Visual iterations and adaptations in today's pop culture make it endure as a reminder of human's extraordinary faculty of imagination and its frightening consequences.

Jingxuan Yi
University of Nottingham
<https://doi.org/10.18573/romtext.112>

Date of acceptance: 17 June 2021.

Anna Mercer, *The Collaborative Literary Relationship of Percy Bysshe Shelley and Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley* (London: Routledge, 2019), 244pp. ISBN 978-0-3672-7795-6; £29.59 (eBook) / £96 (hb).

Romantic scholars have frequently referred to the deep collaborative relationship between Mary and Percy Shelley in the authors' literary pursuits. Anna Mercer's debut monograph, *The Collaborative Literary Relationship of Percy Bysshe Shelley and Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, reminds us—through the writings of Charles Robinson and Timothy Morton, among others—that this relationship has not been thoughtfully enough considered. Much to the detriment of currently available research on the Shelleys, this deficiency has been 'acknowledged' (p. 3), but not yet fully examined. The introduction to Mercer's work dexterously asserts the extent to which '[t]heir experiences as a literary couple reflect their artistic intimacy', a communion of literary genius that 'provide[s] a beguiling example of how creativity flourishes and develops when provided with the support of an emotional and literary partner' (p. 24). Mercer delivers on her promise to fill a void in our understanding of the Shelleys' working and personal relationship, as well as how the complex and often unfortunate circumstances of their lives together produced inimitable affection and literary success.

Mercer's powerful suggestion that the Percy and Mary Shelley's mutual respect for each other's work engenders an authentically collaborative creative process that flourishes through both their lives. Mercer argues that it is 'evident that the Shelleys engaged in a reciprocal process of creative idea-sharing, drafting, reading, and copying, which had a hugely important effect on the works that they produced' (p. 30). This explicates further upon the extant scholarship on their relationship by making inseparable Mary's influence over her husband's work and his over hers. This theme is consistently drawn throughout Mercer's chapters, the first of which covers the period between 1814 and 1818, by the end of which it becomes increasingly clear how profound a connection they shared in life and creativity. Yet Mercer is careful not to

overdo the implications of their collusion. She writes, 'such intertwined creativity reveals a rich continuity between their works as well as important differences as both authors construct and mould their individual voices as writers, [and] is particularly important to consider' (p. 70), distinctions which become more evident as their lives together mature. Collaboration in their writings, in other words, does not eliminate the subjectivity of either author, but rather strives (almost desperately at times) to enhance, shape and perfect each's subjectivity in both craft and personhood.

Mercer reminds without redundancy that, while in Italy, the Shelleys endured extensive trauma that severely damaged their personal relationship. Existing scholarship contends that they continued to collaborate as a means of reconciling their private hardships; Mercer pushes a bit further. It is exceedingly admirable the methods through which she collects archival evidence to support her argument about the 1818–22 period, that 'the Shelleys provided both supportive, enthusiastic contributions and stimulating challenges to each other's writings' (p. 80). By the end of the chapter, the claim is abundantly clear that the Shelleys' collaborative lives are not merely a reconciliation, but a period of accelerating development and maturation.

Current scholarship tends to emphasise the ways in which their collaboration often bred turbulence, especially as (as individuals) they sought to negotiate and orient the boundaries of their own individualities. This crucial dilemma plays out within the Shelleys' marriage and as they continue their collaborative journeys. Pushing this tension quite a bit further, Mercer notes that 'the Shelleys continued to write and to be present in each other's lives', and that '[e]ven their antagonism in its own way provided creative stimulation' (p. 99). So whether or not Mary and Percy developed any sense of enmity toward one another, even this anxiety was creative. It is not evidently clear in Mercer's argument, however, the magnitude of their shared hostility nor how precisely this antipathy built upon their working relationship. It seems somewhat hasty to presume that a causal link exists between their alienation from one another and their literary output. Yet, the thrust of Mercer's compelling argument does not depend on this point; rather, her diligent readings of the manuscripts of 1818 and 1822 expose a careful erudition and specificity. Their manuscripts and letters demand that the Shelleys' continued to share common interests and practice collaborative efforts throughout these years. Mercer's research insists that, '[w]hile it has long been recognised that PBS revised MWS's writing she, in turn, revised his work, not just to his dictation but probably following discussion with him, perhaps on occasion with his agreement, and sometimes through her own determination' (p. 131). It cannot be overstated how crucial this observation is, especially as it evinces a characterisation of Mary Shelley as a shrewd and forceful editor of her husband's work, an observation upon which the future of Shelleyan and Romantic criticism can assuredly rely.

It is no less important to remark upon the final two chapters of Mercer's book, which consider posthumous editing as a form of collaboration (chapter 4) and the spectral influence of Percy Shelley over Mary's later novels (chapter 5) as further evidence of the inextricability of the Shelleys' creative bonds. After Percy drowned in July of 1822, Mary continued the work of posthumously collecting, editing and publishing his work. This is, of course, an argument of definition, one that has serious implications over the larger umbrella of literary studies. Does Mercer demonstrate that Percy's poetry after his death constitutes what we normally think of as collaboration? I'm not so convinced, but neither would I rule it out. I am most compelled by Mary's own considerations, the language of which indicates a collaborative enthusiasm; she speaks as if Percy were still alive. So, the following claim by Mercer deserves careful scrutiny:

> I argue that the term 'collaboration' still applies to the Shelleys' relationship after PBS's demise because MWS's editing produced the first full edition of PBS's works: both of the Shelleys' creative input contributed to the posthumous texts as MWS's role included taking fragmentary, sometimes almost incomprehensible manuscript drafts and providing a version fit for publication. (p. 139).

The merit of this argument rests in Mary's own attitude toward her continued collusion with her husband, even after his passing.

To believe Mary's personal belief in her ongoing collaborative relationship with the now-deceased Percy has enormous implications and potentialities for the study of literature. Mercer here enters a serious debate that extends beyond the Shelleys and the Romantics, one that questions the very definition of collaboration. This wonderfully rhetorical gesture begs further study and evaluation.

Stephen J. Pallas
Stony Brook University
<https://doi.org/10.18573/romtext.113>

Date of acceptance: 25 March 2021.

Kathryn Sutherland (ed.), *Jane Austen: The Chawton Letters* (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2017), 128pp. ISBN 978-1-8512-4474-4; £14.99 / $25 (hb).

In this sumptuously printed selection of Austen's letters, Sutherland has encapsulated Austen's gifts as a correspondent. Few match her qualifications to edit such a volume. Scholars of Austen and bibliography are