

## NOTES TO THE FIELDS OF FANCY

[88] Here is printed the opening of F of F--A, which contains the fanciful framework abandoned in Mathilda. It has some intrinsic interest, as it shows that Mary as well as Shelley had been reading Plato, and especially as it reveals the close connection of the writing of Mathilda with Mary's own grief and depression. The first chapter is a fairly good rough draft. Punctuation, to be sure, consists largely of dashes or is non-existent, and there are some corrections. But there are not as many changes as there are in the remainder of this MS or in F of F--B.

[89] It was in Rome that Mary's oldest child, William, died on June 7, 1819.

[90] Cf. two entries in Mary Shelley's journal. An unpublished entry for October 27, 1822, reads: "Before when I wrote Mathilda, miserable as I was, the inspiration was sufficient to quell my wretchedness temporarily." Another entry, that for December 2, 1834, is quoted in abbreviated and somewhat garbled form by R. Glynn Grylls in *Mary Shelley* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), p. 194, and reprinted by Professor Jones (*Journal*, p. 203). The full passage follows: "Little harm has my imagination done to me & how much good!--My poor heart pierced through & through has found balm from it--it has been the aegis to my sensibility--Sometimes there have been

periods when Misery has pushed it aside--& those indeed were periods I shudder to remember--but the fairy only stepped aside, she watched her time--& at the first opportunity her ... beaming face peeped in, & the weight of deadly woe was lightened."

[91] An obvious reference to Frankenstein.

[92] With the words of Fantasia (and those of Diotima), cf. the association of wisdom and virtue in Plato's *Phaedo*, the myth of Er in the *Republic*, and the doctrine of love and beauty in the *Symposium*.

[93] See Plato's *Symposium*. According to Mary's note in her edition of Shelley's *Essays, Letters from Abroad, etc.* (1840), Shelley planned to use the name for the instructress of the Stranger in his unfinished prose tale, *The Coliseum*, which was written before *Mathilda*, in the winter of 1818-1819. Probably at this same time Mary was writing an unfinished (and unpublished) tale about Valerius, an ancient Roman brought back to life in modern Rome. Valerius, like Shelley's Stranger, was instructed by a woman whom he met in the *Coliseum*. Mary's story is indebted to Shelley's in other ways as well.

[94] *Mathilda*.

[95] I cannot find a prototype for this young man, though in some ways he resembles Shelley.

[96] Following this paragraph is an incomplete one which is scored out in the MS. The comment on the intricacy of modern life is interesting. Mary wrote: "The world you have just quitted she said is one of doubt & perplexity often of pain & misery--The modes of suffering seem to me to be much multiplied there since I made one of the throng & modern feelings seem to have acquired an intricacy then unknown but now the veil is torn aside--the events that you felt deeply on earth have passed away & you see them in their nakedness all but your knowledge & affections have passed away as a dream you now wonder at the effect trifles had on you and that the events of so passing a scene should have interested you so deeply--You complain, my friends of the"

[97] The word is blotted and virtually illegible.

[98] With Diotima's conclusion here cf. her words in the Symposium: "When any one ascending from a correct system of Love, begins to contemplate this supreme beauty, he already touches the consummation of his labour. For such as discipline themselves upon this system, or are conducted by another beginning to ascend through these transitory objects which are beautiful, towards that which is beauty itself, proceeding as on steps from the love of one form to that of two, and from that of two, to that of all forms which are beautiful; and from beautiful forms to beautiful habits and institutions, and from institutions to beautiful doctrines; until, from the meditation of

many doctrines, they arrive at that which is nothing else than the doctrine of the supreme beauty itself, in the knowledge and contemplation of which at length they repose." (Shelley's translation) Love, beauty, and self-knowledge are keywords not only in Plato but in Shelley's thought and poetry, and he was much concerned with the problem of the presence of good and evil. Some of these themes are discussed by Woodville in *Mathilda*. The repetition may have been one reason why Mary discarded the framework.

[99] *Mathilda* did have such a friend, but, as she admits, she profited little from his teachings.

[100] In F of F--B there is another, longer version (three and a half pages) of this incident, scored out, recounting the author's return to the Elysian gardens, Diotima's consolation of *Mathilda*, and her request for *Mathilda*'s story. After wandering through the alleys and woods adjacent to the gardens, the author came upon Diotima seated beside *Mathilda*. "It is true indeed she said our affections outlive our earthly forms and I can well sympathize in your disappointment that you do not find what you loved in the life now ended to welcome you here[.] But one day you will all meet how soon entirely depends upon yourself--It is by the acquirement of wisdom and the loss of the selfishness that is now attached to the sole feeling that possesses you that you will at last mingle in that universal world of which we all now make a divided part." Diotima urges *Mathilda* to tell her story, and she, hoping that by doing so she will break the bonds that

weigh heavily upon her, proceeds to "tell this history of strange  
woe."