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## “OZYMANDIAS” AND THE DORMOUSE

WHEN SHELLEY FIRST PUBLISHED “OZYMANDIAS” in Leigh Hunt’s *Examiner*, on January 11, 1818, he signed it “Glirastes”.<sup>1</sup> The name appears sufficiently cryptic to warrant analytical discussion, and indeed it yields a curious insight into Shelley’s relationship with Mary and, indirectly, with Thomas Jefferson Hogg as Mary’s lover. It was quite in accord with Shelley’s practice of that period to use pseudonyms. His review of Godwin’s novel *Mandeville*, in the *Examiner* of December 28, 1817 (pp. 826-827), had been signed “E. K.”—representing “Elfin Knight”, Mary’s pet name for Shelley, derived from Spenser. His “Hymn to Intellectual Beauty”, written in Switzerland in 1816, had been announced for publication by “Elfin Knight”, although Shelley’s name had finally been signed to it in the *Examiner* of January 19, 1817.<sup>2</sup> Another work of the same period, *A Proposal for Putting Reform to the Vote Throughout the Kingdom*, was published in March, 1817, by “The Hermit of Marlow”, in which place Shelley was then residing.

From the ending of the name, “Glirastes” would appear to be of Greek origin or semantic construction at least. Another clue is the Greek provenance for the material in a portion of the sonnet “Ozymandias” itself. The inscription on the pedestal, “My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings”, is derived from the account of Diodorus Siculus, who spoke of a “monument of the king known as Osymandyas”, with an inscription reading, “King of Kings am I, Osymandyas. If anyone would know how great I am and where I lie, let him surpass one of my works” (I, 47)<sup>3</sup>. Since the statue had become a shapeless ruin, and the inscription was neither perceptible nor decipherable in that pre-Rosetta-stone year of 1816, Diodorus Siculus must have been the reference for this part of Shelley’s sonnet at least.

Shelley’s dear friend, Horace Smith, a visitor to Marlow for three days at the end of December, 1817,<sup>4</sup> had also written a sonnet to Ozymandias’s statue, published in the *Examiner* on February 1, 1818, and signed by “H. S.” It is possible that Shelley and he were reading Diodorus Siculus together on

that occasion, in December, although it is a mere conjecture, not a certainty as the editors of the Julian edition of Shelley's works and others seem to assert.<sup>5</sup> Smith is of interest in this matter because of the sonnet and also because of his passion for Greek literature and language studies, shared with Shelley.<sup>6</sup> He was aware of Shelley's pseudonym, for he alludes to it in the prefatory letter to the editor that accompanied his sonnet.<sup>7</sup>

Shelley's interest in Greek, and in teaching it to Mary, was so keen that we may be warranted in assuming that part of his pseudonym at least was Greek in derivation. The reference, of course, is to the ending *rastes*, which would appear to be a form of *erastes*, or "lover". The *gli* offers more difficulty, for the Greek words in *gli* are completely at variance with any possible meaning. A consideration of the roots for "carving", (*glypt-*) and "sweet or delightful" (*glyk-*) does little to strengthen the chance that Shelley would use an "upsilon" for an English "i" instead of the equally euphonious "y" in his word, "Glirastes". Moreover, a combining form from *glukus* would require a preservation of more of the stem, such as *gluku*, as in the word for sweet-root or licorice, *glukurriza*. Shelley uses a derived form, *glukeron* [sic] in one of his entries in Mary's journal for 1815 (p. 36). We know of Shelley's willingness to adapt Greek words, as in "Epipsychidion", or to make a rather strange use of a borrowed term, as in "Alastor". This he derived from Peacock, who was his close friend and companion during 1816, in Marlow.<sup>9</sup> Yet the dropping of so much of the initial Greek word would, in Shelley's opinion, almost certainly be inappropriate.

He was, however, having a private joke in using a Latin word for the first half of his portmanteau, hybrid coinage: *glis*, *gliris*, i.e., "dormouse". The whole series of associations with this animal-name makes this very likely.<sup>10</sup> One must bear in mind Mary's being only seventeen when Shelley took her away from Godwin's home in 1814; from the beginning of their relationship, pet names and playful modes of expression were common in their letters and conversations. As Newman Ivey White points out, they were delighted with their secluded cottage at Bishopsgate in 1816 because there Shelley could be the "elfin knight" without shocking the neighbours (*Shelley*, I, 412). The use of "Elfin Knight" for two works written during 1816-1817 and published in 1818 shows the persistence of this playfulness even later than the first two years. Three pet names for Mary were "The Maie", "Pecksie", and "Dormouse". Readers of Mary's letters and of the journal know how frequently Mary herself as well as Shelley and Hogg refer to her as "The Maie".<sup>11</sup> Less frequent is "Pecksie". As for "Dormouse", it puzzled Edward Dowden

in his *Life of Shelley*, when he tried to explain references in his reprinted letter of July 27, 1815, from Mary to Shelley: "The Dormouse has hid the brooch; and, pray, why am I for ever and ever to be denied the sight of my case? . . . It would give me very great pleasure if you would send it to me. I hope you have not already appropriated it, for if you have I shall think it unPecksie of you, as Maie was to give it you with her own hands on your birthday".<sup>12</sup> Dowden did not have the benefit of the "new" letters from the Hogg MSS. which W. S. Scott, who married into the Hogg family, was able to publish in the 1940s. On the "Dormouse" affair, these are most revealing.<sup>13</sup>

A letter of April 25, 1815, from Mary contains a tercet by Shelley (erroneously called a "distich" by Mary) which both Shelleys and the correspondent, Hogg, seem to know very well:

On her hind paws the Dormouse stood  
In a wild & mingled mood  
Of Maieishness & Pecksietude (*New Shelley Letters*, p. 86).

Incidentally, one might remark, the tercet has not yet been included in Shelley's poetical works. The letter is an apology to Hogg for her absence from London; she continues with an entreaty to "dear Jefferson" to give up the law and come down to Windmill Inn, Salt Hill, for a holiday. It concludes in rather free form (here uncorrected):

The Pecksie will soon be back all the better for her dormouseish jaunt, & remember, nothing take away from my Maieishness.

For Maie girls are Maie girls

Wherever they're found

In Air or in Water

Or In the ground

Now think of me very kindly while I am away, & and receive me kindly when I come back, or I will be no more

Your affectionate Dormouse.

The next letter in the series printed by Scott is equally revealing, for on April 26, 1815, Mary is again addressing "dear Jefferson":

I am no doubt a very naughty dormouse [here follows a drawing of a minute dormouse] but indeed you must forgive me. Shelley is now returned. . . . How are you amusing yourself with the Pecksie away? very doleful no doubt. . . .

Do you mean to come down to us? I suppose not, Prince Prudent. . . . If you had not been a lawyer you might have come with us (pp. 87-88).

Obviously the scion of Godwin shared his antagonism to the profession of lawyer, minister perforce to the unholy basis for "positive institutions". Her final statement that "Shelley calls me to come" indicates rather clearly Shelley's awareness of this letter with its sentiments from "Runaway Dormouse". Similarly, the next letter in the series is from "A Runaway Dormouse", and includes the statement: "The dormouse is going to take a long ramble among green fields and solitary lanes as happy as any little animal could be in finding herself in her native nests again". After pleading with Jefferson to come, she says, rather significantly, even broadly: "Do you not think you ought to come to Salt Hill *incontinently*—Remember I shall believe that your love is all a farce if you do not—so I expect you". The giddiness of the letter is slightly counterbalanced by the further request that Hogg send the Shelleys some money.

Whether or not one believes that these letters indicate physical relations between Hogg and "The Maie—Pecksie—Dormouse", there is less doubt about the next in the series, from Shelley to Hogg. In this famous letter, printed before Scott's collection, Shelley speaks of Mary's fair person and writes: "The Maie knows how highly you prize this exquisite possession. . . . A few months [these three words crossed out] We will not again be deprived of this participated pleasure. I . . . returned immediately to the Pecksie". Newman Ivey White and Frederick L. Jones differ in their dating and interpretation of this crucial letter. The first declares that "one need not draw extreme conclusions from a very interesting passage" in it (*Shelley*, I, 401), while Professor Jones asserts: "This letter is absolute proof that Shelley knew and approved of the 'affair' between Mary and Hogg". This follows an earlier dictum: "The evidence indicates that Mary found Hogg pleasant company . . . and when Hogg declared his love, she was surprised but not offended. She consulted Shelley from the beginning and from him caught his vision of a life strictly according to nature and reason".<sup>14</sup> She might also have caught it from Godwin's *Political Justice*, which both she and Shelley read religiously. It might be observed that although Mary did indeed speak distastefully of Hogg later, as White declares, the *New Shelley Letters* also show his feeling as ripening into some sort of stable friendship, if we may judge from Mary's letters to Hogg after Shelley's death. Her feeling for Hogg is there united by their common interest in Greek, which takes us back to "Glirastes"; on February

23, 1823, she wrote: "Although our connexion was marked by storms, and circumstances led me often into erroneous conduct with regard to you, yet now bereft of all, I willingly turn to my Shelley's earliest friend, and to one, whom I am persuaded, notwithstanding all, thinks kindly of me" (p. 138). In her friendly letter to him of October 3, 1824, she mentions "grubbing at Greek roots" for the "final improvement of my mind" (p. 150), and on August 30, 1824: "I live quietly, write, read a *little* Greek. . . . Virgil is a great favorite of mine" (p. 157).

Hogg's interest in Greek, as well as in Mary, was deeply rooted, as we can see from his exclamation to Thomas Love Peacock, September 8, 1817: "What would be the barbarity of the present age, but for the revival of Greek literature?" (p. 100). Concerning the winter of 1815-16, Peacock remarks: "This winter was, as Mr. Hogg expressed it, a mere Atticism. Our studies were exclusively Greek". He refers of course, to Shelley in the "our".<sup>15</sup> Other references by Peacock and Hogg prove the love of the youthful, exuberant circle for punning words in foreign tongues. On September 26, 1817, Shelley, or the "Hermit of Marlow", is thus designated: "The Conchoid is well. A Conchoidion or little hermitess has just stopt forth upon the stage of the world. . . . The Conchoid is in town at present" (pp. 101-102). There is no need to wonder at Peacock's planning his novel *Nightmare Abbey* (November, 1818), at this very time, to include Shelley as Schythrop Glowry, the praenomen coming from "skythrop" (*skuthros*) or "sullen". Upon reading the book, Shelley wrote Peacock his delight in the widely-recognized caricature. Clearly Hogg and Peacock, and probably Horace Smith and Leigh Hunt, at whose house Shelley met Smith, would enjoy the wordplay in Shelley's signing "Ozymandias" as the "lover of the Dormouse" or "Glirastes". There is no reason to infer any recrimination of Hogg or any sense of bad taste in the reference to a pet name for Mary which had been shared so intimately by Hogg and himself. Moreover, as was likely, the physical relationship between Hogg and Mary had entirely ceased by the end of 1817—indeed much earlier.

A sad note is also provided by the "dormouse" pseudonym. Readers of the letters of Shelley and his wife find that their son, William, was usually designated as "Willmouse". No provenance for the name has ever been given, so far as I know; can one doubt that the child of the Dormouse was to be called Will-mouse? It became so much his nickname that biographers have fallen into the habit of the parents. Thus Eileen Bigland writes: "The stricken parents buried Willmouse in the English cemetery in Rome".<sup>16</sup>

This was close by the ancient Roman tombs which Shelley had prophetically described as an ideal place for burial.<sup>17</sup> His interment was to follow that of his poor little son, not three years later, both Glirastes and Willmouise to be mourned by "The Maie".<sup>18</sup>

## NOTES

1. The name, given on p. 24, was first printed in block capitals but is always reprinted in upper- and lower-case letters.
2. See Edward Dowden, *Life of . . . Shelley* (London, 1886), I, 523 and Roger Ingpen and Walter E. Peck (eds.), *Works of . . . Shelley* (London, 1926-29), II, 415.
3. Conveniently given at greater length in Shelley: *Selected Poetry and Prose*, ed. Kenneth Neill Cameron (New York, 1951), p. 497; see also the Julian edition of *Works of Shelley* (above), II, 415.
4. *Mary Shelley's Journal*, ed. Frederick L. Jones (Norman, Oklahoma, 1947), p. 87.
5. Julian ed. of *Works*, *ibid.* Their source for the notion seems to be H. Buxton Forman's conjecture (see n. 7 below).
6. See Arthur H. Beavan, *James and Horace Smith* (London, 1899), pp. 137-138 and Smith's *Amarynthus, the Nympholept*, based on mythology.
7. The letter is given, together with Smith's sonnet, in H. Buxton Forman, *The Poetical Works of Shelley* (London, 1882), III, 410; for the sonnet alone, see *Amarynthus, the Nympholept with Other Poems* (London, 1821), p. 214.
8. Newman Ivey White, *Shelley* (New York, 1940), I, 407, cited hereafter as *Shelley*; see also many entries in the *Journal* concerning Mary's learning Greek, such as pp. 16, 17, 19, 20, 23, 24, 24, 36, 37, and 38.
9. Thomas Love Peacock, *Memoirs of . . . Shelley* in *Works of . . . Peacock*. (London, 1934), VIII, 100: "At this time Shelley wrote his *Alastor*. He was at a loss for a title, and I proposed that which he adopted: *Alastor; or, the Spirit of Solitude*. The Greek word *Alastor* is an evil genius, *κακὸδαιμόνιον*, though the sense of the two words is somewhat different, as in the *phareis Alastor e daimon pothen* of Aeschylus".
10. I was helpfully led to this conclusion by the tentative suggestion of Miss Rita M. Fleischer of the Department of Classics at New York University.
11. *Journal*, entries for 1814: December 26 and 31; entries for 1815: January 1 (Peacock to Mary, "the own Maie"), February 14, 15, 16, 22, 23, 24, 25, and 26.
12. Dowden, *Shelley*, I, 523-525, explains "Pecksie" as possibly derived from the Pecksy of Mrs. Trimmer's *History of the Robins*.

13. Published in three thin volumes in 1943 and 1944 and collected as *New Shelley Letters* (London, 1948), to which volume the text will refer. For discussion see *Letters of . . . Shelley*, ed. Frederick L. Jones (Oxford, 1964), I, vii.
14. Jones, *Letters*, I, 423 and 426. White dates it as January, 1818, without giving evidence for so unlikely an attribution.
15. Peacock, *Memoirs*, p. 100.
16. Eileen Bigland, *Mary Shelley* (London, 1959), p. 134; see also pp. 98 and 133. The date was June 9, 1819.
17. For Shelley's admiration of the spot see Jones, *Letters*, II, 491, letter of January, 1819, to Peacock.
18. After completing this study I came upon a note by Frederick A. Pottle in the *Keats-Shelley Journal*, VII (1958), 6-7, indicating the source of *Glirastes in glis, gliris*, plus a Greek suffix *astes* as in "dynast" and deeming *Ecclesiastes* to be implicit in Shelley's coinage for "dormouse in a preaching mood". In view of the invariable and frequent application of dormouse by Shelley and Hogg to Mary alone, I differ with this view of Shelley as the dormouse.