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Chapter 7

Shelley’s Neapolitan-Tuscan Poetics: ‘Sonnet: Political Greatness’ and the ‘Republic’ of Benevento

Michael Rossington*

I

First published by Mary Shelley in *Posthumous Poems* (1824), Shelley’s poem beginning ‘Nor happiness, nor majesty, nor fame’ was there accorded the title ‘Sonnet II. / Political Greatness’, and placed second in a sequence of four sonnets, the other three identified by number alone.1 Timothy Webb has summarized the interpretative consensus thus: ‘The poem suggests that political revolutions are of little value unless they are accompanied or preceded by an interior, psychological revolution.’2 P.M.S. Dawson’s refinement of this gloss sees the poem’s essence, ‘Man who man would be, / Must rule the empire of himself’ (ll. 10–11),3 as the expression of philosophical anarchism, a view reinforced by its title’s echo of that of Godwin’s

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3 Citations from the sonnet in my opening paragraph are from the version published in *Posthumous Poems*. 
most celebrated work, *Political Justice*. Support for other kinds of interiorized readings has been provided by Earl Wasserman who comments that ‘‘Being himself alone’’ was Shelley’s standard phrase for self-possession, or for absoluteness and autonomy, and by Donald Reiman. The latter notes, in the words from lines 10–11 quoted above, an echo of Shelley’s pained and deeply private letter of 11 March 1820 to the Gisbornes in which he contemplates the means by which Mary Shelley, then in a state of acute dejection, ‘‘would obtain empire over herself’’.

In contrast, and by close reference to its prompt, the Neapolitan revolution of 1820, this chapter seeks to explore other aspects of the poem’s analysis of, and antidote to, ‘‘voluntary servitude’’. By invoking this phrase, which was used by Shelley in a letter to Peacock of 25 February 1819, I identify the sonnet’s preoccupations with Étienne de la Boétie’s *Discours de la servitude volontaire* (c. 1553) that Claire Clairmont translated, then fair copied, in the spring of 1820. La Boétie’s scrutiny of the obstacles to political liberty is adopted within a predominantly republican tradition, familiar to Shelley, that takes in not only Plato but Dante, Machiavelli and Alfieri who may all be described as Tuscan (if not, in Alfieri’s case, by birth). Moreover la Boétie’s essay had a distinctively rebellious incarnation in Cesare Paribelli’s Italian translation published in Naples in 1799, or, as its title-page asserts, ‘‘Anno Settimo Repubblicano [sic]’, that is, the seventh year of the French revolutionary calendar adopted by the Parthenopean republic after the Neapolitan revolution of January that year. A possible distant echo of la Boétie’s essay in the title of Shelley’s sonnet

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7 The context was a visit to the Grotto del Cane, near Naples, where, as a spectacle for tourists, dogs were pushed into the cave to show the fatal effects of the carbon dioxide it naturally produced. Shelley explained: ‘‘we … wd. not allow the dog to be exhibited in torture for our curiosity. The poor little animals stood moving their tails in a slow & dismal manner as if perfectly resigned to their condition; a curfike emblem of voluntary servitude’’ (*Letters* II: 78).


may be found in the following passage where, identifying three kinds of tyrant, who obtain their kingdoms either by force of arms, or by birth, or by popular election, he comments of the last:

Celui à qui le peuple a donné l'état devrait être, ce me semble, plus supportable, et le serait, comme je crois, n'était que dès lors qu'il se voit élevé par-dessus les autres, flatté par je ne sais quoi qu'on appelle la grandeur, il délibère de n'en bouger point. [The person to whom the people have granted the state ought to be, in my opinion, more acceptable and would be so, I think, were it not for the fact that from the very moment when he sees himself raised above the others, flattered by something of that quality which we call greatness, he plans not to be moved from that position].

Certainly three of the six popular magazines and literary journals which reprinted the sonnet in 1824 and 1839, soon after its publication in Mary Shelley’s editions of those years, testify to its adoption by English readerships of a republican cast.

But Shelley’s concern is also, as it had been in ‘Ozymandias’, with the function of art in furthering liberty. Built into the craft of ‘Political Greatness’ is an adaptability similar to the earlier sonnet that makes it both a commentary on an historical predicament vis-à-vis tyranny at once particular and universal, and, in Paul Hamilton’s usage of the term, a ‘metaromantic’ reflection on the role of art in providing the means by which such a commentary can take place. The title ultimately given to the sonnet by Shelley is thus a rebuttal of an injunction by Peacock, probably made in one of the many letters eventually destroyed by the latter, to which Shelley refers in a letter of 21 March 1821: ‘the news in the papers will tell you far more than it is prudent for me to say; and for this once I will observe your rule of Political Silence—the Austrians wish that the Neapolitans & Piedmontese would do the same.’ He went on to request Peacock to procure two seals, ‘the device, a dove with outspread wings & this motto round it. Μάνιτις εμ’ εσθωλων αγώνων.—’ ['I predict a victory in the struggle!!']

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14 *Letters II*: 276–7, though the Greek motto is given here as it appears in the original MS of the letter (Oxford, Bodleian Library, [Abinger] Dep. b. 214/4) in which Shelley (correctly) cancelled the iota he had written at the end of the second word. The accents and breathings, which are in paler ink and done with a finer nib, were almost certainly added by Peacock, perhaps just before the letter’s first publication in *Fraser’s Magazine* 61 (March 1860), pp. 315–17 (where, however, Fraser’s fails to reproduce accurately the second of the six accents supplied by Peacock). The Greek, used as epigraph for *Hellas* (1822), is from
As well as examining the sonnet’s politics, there is also an attempt in what follows to address various problems it has posed to editors, including the question of which of Shelley’s two manuscript fair copies is to be taken as copy-text. In this regard, a reader of the poem in two recent paperback selections of his poetry and prose, one edited by Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat (SPP), the other by Zachary Leader and Michael O’Neill, might justifiably be intrigued. Reiman and Fraistat chose as the basis of their text the intermediate fair copy entitled ‘Sonnet: To the Republic of Benevento’ in the Houghton Library, Harvard University (hereafter Harvard MS).

The poem in Leader and O’Neill’s edition is based on the neat fair copy in the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford (hereafter adds. c. 5, see Fig. 7.1). Like Webb in his edition, Leader and O’Neill add a comma to line 7 after ‘fleet’ (meaning ‘hurry’ or ‘hasten’), to the adds. c. 5 text, an entirely defensible intervention that ensures the reader takes in the emphasis of that verb, on which lines 4 to 9 hinge:

Sonnet,

Political greatness

Nor happiness, nor majesty nor fame,
Nor peace nor strength, nor skill in arms or arts
Shepherd those herds whom Tyranny makes tame:
Verse echoes not one beating of their hearts;

History is but the shadow of their shame;
Art veils her glass, or from the pageant starts
As to oblivion their blind millions fleet
Staining that Heaven with obscene imagery
Of their own likeness. What are numbers, knit

By force or custom? Man, who man would be,
Must rule the empire of himself; in it
Must be supreme, establishing his throne
On vanquished will; quelling the anarchy
Of hopes and fears; being himself alone.


18 I read a colon in adds. c. 5 after ‘tame’ in l. 3, not a full-stop as given in BSM XXII (2): 319.
7.1 MS fair copy of ‘Sonnet: Political Greatness’
Versions of the poem different to those presented in the above-mentioned editions were published in two earlier, and similarly comprehensive, selections. Francesco Rognoni,19 like the first (1977) Norton edition of Reiman and Powers, follows Harvard MS whereas Webb largely follows adds. c. 5 but adopts the Harvard MS title. As a means to exploring further the poem’s double textual life, itself worn under differently-titled guises, this chapter finds itself preoccupied with when its different versions were composed. This is another matter on which recent editors’ judgements are various: ‘uncertain, probably sometime after July 1820’ (Leader and O’Neill); ‘between July and September 1820’ (SPP); ‘Probabilmente … nel settembre del 1820’ [probably in September 1820] (Rognoni) and ‘Probably … at the end of summer 1820’ (Webb).20

II

It was an insurrection at Nola near Naples on 1–2 July 1820, initiated by army officers and carbonari, which created a crisis for the Spanish Bourbon king, Ferdinand IV (1751–1825, renamed Ferdinand I of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies in 1816). He was forced to accede to the demand of the rebels’ leader, Guglielmo Pepe, for the Spanish Constitution of 1812 that had been proclaimed by another mutinous army general, Rafael de Riego at Cadiz on 1 January 1820.21 Claire Clairmont greeted the ‘Report of the Revolution at Naples’ on 16 July with a pithy pronouncement on its genesis: ‘This is glorious & is produced by the Revolution in Spain.’22 A few days later Mary Shelley’s report of events to Maria Gisborne in London from the Gisbornes’ house in Leghorn displayed a similar confidence. Buoyed by the ostensibly lasting success of the liberal cause in Spain, she envisaged an epochal change in the Italian peninsula:

Are you not, or will you not be delighted to hear of the Revolution at Naples. The Duke of Campochiaro was at the head of it—They assembled before the gates of the palace, and the old pastry Cook ordered the Soldiers to fire on them—they refused, and he was obliged to compromise by turning out his old ministry and filling their places by popular nobles and entreating the people’s patience until a constitution should be formed. Thirty years ago was the era for Republics, and they all fell—This is the era for constitutions.

20 Leader and O’Neill, Major Works, p. 794; SPP: 327; Rognoni, Opere, p. 1603; Webb, Selected Poems, p. 216.
22 Stocking, Journals of Claire Clairmont, p. 156.
I only hope that these latter may in the end remove the mother of the former. What a glorious thing it will be if Lombardy regains its freedom—and Tuscany—all is so mild there that it will be the last, and yet in the end I hope the people here will raise their fallen souls and bodies, and become something better than they are.  

This sketch emphasizes the imminent possibility of the Italian states recovering that liberty constitutive of their independent identities since at least the medieval period articulated by Sismondi in *Histoire des républiques italiennes du moyen âge* (1818), a work the Shelleys began reading enthusiastically at Naples in January 1819. Mary Shelley hopes that ‘constitutions’ will remove the Bourbon monarchy, ‘the mother’ (that is, in a Greek tragic sense, the cause), of the unstable and short-lived Napoleonic Republics of 1797–99, including the Parthenopean republic. But her letter was misguidedly optimistic. She underestimated the durability of the Restoration régimes generally as well as the treachery, brutal vindictiveness and infinite capacity to be restored to his throne, specific to the anti-liberal Ferdinand, at 69 then the most senior monarch in Europe. But her ridicule is perceptive, making that king, in the idiom of ‘England in 1819’, if not ‘old, mad, blind … and dying’, then senescent and certainly ‘despised’. The contemptuous reference to him as a ‘pastry cook’ alludes to his setting up a confectioner’s shop and to his wide renown for preferring common trade over the duty of government proper to majesty. Moreover the final sentence of the above quotation, in its hope that the Tuscans will now be roused from their characteristic torpor, is so close to the sentiment of Shelley’s sonnet that it may be seen as part of a shared outlook and tentatively advanced in support of those editors who see the sonnet as first drafted at this time. She later sought to redeem the failure of the constitutional revolution in Piedmont in March 1821, arguing that ‘if the attempt had not been made, the Italians would have lost their characteristic of being slaves “ognor frementi,” and have sunk into as degraded an existence as that of the Fanariotes of Constantinople’. But at the same time she noted, witheringly, the recalcitrant serenity of another Italian state: ‘Tuscany alone was tranquil. They talked of liberty, but their enthusiasm began and ended in talk.’

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23 *MWS Letters* I: 156 (I read ‘mother’ [l. 7] in the MS of this letter, where Bennett gives ‘[?mothes]’). The Duke of Campo Chiaro was one of five members of the new cabinet according to *Annual Register … for the year 1820* (London, 1822), p. 311.

24 See *MWS Letters* I: 85.

25 In this regard, see Shelley’s application of Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* ll. 759–60 to the Greek cause in a letter to Mary of August 1821 (*Letters* II: 325).


A likely source of the Shelleys’ sanguine view of events in Naples in the immediate aftermath of Pepe’s coup was *le Constitutionnel*, a Paris-based daily founded in 1815 by an ex-Jacobin, that was available at Leghorn (Livorno). In its report from Naples dated 17 July the origins of the uprising are ascribed not to a small group of men but, in grandiloquent language, to a whole populace willing to be enlightened:

On se tromperait étrangement, si l’on imaginait en Europe que le mouvement de quelques hommes a été le seul ressort de la révolution napolitaine. Nous pouvons aujourd’hui le publier: c’était une vaste entreprise, conduite avec constance et générosité et avec les sentiments d’humanité, fruit nécessaire des progrès de la civilisation; pas une goutte de sang n’a souillé ce triomphe. [One would be oddly mistaken if in Europe one thought that the movement of a few men was the only impulse behind the Neapolitan revolution. We are able to make it known today that it was a vast enterprise, conducted with perseverance and generosity and with the feelings of humanity that are the inevitable result of the progress of civilisation; not a drop of blood tarnished this triumph].

The *Examiner*, allied in its politics with the *Constitutionnel*, expressed similar satisfaction at the exemplary course of events noting the “completion of a great revolution in seven days, without the loss of a single life, and in the most perfect order and good humour”. As Kenneth Neill Cameron notes, Leigh Hunt had silently co-opted Shelley to the wider cause of Italian liberty by quoting, though not sourcing, a passage from a verse paragraph about Padua (ll. 256–82) in ‘Lines Written among the Euganean Hills, October, 1818’ (published in *Rosalind and Helen: A Modern Eclogue; with Other Poems* [1819]) in his leading article on the Neapolitan Revolution of 30 July 1820. But by then fissures were apparent amidst the revolutionary unrest even if Shelley was unable to see them.

His letter of the same date conveys to Mary the ‘bad news from Palermo’ of ‘a terrible slaughter’ that ensued when the new constitutional government of Naples did battle with Sicilians demanding a return to their pre-1816 independence. Shelley’s understanding of the initial outcome, from what he acknowledged to be an unauthoritative source – ‘the brief & partial accounts of the Florence Paper’ (possibly the *Gazzetta di Firenze*) that ‘The event how ever was as it should be—Sicily like Naples is free’, was woefully beside the mark. To most recent historians the uprising in Sicily confirmed the successful strategy of the continued fragmentation of Italy bequeathed by Napoleon and reinforced by Metternich. But Shelley’s outsider interpretation followed the liberal English desire to believe in a

[‘The Francophile: Prose and Verse’]. Londra [i.e. Florence], 1799, p. 72: ‘Schiavi or siam, si; ma schiavi almen frementi’ [At present we are slaves, but at least restless slaves].


32 *Letters II*: 223.
unified, as opposed to factionalized, Italian patriotism, and adhered to the reformist agenda of the *Constitutionnel* by which the Sicilians would come to abide by constitutional principles as opposed to revolutionary or quiescent ones. On 17 August, her information based on *Galignani’s Messenger*, the Paris-based English-language daily to which the Shelleys subscribed, Mary Shelley told Amelia Curran that ‘Austrian troops are coming here’ (‘here’ meaning Tuscany). On 21 August, the *Constitutionnel* published a report, dated 30 July, announcing the threat of an Austrian invasion, and another, on 28 August, that troops would arrive by the end of September. In these circumstances, at the end of August, Shelley wrote ‘Ode to Naples’ with the intention of alerting the readership of the Whig London daily, the *Morning Chronicle*, to the crisis in the constitutionalists’ cause. On 1 September, in Leghorn with Claire, he was party to news ‘by private letters from Merchants’, that suggested Europe-wide commotion, including ‘an attack made by the populace on the Tuileries’, and the constitutional party’s threat to kill all members of the royal family ‘if the Emperor [Francis I of Austria] should make war upon them’. In another twist upon the vocabulary of the sonnet, Shelley remarked of the latter ‘measure’: ‘That kings should be every where hostages for liberty were admirable!’ He then speculated in nervous anticipation on the fate of liberal expatriates, possibly having in mind the similar position of Mary Wollstonecraft in France in 1793: ‘What will become of the Gisbornes, or of the English at Paris.—How soon will England itself & perhaps Italy be caught by the Sacred fire? And what, to come from the solar system to a grain of sand, shall we do.’ But by the spring of 1821, with short-lived constitutional revolutions in Piedmont and Massa overcome, it was clear that Russia and Prussia, the two other members of ‘The Holy Alliance’, would acquiesce in Austria’s predicted re-establishment of control in Italy by use of armed force. The ‘Sacred fire’, fanned from the ‘sacred flame’ of liberty invoked by Hunt, was now almost extinguished. Late in 1820 Ferdinand had escaped from captivity in Naples and Metternich’s Congress of Powers, which met at Troppau in October and Laibach in January 1821, deployed the Austrian army to recover his kingdom. The inevitable defeat of Pepe took place at Rieti on 7 March 1821, and Ferdinand’s brutal execution of some of the leaders of the constitutional revolution and imprisonment of others, followed the re-occupation of Naples later that month. On 4 May, Shelley confided bleakly to Byron: ‘This attempt in Italy has certainly been a most unfortunate business. With no strong personal reasons to interest me, my disappointment on

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34 *MWS Letters* I: 158.


37 The revolution at Massa is noted in Mary’s journal entry of 28 March 1821 (*MS Journals* I: 358), and her 1839 edition of Shelley’s poems (*PW* II: 345).
public grounds has been excessive. But I cling to moral and political hope, like a
drowner to a plank.\textsuperscript{38}

\section{III}

Whereas Mary Shelley placed the sonnet amongst ‘Poems written in 1821’ in her
first 1839 collected edition of Shelley’s poetical works,\textsuperscript{39} recent editors, as noted
above, date its composition to the previous summer. This view is given weight by
the evidence of the extant manuscript sources. Rough drafts of the sonnet are to be
found on facing pages in a notebook in use between early 1820 and the spring of
1821 (hereafter \textit{adds. e. 8}).\textsuperscript{40} The first of these comprises a draft of the opening six-
and-a-half lines, and is untitled.\textsuperscript{41} Added above the second draft, of the whole poem,
is the title ‘Rex sui’. Its most obvious English translation, ‘King of himself’, makes
explicit the frequently-noted parallels between lines 10–11 of the sonnet (‘Man, who
man would be, / Must rule the empire of himself’) and the description of ‘man’
in \textit{Prometheus Unbound} III, iv, 196–7 as ‘the King / Over himself’.\textsuperscript{42} Given that
\textit{Rex} means ‘master’ as well as ‘king’ in Latin, this title also draws attention to the
draft of line 12 where the self-possession required of man is seen more overtly as
the assumption of kingship than it is in the final version (where the word ‘King’ is
not used): ‘A King [   ] \
\begin{small}
\textit{canc.}
\end{small}’.

\textit{Rex sui’ is written above another title, ‘The true Republican’ (the word}
\textit{true} inserted with a caret), itself a
cancelled modification of a first attempt, ‘The Republican’.\textsuperscript{43} In lighter ink than the
body of the poem, the three titles were probably added later. In respect of their dating,
B.C. Barker-Benfield argues that ‘the close proximity of an abortive address “To
the Illustrious assertors of Neapolitan Liberty” ([p. ] 148 rev.) supports the sonnet’s

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{38} \textit{Letters II}: 290–91.
\item \textsuperscript{39} \textit{PW} IV: 147.
\item \textsuperscript{40} Bod. MS Shelley \textit{adds. e. 8}, pp. 151–150 rev. For a facsimile and transcription by
\begin{small}
Carlene A. Adamson, see \textit{BSM} VI: 396–9. On the date-range of this notebook’s contents, see
\end{small}
\begin{small}
Barker-Benfield, \textit{BSM} XXIII: 44.
\end{small}
\item \textsuperscript{41} \textit{adds. e. 8}, p. 151 rev.
\item \textsuperscript{42} Kelvin Everest (\textit{PS} II: 610) notes that these lines recall \textit{Prometheus Unbound} I, 492.
The sonnet also parallels stanzas 16 and 17 of ‘Ode to Liberty’, drafted early May – late June
1820 and published in August 1820 in \textit{Prometheus Unbound: A Lyrical Drama in Four Acts,
with Other Poems}.
\item \textsuperscript{43} \textit{adds. e. 8} p. 150 rev. Most of the second draft is on \textit{adds. e. 8} p. 150 rev., but the final
wording of the second half of line 12 and the first half of line 13 is on p. 151 rev.
\item \textsuperscript{44} As Alan Weinberg commented to me in conversation, there may be a reference in
the first title to the journal of that name founded by Richard Carlile in 1819. Shelley would
almost certainly have known of it through \textit{Cobbett’s Weekly Register} or the \textit{Examiner}, sent
to him regularly from England by Peacock. The ‘Letter to the Examiner’, 3 November 1819,
in protest against Carlile’s trial, reflects Shelley’s monitoring of radical publications and
their exposure to vindictive censorship. Dawson, ‘“King over Himself”’, p. 16, reads the
modification to the original title in \textit{adds. e. 8}, p. 150 rev. (unconvincingly in my view) as
““The Eng[lish?] Republican”.”.
\end{itemize}
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accepted context and date [that is, July–September 1820]. This view is broadly supported by Carlene Adamson who, however, notes that the draft of Epipsychidion also on p. 148 rev. ‘clearly written in after the fragment was entered’, establishes a terminus ante quem of February 1821 for the fragmentary address which ‘[b]y extension … could safely be applied to the sonnet’.

A similar balance of evidence pertains to Harvard MS, the subject of remarks by Reiman which deserve close scrutiny. Of the Harvard MS Eng. 258.2 notebook in general, he comments that the poems ‘first written in … date from the last half of 1819 through the middle of 1820’, and judges that, ‘The Shellesys … when they began to use this pristine notebook as a fair-copy book, copied into it intermediate fair copies of recently drafted poems before they retranscribed press copies of them for transmittal to England.’ Harvard MS is identified as one such poem. In respect of date, Reiman states, ‘“Sonnet: To the Republic of Benevento” was written and this fair copy made between July and September 1820.’ However he also allows for a separate, distinctively psychological iteration in ‘Sonnet: Political Greatness’, though whether outside the summer of 1820 time-frame is not stated: ‘Shelley’s disappointment at the rapid extinction of this brief flickering of the republican ideal expressed itself when he internalized the message of the sonnet in a later version called “Political Greatness”’. Moreover, in describing the fair copy itself, he notes, ‘The text, written entirely in the hand of PBS, shows revisions made by him on two separate occasions, some at the time he was copying the sonnet (from a source yet to be identified) and others later, when he wrote smaller with a finer pen point.’ That the source of this intermediate fair copy may not be adds. e. 8, though of interest, is less pertinent for my purposes than Reiman’s attention to the evidence in Harvard MS of three stages of creative labour, the transcription, then the immediate, followed by the subsequent, revisions to it. This is a reminder of the sense of responsibility in respect of dating that weighs particularly heavily on editors of Shelley’s poems. His and Adamson’s comments suggest the poem resists fixity in this regard because of the multiple stages of composition and revision for which the manuscript versions provide evidence. The poem’s making thereby shows it to be, so to speak, repeatedly beyond itself, a quality that is integral to its theme.

The title of Harvard MS, ‘Sonnet To the Republic of Benevento’, has been taken to allude to a satellite of the main narrative of the Neapolitan revolution that also began in July 1820. Benevento, a town thirty miles or so north-east of Naples, was one of two Ecclesiastical States within the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies that had been ceded by Henry III to Pope Leo IX in 1053 in exchange for the Bishopric of Bamberg. Vincenzo Cuoco’s Saggio storico sulla rivoluzione di Napoli [Historical Essay on the Neapolitan Revolution] (1800), a celebrated analysis of the earlier Neapolitan revolution, which Claire Clairmont had begun to read with uncanny prescience in May 1820, notes that Benevento had asserted itself as part of the Parthenopean republic in

46 BSM VI: 26.
47 MYR V: xviii.
48 MYR V: xxxix.
49 MYR V: 193.
1799. It remained a Papal state until 1806 when Napoleon granted it to Talleyrand with the title of Prince then, in the Restoration settlement of 1815, was restored to the Papacy. As noted by Richard Keppel Craven, who witnessed events in Naples in July 1820, ‘the inhabitants of Pontecorvo and Benevento could not be debarred from all intercourse with those of the surrounding districts: and the fire which had thus been silently kindled was not likely to be extinguished by the inefficient hand of the vicar of pontifical authority.’ Soon after the events of 1–2 July at Nola, Andrea Valiante, a hero of the 1799 uprising in Benevento, returned to occupy its fortress and the Papal Delegate fled. However the constitutional government at Naples refused the requests of Benevento and Pontecorvo for annexation on strategic grounds, as Craven explained:

These two states openly threw off their allegiance to the Court of Rome, and declared their intention of abiding by the fortunes, and sharing the independence, of their neighbours; but the Vicar-General and the new Cabinet wisely disclaimed any wish to avail themselves of these friendly overtures, and even prohibited all Neapolitan subjects from taking any part in the proceedings, which might give umbrage to a power whose goodwill and friendship they were anxious to maintain.

As a result of the constitutional government’s betrayal of the aspirations of the two states, events took what the *Constitutionnel* described as ‘une tournure singulière’ [a remarkable turn]: ‘les deux états se sont constitués en gouvernements indépendants’ [the two states established themselves as independent governments]. By late August, the same source described them in language that resonates directly with the Harvard MS title as ‘complètement organisés en petites républiques’ [completely formed as small republics]. In a passage possibly based upon this last report, the *Military Register*, a liberal weekly which was to reprint Shelley’s ‘Ode to Naples’ in October 1820, remarked, ‘Their baptized bells, which they formerly believed had the power of driving away the devil, are now melted into cannon, for the purpose of keeping out the Pope.’ While such circumstantial evidence supports the editorial

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51 Richard Keppel Craven, *A Tour through the Southern Provinces of the Kingdom of Naples*. London, 1821, p. 448. There may, incidentally, be an allusion to *The Cenci* V, iv, 1–27 in Craven’s preceding sentence: ‘The persevering pertinacity so peculiar to the Romish See, and which, as a modern author observes, forms the distinctive character of a government composed of old men, has obtained the restoration of Benevento by every treaty of peace which has been signed by the Popes and Kings of Naples during the lapse of eight centuries.’


53 Craven, p. 448.

54 *Constitutionnel* (22 August 1820), p. 3.

55 *Constitutionnel* (28 August 1820), p. 3.

consensus about when the sonnet was drafted, it is worth noting that riots against the carbonarist ‘junta’ in Benevento took place in February 1821.57

The revolutionaries who took control of Benevento in July 1820, carbonari as well as veteran patriots of 1799, discovered that the historical legacy of Papal authority intimidated the moderate leadership of the constitutional government into denying their incorporation for fear of antagonizing the Holy Alliance. Thus, if Harvard MS was written, as Barker-Benfield suggests, in ‘late summer 1820’,58 it may be seen as being prepared to serve, like the ‘Ode to Naples’, an occasional function. That is, its intention was to raise amongst the British public awareness of, and support for, the cause of Valiante and his citizens in their tenuous hold upon republican autonomy. In fact it may be read as an exhortation to them to prefer their establishment of a republican identity independent of external powers of any kind to one they had sought to validate through association with a constitutional government premised on monarchy. In this way the sonnet emblemizes a problem specific to Italy confronted most overtly by Machiavelli in Il Principe. Italian republican city-states had, since the medieval period, found themselves restlessly engaged in tactical manoeuvring against one another. This was because they were the locus of conflicts between external powers: the Holy Roman Empire, then Napoleon, and most recently Austria, on the one hand, and the Papacy on the other. Addressed to a tiny and fragile symptom of this condition, Shelley’s poem represents an idealized hope for the lasting realization of what he knew might be merely a temporary manifestation of a genuine republicanism uncompromised by monarchical associations, and a political state liberated from the usual dependency consequent on factional divisions.

But the interest of Benevento for Shelley antedates its anomalous post-medieval status. Founded by the Samnites, an early form of its name, Malventum (evil wind), was changed by the Romans to Beneventum after they seized it in 275 BC.59 As has been noted,60 the grounds for the name-change were superstitious. Beneventum may be taken to mean ‘good/kind wind’ and, by extension, through the combination of bonus and eventum include the sense of ‘favourable outcome’.61 This albeit poetical etymological possibility cannot have escaped Shelley’s notice and is singularly appropriate to the poem in its Harvard MS form. During the Roman era, the city had strategic military and commercial significance and its arch of Trajan was no doubt a reason why Shelley proposed an excursion there from Naples in December 1818.62

In the first volume of his Histoire, Sismondi notes that ‘un prince lombard, presque indépendant des rois de sa nation, s'étoit établi au centre des provinces qui forment aujourd'hui le royaume de Naples, et y régnoit avec le titre de duc de Bénévent’

[a Lombard prince, virtually independent of the Kings of his people, established himself at the centre of the provinces which today form the Kingdom of Naples and reigned there as Duke of Benevento]. The sole Lombard stronghold south of Rome in the sixth century, Benevento also enjoyed independence from the Lombard realm in the north. This suggests an originally dynamic and independent strain in Benevento’s identity in contrast to its later fate, trapped and weakened by Papal rule. For Sismondi, Benevento is thus an example of the commercial and artistic energy bequeathed by the Lombards to the medieval city-states. In a manner similar to that of other early-nineteenth-century commentators who wrote about southern Italy, Sismondi sees the phenomenon in terms of southern sloth benefitting from the injection of northern vitality:

Ainsi, la conquête des Lombards fut, en quelque sort, pour l’Italie, l’époque de la renaissance des peuples. Des principautés indépendantes, des communautés, des républiques, commencèrent à se constituer de toutes parts, et un principe de vie fut rendu à cette contrée, long-temps ensevelie dans un sommeil léthargique. [Thus the conquest achieved by the Lombards was, in a way, for Italy, the period of the rebirth of its various nations. Independent principalities, communities and republics began to be established everywhere, and a fundamental condition of life was restored to this region which had for a long time been buried in a lethargic slumber].

Benevento was also a site movingly memorialized in Dante’s *Purgatorio*. There, in 1266, Manfred was killed in battle with Charles of Anjou whose army was supported by the Pope, then denied proper burial. The brutality of Charles’s troops towards the citizens of Benevento is recorded vividly by Sismondi, as it had been by Pietro Giannone in his avowedly secular *Dell’Istoria Civile Del Regno di Napoli* (1723) – for which the author was exiled and imprisoned – which Claire Clairmont began to read in October 1820. Manfred, reputedly an Epicurean, about whom Mary Shelley later began to write a tragedy, is eulogized thus as a model ruler by Giannone: ‘By his great Courage, Liberality, and Love of Justice, he kept his Dominions always in a flourishing and plentiful State.’

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66 *Purgatorio* III, 124–35.
68 Godwin told her in a letter of 15 November 1822 that ‘Manfred is a subject that nobody interests himself about’, and criticized her drafts in a letter of 27 February 1824 (Oxford, Bodleian Library [Abinger] Dep. c. 524).
IV

Clearly adopting revisions made in *Harvard MS*, the *adds. c. 5* neat copy of the sonnet is disciplined in its pointing. Dashes are omitted and the semi-colons in lines 11, 13 and 14, echoing those in lines 4 and 5, assist the poem’s argumentative transition from the many to the one. It is on the verso of a leaf of flimsy paper that was originally part of one of the home-made booklets the Shelleys customarily used when transcribing poems to be sent for publication. On the recto, in Mary’s hand, is a fair copy of lines 151–76 of ‘Ode to Naples’.

Barker-Benfield’s insight that ‘The vertical deletion-stroke in ink down the centre of the whole sonnet was added later, after the sheet had been folded and unfolded’ implies that the line was not an authorially-sanctioned cancellation. The visible folds in the leaf suggest the booklet had been enclosed in the letter to Ollier of 16 February and that this is the sonnet identified in that letter as accompanying the Ode and *Epipsychidion*. Alan Weinberg’s comment that ‘The appearance of the sonnet after the ode suggests Shelley intended the shorter poem on Naples to complement the longer one on the same subject’ is supported by the original title in *adds. c. 5*: ‘Sonnet to Naples’. The last two words are cancelled and ‘Political greatness’ is written beneath. Its non-publication in his life-time may be explained by the failure of *Ollier’s Literary Miscellany*, a magazine in which Shelley hints ode and sonnet could be placed, in a further letter of 22 February. It would seem that, at her request, *adds. c. 5* had been returned to Mary Shelley by Ollier in late 1823 since, though the pointing is different, it forms the basis of the text as first published in 1824.

In an unpublished note, the late Geoffrey Matthews gives support to Mary’s dating of the sonnet arguing it was ‘written probably immediately after finishing *Epipsychidion*’ in February 1821. Such a hypothesis contradicts the material evidence Reiman adduces in his chronological placing of *Harvard MS* but is not inconsistent with Adamson’s *terminus* for *adds. e. 8*. Matthews’s grounds, that Shelley’s letter to Claire Clairmont of 18 February ‘repeats very closely what was said in the sonnet’ sent to Ollier two days previously, are illuminatingly sensitive to the poem’s immediate political contexts. According to Matthews, Shelley’s letter of 18 February is a reply to Claire Clairmont’s to him from Florence where she had been living since October 1820. In it she must have mentioned the visit from the *improvvisatore* Tommaso Sgricci that is recorded in her journal entry for 6 February: ‘Sgricci calls. He says the Neapolitans—those few who were for the Constitution cried Viva la Costernazione [Long live Consternation] instead of Costituzione [Constitution].’ Claire’s function as mediator from Florence of news that Shelley,
based in more parochial Pisa, was anxious to hear,\textsuperscript{76} is highly significant as the opening of the following extract from his letter makes clear:

You send us news of Naples & Neapolitan affairs; we know nothing of them except what we hear from Florence. Every post may be expected to bring decisive news, for even the news that they defend themselves against so immense & well appointed a force, is decisive.—I hate the cowardly envy which prompts such base stories as Sgricci’s about the Neapolitans: a set of slaves who dare not to imitate the high example of clapping even the shadow of freedom, allude the ignorance (?) & excesses of a populace, which oppression has made savages in sentiment & understanding. That the populace of the city of Naples are brutal, who denies to be (?) they cannot improvise tragedies as Sgricci can, but is it certain that under no excitement they would be incapable of more enthusiasm for their country? Besides it is not of them we speak, but of the people of the Kingdom of Naples, the cultivators of the soil; whom a sudden & great impulse might awaken into citizens & men, as the French & Spaniards have been awakened, & may render instruments of a system of future social life before which the existing anarchies of Europe will be dissolved & absorbed.— … If the Austrians meet with any serious check—they (?) as well at once retire, for the good Spirit of the World is out against them.—If they march (?) Naples at once—let us hide our heads in sorrow, for our hopes of political good are vain.—\textsuperscript{77}

With this letter in mind, Matthews’s assessment of the sonnet’s occasion, that it was ‘evidently provoked by Sgricci and directed at non-participating Italians’, seems convincing. Read thus, it chides Florence for its unwillingness to assist in the Neapolitan cause in terms that resonate clearly with a contemporary account of Italy’s cultural heritage much admired by Shelley, Joseph Forsyth’s \textit{Remarks}:

\begin{quote}
The virtues, however, of the Florentines are all of the timid, passive, Christian kind. Though ready to relieve and to toil for a friend, they will not face danger, nor the displeasure of the great, to defend him. Their sturdiness of spirit is vanished with the republic. Prone to revolution in that lusty period of independence and hardihood, they have exchanged the more turbulent virtues for meekness, long-suffering, obedience, and every quality that can adorn a slave.\textsuperscript{78}
\end{quote}

Thus the sonnet seeks to convince a coward or a chauvinist or a sceptic that the inhabitants of the Kingdom of Naples and the Two Sicilies generally (rather than

\textsuperscript{76} Mary Shelley notes: ‘in 1821, Shelley, as well as every other lover of liberty, looked upon the struggles in Spain and Italy as decisive of the destinies of the world, probably for centuries to come. The interest he took in the progress of affairs was intense’ (\textit{PW} II: 344–5).

\textsuperscript{77} Shelley to Claire Clairmont, 18 February 1821, MA 406 fol. 2r–3r, Morgan Library and Museum. My transcription differs in some respects from \textit{Letters} II: 266–7. A question-mark within space in square brackets indicates the presence of illegible words, space enclosed within curly brackets a hole created in the MS by a burn, a question-mark before words within curly brackets a conjectural reading.

the *Lazzaroni*, the name given by the Spanish to the poor of the city of Naples), hitherto viewed as beyond redemption by Tuscan liberals such as Sgricci, have the potential to redeem themselves and to achieve what the last sentence of Shelley’s letter, in an echo of ‘Political Greatness’, identifies as ‘political good’. Moreover, the letter argues, such a possibility has precedents in both the recent French and Spanish Revolutions. Its admonition against the enslaved mentality exemplified by Sgricci may be found in what Shelley described as ‘the most perfect and beautiful piece of writing of modern times’,79 Henrietta’s plea with the misanthropic protagonist of Godwin’s *Mandeville* (1817) for ‘virtue and benevolent energy’:

I will tell you what a slave is, and what is a freeman. A slave is he who watches with abject spirit the eye of another: he waits timidly, till another man shall have told him, whether he is to be happy or miserable to-day: his comforts and his peace depend on the breath of another’s mouth. No man can be this slave unless he pleases. If by the caprice of fortune he has fallen as to externals into another’s power, still there is a point that at his own will he can reserve. He may refuse to crouch; he may walk fearless and erect; the words that he utters may be supplied by that reason, to which the high and the low, the rich and the poor, have equally access. And, if he that the misjudging world calls a slave, may retain all that is most substantial in independence, is it possible, that he whom circumstances have made free, should voluntarily put the fetters on his own feet, the manacles on his own hands, and drink the bitter draught of subjection and passive obedience?

Shelley’s denomination of the likes of Sgricci as ‘slaves’ in contrast to the potential ‘citizens and men’ of Naples corresponds to Henrietta’s refusal to discriminate between slaves and freemen according to the ‘misjudging world’. Set during the conflict between royalists and commonwealthmen in the English Civil War, Godwin’s novel offers an historical precedent for struggle against monarchy readily available to the intended English audience, in addition to the recent continental examples of France, Spain and Naples. But the letter also helps to focus attention on the enlightenment of art. The question posed in the sonnet, ‘What are numbers, knit / By force or custom?’ (ll. 9–10) is given added weight if ‘numbers’ is understood in the sense of ‘metrical periods or feet; lines, verses’ (*OED* 17a) of the kind that Sgricci spoke in his *accademie* performances as well as the more obvious sense, in the context of ‘blind millions’ (l. 7), of ‘the multitude’ (*OED* 8d). The two senses are conjoined in the question posed in Shelley’s letter, ‘they cannot improvise tragedies as Sgricci can, but is it certain that under no excitement they would be incapable of more enthusiasm for their country?’ While the fourth line of the sonnet, ‘Verse echoes not one beating of their hearts’, implies that under the dominion of liberty as opposed to tyranny, the rhythms of poetry will correspond to those of a living body, the sonnet’s question may be interpreted as a reminder to artists such as Sgricci of their responsibilities. ‘Numbers’ deployed properly by artists like Sgricci have the power to be a means of political inspiration, as Shelley noted in the draft of an unpublished review of Sgricci’s performance of *La Morte d’Ettore* written, as

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80 *Collected Novels and Memoirs* VI: 155.
Nora Crook notes, ‘shortly after … 22 January 1821’.\(^{81}\) In language that echoes the attention to oratorically-inspired ‘excitement’ in Plato’s *Ion* which he had probably begun to translate at the end of 1819,\(^{82}\) Shelley writes thus of Sgricci’s art, albeit in faulty Italian:

> In questo talento, e tutto d’Italia—l’imagination fa, fra di noi in un momento l’opra che l’intelletto consomma fra gli altri in lungo tempo, o dopo molte tentative. E questo dono e il pegio del nostro presente destino, ed il pegno del futuro. [In this ability, is the most distinctive characteristic of Italy—among us the imagination performs in an instant the work which reason accomplishes among others in a long period of time, or after many attempts, and this gift is the glory of our present destiny, and the pledge of our future.]

In respect of its date of composition, it is possible to argue not just that the poem was written between July 1820 and February 1821 but that it may have a doubled conception. The rough draft and intermediate fair copy were very possibly done in the summer of 1820, but that the final version was written immediately before 16 February 1821 is almost certain. Thus while *adds. e. 8*, Harvard MS and *adds. c. 5* are recognizable as in some respects the same creative entity, the trajectory of the separate instances of the poem’s evolution suggest an affirmation of the future-oriented poetic theory so forcefully articulated in February–March 1821 in ‘A Defence of Poetry’. The poem takes on new meanings in new contexts (and will continue to do so). Against the view that events in Benevento the previous summer were an exclusive context of the poem, his letter to Peacock, written a few days before the above letter to Claire, is a further reflection on its genesis. For the poem’s argument could now be applied to the acute phase of the current crisis in which Shelley anticipated that the Ecclesiastical States would be the locus of a battle between the troops of Austria and Naples of the proportions of 1266.\(^{84}\)

We are now in the crisis and point of expectation in Italy. The Neapolitan and Austrian armies are rapidly approaching each other, and every day the news of a battle may be expected. The former have advanced into the Ecclesiastical States, and taken hostages from Rome, to assure themselves of the neutrality of that power, and appear determined to try their strength in open battle. I need not tell you how little chance there is that the new

\(^{81}\) *BSM* XII: xlii.  
\(^{82}\) Fraistat, *BSM* IX: xlv.  
\(^{83}\) Bod. MS Shelley adds. e. 17, p. 19. There is a facsimile of the review and a diplomatic transcription with commentary by Nora Crook in *BSM* XII: 28–49. My transcription omits cancellations and differs from Crook’s only in that I read a comma after ‘talento’. Crook’s notes (*BSM* XII: 45) record Shelley’s mistakes in the passage (for example, ‘il pegio’ instead of ‘il pregio’) but of the draft as a whole she says, ‘Some “solecisms” might be justified in terms of an archaic, poetic, or regional form’ (*BSM* XII: xlii). From his extensive reading of Italian authors, Shelley would have known that, when used to mean ‘is’ ‘è’ is accented (è). Some of this passage’s linguistic faults may thus result from a carelessness with pointing characteristic of many of his drafts. The translation is P.M.S. Dawson’s in ‘Shelley and the Improvisatore Sgricci: An Unpublished Review’, *Keats-Shelley Memorial Bulletin* 32 (1981), pp. 19–29 (pp. 28–9).  
\(^{84}\) *Letters* II: 263.
and undisciplined levies of Naples should stand against a superior force of veteran troops.

But the birth of liberty in nations abounds in examples of a reversal of the ordinary laws of calculation: the defeat of the Austrians would be the signal of insurrection throughout all Italy.\(^85\)

The final sentence resonates with the renewed significance of the challenge to assert independence in Shelley’s sonnet. However it needs to be noted that distinct kinds of political independence corresponding to different phases of the Neapolitan revolution are captured in its intermediate and neat copy versions. The *Harvard MS* title, ‘Sonnet to the Republic of Benevento’, reflects Shelley’s defence of the right of Benevento in the summer of 1820 to be a republic independent of the constitutionalist government of Naples. But the first title of the *adds. c. 5* version, ‘Sonnet to Naples’, asserts the need for that constitutionalist government to be preserved against the depredations of the Austrian army in February 1821. In its 1820 incarnation Shelley’s poem is a defence of a republican polity untainted by monarchical values. But by 1821, its title suggests that ‘greatness’ is now tantamount to expediency. The urgent need to support the constitutional monarchy is the only alternative to ‘anarchy’ (used in the plural in the letter to Claire, cited above, to refer to the Restoration regimes). A true republic is thus deferred but its future realization not entirely obscured.

Stuart Woolf comments that under Metternich’s system, ratified at the Congress of Vienna, ‘monarchy was the only sure foundation of order, and although the prince could no longer claim divine approbation … his authority remained absolute … Constitutional monarchy was thus inadmissible in principle’.\(^86\) Metternich’s ‘system’ may be juxtaposed with Shelley’s transcription in *adds. e. 8*, p. 1 of Hippolytus’s speech to Theseus after he has been accused of incest with Phaedra in Euripides’s *Hippolytus*: ‘But will you say that to be king is a tempting pleasure even to the virtuous? Not at all, since kingly power has corrupted the minds of all those who love it.’\(^87\) But the basis of the sonnet’s idiom, in which the needs of the polis may be understood by reference to self-mastery, is articulated by Socrates in Plato’s *Republic*:

‘[…] in the soul of a single person there is a better part and a worse part. When the naturally better part is in control of the worse, this is what is meant by “master of himself.” It is a term of approval. But when as a result of bad upbringing or bad company the better element, which is smaller, is overwhelmed by the mass of the worse element, this is a matter for reproach. They call a person in this condition a slave to himself, undisciplined.’ … ‘Now, if you take a look at this new city of ours, … You will admit that it can quite legitimately be called master of itself, if something in which the better rules the worse can be called self-disciplined and master of itself.’\(^88\)

\(^{85}\) *Letters* II: 261–2.  
\(^{86}\) Woolf, *History of Italy*, p. 232.  
A passage on the origins of inequality in his draft essay ‘On Christianity’ (1817) is informed by the views of Plato and Diogenes on genuine majesty: ‘Too mean spirited and too feeble in resolve to attempt the conquest of their own evil passions, and of the difficulties of the material world, men sought dominion over their fellow men as an easy method to gain that apparent majesty and power which the instinct of their nature requires.’ The successive titles of the sonnet in *adds. e. 8*, ‘The Republican’, ‘The true Republican’ and ‘Rex sui’, refer to the foundations on which virtue in the polity must be laid according to *Republic*, the last deriving from the remark that ‘“The best and most just character is the happiest. This is the one who is the most kingly, the one who is king over himself.”’ The language of sovereignty is legitimate only when there is no-one to regulate but oneself. Or, put another way, the sonnet argues that the only context in which kingship is necessary is self-rule. It seems possible, especially in light of the first of the titles in *adds. c. 5*, ‘Sonnet to Naples’, that Shelley was aware of a variation on this insight in Cuoco’s *Saggio Storico*. In her journal entry for 29 June, two days before the insurrection at Nola, Claire Clairmont noted in relation to her reading of Cuoco: ‘one thing for the people to remember—that they can do very well without a king but there was never heard of a king without a people.’ The previous day’s entry includes the following free translation from *Saggio*: ‘The author affirms that all the people of the middling class & all the nobles were republicans and that so far from the revolution failing from a want of patriotic feeling it fell as it were through the overpowering virtue of the republicans.’ This sense of the nobility of some of the impulses which require containment is present in the sonnet’s reference to ‘quelling the anarchy / Of hopes and fears’ (ll. 13–14). In this way, the sonnet leaves the reader with a paradox: the peace of Tuscany, which had the most enlightened of all governments in the Italian states under the Restoration, exemplifies a too facile self-possession that is singularly inferior to the energy exemplified by the revolutionary struggle of the *carbonari* in Benevento – a struggle which Shelley acknowledges may issue, as had that of the Neapolitan revolution of 1799, in failure. The injunction to ‘rule the empire of himself’ follows Plato in acknowledging that conflict with ‘anarchy’ necessarily pertains in a republican polity as it does in man’s (or woman’s) being.

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89 *Prose* I: 263.