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Transnational Shelley(s): Metamorphoses and Reconfigurations

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In the last decade, critical interest in the afterlives of Percy Bysshe Shelley and Mary Shelley has grown exponentially. Particularly in the wake of two major anniversaries—the 2018 bicentenary of *Frankenstein* and the 2022 bicentenary of Percy Shelley's death—a flourishing body of scholarship has illuminated the extraordinary resilience and adaptability of their works across time, languages, and media. What emerges from this new wave of studies is a rich and complex portrait: far from remaining static icons of Romanticism, Percy and Mary Shelley have lived multiple lives, undergoing continual metamorphoses that reflect the shifting concerns of successive generations. Their texts have travelled far beyond the historical and national coordinates of early nineteenth-century Britain, embedding themselves in global literary and cultural imaginations. To read the Shelleys today is, therefore, to enter a living, transnational conversation that continues to transform itself—and transform us in the process.

With the joint publication of Volumes Five (1821–1822) and Volume Six (1822) in 2024, the Longman is now the first collective edition of Shelley's poetry to be completed since 1927. Thirty-five years in the making, with Volume One (1804–1817) appearing in 1989, it surpasses its predecessors in the comprehensiveness and accuracy of its texts and its wealth of contextual notes. The two volumes, edited by a multi-generational team of eminent Shelley textual editors led by Kelvin Everest, one of its two founding editors, covers the period from the composition of *Hellas* to *The Triumph of Life* and to the late lyrics addressed to Jane Williams. For the first time Shelley's great translations from Calderón and Goethe are not relegated to a "Translation" section but integrated within his original masterpieces. We are reminded that Shelley is not only the translated but also the translator.

Another notable editing event took place in 2021 with the publication of Volume VII of *The Complete Poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (Johns Hopkins), in progress since 2000, also edited to the highest standards, and aiming at completion in 2030. Volume VII, consisting of posthumous poems edited by Mary Shelley from the poet's rough drafts, is an illuminating piece of editing by Nora Crook, a general editor with Hopkins since 2012. Crook's work, which includes the general editorship of the standard editions of Mary Shelley's novels, biographies, and miscellaneous writings (Pickering,1996, 2002), consistently highlights Mary's role as editor, interpreter, and collaborator in Percy's legacy. Anna Mercer's monograph, *The Collaborative Literary Relationship of Percy Bysshe Shelley and Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley* (2019), further challenges the traditional notion of Percy Bysshe Shelley as a solitary genius by foregrounding the collaborative dimensions of his creative process, especially with Mary Shelley and Claire Clairmont. Drawing on archival research and contemporary theories of authorship, Mercer redefines Shelleyan poetics through the lens of relational creativity and gendered literary networks, offering a compelling new model of Romantic authorship. Together, these editorial projects underscore the vitality of Shelley studies, where philological precision and historical recovery continue to reshape our understanding of both poets and prepare the future of research in Shelley studies.

This issue, *Transnational Shelley(s): Metamorphoses and Reconfigurations*, seeks to contribute to this conversation by charting some of the paths—both well-known and less explored—through which the Shelleys' works and legacies have been reimagined. Starting as an international conference held at the Accademia Vivarum Novum in October 2022, where international scholars of the Shelleys engaged in a lively and stimulating debate on the occasion of Percy's bicentenary, is divided into three sections, each reflecting a different moment and mode of this ongoing process.

The first section, *The Immediate Aftermath*, investigates the early, often unpredictable trajectories of Percy and Mary Shelley's reputations after their deaths.

Nora Crook's essay identifies 1829 as a crucial turning point in Percy Shelley's posthumous fame. Drawing attention to a relatively overlooked moment, Crook shows how Shelley's consolidation as a canonical figure was facilitated not only by domestic British efforts but significantly through European and American networks of literary circulation and critical reception. His contribution invites us to reconsider the "canonization" of Shelley as a transnational phenomenon from its very inception, shaped by exchanges and appropriations that crossed linguistic and national borders.

Valentina Varinelli turns the spotlight on Mary Shelley's role as both editor and interpreter of Percy's works. Through a detailed examination of her editorial practices—ranging from textual interventions to paratextual framing—Varinelli reveals how Mary acted as a powerful agent of transmission, ensuring the survival of Percy's writings while simultaneously influencing their critical reception. Her analysis highlights the delicate balance between fidelity and mediation that characterizes Mary's contribution, presenting her not as a passive custodian but as a creative figure in her own right.

Finally, Renée Schlueter broadens the scope of this section by juxtaposing Mary Shelley's and Margaret Fuller's experiences of Italy and travel. In both women's writings, the journey becomes a rich metaphorical and political trope: a site where national, personal, and gendered identities are questioned, reconfigured, and reasserted. Schlueter's comparative reading foregrounds the transnational, feminist dimensions of both figures, demonstrating how travel writing could function as a powerful space for critical reflection and self-invention.

The second section, *Modern Revisions of Percy*, explores how Shelley's legacy was reactivated and reinterpreted in the context of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century modernisms.

Giuseppe Capalbo investigates the complex dynamics of Shelley's reception in Scotland, focusing on the writings of William Sharp and his literary alter ego, Fiona Macleod. Through this fascinating case study, Capalbo shows how Shelley's influence catalyzed a radical questioning of identity, gender, and authorship, as Sharp oscillated between his male and female personae. Shelley's fluid, visionary poetics provided Sharp with a model for transgressing conventional boundaries, anticipating modernist experiments with fragmented selves and unstable voices.

Mark Sandy's essay traces Shelley's visionary impulse into American modernism, uncovering its resonances in the work of Hart Crane. Through a close reading of Crane's poetry, Sandy demonstrates how Shelley's ecstatic and metaphysical sensibility permeated Crane's attempts to articulate a new, transcendent vision of America. This transatlantic dialogue, Sandy suggests, underscores the continuity of Shelley's project into the modernist search for meaning amid fragmentation and chaos.

Paolo Bugliani's contribution complements these explorations by focusing on the critical fortunes of Shelley's *Defence of Poetry* in the twentieth century. Bugliani argues that, despite accusations of naivety or sentimentalism, Shelley's aesthetic theory maintained a profound relevance for modernist writers. Figures such as James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and Wallace Stevens, while often departing from Shelley's Romantic idealism, nonetheless found in his vision of poetry's transformative power a compelling

source of inspiration. Bugliani's essay thus reveals the hidden threads that connect Shelleyan Romanticism to modernist innovation.

The third section, *Transnational and Transmedial Echoes between Mary and Percy*, moves even further across geographies, media, and cultural domains, reflecting the extraordinary adaptability of the Shelleys' imaginative legacies.

Elisabetta Marino examines Shelley's commitment to ethical vegetarianism and the influence his thought exerted on Mohandas Gandhi's adoption of nonviolence and vegetarian principles. Marino reconstructs a fascinating chain of intellectual transmission, emphasizing the role of Henry Stephens Salt—a Victorian social reformer and Shelley enthusiast—as a crucial mediator. Her essay illuminates how Shelley's radical ideals, refracted through Victorian activism, could cross centuries and continents to shape one of the twentieth century's most significant political figures.

Marzia Dati focuses on the reception of Shelley's poetry by two figures who at first glance seem worlds apart: Konstantin Balmont, a Russian Symbolist poet and translator, and John Reed, a North American poet and journalist. Through close analysis of Balmont's translations and Reed's mock-heroic poem *The Day in Bohemia*, Dati uncovers a shared rebellious and visionary ethos that links these writers to Shelley's spirit. Her contribution emphasizes how Shelley's poetry, in its revolutionary energy and imaginative boldness, resonated far beyond its original context, inspiring new creative projects across languages and political landscapes.

Simona Munari delves into contemporary French theatre's reinterpretations of *Frankenstein*, focusing on the productions by Philippe Faure and Jean-François Peyret. Munari's essay reflects critically on the evolving role of the theatrical text in a performance culture increasingly oriented toward ephemerality and improvisation. Through her analysis of Faure's and Peyret's approaches, she explores how Shelley's myth is constantly reanimated and reinterpreted, raising crucial questions about textual authority, memory, and creativity.

Alessio Rischia turns to French comics adaptations of *Frankenstein*, particularly the 1950s novels by Benoît Becker and their 1970s comic renditions by Aredit. Rischia traces how the creature's visual representation evolved—from Boris Karloff's iconic features to increasingly fragmented and demonic forms—reflecting broader cultural anxieties about identity, monstrosity, and otherness. His study shows how *Frankenstein*'s story, far from being confined to the literary realm, has become a vital part of contemporary visual culture's symbolic repertoire.

Letizia Carbutto offers a comparative study of the first French and Italian translations of *Frankenstein*, highlighting how differing cultural contexts shaped the reception of Mary Shelley's novel. She shows how the French translation (Saladin, 1821), encouraged by Anglomania and an openness to the Gothic, contrasted sharply with the Italian translation (Cochetti, 1944), marked by delays and ideological resistance to "foreign" literary models. Carbutto's analysis reveals how translation is not a neutral act but a cultural event that profoundly influences how a work is understood and valued.

Finally, two articles address Mary's visual and transmedial potential. Carla Fusco examines the comic *Mister Hyde contro Frankenstein* (Nowcomics, 2014) as a transmedial reimagining of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Merging steampunk and gothic aesthetics, the comic stages a hybrid encounter between Frankenstein's creature and Mr. Hyde. Through a semiotic and intertextual approach, the study explores how the comic reframes themes of alterity, monstrosity, and the fractured self, highlighting the

enduring cultural resonance of Shelley's creation in the visual language of contemporary comics.

Daniela Coramusi proposes a daring parallel between Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and the photography of Diane Arbus. Applying "monster theory," Coramusi explores how both artists constructed haunting visualizations of otherness, fear, and societal unease. She argues that Shelley and Arbus, despite working in different media and centuries, shared a commitment to making visible the marginalized and the monstrous, using their art as a form of cultural critique and self-assertion. Coramusi's essay suggests that every creative woman who challenges conventions leaves a vital legacy for future generations.

Taken together, the contributions to this volume argue that to speak of Shelley—or rather, of the Shelleys—is to speak of plurality, transformation, and translation. Their works were, from the beginning, open to metamorphosis, and it is precisely this openness that has allowed them not merely to survive but to thrive—across languages, across media, across evolving political and aesthetic landscapes. Percy and Mary Shelley have not simply been transmitted; they have been continually reimagined, remediated, and reinscribed into new cultural matrices.

Therefore, Transnational *Shelley(s)* is not simply the title of this collection, but a critical invitation: to think of literary legacies not as static monuments but as living processes of negotiation between past and present, between origin and elsewhere. Only by embracing the multiplicity of these afterlives can we fully appreciate the Shelleys' enduring vitality—and glimpse the futures they continue to inspire.

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