Wroe reverses "the usual priorities of biography" by aiming to elucidate the poet's world with only occasional passages "into which earthly life keeps intruding" (p. ix). The first chapter, entitled "Substance," is an overview of some of Shelley's life, but a reader lacking more detailed biographical knowledge might be confused by the sudden skips forward and backward in the narrative. Further, there are a number of biographical errors, and the author apparently is not aware of more recent biographical studies. The non-chronological approach introduces a number of repetitions throughout the book.

Wroe has written, not a biography, but "a book about Shelley the poet, rather than Shelley the man," quoting his 1821 letter to the Gisbornes: "the poet & the man are two different natures; though they exist together they may be unconscious of each other, & incapable of deciding on each other's powers & effects by any reflex act" (p. ix). Shelley's words, "may be unconscious," are indicative of his strong introspective desire for self-knowledge into the deepest psychological recesses of his own mind, a quest which Frosch makes clear in his work. Indeed, Wroe mentions "the motto of Shelley's life: *Know thyself*" (p. 313; original emphasis) and often blurs the man-versus-poet dichotomy, as when she states that "Shelley often saw himself as a mirror or a shield" (p. 310) and "when he wrote of the sun, therefore, he wrote of himself" (p. 350).

Wroe's implicit interpretive framework seems a personal, inspirational psychology featuring such favorite words from Shelley's lexicon as "soul," "divine," and "spirit." Thus, "his body was a mere machine, struggling towards the grave" while "his soul-self" in *Queen Mab* "aspires to Heaven / Pants for its sempiternal heritage" (p. 351). Wroe believes Shelley's "young materialist moods . . . drawn from Lucretius" were largely replaced in his last years by "his devotion to Plato [which] led him to see the soul as a separate essence" (p. 351). *Hellas* is "the closest he came to expressing in a published poem the soul's journey, perhaps his own" (p. 369). In her introduction, Wroe states that "twentieth century" biography, by focusing on Shelley's "political radicalism," has "brought [him] severely to earth" (p. ix). However, "if the life of the spirit is man's most vital resource and means of change—as Shelley believed," then "he has truly revolutionary things to suggest to us" (p. ix). Wroe brings the poet back to earth in the final brief Coda, an accounting of Shelley's drowning. Perhaps of two minds about his rebellious spirit, after quoting his boyhood words in a letter, "I am not / Your obedient servant," she envisions Vesper as it "glittered in the darkening sky" (p. 390).

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Shelley's Intellectual System and its Epicurean Background. By Michael Vicario. New York: Routledge, 2007. Pp. x, 314. Cloth, $110.00.

Both the genealogy of Shelley's philosophical system and the precise nature of that system (if it exists at all) have been a source of critical contention for some time.

Shelley has been called, among other things, an empiricist, a Platonist, an atheist, a skeptic, a skeptical idealist, a Humean skeptic, a radical skeptic, a dogmatic theist, a materialist, a proto-Marxist, an eclectic. In his exhaustive analysis Michael Vicario calls Shelley a "Platonizing" atomist (pp. 20, 189) and a Neo-Epicurean theist, and asks for a reinterpretation of Shelley's entire intellectual system. Shelley's skepticism, Vicario argues, is not nearly as radical as critics have typically thought—rather, it is a "system-driven and limited instrument" (p. 49). Vicario's study is at once a wide-ranging and ambitious survey of Shelley's philosophical genealogy, and a doggedly close reading of the arguments waged within that genealogy. The Shelley who emerges might be too theist or too dogmatic for some tastes, but Vicario's provocative, well-reasoned thesis cannot be easily dismissed.

Vicario's book has two interrelated goals. The first is to argue that Shelley's skeptical epistemology does not foreclose definitive action. Rather than being an abstracted end in itself, his skepticism is a means to achieve ethical and political goals according to a consistent intellectual system. For Vicario, Shelley's skepticism is far more Epicurean and Lucretian, and thus atomist, than it is Pyrrhonian, Stoic, or Humean. According to such a reading Shelley's alleged atheism "can finally be redefined as an ancient theism" (p. 189). The book's second task is to explicate the radical reinterpretation of Lucretius passed down to Shelley from theist philosophers like Pierre Gassendi, Ralph Cudworth, Nicholas Malebranche, and William Drummond, and from theist editors, translators and commentators such as Gilbert Wakefield and John Mason Good. A significant portion of the book (Chapters 3–5) is devoted to this theistic reevaluation of Shelley's philosophical forebears, asserting that only under such a reading can "Shelley's thought [become] systematically comprehensible" (p. 190).

Vicario builds his theses through a peculiarly thorough analysis of source material and discursive genealogy, beginning with the reasonable assumption that "to understand Shelley's philosophical position is essentially to understand what he took to be an accurate version of the history of philosophy" (p. 33). The chapters on Wakefield's and Good's editions of the *De Rerum Natura* shed much-needed light on two radical (theist) thinkers important to Shelley and the age more generally: Wakefield, editor of the "radical" Latin edition of Lucretius, and once jailed for penning a 1798 pro-French pamphlet; and Good, translator of and commentator on Wakefield's *De Rerum*. Vicario's chapter on Drummond convincingly complicates the standard reading of Drummond as a purely Humean skeptic. Drummond's *Academical Questions* (1805) has become something of a crutch in discussions of Shelley's skepticism, and Vicario's rereading goes far to make us rethink the nature of Drummond's, and by association Hume's, influence on Shelley.

At times the book's major scholarly strength—its comprehensiveness—becomes exhausting for even the most enthusiastic Shelleyan. In the early chapters, for example, there are pages wherein Vicario weaves together—at the same time—five distinct textual layers that inform his analysis of Shelley's intellectual system: classical Greek and Latin texts; a genealogy of "modern" reinterpreta-

tions of those classical texts; Shelley's own writing about each of those texts; a critical genealogy of Shelley scholarship that Vicario develops; and contemporary Shelley scholarship. Vicario's argument jumps between these various historical and critical registers often and quickly, resulting in some fairly thorny exposition in the early chapters. Very little of this rhetorical thorniness, however, is exactly Vicario's fault. Vicario explains the various philosophical connections, breaks, and reconnections as well as I could imagine possible in such a short space. The problem lies with the mess of Shelley criticism compiled over the last fifty years, with the library of texts Shelley may or may not have read, and with the fact that the Romantic era is always several steps ahead of its critics. Readers who are discouraged by the complexity of the early chapters should perhaps first turn to the conclusion, and then to the chapters on Wakefield, Good, and Drummond, and only then tackle the book from the beginning.

One reason to begin with the conclusion is that there Vicario provides a close reading of the poem he most often cites, "Mont Blanc." Aside from this explication and a look at the early *Queen Mab* in relation to Shelley's atomism, there exists relatively little extended analysis of Shelley's poetry or of the way in which it matches up to Vicario's claims concerning Shelley's intellectual system. The vast majority of Vicario's citations come from Shelley's prose, and one wonders whether the linguistic ambiguity and reflexivity peculiar to Shelley's verse would contradict Vicario's reading of him as a Neo-Epicurean theist. I anticipate that articles addressing this and related questions will soon begin to appear.

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Shelley's German Afterlives, 1814–2000. By SUSANNE SCHMID. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. Pp. vi, 243. Cloth, $69.95.

The Cambridge Companion to Shelley. Edited by TIMOTHY MORTON. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. Pp. xvii, 219. Cloth, $80.00; paper, $24.99.

> Shelley, the genius, the prophet, Shelley, and Byron, with his glowing sensuality and his bitter satire upon our existing society, find most of their readers in the proletariat; the bourgeoisie owns only castrated editions, family editions, expurgated in accordance with the hypocritical morality of today.
>
> Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, 1845 (1987)

Engels's claim, cited by Timothy Morton in his Introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Shelley* and alluded to by Susanne Schmid in *Shelley's German Afterlives, 1814–2000*, provides a useful point of comparison between these otherwise quite different recent volumes on Shelley. At stake for Engels was the relationship between the revolutionary potential of poets such as Shelley and Byron and the ways in which that potential could be limited—or, conversely, amplified—