellect animates Infinity.²²

It is in his poetry, not his prose, that Shelley most powerfully evolves visions of loving oneness that counter the Bible’s powerful visions of good versus evil as embodied in sacrificial animals versus death-dealing animals. As Christianity’s central animal symbol, the lamb is simultaneously the human soul (iconically, the lamb in the savior-shepherd’s arms) and the salvific innocence of the divine turned human (Christ as Lamb of God).²³ The divorce of the literal from the symbolic in the former equation rests, however, upon a terrifying if sentimentalized paradox. The shepherd-sheep relationship that is centrally and more or less continuously celebrated in European literature and art derives from the Greco-Roman pastoral, but its symbolism is strongly reinforced by Judeo-Christian allegory, such as that expressed in Psalm 23. However, the glorification of the shepherd’s tender care of sheep and lambs masks a reality rarely dwelt upon — that of the slaughter for which the animals are destined. This duality is made possible by the second equation — Christ as the lamb who was willingly led to the slaughter and opened not his mouth.

The symbolic valence of the divine lamb masks the real-life suffering of innumerable lambs and sheep who are unwillingly led to slaughter and whose cries go unheard. The icon of the crucifixion evokes compassion for the human victim, entirely displacing the animal victims whose deaths are rarely made visible in painting or poetry. The validation of Christ’s self-sacrifice as necessary, desirable, and divinely ordained silences questions regarding the much more common slaughter of animals for the table.

Eighteenth-century literature and poetry, because of its Augustan self-image, was particularly rich in glorification of the shepherd-sheep relationship, and late eighteenth-century literature’s sentimental cult of pet animals,

although focused on dogs and cats, also extended to other creatures, as in the considerable body of anti-hunting literature. Farm animals, however, do not receive much attention; some eighteenth-century writers notice the paradox of the lamb only to advise the reader not to be troubled by it. Thus, in Pope's *An Essay on Man*, the lamb who "licks the hand just raised to shed his blood," like "the poor Indian" who expects his "faithful dog" to accompany him to heaven, is an object lesson to the reader not to question the fate that God has ordained.²⁴ Romantic writers begin to highlight this paradox. Blake, working in an antinomian tradition, displaces the crucified Christ by a joyful human Jesus, and replaces God's forgiveness with human forgiveness ("And throughout all Eternity, I forgive you, you forgive me"). In "The Lamb," the child perceives the lamb not as a victim meant for sacrifice but a companion in a cosmic play that unifies animal, human, and divine:

He is called by thy name
 ...He became a little child.
 I a child, and thou a lamb,
 We are called by his name.²⁵

Blake's thinking grows more uneasy, however, when in "Auguries of Innocence," he considers the lamb being slaughtered and attributes forgiveness to it:

The lamb misus'd breeds Public Strife
 And yet forgives the Butcher's knife.²⁶

Dorothy Wordsworth instructs a child to distinguish between love for living creatures and liking for those killed for the table; however, she does not reprehend the latter:

Say not you *love* a roasted fowl
 But you may love a screaming owl.²⁷

William Wordsworth, in "The Pet Lamb," dramatizes the irony of the loving owner's inability to understand the mountain lamb's unhappiness; since she gives it food and water, she expects it to be content, but it yearns for freedom. Keats, in a brief vignette in "Ode on a Grecian Urn," visualizes the pathos of the "heifer lowing at the skies" as she is led to the altar.

The contradiction was perhaps sharpest in the work of William Cowper, most of whose poems plead eloquently against bloodshed. He reluctantly allows killing for food to be permissible for fallen man whom he describes as "carnivorous ... through sin,"²⁸ but denounces hunting, the "Detested sport/That owes its pleasures to another's pain."²⁹

Yet, Cowper's Christian hymns almost revel in the paradox when they glorify bloodshed and connect it with the idea of pleasure:

Comfortable thoughts arise
From the bleeding sacrifice³⁰

and

There is a fountain filled with blood
Drawn from Emmanuel's veins.³¹

The logic of the hymns (in contrast to that of the more "secular" poems) is that God considers one kind of life less valuable than another — the ram's than Isaac's, the foreign enemy's than the chosen one's:

This Abraham found: he raised the knife;
God saw, and said, "Forbear!
Yon ram shall yield his meaner life;
Behold the victim there."

Once David seem'd Saul's certain prey;
But hark! The foe's at hand;
Saul turns his arms another way,
To save the invaded land.³²

These equations do not come easily to Cowper, however; he struggles with them, and even the use of such a term as "his meaner life" indicates an awareness of the ram's life having some value, which one does not find in most representations of the story, including the Biblical one. Cowper's image of the bloodless millennium when sheep are finally freed from fear derives directly from the image of blood sacrifice:

The lion, and the libbard, and the bear
Graze with the fearless flocks...
All creatures worship man, and all mankind
One Lord, One Father...
One song employs all nations, and all cry,
"Worthy the Lamb, for he was slain for us!"³³

Cowper's poems betray deep disturbance around these paradoxes; in an 1819 rebuttal of *The Quarterly Review's* attack on Shelley's *Revolt of Islam*, Leigh Hunt suggested that the contradiction between Church dogma, especially the idea of Hell, and Cowper's own notions of a compassionate "Supreme Goodness" had driven him mad, and made of him a human sacrifice, "like a child on the altar of Moloch."³⁴

It was left to Shelley, however, to expose the assumptions on which the paradox rests. With his curiously literal as well as myth-making imagination, he at one stroke divests the lamb of its mystified status, when he focuses sharply on the act of a man killing an animal whose innocence consists not

(like Blake's lamb) of forgiveness but of harmlessness (the literal meaning of "innocent") and incomprehension:

...no longer now
He slays the lamb that looks him in the face.³⁵

Shelley's notion of a bloodless world, unlike Cowper's, rests not on blood sacrifice but on the abstention from such sacrifice. In *The Revolt of Islam*, Shelley suggests that the first innocent blood that was shed in *Genesis* was not that of Abel but that of the sheep that Abel sacrificed. Elsewhere, he refers to this kind of bloodshed as "original and universal sin,"³⁶ and in his essay on vegetarianism, he interprets the forbidden fruit as a diet of flesh which brings both cruelty and suffering in its wake. This reading suggests that by killing other animals, humans disobey divine natural law and perpetrate a universal sin, creating a contaminated social order that rests on a sea of blood.

Purification from this sin, in Shelley's view, requires not being washed in blood but rather ceasing to deal in blood:

Never again may blood of bird or beast
Stain with its venomous stream a human feast
To the pure skies in accusation streaming...³⁷

This recalls God's asking Cain, "What hast thou done? The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground" (*KJV, Genesis* 4: 10), and also recalls the first death in *Genesis*, that of unnamed animals whose skins God makes into coats for Adam and Eve (*Genesis* 3: 21).

Shelley rewrites the first murder of brother by brother, because for him a human's brother need not be human. The opening invocation of *Alastor*, for instance, stresses the kinship of human and nonhuman in a way reminiscent of religions like Hinduism and Jainism which see the same spirit as animating human and nonhuman beings that may be reborn in either form:

Earth, ocean, air, beloved brotherhood!...
If no bright bird, insect or gentle beast
I consciously have injured, but still loved
And cherished these my kindred...³⁸

Figuring lion and lamb as both literal and emblematic, Shelley presents nonviolence as an indispensable precondition for human freedom and equality:

... no longer now
He slays the beast that sports around his dwelling
And horribly devours its mangled flesh,
Or drinks its vital blood...
All things are void of terror; man has lost

His desolating privilege, and stands
An equal amidst equals....³⁹

Here, Cowper's millennial vision of animals worshiping man (built into his imperialist notion of all nations worshiping one God) is replaced by the idea of all creatures as equal, and of God as animating spirit.

The notion of humans enjoying the status of an equal with nonhuman animals reverses many centuries of Christian theology which had read the *Genesis* notion of "dominion" as legitimizing what Shelley powerfully terms a "desolating privilege" (although a minority of Christian theologians had indeed read "dominion" to mean kingship based on protection, not destruction, of subjects). By emphasizing the necessity to end terror in a nonselective manner ("all things"), Shelley addresses the contradiction at the heart of Isaiah's vision of the wolf lying down with the lamb.

The Jewish prophets' ideal of nonviolence ("They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain," *KJV, Isaiah*, 11:9) was undercut by their calls for bloodshed — both the blood of animals at the altar and the blood of idolaters. This contradiction remains even in Jesus of the Gospels' more radically nonviolent teachings, because although he forbids humans to violently punish other humans, he expands the idea of humans suffering eternal, divinely inflicted violence in Hell. This theological paradox lies at the heart of much Christian legitimization of violence; such legitimization depends not so much on hypocrisy or failure to live up to doctrine as on doctrine itself.

Shelley repeatedly points to the history of Europe as an illustration of the contradiction, drawing on Spinoza, Hume, and Paine for his account of "the extermination of infidels, the mutual persecution of hostile sects; the midnight massacres, and slow burning of thousands," and the killing of "eleven millions of men, women and children" on religious pretexts.⁴⁰

As an artist sensitive to the effects of symbols on the imagination, he critiques the iconic glorification of torture and bloodshed in European art. In an 1818 letter written in Italy, he comments on Guido's paintings:

There was a J[esus] C[hrist] Crucified by the same, very fine. One gets tired indeed whatever may be the conception & execution of it of seeing that monotonous & agonized form forever exhibited in one prescriptive attitude of torture — but the Maddalena clinging to the cross with the look of passive & gentle despair ... & the figure of St. John, with his looks uplifted in passionate compassion ... of the contemplation of this one never would be weary.⁴¹

In his poetry, Shelley builds word-pictures of human-nonhuman relations that counter mainstream Christian depictions. In *The Revolt of Islam*, both serpent and eagle are complex symbols, drawing on iconography found

in Moor's *Hindu Pantheon*.⁴² For his re-conception of the serpent, Shelley draws on Greek, Egyptian and Hindu notions of snakes, which may be, among other things, symbols of wisdom, healing and immortality. In Hinduism, cobras (Nagas) are worshiped as royal forces; the snake also symbolizes destructive forces controlled by devotion, as in the figure of Hindu preserver God Vishnu who stands on a thousand-headed snake with hoods open over his head, and the figure of the God Shiva, who has snakes coiled around his neck and upper arms. As John Drew writes, "in *The Revolt of Islam* as in Indian mythology ... the magical cycle of creation within which we exist is ultimately reduced (or expanded) to an archetypal pattern, or mythic triad, of male, female and snake."⁴³

In a "fragment of a romance," entitled "The Assassins," written in 1814 and left incomplete, Shelley imagines a Utopian egalitarian society of early followers of Jesus isolated in a valley away from the reach of the Church. The characters have Islamic names, and the fragment ends with an Edenic picture of two children, Maimuna and Abdullah, playing with their favorite snake near a river:

The girl sang to it, and it leaped into her bosom and she crossed her fair hands over it, as if to cherish it there. Then the boy answered with a song, and it glided from beneath her hands and crept towards him.⁴⁴

This little vignette rewrites the Adam and Eve story. Now the snake is protected and loved by the innocent human female and male. The girl's crossed hands recall the crucifix but they protect the serpent whom the crucifix is intended to destroy. The scene enacts a utopian transfiguration through love, one of Shelley's central themes, as stated by Asia in *Prometheus Unbound*:

Common as light is love,
And its familiar voice wearies not ever.
Like the wide heaven, the all-sustaining air,
It makes the reptile equal to the God.⁴⁵

Here, Shelley carries further the redemptive moment in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. In *The Rime*, when the mariner realizes that the water snakes are neither good nor evil but are "happy living things" and, therefore, unutterably beautiful, his love for them heals him. In Asia's statement, however, it is not only human beings who feel love and are transfigured by it; all creatures feel and respond to love, and this mutual current of love renders all equal.

Like Gandhi, whose interlocutors pushed him to examine his tenets of nonviolence, asking him how he would deal with venomous snakes, rabid dogs or poisonous insects, Shelley thinks about the practicalities of his utopi-

anism. In *The Sensitive Plant*, the exquisite images of insects (“the plumed insects swift and fee,/Like golden boats on a sunny sea”⁴⁶), are not merely decorative but illuminate a relationship between human and nonhuman, demonstrated when the young woman has to preserve her garden from creatures that would destroy it:

And all killing insects and gnawing worms,
And things of obscene and unlovely forms,
She bore, in a basket of Indian woof,
Into the rough woods far aloof, —
In a basket, of grasses and wild-flowers full,
The freshest her gentle hands could pull
For the poor banished insects, whose intent,
Although they did ill, was innocent.⁴⁷

The basket “of Indian woof” is significant, suggesting that the idea of preserving insects rather than exterminating them comes from India. Many traditional Hindus and Jains avoid killing snakes, rats, mice and insects, although they may convey them outside their homes to wilderness areas. For instance, Gandhi kept a basket at his Wardha ashram for poisonous snakes who entered the premises. They were released into the nearby forests.

Shelley’s images slide constantly between the literal and the symbolic, fusing the two planes of meaning in a way that disconcerted some readers. For instance, an 1821 review of *Adonais* in *The Literary Gazette* quoted as an example of “incomprehensible folly”⁴⁸ the lines “And the green lizard, and the golden snake/Like unimprisoned flames, out of their trance awake.”⁴⁹ This image goes beyond reversal; drawing on antiquity’s view of time as cyclical, it suggests the renewal of the world through fertility (“green”) and prosperity (“gold”). The snake shedding its old skin is an ancient image of rejuvenation that Shelley is fond of: “The earth doth like a snake renew/Her winter weeds outworn.”⁵⁰ The reviewer, however, could make neither head nor tail of it.

Reviewers, berating what they saw as Shelley’s blasphemous atheism, often termed him a worm (which can also mean “snake”). Thus an unsigned review of *Queen Mab* in *The Literary Gazette* proclaims:

And what substitute have we for piety, good-will to man, religion, and a God?
The answer of this incarnate driveller is, a “Spirit of Nature!” ... Miserable worm! Pity pleads for thee; and contempt, disgust and horror are tempered by compassion for thy wretched infirmity of mind.⁵¹

The word “worm,” used for human beings as distinct from God, and for the devil as opposed to God, derives from Christian discourse. Cowper refers to himself as a “feeble worm,” to the devil as a “loathsome worm,” and to the

abstract idea of “the serpent Error” as “poisonous, black, insinuating worms” twined “round human hearts.”⁵²

Shelley’s pet-name amongst his intimates was “Serpent” or “Snake,” and he identified with that creature, for instance, his poem, “To Edward Williams.” It begins with a reference to himself, “The serpent is shut out from Paradise,” and proceeds to describe paradise as the company of his friends.⁵³ Similarly, his “Sonnet to Byron” concludes, “the worm beneath the sod/May lift itself in homage of the god.”⁵⁴ Here, worm and God are friends; Shelley assumes towards his friend the attitude of humility he refuses to an authoritarian God. This deification of the human would for orthodox Christians constitutes idolatry and blasphemy. In *Julian and Maddalo: A Conversation*, Maddalo (Byron) playfully accuses Julian (Shelley, named after the pagan apostate Emperor) of being “Among Christ’s flock a perilous infidel/A wolf for the meek lambs...”⁵⁵

A third strategy Shelley employs is that of changing the conventional values attached to certain animals. Thus, pigs, “the swinish multitude,” become the victimized masses in his verse drama *Oedipus Tyrannus* or *Swellfoot the Tyrant*; significantly, Shelley got the idea for this play from a herd of pigs he saw put up for sale at a fair in Italy, that is, pigs destined for slaughter.⁵⁶ Orwell would later rewrite the image as dystopian, but Shelley was among the first to politicize pigs.

Likewise, dogs (especially hunting dogs), so celebrated in English literature, generally get a bad press in Shelley, who follows Shakespeare in this regard. He figures British society (symbolized by the dog) as built on slavery and violence:

I met Murder on the way
He had a mask like Castlereagh—
Very smooth he looked, yet grim;
Seven bloodhounds followed him;
...For one by one, and two by two,
He tossed them human hearts to chew.”⁵⁷

On the occasion of Shelley’s centenary, in 1892, Henry S. Salt, eminent socialist reformer, believer in nonviolence, campaigner for animal rights, and friend and associate of M.K. Gandhi, wrote, in one of his books on Shelley:

He did not, like our modern school of sentimentalists, prate of men’s benevolent feelings towards the objects of their gluttony, and preach peace under conditions where peace does not exist, but boldly and consistently arraigned the prime cause of animal suffering...”⁵⁸

M.K. Gandhi, who more than once referred to and quoted Shelley, also

stressed the inalienable importance of nonviolence to nonhuman animals from nonviolence between humans. In a 1932 letter to Salt, he writes:

May I say in all humility that one rarely finds people outside India recognizing non-human beings as fellow beings. Millennium will have come when mankind generally recognizes and acts up to this grand truth.⁵⁹

Gandhi also repeatedly emphasizes that this truth acts through poetic symbols. Cultural attitudes towards nonhuman life reveal themselves perhaps most startlingly and ubiquitously in the unexamined symbols that appear in literature and art, for example, in book-titles like *Chicken Soup for the Soul* and *Sacred Cows Make the Best Burgers*, the latter neatly fusing contempt for animals and for Hindus. For Gandhi, the cow was a symbol, which “means the entire sub-human world.... The appeal of the lower order of creation is all the more forcible because it is dumb.”⁶⁰

Written in a culture that was aggressively monotheistic and violently imperialist, at a time when Europe was not only trying to colonize but also to Christianize the world, Shelley’s symbols counter the bias that sets up individual, race or species as enemy to that which appears alien. His emphasis on the oneness of all things (“The One remains, the many change and pass...”) is close to that of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, which, in Wilkins’ translation, evokes animals both as symbols and as real beings in much the way Shelley does, to focus on the equal divinity of all:

The learned behold him alike in the reverend Brahman perfected in knowledge,
in the ox and in the elephant; in the dog and in him who eateth of the flesh of dogs.
Those whose minds are fixed on this equality, gain eternity even in this world.⁶¹

Invisible spirit taking visible and fleshly forms, human and non-human, is one of Shelley’s most common tropes, as when Demogorgon at the end of “Prometheus Unbound,” invokes

Ye elemental Genii, who have homes
From man’s high mind even to the central stone
Of sullen lead; from heaven’s star-fretted domes
To the dull weed some sea-worm battens on...
Spirits, whose homes are flesh: ye beasts and birds,
Ye worms, and fish; ye living leaves and buds; ...
Man, who wert once a despot and a slave...⁶²

Like many Hindus, too, Shelley posits individual Gods or divinities as manifestations of one mother Goddess, simultaneously suggesting that all living things are manifestations of the divine:

Sacred Goddess, Mother Earth,
Thou from whose immortal bosom

God, and men, and beasts have birth,
 Leaf and blade, and bud and blossom⁶³

Perhaps Shelley's most powerful adumbration of this theology occurs in "Adonais," where not all forms are equally animate, because some forms are more amenable to spirit than others:

...the one Spirit's plastic stress
 Sweeps through the dull dense world, compelling there,
 All new successions to the forms they wear;
 Torturing th' unwilling dross that checks its flight
 To its own likeness, as each mass may bear;
 And bursting in its beauty and its might
 From trees and beasts and men into the Heaven's light.⁶⁴

These aspects of Shelley's thought have left their imprint not so much on the critical record as on the creative heritage, from Wilde to Forster and Woolf to Mary Oliver.⁶⁵ E. M. Forster, whose work, like that of Virginia Woolf, is heavily influenced by Shelley's, evokes the utopian moment of Shri Krishna's birth celebrations in a temple, in *A Passage to India*, in terms very similar to Shelley's, with every form in the universe becoming irradiated:

All sorrow was annihilated, not only for Indians, but for foreigners, birds, caves, railways, and the stars; all became joy, all laughter; there had never been disease nor doubt, misunderstanding, cruelty, fear.⁶⁶

This literary continuity in the Western canon continues to counter mainstream contempt for cows and cow-worshippers, for non-human life and for those who view it as participating in divinity.

Notes

1. This is an updated version of an essay that first appeared in *Yearly Review*, the journal of the Department of English, Delhi University, in December 1992.

2. Robert Southey, extract from letter to John E. Reade, 12 June 1838, *Shelley: The Critical Heritage*, ed. James E. Barcus (London: Routledge, 1975).

3. Henry Salt, *Shelley's Principles: Has Time Refuted or Confirmed Them, A Retrospect and Forecast* (London: W. Reeves, 1892), 35.

4. Ellsworth Barnard, *Shelley's Religion* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1937), 3.

5. John Holloway, "Shelley's Achievement in Perspective" (1960) in *Shelley: Shorter Poems and Lyrics, A Casebook*, ed. Patrick Swinden (London: Macmillan, 1976), 134–35.

6. See, for example, Nigel Leask, *British Romantic Writers and the East: Anxieties of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), and the essays in *The New Shelley: Later Twentieth-Century Views*, ed. G. Kim Blank (New York: St Martin's Press, 1991).

7. Daniel J. MacDonald, *The Radicalism of Shelley and Its Sources* (1912; New York: Phaeton Press, 1970); Gerald McNeice, *Shelley and the Revolutionary Idea* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969); Paul Foot, *Red Shelley* (London: Sidgwick, 1980); Michael Henry Scrivener, *Radical Shelley: The Philosophical Anarchism and Utopian Thought of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).

8. Eleanor J. Harrington-Austin, *Shelley and the Development of English Imperialism: British India and England* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1999).

9. Christine Kenyon Jones, *Kindred Brutes: Animals in Romantic-Period Writing* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), and Timothy Molton, *Shelley and the Revolution in Taste: The Body and the Natural World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

10. See, for example, Ellsworth Barnard, *Shelley's Religion*; A.M.D. Hughes, *The Theology of Shelley* (Folcroft, PA: Folcroft Press, 1938).

11. Meena Alexander, "Shelley's India: Territory and Text, Some Problems of Decolonization," in *Shelley: Poet and Legislator of the World*, ed. Betty T. Bennett and Stuart Curran (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 169–78; 173. In this same anthology, Marilyn Butler, "Shelley and the Empire in the East" (158–68), mentions Shelley's vegetarianism in passing, but considers his animals, including the lamb looking his murderer in the face, "decorative" (165).

12. Lisbeth Chapin, "Science and Spirit: Shelley's Vegetarian Essays and the Body as Utopian State," in *A Brighter Morn: The Shelley Circle's Utopian Project*, ed. Darby Lewes (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2003), 123–42.

13. Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: A History of the Modern Sensibility* (New York: Viking, 1983).

14. Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de-Siecle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

15. John Drew, *India and the Romantic Imagination* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987).

16. Raymond Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance: Europe's Rediscovery of India and the East 1680–1880* (Paris, 1950; English translation New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).

17. S.R. Swaminathan, *Vedanta and Shelley* (Salzburg: University of Salzburg, 1997). More recent books and essays on Shelley fail to cite Swaminathan.

18. See Edward Moor, *Hindu Gods and Goddesses: 300 Illustrations from "The Hindu Pantheon"* (New York: Dover, 2006).

19. Editor's Introduction to "A Refutation of Deism," in *Shelley's Prose: The Trumpet of a Prophecy*, ed. David Lee Clark (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1966), 118.

20. Swaminathan, *Vedanta and Shelley*, 26–27.

21. Kenyon Jones, *Kindred Brutes*, 110, note 6.

22. Letter to T.J. Hogg, 3 January 1811, *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Frederick L. Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), vol. I, 35.

23. Swaminathan considers some of Shelley's animal symbols, such as eagle and serpent, but not the lamb.

24. John Bt, ed., *The Poems of Alexander Pope: A One-Volume Edition of the Twickenham Text* (London: Methuen, 1963), 507–08.

25. "The Lamb," lines 13; 16–18, *Blake: Complete Writings*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), 115.

26. "Auguries of Innocence," lines 23–24, *Blake: Complete Writings*, ed. Keynes, 431. Peter L. Thorslev comments briefly on these contradictions, *Romantic Contraries: Freedom versus Destiny* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 121.

27. Dorothy Wordsworth, "Loving and Liking: Irregular Verses Addressed to a Child," *Yarrow Revisited and Other Poems by William Wordsworth* (London: Longman, Rees et al, 1835), 265.

28. "The Task," *The Poetical Works of William Cowper*, ed. J.M. Ross (Edinburgh: William P. Nimmo, 1864), 131.

29. Ross, ed., *Poetical Works of William Cowper*, 175.

30. Hymn no. viii, "Lord, I will Praise Thee," *Poetical Works of William Cowper*, ed. Ross, 273.

31. Hymn no. xv, "Praise for the Fountain Opened," *Poetical Works of William Cowper*, ed. Ross, 269.

32. Hymn no. ii, "Jehovah-Jireh, The Lord will Provide," *Poetical Works of William Cowper*, ed. Ross, 269.

33. "The Task," *Poetical Works of William Cowper*, ed. Ross, 138.

34. Leigh Hunt, "The Quarterly Review and The Revolt of Islam," *The Examiner*, Sept.–Oct. 1819, in *Shelley: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Barcus, 138.

35. *Queen Mab*, part viii, lines 211–12, *Shelley: Poetical Works*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson and G. M. Matthews (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 795.

36. "A Vindication of Natural Diet," *Shelley's Prose*, ed. Clark, 86.

37. *The Revolt of Islam*, Canto V, lines 2245–47, *Shelley: Poetical Works*, ed. Hutchinson and Matthews, 92.
38. “Alastor or The Spirit of Solitude,” lines 1, 13–15, *Shelley: Poetical Works*, ed. Hutchinson and Matthews, 15.
39. “The Daemon of the World,” Part II, lines 443–46; 458–60, *Shelley: Poetical Works*, ed. Hutchinson and Matthews, 10.
40. “A Refutation of Deism,” *Shelley’s Prose*, ed. Clark, 124–25.
41. Letter to Thomas Love Peacock, 9 November 1818, from Bologna, *The Letters*, Vol. II, 50.
42. Swaminathan, *Vedanta and Shelley*, 32.
43. Drew, *India and the Romantic Imagination*, 267.
44. “The Assassins,” *Shelley’s Prose*, ed. Clark, 154.
45. *Prometheus Unbound*, II.v. 40–44, *Shelley: Poetical Works*, ed. Hutchinson and Matthews, 241.
46. *The Sensitive Plant*, Part First, 82–83, *Shelley: Poetical Works*, ed. Hutchinson and Matthews, 591.
47. *The Sensitive Plant*, Part Second, 41–48, *Shelley: Poetical Works*, ed. Hutchinson and Matthews, 592.
48. Unsigned review, *The Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Letters*, 8 December 1821, in *Shelley: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Barcus, 300.
49. “Adonais,” XVIII, 161–62, *Shelley: Poetical Works*, ed. ed. Hutchinson and Matthews, 435.
50. “Hellas,” 1062–63, *Shelley: Poetical Works*, ed. Hutchinson and Matthews, 477.
51. Unsigned review, *The Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Letters*, 19 May 1821, in *Shelley: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Barcus, 78.
52. See, for example, Hymn V, line 17, Hymn LI, *passim*, and “The Progress of Error,” lines 4–8, *Poetical Works of William Cowper*, ed. Ross, 271; 298; 18.
53. Hutchinson and Matthews, eds., *Shelley: Poetical Works*, 644.
54. Hutchinson and Matthews, eds., *Shelley: Poetical Works*, 658.
55. “Julian and Maddalo,” lines 116–17, *Shelley: Poetical Works*, ed. Hutchinson and Matthews, 192.
56. “Note on Oedipus Tyrranus,” by Mrs. Shelley, *Shelley: Poetical Works*, ed. Hutchinson and Matthews, 140.
57. “The Mask of Anarchy,” lines 5–8; 11–12, *Shelley: Poetical Works*, ed. Hutchinson and Matthews, 338.
58. Salt, *Shelley’s Principles*, 56–57.
59. Letter to Henry S. Salt, 28 October 1932, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Trust, 1972), LI, 309.
60. “Hinduism,” in *Young India*, 6 October 1921, in *The Collected Works*, XXI (1966), 248.
61. Charles Wilkins, trans., *The Bhagvat-Geeta or Dialogues of Kreesna and Arjoon in Eighteen Lectures with Notes* (London: Nourse, 1785), 59.
62. “Prometheus Unbound,” IV: 539–42; 544–45; 549, *Shelley: Poetical Works*, ed. Hutchinson and Matthews, 267.
63. “Song of Proserpine,” *Shelley: Poetical Works*, ed. Hutchinson and Matthews, 612.
64. “Adonais,” XLIII, *Shelley: Poetical Works*, ed. Hutchinson and Matthews, 441.
65. Forster took the title for his novel *The Longest Journey* from Shelley’s “Epipsychidion”; for the influence of Shelley, especially his “Rosalind and Helen” on Forster’s *Howards End*, and his “The Question” on Woolf’s *The Waves*, see Ruth Vanita, *Sappho and the Virgin Mary: Same-Sex Love and the English Literary Imagination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 146–47, 207; 210–11.
66. E.M. Forster, *A Passage to India* (1924; Delhi: Dorling Kindersley, 2006), 257.

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