

### *Laon and Cythna and The Revolt of Islam: Revisions as Transition*

In March 1817, the Court of Chancery denied Percy Bysshe Shelley the custody of his children by his first wife Harriet Westbrook. To disparage Shelley's suitability as a father, a bill had been filed in January by the Westbrooks' lawyers that cited the malign influence of the 'Atheist' Shelley's *Queen Mab* (1813), a poem that 'blasphemously derided the truth of the Christian Revelation and denied the existence of God as the Creator of the Universe.'<sup>1</sup> While the decision in *Shelley v. Westbrook* [sic], as the case came to be known, opened up the possibility of subsequent criminal prosecution for *Queen Mab*, Shelley did not shy away from writing and publishing a poem addressing similar ideas. This poem, *Laon and Cythna*, was, according to both Mary Shelley's journal and Percy Shelley's correspondence, completed on either 22 or 23 September of that year.<sup>2</sup> In a letter to Lord Byron, Shelley reflected on his new poem and its likely reception:

I have been engaged this summer, heart and soul, in one pursuit. I have completed a poem which, when it is finished, though I do not tax your patience to read it, I will send you. It is in the style and for the same object as 'Queen Mab', but more interwoven with a story of human passion, and composed with more attention to the refinement and accuracy of language, and the connexion of its parts. Some friends speak favourably of it, and particularly Hunt, whose opinion is very flattering. It *is* to be *published*- for I am not of your opinion as to religion &c., and for this simple reason, that I am careless of the consequences as they regard myself. I only feel persecution bitterly, because I bitterly lament the depravity and mistake of those who persecute. As to me, I can but die; I can but be torn to pieces, or be devoted to infamy most undeserved; and whether this is inflicted by the necessity of nature, and circumstances, or through a principle, pregnant, as I believe, with important benefit to mankind, is an alternative to which I cannot be indifferent (i. 557).

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<sup>1</sup> As cited in Thomas Medwin and H.B. Forman, eds., *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (London: Oxford University Press, 1913), 464.

<sup>2</sup> Frederick L. Jones, ed., *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963–1964) i. 556 (further references to this edition); Paula R. Feldman and Diana Scott-Kilvert, eds., *The Journals of Mary Shelley* (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 187.

Anticipating controversy, Shelley nevertheless appears stoical in the face of the likely personal repercussions of publication, even if such bravery is read as a performance for Byron's benefit. Describing *Laon and Cythna* as a poem 'in the style and for the same object' as *Queen Mab* not only signals Shelley's awareness of the potential adverse reaction he would face but also how we can see the poem as an important one in the development of Shelley's poetic career. It serves as a continuation from earlier poems such as *Queen Mab* and as a transitional or pivotal poem in light of his later works.

Anahid Nersessian's recent claim that *Laon and Cythna* is 'one of the three great epic poems of the Romantic period' alongside *Don Juan* and *The Prelude* illustrates the welcome direction of the poem's scholarly re-evaluation.<sup>3</sup> Recent papers have read *Laon and Cythna* in the light of Shelley's oeuvre more broadly, noting, for instance, its anticipation of 'Ode to the West Wind' (1820) or the echoes of contemporaneous poems such as 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty' (1817).<sup>4</sup> Also, the characters of Laon and Cythna are often read as models for Prometheus and Asia in the later *Prometheus Unbound* (1820). While continuing to recognise the poem *itself* as an evaluative or a transitional one then, this article considers the enforced revisions Shelley made to the poem at the end of 1817 in the same light. Too often encountered only as editorial footnotes, as the poem 'transitioned' into *The Revolt of Islam* these revisions can be read – analogously at the very least – in terms of Shelley's wider political and philosophical development.

After a number of copies were published in December 1817 under the title *Laon and Cythna; Or, The Revolution of The Golden City: A Vision of the Nineteenth Century*, Shelley's

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<sup>3</sup> Anahid Nersessian, 'Introduction,' in Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Laon and Cythna*, ed. Anahid Nersessian, (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview, 2016), 9.

<sup>4</sup> Particularly ll.3649-3693 and 'The Dedication' (ll. 28-42) respectively. See Kelvin Everest, Geoffrey Matthews, Jack Donovan, Ralph Pite and Michael Rossington, eds., *The Poems of Shelley: Volume Two, 1817-1819* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014) (further references to this edition).

publisher Charles Ollier, alerted by his printer Buchanan McMillan, soon decided against further publication and it was quickly suppressed. Shelley reacted angrily to Ollier's decision and in a letter dated 11 December 1817 argues his reversal would make alternative publication difficult (i. 579). The poem had already been rejected by at least three other publishers; one of them, Robert Triphook, even detailed his refusal in a handwritten addition to a manuscript now held by the Bodleian.<sup>5</sup> Shelley's anger at Ollier's change of heart prompts him in the same letter to persuade Ollier that his retraction is a sign of weakness, that serves to draw further attention to the poem's nature. He notes, for instance, how *Laon and Cythna* is in fact 'so refined and so remote from the conceptions of the vulgar' that it would have likely resisted criminal charges on its own terms (i. 579).

While Shelley remained confident that his poem would not be subject to criminal proceedings, Ollier and McMillan, as the disseminators of the work, had every reason to be fearful. 1817 began with the passing of repressive legislation; *Habeas Corpus* was suspended in February, and March saw the passing of the so-called 'Gagging Acts', known individually as the 'Treason Act' and the 'Seditious Meetings Act'.<sup>6</sup> Even more recently, a bookseller of Portsea named J. Williams had been convicted, heavily fined and imprisoned on 25 November for blasphemy.<sup>7</sup> Most famously – and, indeed, contemporaneously – was the case of the radical bookseller, writer and editor of *The Reformer's Register* William Hone. Hone had produced three 'Liturgical Parodies' in February and March 1817 – the *Late John Wilkes Catechism of a Ministerial Member*, the *Political Litany* and the *Sinecurist's Creed* – and was facing three trials for blasphemous libel between 18 and 20 December. At the time of *Laon*

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<sup>5</sup> Donald Reiman, ed., *Volume 13 of The Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts: A Facsimile Edition, with Full Transcriptions and Scholarly Apparatus* (London and New York: Garland, 1986), 252-3.

<sup>6</sup> 57 Geo. 3 c. 6 and 7.

<sup>7</sup> Reported in 'Court of King's Bench', *The Examiner*, 518 (30 November 1817), 764-8.

and *Cythna's* withdrawal, barely over a week before, it was not certain that Hone would be found not guilty. The socio-political climate of 1817, and November and December most particularly, was therefore not favourable to writers and publishers of potentially blasphemous or seditious material.<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless, Ollier was willing to proceed with publication of the poem subject to revisions. Ollier successfully convinced Shelley that the changes to the text were minimal and Shelley ultimately accepted them. However, Thomas Love Peacock claimed that Shelley 'contested the alterations step by step' and insisted that 'his poem was spoiled' by the revisions.<sup>9</sup> Such resistance is not discernible in a letter Shelley wrote to Thomas Moore, dated 16 December, concerning the planned changes:

The present edition of 'Laon and Cythna' is to be suppressed, & it will be republished in about a fortnight under the title of 'The Revolt of Islam', which consist in little than the substitution of the words *friend* or *lover* for that of *brother & sister*. The truth is, that the seclusion of my habits has confined me so much within the circle of my own thoughts, that I have formed to myself a very different measure of approbation or disapprobation for actions than that which is in use among mankind; and the result of that peculiarity, contrary to my intention, revolts & shocks many who might be inclined to sympathise with me in my general views. –

As soon as I discovered that this effect was produced by the circumstance alluded to, I hastened to cancel it – not from any personal feeling of terror, or repentance, but from the sincere desire of doing all the good & conferring all the pleasure which might flow from so obscure a person as myself (i. 582).

This letter is enlightening for several reasons. Firstly, it does not indicate Shelley as strongly resisting the revisions suggested to *Laon and Cythna*, seemingly contrary to what Peacock

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<sup>8</sup> Shelley had a passing connection to Hone. A 'P.B. Shelley [of] Marlow' had contributed five pounds towards a subscription fund for the support of Hone's family and legal expenses. See Joss Marsh, *Word Crimes: Blasphemy, Culture, and Literature in Nineteenth Century England* (Chicago, IL.: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 24. Shelley had also considered Hone to be an appropriate publisher for his pamphlet *A Proposal for Putting Reform to the Vote* (1817), writing to him on the matter in March of the same year, see *Letters*, i. 392.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Love Peacock, *Memoirs of Shelley*, ed. Humbert Wolfe, 2 vols (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1933), ii. 365.

claims. Secondly, the letter suggests Shelley felt that these revisions were relatively minor, giving the impression that they focused largely on removing any hint of an incestuous relationship between the eponymous characters. Thirdly, Shelley implies that the changes did not impact on the overall 'message' of the poem, and that they simply prevented readers from becoming alienated or shocked when they would otherwise find much in it to praise.

The revisions from *Laon and Cythna* to the revised *The Revolt of Islam* were indeed minimal for a poem of nearly 5,000 lines, with fewer than fifty lines subject to modification. The fact that Shelley was allegedly able to complete these revisions in a single day, on 15 December, with the revised poem appearing 12 January 1818, supports this.<sup>10</sup> The similarity between the two poems was in fact noted in 1819 in a combative *Quarterly Review* article by Coleridge's nephew, John Taylor Coleridge, who argued there were 'few slight alterations' made to the original and went so far as to claim 'Laon and Cythna is the same poem with The Revolt of Islam [*sic*]'.<sup>11</sup> However, Shelley's claim that the amendments were mainly focused on removing incestuous passages is disingenuous. In fact, only seven passages were altered in this way, with the vast majority of revisions being made to passages concerning God and religion. Incest was not as taboo or offensive in the period as is often thought; in the theatre for instance there were at least sixteen new plays performed between 1750 and 1834 containing incest plots.<sup>12</sup> Shelley's performative letter to Moore then simultaneously both

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<sup>10</sup> Shelley likely collaborated on these revisions. Present at Marlow that day were Shelley, Ollier, Peacock, Mary Shelley and Claire Clairmont. Nora Crook and Stephen Allen attest to the centrality of Peacock's role in authoring – or at least initially authoring – some of the revised passages. See 'The Marlow Expurgation', *The Times Literary Supplement* 5734 (2013), 14.

<sup>11</sup> John Taylor Coleridge, 'Art. VII. 1. — *Laon and Cythna, or the Revolution of the Golden City. A vision of the Nineteenth Century in the Stanza of Spenser*. By Percy B. Shelley. London. 1818. 2. *The Revolt of Islam. A Poem, in Twelve Cantos*. By Percy Bysshe Shelley. London. 1818', *The Quarterly Review*, 21.42 (April, 1819), 460-471 (461).

<sup>12</sup> See Frederick Burwick, 'Romantic Incest Plots: Baillie, Byron, and the Shelleys,' in *Decadent Romanticism*, eds. Mark Sandy and Kostas Boyiopoulos (Oxford: Routledge, 2016), 27-42.

plays down the controversial nature of his original poem and portrays his revisions as mere tweaks should he be accused of acquiescence to authority.

Most of the differences between *Laon and Cythna* and *The Revolt of Islam* are to be found in Cantos VIII and X, cantos that most explicitly address matters of religion. Canto VIII for instance includes Cythna's damning assault against superstition and organised religion while Canto X attacks the counter-revolutionary religious authorities as murderous, offering an ironic inversion of the *Genesis* creation story:

[...] Five days they slew  
Among the wasted fields; the sixth saw gore  
Stream through the city; on the seventh, the dew  
Of slaughter became stiff, and there was peace anew (ll. 3888–91).

Although this passage is not one of the altered passages, it is nevertheless illustrative of much of the general tone of Canto X. Twenty-three of the poem's revised lines occur in these two Cantos; eleven in Canto VIII and twelve in Canto X. The fact that these two cantos were subject to almost half of all the revisions made to the text therefore supports the now common consensus that the changes between the two versions concern themselves largely with matters of religion.

Although Frederick L. Jones, the editor of Shelley's letters, is keen to paint Shelley as willingly submitting to the changes suggested to him by Ollier, the critical consensus is against him. Jack Donovan, for instance, is more sceptical and claims that Shelley 'only consented to those changes against his will and as a last resort' to ensure publication (*Poems*, ii. 19). Donovan argues that this is 'borne out by the character of the alterations themselves. On examination, they appear [...] no more than functional expedients produced for the occasion and without either intellectual integrity or artistic merit' (19). His position is essentially that *The Revolt of Islam* is an inferior poem to *Laon and Cythna*. Nersessian, on the other hand,

takes the opposite view, arguing that ‘some of the rewritten passages in *The Revolt* [...] are simply better as poetry than their counterparts in *Laon and Cythna*’ (37). Regardless of whether the revisions can subjectively be seen to have aesthetic or intellectual merit, they are nevertheless worth considering thematically, on their own terms, as well as in their relationship to Shelley’s broader poetics.

Shelley’s revisions tend to fall into a couple of categories. When Shelley refers to ‘God’ in *Laon and Cythna*, with an upper-case ‘g’ indicating the ‘One God’ of Christian conception, this is changed to the less specific ‘Power’, still with an upper-case ‘p’, in *The Revolt of Islam*. This necessitates an alteration in the third-person pronoun and the possessive where required, from ‘him’ or ‘his’ in relation to ‘God’ in *Laon and Cythna*, to ‘it’ or ‘its’ in relation to ‘Power’ in *The Revolt of Islam*. The following stanza, given in both the *Laon and Cythna* and *The Revolt of Islam* versions, serves as an illustration:

“What then is God? Some moon-struck sophist stood  
Watching the shade from his own soul upthrown  
Fill Heaven and darken Earth, and in such mood  
The Form he saw and worshipped was his own,  
His likeness in the world’s vast mirror shown;  
And ‘twere an innocent dream, but that a faith  
Nursed by fear’s dew of poison, grows thereon,  
And that men say, God has appointed Death  
On all who scorn his will, to wreak immortal wrath (*Laon and Cythna*, ll. 3244 -52).

The revisions in *The Revolt of Islam* are emphasised:

“What *is that Power*? Some moon-struck sophist stood  
Watching the shade from his own soul upthrown  
Fill Heaven and darken Earth, and in such mood  
The Form he saw and worshipped was his own,  
His likeness in the world’s vast mirror shown;  
And ‘twere an innocent dream, but that a faith  
Nursed by fear’s dew of poison, grows thereon,  
And that men say, *that Power* has *chosen* Death  
On all who scorn *its* will, to wreak immortal wrath (*The Revolt of Islam*, ll. 3244 -52).

In this example, 'God' has been exchanged for 'Power', or 'that Power', and third-person pronouns have been replaced accordingly; in this stanza it is established that this 'Power' is an 'it'. In addition, the use of 'that Power' necessitates the replacement of 'appointed' with 'chosen' in the penultimate line to maintain the metre. Other alterations of 'God' to 'Power' in the poem are a straight swap without alteration to the surrounding text. Although in modern English 'Power' has two syllables which would therefore disrupt the metre, in the early nineteenth century it was regarded, particularly in poetry, as a mono-syllabic diphthong like 'hour'.<sup>13</sup> Keats's contemporaneous poem 'When I have fears that I may cease to be' (1818) for instance, rhymes 'Power' with 'hour'. The purpose in emphasising this is to illustrate that such changes were not metrically poor ones in themselves.

Shelley's use of the word 'Power' as a less controversial replacement for 'God' is a significant one for several reasons. Firstly, its very generality, as opposed to the specific 'God' with an upper case 'g', helps to blunt its potential perceived blasphemy. Secondly, 'Power' is increasingly a thematic preoccupation for Shelley as his career develops. Two poems first published the same year as *Laon and Cythna* but written in 1816, that is, 'Mont Blanc' and 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty', are concerned with 'Power', but this is primarily because it turns out to be an appropriate and crucially indefinable abstract term for generally positive sublime experience that avoids slipping into the discourse of religion and faith. The 'Power' of *Laon and Cythna* and *The Revolt of Islam* however is far less positive and more akin to the abstracted political 'power' of the end of the later *Prometheus Unbound*, the 'Power' that Prometheus has served as an exemplar of defiance against:

To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite;  
To forgive wrongs darker than Death or Night;  
To defy Power, which seems omnipotent;

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<sup>13</sup> See John Walker, *A Critical Pronouncing Dictionary* (London: J. Richardson & Co, 1822), 30.

To love, and bear; to hope, till Hope creates  
From its own wreck the thing it contemplates;  
Neither to change, nor falter nor repent:  
This, like thy glory, Titan! is to be  
Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free;  
This is alone Life, Joy, Empire, and Victory (IV. ll. 570-8).

The 'blunting' of the poem's blasphemy through generalisation is a tactic Shelley uses throughout his revisions to the poem. Passages that refer to religion overtly are revised so that they speak of religion more broadly rather than Christianity specifically. In other cases, Shelley simply removes his explicit criticisms of Christianity. In Canto X, the ruling 'Princes' and 'Priests' of the reactionary forces, who have ruthlessly put down the rebels, call on various names for God(s) and prophets to spare them from the plague and famine that now stalks the land. They call on the names of 'Oromaze, and Christ, and Mahomet, / Moses, and Buddh, Zerdusht, and Brahm, and Foh' (*Laon and Cythna*, ll. 4063-64). This same passage in *The Revolt of Islam* is revised to remove the reference to Christ entirely: 'Oromaze, Joshua, and Mahomet, / Moses, and Buddh, Zerdusht, and Brahm, and Foh' (ll. 4063-64, my emphasis). Similar is seen in the stanza that directly follows this, that introduces a particularly zealous senior Priest who later calls for the death of Laon and Cythna:

He was a Christian Priest from whom it came,  
A zealous man, who led the legioned west  
With words which faith and pride had steeped in flame,  
To quell the rebel Atheists; a dire guest  
Even to his friends was he, for in his breast  
Did hate and guile lie watchful, intertwined,  
Twin serpents in one deep and winding nest;  
He loathed all faith beside his own, and pined  
To wreak his fear of God in vengeance on mankind (*Laon and Cythna*, ll. 4072-80).

The revisions in *The Revolt of Islam* are emphasised:

'T was an Iberian Priest from whom it came,  
A zealous man, who led the legioned West,  
With words which faith and pride had steeped in flame,

To quell *the unbelievers*; a dire guest  
Even to his friends was he, for in his breast  
Did hate and guile lie watchful, intertwined,  
Twin serpents in one deep and winding nest;  
He loathed all faith beside his own, and pined  
To wreak his fear of *Heaven* in vengeance on mankind (*The Revolt of Islam*, ll.  
4072 –80).

This stanza is altered to again remove the overt reference to Christianity, meaning the priest is no longer explicitly Christian. ‘God’ too is revised to the less specific ‘Heaven’, and the rebel supporters of Laon and Cythna are no longer described as atheists. Not only is Shelley’s alteration of ‘Christian Priest’ to ‘Iberian Priest’ a less *explicit* reference to Christianity, it also simultaneously implies that this figure is a Catholic, hailing as he does from the Iberian Peninsula. Nigel Leask suggests that Shelley’s priest in fact bears resemblance to the Spanish Jesuit in the third volume of Sydney Owenson’s *The Missionary* (1811).<sup>14</sup> In this sense, criticism is levelled at Catholicism more specifically than Christianity more broadly. Such a reading is supported by the other alterations made in this stanza. This Iberian Priest ‘loathe[s] all faith beside his own’ in both the original and revised versions. Because of this, the changing of ‘rebel Atheists’ to ‘unbelievers’ in the fourth line implies Laon, Cythna and their supporters to be simple ‘unbelievers’ in the *Priest’s* faith – Catholicism – rather than establishing them as outright atheists. Readers of *The Revolt of Islam* are therefore ‘spared’ from admiring atheistic heroes. Crucially, the fact that Shelley’s Catholic priest is specifically Iberian rather than, say, Italian, which would have fitted the metre equally well, recalls that notorious branch of Catholic tyranny the Spanish Inquisition.<sup>15</sup> This is a topic Shelley returns to, if a little tongue in cheek, in his ‘A Letter to Maria Gisborne’ (1820):

[...] that man of God, St. Dominic,

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<sup>14</sup> Nigel Leask, *British Romantic Writers and the East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 115-118.

<sup>15</sup> For further discussion of the significance of Spain and the Iberian Peninsula in British Romantic writing see Diego Saglia, *Poetic Castles in Spain: British Romanticism and Figurations of Iberia* (Amsterdam & Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 2000), 60.

To convince Atheist, Turk, or Heretic;  
Or those in philanthropic council met,  
Who thought to pay some interest for the debt  
They owed to Jesus Christ for their salvation,  
By giving a faint foretaste of damnation  
To Shakespeare, Sidney, Spenser and the rest  
Who made our land an island of the blest,  
[...]  
With thumbscrews, wheels, with tooth and spike and jag (ll. 25-32, 35).<sup>16</sup>

Shelley notes the potential atrocities that would have been committed by the Inquisition in converting English protestants had the Spanish Armada of 1588 succeeded. We can start to see then, even if a little tenuously, how the *Laon and Cythna/Revolt of Islam* revisions pre-empt images and themes that return in later works.

Returning to Donovan's belief that *The Revolt of Islam* is an inferior poem to *Laon and Cythna*, there is evidence that some of the revisions were hasty and thus careless. A key example is in the following stanza from Canto VIII:

Men say they have seen God, and heard from God,  
Or known from others who have known such things,  
And that his will is all our law, a rod  
To scourge us into slaves – that Priests and Kings,  
Custom, domestic sway, ay, all that brings  
Man's free-born soul beneath the oppressor's heel,  
Are his strong ministers, and that the stings  
Of death will make the wise his vengeance feel,  
Though truth and virtue arm their hearts with tenfold steel (*Laon and Cythna*,  
ll. 3253-61).

In *The Revolt of Islam*, the above stanza is altered to the following (changes *emphasised*):

Men say *that they themselves have heard and seen*,  
Or known from others who have known such things,  
*A Shade, a Form, which Earth and Heaven between*  
*Wields an invisible rod* – that Priests and Kings,  
Custom, domestic sway, ay, all that brings  
Man's *freeborn* soul beneath the oppressor's heel,

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<sup>16</sup> Jack Donovan, Cian Duffy, Kelvin Everest and Michael Rossington, eds., *The Poems of Shelley: Volume Three, 1819-1820* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014).

Are his strong ministers, and that the stings  
Of death will make the wise his vengeance feel,  
Though truth and virtue arm their hearts with tenfold steel (*The Revolt of Islam*, ll. 3253-61).

In common with Shelley's other revisions the reference to God specifically is removed. Instead, the reference to a divine power is made more general and abstract. It becomes a 'Shade' or a 'Form' rather than an anthropomorphic kingly figure. In addition, the reference to God as a lawmaker and lawgiver is removed – although there remains reference to an 'invisible rod' of inferred kingly power – with simply the abstract power acting as a force between earth and heaven.

In this stanza, however, there are no revisions to the third-person pronouns and possessives in the last three lines. As established above, when 'God' is revised to 'Power', 'his' becomes 'its'. This is not the case here. The original stanza, particularly in the context of the wider poem, argues that the Christian conception of God, an authoritarian, patriarchal and infallible figure, gives false legitimacy to power or tyranny of a more terrestrial nature. Monarchical or political tyranny, priest-craft, cultural hegemony – or 'Custom' – and patriarchy on a more domestic scale all turn to the power enshrined in the God of Christian conception to justify their own status. At the same time, 'Kings' and 'Priests' are '[God's] strong ministers', who work to prop up faith in this very same God whose existence and infallibility is crucial to maintaining their own power. Fears of death and of God's vengeance are used to maintain order. Essentially, they are falsely creating or at least maintaining the very thing that justifies their own position.

In the revised stanza, however, this message is confused. The third-person possessive – 'his' – is retained despite the explicit reference to God being removed. In the revised version 'his' does not correspond to anything, unless we are to assume the 'Shade' or 'Form' on the

third line is gendered which is inconsistent with Shelley's treatment of 'Power' elsewhere in the poem. Furthermore, the nouns 'ministers' and 'vengeance' referred to in the third to last and second to last lines respectively, can be read as corresponding to 'Man' on the previous line. This reading does not seem to follow Shelley's intentions elsewhere. Although one could argue that Shelley's revisions imply that mankind is its own oppressor, which would still be a deviation from the message in *Laon and Cythna* even if it is not such an uncommon idea in Shelley's poetry, it does not make sense that man is then to be held responsible for 'the stings of death' or divine 'vengeance'.

While the revised *The Revolt of Islam* stanza may appear to detract from the overall 'message' of the poem in this instance, Nersessian in fact highlights the first four lines as an example of *The Revolt of Islam's* better poetry; this is despite their incongruity amidst the surrounding stanza (37). Even aside from such nuanced, if subjective, approaches to the aesthetics of Shelley's form, the revisions do not deviate too much from Shelley's direction in the poem. Indeed, particularly in the context of Shelley's other poetry, they could even be seen to enhance it. Much of Shelley's poem highlights the perceived collusion of religious with political tyranny. By changing 'God' to 'Power', Shelley makes this connection explicit. The following example is also taken from Canto VIII, when Cythna relates her speech to the mariners approaching the Golden City. She decries the Christian conception of God as a vengeful and unjust being:

"And it is said, that God will punish wrong;  
Yes, add despair to crime, and pain to pain!  
And his red hell's undying snakes among,  
Will bind the wretch on whom he fixed a stain,  
Which, like a plague, a burden, and a bane,  
Clung to him while he lived; - for love and hate,  
Virtue and vice, they say are difference vain--  
The will of strength is right -This human state

Tyrants, that they may rule, with lies thus desolate (*Laon and Cythna*, ll.  
3262- 70)

In *The Revolt of Islam*, the above stanza is altered as following. The changes are largely typical of Shelley's general alterations as discussed (changes *emphasised*):

"And it is said *this Power* will punish wrong;  
Yes, add despair to crime, and pain to pain!  
And *deepest hell, and deathless snakes among*,  
Will bind the wretch on whom *is* fixed a stain,  
Which, like a plague, a burden, and a bane,  
Clung to him while he lived; - for love and hate,  
Virtue and vice, they say, are difference vain--  
The will of strength is right. This human state  
Tyrants, that they may rule, with lies thus desolate (*The Revolt of Islam*, ll.  
3262-70)

Cythna challenges the conception of God as a moral judge over mankind – a figure that ‘will punish wrong’ – by suggesting that such eye for an eye justice is unconstructive, only adding ‘despair to crime’. God’s threat of hell is seen as another means of controlling dissent, as those on ‘whom he fixed a stain’ are to be bound by the fear of hell for life. It is the arbitrariness of ‘fixing’ a stain that is particularly important. The difference between ‘virtue and vice’ or ‘love and hate’ is simply a matter of opinion by those in power: ‘might is right’. Again, therefore, this tyrannical God’s arbitrary rule is seen as prototypical of political power structures on earth. Because of this God’s ‘arbitrariness’, tyrants can use their might to rule arbitrarily as they wish, based on God’s example. In *The Revolt of Islam* version of this stanza, this connection, between conceived religious tyranny and the tyranny of political power, is in fact drawn out more explicitly. Not only does the change of ‘God’ to ‘Power’ unify the different powers at work here, universalising power into one concept, but the small alteration of ‘whom *he* fixed a stain’ to ‘whom *is* fixed a stain’ is equally significant. In the original stanza the suggestion is that it is God’s whim as an individual ruler, albeit a divine, omnipotent one, as to who is to be outcast. Changing ‘he’ to ‘is’, however, increases the emphasis on the

arbitrariness of the 'fixing' of such slurs on individuals; it is not specified as to where this 'fixing' originates, increasing the feasibility of reading this from a political perspective. It is inferred that 'stains' are 'fixed' upon individuals for arbitrary reasons by political powers, citing the example set by God.

This notion of the collusion between religious and political authority is extended in the two stanzas that follow. These remain unchanged in *The Revolt of Islam* and help support the idea that it is the very lack of specificity or universality of this 'Power', as well as its misuse, that Shelley attempts to emphasise:

"Alas, what strength? opinion is more frail  
Than yon dim cloud now fading on the moon  
Even while we gaze, though it awhile avail  
To hide the orb of truth - and every throne  
Of Earth or Heaven, though shadow, rests thereon,  
One shape of many names:- for this ye plough  
The barren waves of Ocean- hence each one  
Is slave or tyrant; all betray and bow,  
Command, or kill, or fear, or wreak or suffer woe.

"Its names are each a sign which maketh holy  
All power- ay, the ghost, the dream, the shade  
Of power- lust, falsehood, hate, and pride, and folly;  
The pattern whence all fraud and wrong is made,  
A law to which mankind has been betrayed;  
And human love is as the name well known  
Of a dear mother, whom the murderer laid  
In bloody grave, and, into darkness thrown,  
Gathered her wildered babes around him as his own (ll. 3271 –88).

These stanzas are central to Cythna's argument in the poem and are a key component of many of Shelley's arguments elsewhere, such as in the earlier *Queen Mab* and the later 'The Mask of Anarchy' (1819). The emphasis here is that different types of 'power' are all part of the same thing; a single 'shape of many names'. *The Revolt of Islam* alterations elsewhere of 'God' to 'Power' therefore fit this notion of a universal power well. In 'The Mask of Anarchy', the personified Anarchy bears the words 'I AM GOD AND KING AND LAW' (*Poems*, iii, l. 37),

with the implication being that God, monarchical power, and the legal system that governs the land, are simply all different names for the same thing; it is still the same 'Anarchy' that is behind them all. Similarly, *Laon and Cythna/The Revolt of Islam* pre-empts 'The Mask of Anarchy's concern for the relationship between nomenclature and power; as names 'maketh holy/ All power', the crowds in 'The Mask of Anarchy' pay fealty by chanting "'Anarchy, to thee we bow / Be thy name made holy now!'" (ll. 72-3).

The process of revising *Laon and Cythna* then serves to reformulate much of the language of *Queen Mab*, which is concerned more explicitly with 'God' and 'Religion', towards the more abstracted or generalised notion of power in such poems as 'The Mask of Anarchy' and the end of *Prometheus Unbound* as we have seen. These enforced revisions are therefore not only simple pragmatic acts of self-censorship but can also be seen to provide Shelley with an opportunity to rethink and to refocus an aesthetic and political philosophy.