

SHELLEY AND THE DRAMATIC FORM

Thesis submitted for the  
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
to the University of London  
in 1959 by S.UttamSingh.

ProQuest Number: 10096640

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



ProQuest 10096640

Published by ProQuest LLC(2016). Copyright of the Dissertation is held by the Author.

All rights reserved.

This work is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.  
Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

ProQuest LLC  
789 East Eisenhower Parkway  
P.O. Box 1346  
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

I should like to thank Dr J.M.S.Tompkins  
for her constant kindness and assistance;  
I owe an immeasurable amount to her.  
Further, I should like to thank the  
Principal and Council of  
Royal Holloway College and the English Department  
there for making my work possible.

ABSTRACT OF THESIS.

This thesis on 'Shelley and the Dramatic Form' has been divided into an introduction, eight chapters and a conclusion. The introduction justifies the theme of the thesis by discussion of the comparative neglect of Shelley's dramas from the point of view of form.

The first chapter deals with Shelley's interest in the living theatre with reference to performances in both England and Italy. The second reveals Shelley actually at work on the dramatic compositions of his wife Mary and his friend E.E. Williams. The third chapter shows the reciprocal dramatic influence of Byron and Shelley from the time of their first meeting in Geneva in 1816 to Shelley's death in 1822.

The succeeding chapters analyse the dramatic form of Shelley's dramas in chronological order: Prometheus Unbound in Chapter IV, The Cenci in Chapter V, Oedipus Tyrannus in Chapter VI, Hellas in Chapter VII, Charles I in Chapter VIII. Prometheus Unbound and Hellas have been examined primarily from the point of view of dramatic form but a further treatment has been accorded to The Cenci.

The thesis concludes with a brief assessment of Shelley's ability as a dramatist.

CONTENTS

Title Page	p.i.
Acknowledgements	p.ii.
Abstract of Thesis	p.iii.
Contents	p.iv.
Abbreviations	p.v.
Introduction	pp.vi-ix.
Chapter I.	
Shelley's attitude to the living theatre	pp.1-16.
Chapter II.	
Mary Shelley and E.E.Williams	pp.17-39.
Chapter III.	
Shelley and Byron	pp.40-62.
Chapter IV.	
<u>Prometheus Unbound</u>	pp.63-92.
Chapter V.	
<u>The Cenci</u>	pp.193-159.
Chapter VI.	
<u>OEdipus Tyrannus or Swellfoot the Tyrant</u>	pp.160-86.
Chapter VII.	
<u>Hellas</u>	pp.187-207.
Chapter VIII.	
<u>Charles the First</u>	pp.208-222.
Conclusion	pp.223-226.
Bibliography	pp.227-233.

ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used in the footnotes to the text. The abbreviations for the periodicals are used also in the Bibliography. For full details see Bibliography.

- Baker = Carlos Baker, Shelley's Major Poetry.
- Bates = E.S.Bates, The Cenci. A Study.
- Blunden = Edmund Blunden, Shelley.
- Cameron = Kenneth Cameron, Use of Source Material in Charles I.
- E.L.H. = English Literary History.
- Hicks = A.C.Hicks & R.M.Clarke, A Stage Version of Shelley's Cenci.
- Hogg = T.J.Hogg, Life of Shelley.
- Hunt, Correspondence = Correspondence of Leigh Hunt. Edited by his Eldest Son.
- Hutchinson = The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley, ed. T.Hutchinson.
- Julian = The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley, vols I-X, Julian edition.
- Koszul = A.Koszul, Shelley's Prose in the Bodleian Library.
- L.J. = The Works of Lord Byron. Letters and Journals, vols I-VI, ed. R.E.Prothero.
- Locock = C.D.Locock, An Examination of the Shelley MSS in the Bodleian Library.
- M.L.Q. = Modern Language Quarterly.
- M.S.J. = Mary Shelley's Journal, ed. Frederick L.Jones.
- M.S.L. = The Letters of Mary W.Shelley, ed. Frederick L.Jones.
- Medwin = T.Medwin, Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley.
- Monpurgo = E.T.Trelawney, The Last Days of Shelley and Byron, ed. Monpurgo.
- Note Books = The Note Books of Shelley, ed. Buxton Forman.
- P.M.L.A. = Publications of Modern Languages of America.
- Peacock = Thomas Love Peacock, Memoirs.
- White = Newman Iv<sup>e</sup>y White, Shelley.
- Williams = Maria Gisborne and Edward B.Williams, Their Journals and Letters.

## Introduction

---

When I first read Shelley's A Defence of Poetry I felt, like others before me, that Shelley wrote brilliantly, vividly and poetically about poetry and drama. What I did not know then, having succumbed to the myth of the "ineffectual angel" was that Shelley in practising the art of dramatic writing had achieved a measure of success not fully recognized by his critics and readers. Curiosity to explore this aspect of Shelley's poetic personality, strengthened by a subconscious urge to vindicate his position, led me to study his dramatic compositions from the point of view of form. This in turn made me read his prefatory notes to his dramas with unusual care, to study his prose writings and to delve into his correspondence, and that of his wife, friends and acquaintances; what followed was a revelation. I discovered that Shelley, contrary to the accepted view had always been interested in drama, particularly in acting drama; that the views he had expressed in his Prefaces and Essays were based on a deep searching analysis of the plays he had read in English, Greek, Spanish and German, the performances he had seen in England and Italy and his own experiences as a writer of dramas.

Shelley as a dramatist has been sadly neglected. Articles have appeared treating of his debt to Aeschylus, Shakespeare and Calderon. The Cenci inspired a monograph in 1903 and a dissertation in English in 1908. The first was written by the German scholar Wagner and the second by the American scholar Bates. Beatrice's 'Denial' has provoked some critics to explain her conduct in isolated articles and essays. But no scholar has made a survey

of Shelley's dramas or traced the development of his dramatic talent. It is generally believed that Shelley did not possess any dramatic talent which deserves serious consideration.

One of the causes of this neglect is the popular belief that Shelley was too fond of the abstract and the ideal to concern himself with the ordinary mortals and their all too human passions. It is believed, and I confess that Shelley is partly responsible for this, but partly only, that his important works are those in which he employs rare and abstruse symbols to conceal the metaphysical ingenuities and platonic subtleties which exercise his imagination. It is true that in a great many of his works, such as Prometheus Unbound, Adonis<sup>a</sup> and Hellas, he gives utterance to the platonic or vedantic idea that the phenomenal world is an illusion, is 'Mays', a 'painted veil' which hides from us the imageless truth. It is also true that while he longed to lift this veil "which those who live call life" he also sat back and gazed at the patterns and motifs, and the forms and figures which had been drawn with such consummate skill. Their variety and complexity absorbed his attention until they came to life and then Shelley saw a distracted poet~~r~~ in a dungeon writing love songs to a high born maiden; he saw a being of titanic stature endure endless torture; he saw an ancient patriarch suddenly afflicted with pain and sorrow; from god-like individuals his glance moved towards the common man and saw him in conflict with a Timon in Athens, a Charles I in England, or a Napoleon anywhere in Europe. With amusement he observed a Monarch and his Queen involved in a domestic tangle. He watched with excitement the descendants of a mighty race struggle for freedom. Above all he saw Beatrice, beautiful and young, and he traced the course of her life from the day

she ~~had~~ learnt to obey her father, until the moment she rose to bind her mother's hair gently, tenderly, finally. From among these Shelley selected Prometheus, Beatrice, George IV, Mahmud, Charles I to dramatize the conflicts in which they <sup>were</sup> ~~was~~ embroiled. The critics who have studied these works have given penetrating interpretations of the metaphysical, political and ethical significance of these compositions and treated the characters as if they were shadowy personifications of Shelley's ideas. My object, therefore, has been to examine these characters in their dramatic setting, analyse their speech, their conduct in relation to other characters in the drama and show how intensely alive they are. Another cause of this neglect lies in the attitude that in the conflict Shelley experienced between the didactic and purely artistic aims of poetic drama he allowed the first to predominate. Consequently he would not surrender himself to the mood of "negative capability" which is the primary requisite of a great dramatist. Allowing for Shelley's bias in favour of the didactic function of poetry, I failed to see the implied contradiction in his use of the dramatic form. The highest moral, Shelley aimed at was knowledge of self and this moral he believed was implicit in the dramatic form, was an integral part of it:

"In a drama of the highest order there is little food for censure or hatred; it teaches rather self-knowledge and self-respect. Neither the eye nor the mind can see itself, unless reflected upon that which it resembles. The drama, so long as it continues to express poetry, is as a prismatic and many-sided mirror, which collects the brightest rays of human nature and divides and reproduces them with majesty and beauty, and multiplies all that it reflects, and endows it with the power of propagating wherever it may fall." (1)

Tragedy, Shelley came to believe, ~~was~~ the ultimate expression of poetic genius not because the poet ~~could~~ <sup>can</sup> use it as a

(1) Julian, VII. p 121

vehicle ~~of~~for his ideas of good and evil but because it involves "going out of our own nature", seeking an identification with others so that their pains and their pleasure become our own. In such a form any palpable design upon the audience would only impair the artistic unity of the composition and Shelley I believe was aware of this.

My object in this thesis has been to show how Shelley came to hold this view of drama, to trace his interest in the living theatre, to follow the development of his dramatic powers from the time he meditated a tragedy on Tasso until his last days when he was working on Charles ~~the First~~ I examined the manuscript of Williams' play A Promise and studied the nature and extent of his debt to Shelley, his friend. I have avoided any discussions of the metaphysical elements in Prometheus Unbound and Hellas.

My interest in Shelley has often led me to read books not entirely relevant to the subject under discussion, but which were included in Shelley's list of reading. They have given me a fresh insight into the world in which he moved. Unfortunately, I do not read Greek, German or Spanish, languages in which he read the Attic dramatists, and Goethe and Calderon.

I have also visited places associated with Shelley: Shelley Cottage, near Windsor Great Park, where he ~~had~~ spent a few months of "Atticism" with Hogg and Peacock; the Baths of Car<sup>a</sup>calla where he wrote some of his Prometheus Unbound; Casa Magni where the manuscript of the unfinished Charles ~~the First~~ lay as Mary waited for Shelley to return. There have been moments when it seemed as if one had almost met someone who had known, loved and seen Shelley plain.

## CHAPTER I

### Shelley's attitude to the living theatre.

"Shelley had a prejudice against theatres which I took some pains to overcome", writes Thomas Love Peacock in his Memoirs of Shelley.<sup>(1)</sup> Shelley's dislike, Peacock suggests, extended chiefly to those plays which violated the principles which were dearer to him than the passing entertainment of an hour. These prejudices<sup>s</sup> were observed by Mary Shelley who tells us that Shelley "was not much of a playgoer being of such fastidious taste that he was easily disgusted by the bad filling-up of the inferior parts."<sup>(2)</sup> Shelley in fact shared with Byron a distaste for the contemporary stage and as we shall see further on,<sup>(3)</sup> there were good reasons for this distaste. He was not incapable of enjoying a good performance when he saw one, as even Peacock knew, and later on he came to develop quite a taste for the opera and the theatre.

Like all normal children Shelley had indulged a boyish fondness for acting, his sisters being at once the actors and spectators. They donned fantastic costumes in which to personate spirits and fiends while Bysshe as the arch-fiend rushed through a passage with a flaming liquid in a portable stove. Thus he combined an early love for chemical experiments with his interest in the Gothic world of romance. Another of his favourite pastimes was to disguise himself as a country boy by adopting a broad Sussex dialect. While he was doing this

---

(1) Peacock, II, p.330.

(2) Hutchinson, p.333.

(3) See chapter on Byron.

once on a ride with a gentleman to Horsham, he brought the conversation round to Squire Shelley's son, only to learn that there were some who considered him a little mad.

His first visit to a theatre was made while he was at Syon House in Brentford. Together with his cousin Thomas Medwin he played ~~the~~ truant to go to Richmond where they saw Mrs Gordon in The Country Girl.<sup>(1)</sup> This event marked an era in Medwin's life but apparently made little impression on the boy Shelley for he never refers to it again.

From Syon House Shelley went to Eton, where it became one of his principal pleasures to write plays in collaboration with his companion, Andrew Amos. These were acted before the only lower boy in their house, who constituted their sole audience. From the circumstances attending the theatre of the triumvirate and the vivacity with which Shelley <sup>entered</sup> into this amusement Amos concluded that his friend possessed considerable talent.<sup>(2)</sup> At one time, he with his oldest sister Elizabeth, wrote a play secretly, and sent it to Matthews, the comedian, who after a time returned it with the verdict that it would not do for acting. "I wonder whether Matthews knew the age of the boy and girl who ventured upon writing a play", writes Helen Shelley to Jane Hogg.<sup>(3)</sup> The subject of this early comedy of Shelley was not divulged to any other member of the family nor does Shelley ever mention this juvenile effort of his. We hear no more of play writing until Shelley falls in love with his cousin Harriet Grove. Barely eighteen he started work on a tragedy to be offered to Covent Garden when completed, and hoped for some notice in Ackerman's Poetical Magazine.<sup>(4)</sup> No

---

(1) Medwin, p.39.

(2) White, II, p.494.

(3) Hogg, I, p.26.

(4) Julian, VIII, p.8.

more was heard of <sup>it</sup> again.

Shelley made his first acquaintance with the theatres in London in 1809, when he went to stay with Harriet's family. He squired her to the theatre and opera, exhibitions and parties. Shelley apparently derived more pleasure from her company than any of the plays they saw. Harriet fails to mention the names in her diary and the only time she ventures to comment was the evening they went to the opera. "I hate it more than ever (so does Percy)." (1)

Not until three years later when Shelley meets Peacock does a real interest in the theatre and the opera develop. Between this period and his association with Mary Godwin there is no record of Shelley visiting the theatre in London or elsewhere. But even before his close association with Peacock, an ardent lover of music and drama, and Hunt, another confirmed theatre-goer, Shelley displays a critical interest in the contemporary stage. He is particularly sensitive to imaginative interpretation of dramatic characters and a poor performance by the most gifted of the actors of his time provokes his censure. The production of Hamlet with Kean in the title role, which Shelley, Mary and Claire Clairmont saw in October 1814 disgusted them.

"The extreme depravity and disgusting nature of the scene, the inefficacy of action to encourage or maintain the delusion, the loathsome sight of men personating characters which do not and cannot belong to them ..." (2)

one feels, must have been what drove the party to leave at the end of the second act. (3) The note of extreme disapprobation in Mary's comment would perhaps explain Shelley's reluctance to pay frequent visits to the theatre.

---

(1) White, I, p.66.

(2) M.S.J., p.20.

(3) Ashley MS, 394, fol.69.

Shelley, Mary adds, was displeased with what he saw of Kean. This performance, however, did not prejudice him permanently against Kean as a tragic actor. Three years later the Shelleys went to see him again in The Merchant of Venice.<sup>(1)</sup> Mary saw Kean for the third time in a revival of Barbarossa.<sup>(2)</sup> Shelley was away in Marlow but Mary doubtless had much to tell him about John Brown's drama. Based probably on Voltaire's Merope,<sup>(3)</sup> this play with its themes of usurpation by murder, of vengeance, of love for the enemy's daughter, its flamboyant speeches and resplendent eastern costumes gave Kean the opportunity to appear in a different role. Peacock and Hunt who most probably did not miss any of this notable actor's performances must have found many occasions on which to discuss the merits and limitations of Edmund Kean with Shelley. As a result of these visits and after-dinner talks about the contemporary dramatists and actors Shelley retained such a favourable impression of Kean that when he composed The Cenci in 1819, he would not be content with any other actor for the principal male role.<sup>(4)</sup> It is also just possible that during his close association with Byron in the summer of 1816 in Geneva, he learnt of the powerful effect Kean's rendering of Othello had produced on Byron.

The entries in the journals kept by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley and Claire Clairmont reveal a great enthusiasm for the theatre on the part of the Hunts, as of Mary, Claire, Peacock, an enthusiasm which Shelley to some extent shared. On February 16, they all went to Covent Garden to see Milman's tragedy of Fazio.<sup>(5)</sup> Here Shelley saw Miss O'Neil for the

---

(1) M.S.J., p.77.  
 (2) Ibid.  
 (3) Allardyce Nicoll, A History of English Drama 1660-1900, III, p.82.  
 (4) Julian, X, p.62.  
 (5) M.S.J., p.92.

first time. So intense was the impact of her performance on Shelley's imagination that he could scarce shut her out of his mind when he created the character of Beatrice. Miss O'Neil as Bianca, the young wife who loved not too wisely but too well, and who paid with death for the betrayal of her husband after his execution, placed Miss O'Neil among the top-ranking actresses of the day. Her interpretation of this tragic character, the memory of the "wild haired" woman whose "pain's within" stayed in Shelley's mind through his composition of The Cenci:

"The principal character Beatrice is precisely fitted for Miss O'Neil and it might even seem to have been written for her (God forbid that I should ever see her play it - it would tear my nerves to pieces..."(1)

he wrote to Peacock.

Shelley's prejudice, apparent to all his friends chiefly extended to comedies rather than tragedies. His comments on The School for Scandal among other things have made the critics and scholars doubt if he was endowed with any sense of humour:

"I see the purpose of his comedy. It is to associate <sup>(2)</sup> virtue with bottles and glasses and villainy with books.

Peacock only just succeeded in keeping him from leaving the theatre before the curtain fell at the end of the play; and Shelley unmoved by his remonstrance read him a lecture on the "withering and perverting spirit of the comedy." Once Peacock sought to make him admire the following passage satirising a withered old crone and a maidservant in Beaumont and Fletcher's To Rule a Wife and Have a Wife:

"There is an old woman that's now grown to marble  
Dried in this brick-kiln, and she sits i' the chimney  
(Which is but three tiles, raised like a house of cards)  
The true proportion of an old smoked Sibyl  
There is a young thing too, that Nature meant  
For a maid-servant, but't is now a monster:  
She has a husk about her like a chestnut  
With laziness, and living under the line here,

(1) Julian, X, p.62.

(2) Peacock, p.331.

"And the<sup>s</sup>e two make a hollow sound together,  
Like frogs, or winds between two doors that murmur."

Instead Shelley commented indignantly-

"There is comedy in its perfection. Society <sup>grinds</sup> down poor wretches into the dust of abject poverty, till they are scarcely recognizable as human beings; and then instead of being treated as what they really are, subjects of the deepest pity, they are brought forward as grotesque monstrosities to be laughed at."(1)

Shelley's social conscience deeply resented the manner in which the weapon of laughter had been used in these plays. The poor must be pitied and the idle rich despised, Shelley would argue. He would laugh at a funny situation but refrain from pouring ridicule on a person at a disadvantage in life. He had not learnt the joyful acceptance of the human imperfections, one associates with Peacock. The serious-minded young author of Queen Mab had some time to go before he would satirise a fellow poet in Peter Bell III and a royal scandal in a mock-tragic play. That Shelley was fully capable of appreciating a blistering picture of contemporary society when that society called for such treatment is abundantly clear from his ecstatic remarks on Don Juan.

It is difficult to state with certainty what other plays Shelley saw apart from those just mentioned. There is sufficient evidence in support of the view that he saw more than the two mentioned by Peacock.<sup>(2)</sup> It is highly likely that he accompanied Mary and the Hunts and saw on different occasions Jealous Wife, a comedy by Colman first produced at Drury Lane on February 12, 1761; The Ravens or The Force of Conscience by Isaac Pocock a contemporary of Colman. A different farce was provided on February 22, 1817 when they saw Gay's Beggars' Opera, Bombastes Furioso a burlesque by William Barnes Rhodes and The Flight of Zephyr.<sup>(3)</sup>

Newman I. White, Shelley's chief biographer, comments briefly on the possible effect of the opera on Shelley's

(1) Peacock, p.331.

(2) Mary's note in Hutchinson, p.333.

(3) M.S.J., pp.76-77.

dramatic poems such as Prometheus Unbound. It was during their stay in Marlow in 1817-1818 when the Shelleys paid several visits to London that he acquired a taste for the opera. The Hunts, Claire Clairmont and Peacock, a musical group, each contributed in his own way to further Shelley's interest in the music of Mozart. Shelley whose tastes did not always coincide with Peacock's was on his guard at first. When he went to hear Don Giovanni, accompanied by Peacock, he wanted to know before the curtain went up whether it was comic or tragic. It was composite - more comedy than tragedy, Peacock told him. After the killing of the Commendatore he wanted to know if that was meant to <sup>be</sup> comedy. But by degrees, Peacock relates, he became absorbed in the music and action.<sup>(1)</sup> The journals kept by Mary and Claire reveal that in less than four weeks they paid four visits to this same opera. Very shortly Nozze di Figaro became his favourite opera.<sup>(2)</sup> Hogg was pleased and no less amused to find his friend for once "arrayed in purple and fine linen, in a blue coat and white waistcoat" to attend the opera for close on three weeks every evening.<sup>(3)</sup> Shelley spent the evening before his final departure from England at the première of Rossini's Barbiere di Siviglia, an occasion recollected with deep feeling in Peacock's Memoirs of Shelley. These visits were later commemorated in one of the finest pictures, the more beautiful for the warmth of feeling that glows underneath, given to us by Hunt in a letter to Mary:

"and then we look up to your box almost hoping to see a thin, patrician-looking cosmopolite yearning upon us, and a sedate-faced young lady bending in a similar direction, with her great tablet of a forehead, and her white shoulders unconscious of crimson gown..."<sup>(4)</sup>

(1) Peacock, p.330.

(2) Ibid.

(3) New Shelley Letters, edited by W.S.Scott, London, 1948, p.107

(4) Hunt, Correspondence, I, p.134.

Unlike Byron Shelley showed little talent for acting as a young man. He was credited only once in his life with the histrionic abilities of a professional actor and scholars have since decided that this had no basis in fact.. In August 1815, the Shelleys took the low-roofed furnished cottage at Bishopsgate close to Windsor Great Park so secluded that even the tax collector did not know it. In answer to enquiries made by Sir Timothy, his solicitor, William Whitton, reported a rumour that his son and heir was acting in Shakespearean plays on the stage under the name of Cooks.<sup>(1)</sup> But W.G.Bebbington points out in his article on "Shelley and the Windsor Stage" that the only Shakespearean play performed in Windsor between Shelley's arrival at Bishopsgate and the dispatch of Whitton's letter was Romeo and Juliet for one evening only.<sup>(2)</sup> Also it is highly unlikely that Shelley should go on the stage without provoking Peacock's mirth. Now Peacock and Hogg were regular visitors at Shelley's cottage; there were discussions on the classics, there were rambles among the oaks but there is no reference to a Mr. Cooks acting in Shakespearean plays in their recollections. White, rejecting Peck's acceptance of the rumour suggests that it may have been a wild distortion of the fact that Shelley enjoyed reading Shakespeare aloud.<sup>(3)</sup> And years later when Byron decided to produce Othello in the central hall of the Palazzo Lanfranchi in Pisa he did not think Shelley suitable for any role. He had cast Trelawny as Othello, Williams as Cassio, Mary as Desdemona, Jane Williams as Bianca and himself as Iago.<sup>(4)</sup>

---

(1) Roger Ingpen, Shelley in England, II, pp.457-8.

(2) 'Shelley and the Windsor Stage, 1858', Notes and Queries, May 1956, pp.215-16.

(3) White, I, p.699.

(4) M.S.L., I, p.316.

When we consider how brief was the time Shelley spent in London free from fear of pursuit by bailiffs and how profound his repugnance for the kind of plays put on at Drury Lane and Covent Garden it is not surprising to find how little he saw of <sup>the</sup> London theatre as a young man during his few years together with Harriet. It took the interest and enthusiasm of his friends to reawaken his interest, but once Shelley's attention was re-directed he became quite a regular visitor. Between 29 January 1818 and 28 February, he heard Don Giovanni four times, La Molinara, Acis et Galatée once, saw the ballet of Le Retour du Printemps three times and went to Covent Garden to see Fazio and the Pantomime of Harlequin Gulliver.<sup>(1)</sup> Mary Shelley would have us believe that he saw Miss O'Neil more than once.<sup>(2)</sup> Although she does not mention the names she leaves one with the impression that Shelley saw more plays than Peacock or some of his recent biographers would ascribe to him. And to these he brought an experience and intensity of awareness which must have done much to compensate for the relatively small number of plays he saw.

With his mind stored with images of Kean and Miss O'Neil in their moments of tragic heights, of Mlle Melanie with her graceful movements, and the music of Mozart which Rossini could not obliterate ringing in his ears, Shelley with Mary, Claire Clairmont and their two children left England for Italy. To Mary's dismay Rossini had just taken Italy by storm. In a letter to ~~Marr~~ Marianne Hunt who had shared Mary's enthusiasm for Mozart's operas, Mary writes:

"... they play the same opera for a year together and nothing is listened to of it except the favourite airs -

---

(1) Ashley MSS. 2819~~f~~(1). ff. 3-8

(2) Mary's note in Hutchinson, p. 333.

"nothing is heard in Italy now but Rossini ~~and he is~~  
~~and he is~~ no favourite of mine - he has some pretty  
 airs - but they say that when he writes a good thing  
 he goes on copying it in all his succeeding operas  
 for ever and ever - he composes so much that he cannot  
 always be called on for something pretty and new."(1)

Yet travelling through Leghorn, six months after their  
 arrival in Italy, the Shelleys heard some of these tuneful  
 airs such as "Mi reverrai ti reverdio" sung "lowly but not  
 too melodiously" by the men working in the fields and found  
 them delightful.

Their all too brief stay in various Italian towns  
 was punctuated by visits to the Opera. Mary makes shrewd  
 terse observations on the quality of singing and dancing,  
 on the decor and above all on the manners of the Italian  
 audience. Their very first opera in Milan did not make  
 much sense to them<sup>(2)</sup> but Il Rivale di se Stesso and Il  
Spada di Renetti, so Mary says, amused and delighted them.<sup>(3)</sup>  
 The opera of Othello in Venice was "a wretched piece of  
 business";<sup>(4)</sup> the opera at Rome was the worst possible;<sup>(5)</sup>  
 the scenery in Naples exceeded anything of the same kind in  
 theatrical exhibition elsewhere;<sup>(6)</sup> the ballet in Florence  
 was beautiful.<sup>(7)</sup> On the whole they found the opera in  
 Italy inferior to the Italian Opera in London; the audience  
 did little to raise the tone. They were very different  
 from the decorous audience in England of whom Shelley used  
 to say that it was "delightful to see human beings so

---

(1) M.S.L., I, p.64.

(2) M.S.J., p.95.

(3) Ibid., p.97.

(4) Ibid., p.106.

(5) Ibid., p.111.

(6) Julian X, p.8.

(7) M.S.J., p.125.

civilized." In Italy, except for the first night or two, Mary informs her friends in London, one could not hear anything except a few favourite airs, for the people made the opera house a visiting place and played cards and supped in their boxes. Only David, the celebrated tenor, had the power to silence the chattering audience. Hungry for news of the opera in London Mary asks Marriane Hunt

"... and tell me if you often go to the opera and if any changes have taken place in that singing paradise?" (1)

One performance, significant for its effect on Shelley deserves our special consideration. Both Shelley and Mary are so overwhelmed by the tragic beauty of the "pantomimic drama" of Othello by Vigano that they immediately communicate their enthusiastic response to their friends in London.

"... The**s** ballet or rather a kind of melodrame or pantomimic drama was ~~the~~ most splendid spectacle I ever saw... The manner in which the language is translated into gesture, the complete and full effect of the whole as illustrating the history in question, the unaffected self-possession of each of the actors, even ~~to~~ the children, make this choral drama more impressive than I could have conceived possible." (2)

Shelley had never seen the like of it before. Here at last he found what he had missed in most of the "legitimate" plays he had seen in England, "the unaffected self-possession of each of the actors". The statuesque beauty of the actors' grouping haunted his imagination.

"Indeed they are wholly unlike anything represented on our stage; being a combination of a great number of figures, grouped with the most picturesque and even poetical effect and perpetually changing with motions the most harmoniously interwoven and contrasted with great effect." (3)

---

(1) M.S.L., I, p.52.

(2) Julian, IX, p.294.

(3) Ibid., p.306.

Perhaps he had some of these scenes and melodies of Mozart in mind when he came to write his lyrical drama on the classical myth of Prometheus.

It was not until after Shelley had completed his third drama Swellfoot the Tyrant that he made the acquaintance of the celebrated improvisatore Tommaso Sgricci. Sgricci, who was introduced to the Shelleys by their friend Pacchiani became a regular visitor to the Casa Galletto, Shelley's residence in Pisa. Shelley until now had never come in close personal contact with any great stage personality. Byron had, undoubtedly, given him word pictures of the world beyond the footlights but these in spite of Byron's gift as a raconteur remained second hand impressions. Shelley received Sgricci in his house, discussed politics and philosophy with him and after one of his performances told him that "he appeared in Pisa as Dante among the ghosts".<sup>(1)</sup> The Shelleys and Claire Clairmont first saw his performance in the theatre at Pisa on December 21, 1820. The subject was Iphigenia in Tauris about which Mary writes in her journal:

"Go to the theatre, and hear the Improvise of Sgricci, most wonderful and delightful exhibition. He poured forth a torrent of poetry clothed in the most beautiful language."<sup>(2)</sup>

Claire was no less lavish in her epithets:

"... it seemed not the work of a human mind but as if he were the instrument interpreting played upon by the superhuman inspiration of a god."<sup>(3)</sup>

Of course if they had seen his piece in print they would have noticed its "many slight defects of management but many of the scenes were perfect and", Mary writes "the recognition of Orestes and Iphigenia was worked up beautifully".<sup>(4)</sup>

---

(1) M.S.L., I, p.123.

(2) M.S.J., p.142.

(3) Ashley MSS, 2819 (1). ff. 3-8

(4) M.S.L., I, p.122.

Mary was particularly impressed by his graceful movements, his range of voice and the freedom of his motions which outdid the "constraint ever visible in an English actor".<sup>(1)</sup>

Another evening Mary travelled to Lucca leaving a sick Shelley behind to see Sgricci in Inez de Castro. Six years later she recalled the scene in which

"when Don Pedro, husband of Inez, drawing a curtain suddenly displays to his father the bodies of his murdered wife and children, the same thrill was felt, nay, far greater than if the real mock bodies (the implied bull must be excused) had been brought forward."<sup>(2)</sup>

Sgricci must have surpassed himself in the third tragedy the Shelleys saw together. The madness of Cassandra in the Death of Hector was exquisitely delineated - her prophecies were wondrous and came in torrents. Such music, such eloquence, such poetry, Mary felt, was the work of someone divinely possessed. Speaking afterwards to Shelley, the Improvisatore told him that he did not remember much about any other part, but he had a vivid recollection that

"when he poured forth the ravings of the prophetess, he no longer saw the theatre; Troy was around him, Troy burning, Priam stabbed at his altar and the women dragged away in chains." (3)

Sgricci left Pisa in January 1822, when Shelley was engaged on his historical tragedy Charles <sup>the First</sup>. Except for Miss O'Neil no other actor had stirred Shelley so deeply as this Italian poet-actor. His improvisations had aroused in Shelley the pity and terror that one associates with great tragedies. Shelley may have had a somewhat inflated opinion of Sgricci's talents but what is of significance in Shelley's dramatic career is the obvious pleasure he derived from good acting. And given a good play and a team of fine actors, Shelley could argue, the audience would respond as spontaneously, as intelligently as he, Mary and some of their

---

(1) M.S.L., I, p.122, . . .

(2) Ibid., p.123, n.2

(3) Ibid.,

friends had done.

The vacuum caused by Sgricci's departure was filled up by the presence of Sinclair the English tenor. The Shelleys in conjunction with the Williamses had taken a box during the carnival in the winter of 1820-1821. The choice of the operas was not exactly to Mary's liking but the Shelleys and the Williamses paid frequent visits to hear Sinclair, the most outstanding singer in Pisa. Twice at least they went to the Veglione where dancing was kept up at 3 o'clock. The carnival offered Shelley the opportunity to see a form of entertainment peculiar to the Mediterranean countries. It is doubtful if he entered into the spirit of it as Byron had done in Venice but it could hardly be indifference with which he saw the grotesquely dressed fishermen or the neatly clad Greek gods particularly Bacchus crowding the Lungo Arno.<sup>(1)</sup> Sometimes they saw plays and operas with the scenes laid in Britain. Of Ginevra di Scozzia Williams wrote in his diary.-

"The heroine was intolerably bad - no Scotch dialect could have been more grating to the nerves than the twang with which she ended all lines."

Their last play in Pisa, perhaps the last before Shelley's death, was an absurd piece of drama which drew loud applause from the Italians. It showed the Secretary of State dying of a mysterious disease, that baffled the skill of the physicians:

"A mysterious doctor at length offers to make a cure of the poor secretary provided he releases from prison one Jenkinson - the secretary refuses and the doctor declines to attend him - and so on - Jenkinson is at last released and the secretary of state finds himself better to the great joy of the nation and his friends."<sup>(2)</sup>

Plays such as these instead of damping the enthusiasm of

---

(1) Williams, Journal, p.131.

(2) Ibid., p.142.

the drama enthusiasts in Pisa only served to make them want to try their hands at play writing and produce something better.

When we talk about Shelley's prejudice against theatres we must be quite clear in our minds about the nature of this prejudice and the type of theatre at which it was directed. This brief survey of his activities as a theatre-goer shows that he had infinite capacity for enjoying good operas such as Mozart's; he thrilled to beautiful dancing and choreography, and to pantomimic dramas in which music, mime and dancing made up for poetry. Individual actors and actresses in convincing roles produced a powerful effect on him. Shelley was well aware of the opportunities the stage offered the dramatist, the actor and the audience; what he deplored was the absence of good plays with a capable team of actors, not just one or two celebrities, presented to a sensitive responsive audience. His criticism of Hamlet was directed against the poor quality of acting and production not against the theatre as such. True his comments on The School for Scandal, reported by Peacock expose a vulnerable side of his character. After all, why should Shelley not be allowed to have his blind spot and turn away from comedy? Some develop a sense of humour early in life; to others it comes with late maturity. Nor is there any justification for the sweeping statement made by Newman I. White that Shelley regarded the regular stage, i.e. the actual concrete theatre as opposed to the theatre of the reader's mind, as a "corrupter" of his cherished principles.<sup>(1)</sup> If this is the view Shelley held, may we not ask why at the age of twenty-seven he <sup>should have</sup> submitted a tragedy to Covent Garden, why

---

(1) White, I, p.521.



CHAPTER II

Mary Shelley and E.E. Williams.

Shelley's urge to write a tragedy for the stage manifested itself soon after his arrival in Italy. In the summer of 1818 he started work on Tasso's madness but the effort involved in the construction of a plot brought so little satisfaction that he abandoned it after writing a short opening scene. He believed that he was incapable of framing and sustaining the interest of a plot and he drew little comfort from the knowledge that many of the plays he had read revealed the same defect. With Byron he shared the view that beautiful poetry did not compensate for a faulty construction, that one of the first requisites for a good dramatist was the capacity of forming and following-up a story or a plot and that a good plot was "the proper framework to support the sublimest efforts of poetry."<sup>(1)</sup> Shelley entertained a modest opinion of his poetical powers and no opinion at<sup>all</sup> of his dramatic talents until he wrote The Cenci. In addition he felt that he was "too metaphysical and abstract, too fond of the theoretical and the ideal to succeed as a tragedian."<sup>(2)</sup> It is not surprising that Mary shared this view with him. His two long poems Queen Mab and The Revolt of Islam and his juvenile romances Zastrossi and St. Irvyn gave no indication of the dramatic powers Shelley was to reveal in the most creative year of his life. Characteristically enough, Shelley believed that almost every one of his friends and associates was better equipped than he to attempt play-writing, that Mary was quite competent to write a tragedy at the age of twenty one, that

---

(1) Hutchinson, p.331.

(2) Ibid.

his friend Williams was talented enough to surpass some of the popular contemporary dramatists like Milman. And to each of these would-be dramatists he offered his full support and advice. While Hunt received encouragement from a distance, Mary and Williams, the companion of his last days, received day to day advice and worked under his supervision. In his attempt to get Mary to write a tragedy Shelley gives the impression that he is working off his own deep-seated urge to write for the stage.

Mary Shelley had already achieved some fame as a writer. She had done some writing before she met Shelley but it was not until she went to Geneva in 1816 that at the age of seventeen she produced her masterpiece. Frankenstein or Modern Prometheus, now more famous than its author, belongs to the days when Prometheus and Faust had laid their hold on the imagination ~~on the imagination~~ of her two remarkable companions Byron and Shelley. It had been born out of the thrilling hours Mary had spent talking "ghost lore" with the two poets. Even after allowance has been made for Shelley's personal interest in the author, one cannot doubt the sincerity of his high opinion of Mary's narrative powers and her ability to hold the reader's interest.

"The interest gradually accumulates and advances towards the conclusion with the accelerated rapidity of a rock rolled down a mountain. We are led breathless with suspense and sympathy and heaping up of incident on incident, and the working of a passion out of passion. We cry 'hold, hold! enough' - but there is yet something to come; and like the victim whose history it relates, we think we can bear no more, and yet more is to be born."(1)

Shelley wrote in his Preface to Frankenstein. In 1817, Mary published the History of A Six Weeks Tour for which material was supplied by the letters and journals Mary and

---

(1) Julian, VI, p.263.

Shelley had written during their six weeks tour after their elopment and again during their two months stay in Geneva in 1816. Shelley was convinced that Mary with her ability to sustain the interest of a story, to delineate human passions, to create suspense was eminently suited for the task of writing a tragedy on the conflict between Charles I and Cromwell.

Shelley's letter to Mary urging her to bring Charles I suggests that some work had been started on the subject in the summer of 1818.<sup>(1)</sup> Possibly they had collected some material, formed a plan, even begun something and as in the case of Tasso abandoned it for the time being. Mary showed great reluctance to attempt anything so ambitious as a tragedy for ~~in her own words~~

"she" was too young to have any chance of succeeding, even moderately, in a species of a composition that required a greater scope of experience in, and sympathy with human passion than could then have fallen to her lot.<sup>(2)</sup>

Apparently Shelley did not think the twenty-one-year-old daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin was too young to write tragedies. Mary had met some of the most fascinating personalities of the age and was accustomed to holding her own at gatherings presided over by Godwin or Shelley or Byron. She was at home in the literary world in which her father and her husband lived but she was quite modest in her own literary ambition. Shelley, however, hoped that he would overcome her objections, which he undeniably ascribed to excessive diffidence on her part, by words of encouragement. "I have already been imagining how you will conduct some of the scenes"<sup>(3)</sup> He sought

---

(1) Julian, IX, p.332.

(2) Hutchinson, p.331.

(3) Julian, IX, p.332.

to inspire her by quoting the sentence with which Godwin had begun St. Leon.

"There is nothing which the human mind can conceive which it may not execute."

Shakespeare had proved that and after all even he was "only a human being". Mary did not proceed with Charles I. She was content to improve her Italian by translating Alfieri's Myrrha. Shelley continued to "incite" her to write tragedies of her own and suggested the tragedy of the family of the Cenci. Mary had willingly transcribed the manuscript but wisely refrained from dramatising it. Had she blundered into it she might never have discovered her husband's dramatic powers. But now she "triumphed in the discovery of the new talent brought to light from the mine of wealth - his richly gifted mind."<sup>(1)</sup> She had another reason to be proud of The Cenci. It is the only one of Shelley's works which he discussed with her during its progress and the only instance of their co-operation where Shelley is known to have sought her help.<sup>(2)</sup> He still believed that she was more adept at arranging scenes. There is no indication that he tried to incite her again to write tragedies but he offered her his help, his advice, made suggestions and amendments when she turned to writing again.

A year went by with Shelley creating and Mary reading and copying Shelley's dramas and poems before the urge to write possessed her again. There is no allusion to the two mythological dramas Proserpine and Midas in Mary's correspondence for 1820. That she composed these short dramatic scenes in that year has been accepted by the editor of the two dramas, A. Koszul and the critic Sylva Norman.

---

(1) Hutchinson, p. 332.

(2) Ibid. p. 352.

Their importance for Shelley scholars lies in the contribution Shelley made to his wife's first dramatic efforts. As the title suggests they are very different in form and content from the tragedies Shelley had intended for Mary. They were obviously not meant for the stage; they belong to a species broadly described as Chamber Drama. During the carnival in Pisa the following year, they could have been presented in the marble hall of the Palazzo Lanfranchi, Proserpine with its delicately sketched goddesses and nymphs providing opportunities for the histrionic talents of Mary, Jane and their friends, Midas with its medley of Gods, satyrs and mortals embroiled in a humorous situation providing a fresh form of amusement for Byron, Shelley, Williams, Trelawny and others.

"Mary Shelley had at this time been writing some little dramas on the classical subjects, one of which was the rape of Proserpine, a very graceful composition which she had never published. Shelley contributed to this the exquisite fable of Arethusa and the Invocation to Ceres. Among the nymphs gathering flowers on Enna were the two whom she called Ino and Uno, names which I remember in the Dialogue were irresistibly ludicrous."(1)

wrote Thomas Medwin in the margin of a copy of his life of Shelley. In another book The Angler in Wales, Medwin had given the date of Shelley's translation of Dante's Matilda, which passage appears to have some bearing on the first of the two dramas.

"..... to come, that I may hear  
Thy song; like Proserpine, in Enna's glen,  
Thou seemest to my fancy, singing here  
And gathering flowers, as that fair maiden when  
She lost the Spring, and Ceres her, more dear." (2)

If Shelley did not actually suggest the theme, it is

---

(1) Thomas Medwin, The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley. With an introduction and commentary by H. Buxton Forman, O.U.P. 1913, p. 252.

(2) Hutchinson p. 719.

almost certain that he provided the inspiration. Together they had seen among hundreds of pictures one which made a vivid impression on Shelley's mind. Of Guido's Proserpine he wrote to Peacock-

"I remember, however, <sup>back</sup> an interesting picture in which Proserpine casts her languid and half unwilling eyes as it were to the flowers she had left ungathered in the fields of Enna."(1)

The theme with its poetic interpretation of the seasonal changes would appeal to both Shelley and Mary. Mary was a woman of romantic disposition and her sources of inspiration were chiefly "trees and meadows, flowers and sunshine." And Shelley encouraged her to express herself as best she could in a form most congenial to her. When she composed Proserpine, he supplied two lyrics for it. The fable of Arethusa, her flight from Alpheus and finally her union with him, was given to Ino who repeats her favourite tale to beguile the hours until Ceres returns from Olympus. The lyric is written in a neat measure, smooth as the flow of a river. The first stanza shows Arethusa leaping down the rocks, gliding and springing, the second Alpheus "bold" fast on the nymph's flight, the third the Ocean granting her asylum and Alpheus catching up with her, the fourth their homeward journey through beautiful landscape and finally a Shelleyan picture of their life together.

"And now from their fountains  
In Enna's mountains,  
Down one vale where the morning basks,  
Like friends once parted,  
Grown single hearted  
They ply their wintry tasks.  
.....  
And at night they sleep  
In the rocking deep  
Beneath the Ontygian shore;

---

(1) Julian, IX, p.342.

"Like spirits that lie  
 In the azure sky,  
 When they love, but live no more.(1)

Entirely in harmony with the atmosphere of Proserpine, this stanza prepares us for what Arethusa herself has to say in the second Act. Proserpine, terrified at being left alone, sought the spring of Arethusa to gather water-lilies for her mother. Just then

"With my Alpheus I had wandered down  
 The sloping shore into the sunlight sea;  
 And at the coast we paused, watching the waves  
 Of our mixed waters dance into the main:-(2)

The next thing she relates to Ceres is the abduction of Proserpine by the "king of Hell".

The relevance of these lyrics to their dramatic content and the value Mary put on them is revealed in the alterations Mary was subjected to when she decided to publish Proserpine without the Arethusa poem in an Annual. The poem had already appeared in her edition of Shelley's poetical works of 1824 and as Sylva Norman has suggested, Mary did not wish any of her husband's compositions to be associated with her "inferior" works. So she decided to omit the fable, depriving Proserpine of two long passages in which Proserpine suggests that they idle away their time in exchanging stories of how Prometheus stole heaven's fire - "a God-like gift for man", of the birth of Aphrodite or the stories Ino had had heard from her lover, a River-God. Instead Mary delays Ceres' departure by a few minutes, and gives Proserpine two other passages expressing the fear which has possessed her foreboding soul, an unknown panic which weighs upon her heart.

---

(1) Mary Shelley, Proserpine and Midas. Two unpublished Mythological Dramas. Edited with Introduction by A.Koszul, 1922, p.12.

(2) Ibid., p.30

Since the Invocation to Ceres, Shelley's second lyric for Proserpine, had not been included in the 1824 editions Mary did not hesitate to include it in the first published version of Proserpine in The Winters Wreath for 1832. More solemn in tone, slower in movement and shorter Proserpine sings the words as she gathers her flowers, reminding us forcibly of the lines from Dante quoted earlier. In the Winters Wreath it appears in smaller print without Shelley's name. Mary's motives are so transparently honest that no one would ever accuse her of plagiarism.

In addition to ~~the~~ writing the two lyrics Shelley supervised Mary's work and made several verbal and metrical changes in her drama. There is only one small fragment of twenty three lines in existence today known as the Spencer fragment, which bears these corrections in Shelley's hand. It is only slightly different from the Bodleian MS in Mary's neat hand and was written just before she made the final draft. Sylva Norman after a searching comparison between the Bodleian MS and the first published version in the Winters Wreath concludes that the latter was revised after Shelley's death, originally to make up for the loss of the Arethusa lyric and ultimately as Mary went on rewriting for its own sake.<sup>(1)</sup> A comparative study of the first twenty three lines in the three versions throws interesting sidelights on Shelley at work with Mary. The Spencer Fragment was published in The Nation and Athenaeum as follows:-<sup>(2)</sup>

Act II

Scene

The Plain of Enna, as before.  
Ino Hymera and Eunoe.

Eunoe. How weary am I! - and the hot sun burns (flushes)  
My cheeks that else were white with fear and grief

(1) Sylva Norman, 'Mary Shelley; Novelist and Dramatist', p.95, in On Shelley, 1938.

(2) The Nation and Athenaeum, March 19, 1921, pp.876-7.



of the examination of the Spencer fragment in relation to the Bodleian MS and the Winter's Wreath draft lies in the part Shelley played in developing Mary's dramatic talents. His inspiration, encouragement, advice and material help went a long way to arouse Mary's interest in the dramatic form. After Shelley's death this interest developed into a longing to write for the stage.

"She also wrote one on Midas, into which were introduced by Shelley in the contest between Pan and Apollo, the sublime effusion of the latter, and Pan's characterised Ode" Medwin wrote.(1)

The first indication of their being written for Midas was given by Mary herself when she mentioned in her note on the two poems published in the Posthumous Poems for 1824 edition that they had been composed "at the request of a friend to be inserted in a drama on the subject of Midas." Mary, after Shelley's death, attempted to get Midas published in Watts' Literary Souvenir or failing that Mrs Watts' New Years Gift and Juvenile Souvenir.<sup>(2)</sup> The Wattses for some unknown reason did not publish it. It may have appeared in some obscure periodical whose existence is not yet known. As far as our knowledge goes it was first published in 1922 by A.Koszul. It is wanting in the type of clues Proserpine has been favoured with and there is no fragment with Shelley's contribution. It is hardly likely that Shelley wrote the two lyrics one of which is definitely "characterised" and did not examine the rest of the composition.

Although the Hymn of Apollo and the Hymn of Pan have appeared in Shelley's poetical works in their own right as individual poems the Hymn of Pan suffers from being severed from its dramatic setting. His poem is a rejoinder to Apollo's. Confident, self-assured Apollo sings solemnly of his power over nature. He is a little didactic in the

---

(1) Medwin, p.252.

(2) M.S.L., I, p.405.

third stanza and becomes metaphysical in the final stanza.

"I am the eye with which the Universe  
Beholds itself and knows it is divine.  
All harmony of instrument or verse,  
All prophesy, all medicine is mine;  
All light of art or nature; - to my song  
Victory and praise, in its own right, belong."(1)

The melody of Pan's song varies considerably from the music of Apollo's song. Pan is less pompous than Apollo, acknowledges the power Apollo wields on Earth and Heaven, but when he sings his song strikes silence into the very creatures the Sun-god rules.

"The wind in the reeds and the rushes,  
The bees on the bells of thyme,  
The birds on the myrtle bushes,  
The cicale above in the lime,  
And the lizards below in the grass ,

.....  
The Sileni and Sylvans and Fauns  
And the nymphs of the woods and the waves

.....  
Were silent with love, as you now Apollo!  
With envy of my sweet pipings."(2)

Pan could be merry as well as melancholy. To Apollo's transcendental claims of being the All-beholding Eye he answers with his sad human experience.

" I pursued a maiden and clasped a reed,  
Gods and men, we are all deluded thus!  
It breaks in our bosom and then we bleed!  
All wept, as I think both ye now would  
If envy or age had not frozen your blood,  
At the sorrow of my sweet pipings."(3)

Mary Shelley could not possibly have omitted either the Apollo hymn or the more dramatic hymn of Pan without damaging the plot of the drama. For it was Midas' lack of discretion, consequent upon these songs which provoked

---

(1) Proserpine and Midas, loc. cit., p.53.

(2) Ibid., p.54.

(3) Ibid., p.55.

Apollo's wrath. Because he had preferred Pan's song Midas found himself saddled with a pair of ass's ears. His greed for gold brought him further misfortunes. The piece is not without its measure of object lessons. The whispering reeds echoing Zopyrion's words at the most inappropriate moment introduce a touch of humour. The scene with Silenus in a state of intoxication, Bacchus in search of him, Midas holding fast to his crown and Zopyrion smothering his laughter and the nodding reeds with their disastrous interruptions is extremely lively. Contrasted with the later scene in Proserpine where Arethusa and Ino come to see Ceres it shows the variety of moods Mary could depict in two short sketches. While Proserpine is all moonlight and rainbows, Midas is lively and lusty. The Shelleys must have enjoyed dramatising the two scenes from classical mythology.

Strangely enough the play with which Mary least expected to be associated was the dramatised version of Frankenstein. Her astonishment no less than her pleasure born of success is stamped all over the letter she wrote to Hunt on her return to England after Shelley's death.

"But lo and behold I found myself famous! Frankenstein had prodigious success as a drama, and was about to be repeated for the 23rd night at the English Opera House. The play bill amused me extremely for in the list of dramatis personae came -- by Mr T. Cooke; this nameless mode of naming the unnameable is rather good."(1)

It had obviously been made into a grand spectacle. On her return to England Mary made several visits to the theatre. Kean's Sir Giles Overreach produced a tremendous effect on her and the widow of Shelley began to think in terms of writing a tragedy. Mary had succumbed to "the last infirmity of noble mind." She wrote some scenes and in the absence of Percy, sent them to her father. William Godwin's reply is full of penetrating observations on the inferior dramatists

---

(1) M.S.L., I, p.259.

of that period. In his opinion Mary had only one good scene to show 'Manfred and the Two Strangers in the Cottage'.<sup>(1)</sup>

"Is it not strange that so many people admire and relish Shakespeare, and that nobody writes or even attempts to write like him? To read your specimens, I should suppose that you had read no tragedies but such as have been written since the date of your birth. Your personages are mere abstractions -the lines and points of a mathematical diagram- and not men and women. If A crosses B and C falls upon D, who can weep for that?"<sup>(2)</sup>

He advised Mary to be contented with her dramatic scenes and, with Barry Cornwall, set an example for those who could cope with detached dramatic scenes but not a full length tragedy. This could hardly have pleased Mary. Barry Cornwall had entertained high opinion of Shelley's poetry and of Mary's beauty but the Shelleys, Shelley in particular thought poorly of his dramatic efforts which included a scene on The Rape of Proserpine. Seldom did Shelley use such strong language when criticising a fellow poet.

"The man whose critical gall is not stirred up by such ottava rimas as Barry Cornwall's, may safely be conjectured to possess no gall at all. The world is pale with the sickness of such stuff."<sup>(3)</sup>

Shelley had written. It was because Shelley had wished to rescue the English stage "from the miserable trash which from Milman to Barry Cornwall" had been forced upon it that he encouraged first Mary and then Williams to write dramas.

On May 1, 1821, E.E.Williams and his 'common-law' wife, Jane, moved to Pugnano about seven and a half miles from Pisa. The Shelleys moved to the Baths of Pisa on

---

(1) The Life and Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, by Mrs Julian Marshall, 1889, Vol.II, p.107.

(2) Ibid.

(3) Julian, IX, p.234.

May 8, and very soon they were dining together, walking together and visiting each other several times a week. In addition to being a fairly clever painter of water colours Williams possessed a taste for dramatic writing which immediately caught Shelley's attention. Shelley found in him a congenial companion, one who made intelligent conversation, discussed philosophy and politics and gave up all his accustomed sports for the bettering of his mind. The impact which Shelley's personality made on the sensitive mind of this Eton-educated ex-army officer was recorded by him in a letter he wrote to Trelawny within two mouths of his meeting the poet.

"Shelley is certainly a man of most astonishing genius, in appearance extraordinary young, of manners mild and aimable but withal full of life and fun. His wonderful command of language and the ease with which he speaks on what are generally considered abstruse subjects, are striking; in short his ordinary conversation is akin to poetry, for he sees things in the most singular and pleasing light; if he wrote as he talks he would be popular enough."(1)

Williams' high esteem of Shelley's mental powers was extended to include the poet's knowledge and judgment on matters related to poetry, drama and metaphysics. Very soon Williams came to adopt the attitude of a pupil towards a teacher and never wrote anything without submitting it for criticism to Shelley. Shelley on his part, as the only surviving manuscript of Williams' dramatic efforts shows, went over each line of each scene, correcting, altering, cancelling with his own hands.

It was at Pugnano, in the beautiful villa of Marchese Poschi that Williams composed his first play called The Promise, or a year, a month, and a day. On July 30, 1821, Williams sent the MS to his friend Cox to be submitted to one of the principal theatres in London. Cox forwarded

---

(1) Morpurgo, pp. 6-7

the MS to Fawcett of Covent Garden who shortly afterwards returned it with the compliments of the proprietors of Covent Garden Theatre. They wished to convey their gratitude to Williams for the offer of his play which abounded in "great poetical beauties" but which as a drama for the stage, they felt, would not meet with any very great success. Williams was disappointed.

"So much for the Promise which has proved like the promises of my youth illusions all"(1)

was his sad comment. Williams had cherished high hopes for his maiden drama, not merely because he thought rather well of it himself but because these hopes had been continuously fed by the constant encouragement he had received from his friend and guide, Shelley.

All that survives of The Promise are Acts III, IV, and V. The manuscript reposes with the Shelley collection at the Bodleian and from time to time attracts scholars who are led to it by their curiosity about Shelley's contribution to the drama. It has never been published in full, although in 1927, Walter Peck under Appendix G in his biography of Shelley published "Shelley's Alterations in the Bodleian MS of Edward Williams' play". The third Act of the MS appears to be relatively tidy, it has fewer alterations, but the remaining two Acts with lines and passages crossed out and re-written make the task of deciphering for the weak-sighted rather difficult. Mercifully for those who have consulted the MS, Peck's published 'Alterations' make it easy to see how conscientiously and with what loving care Shelley had revised his friend's drama. Undoubtedly this manuscript is not the one which had been to his friend in London. His Journal shows that Williams revised the drama after it was rejected and finally abandoned it in favour of a new project at the

---

(1) Williams, p.124.

end of the year.

The plot of The Promise contains all the ingredients of a romantic tale such as Williams may have discovered in Boccaccio. Love, chivalry, absence, disguises and recognition<sup>by</sup> tokens, all play a part in his rejected drama. The third Act discovers Saladin and Achmet in the garden of Torello's house in Pavia. Disguised as merchants they have enjoyed several days hospitality with Torello and his beautiful, devoted wife, Adalita. Rumour has reached Achmet that Richard of England and Philip of Gallia have planned another crusade and the Sultan decides to leave immediately. Torello and Adalita are overcome by sadness at being parted from such noble guests. Adalita presents Saladin with a robe she had embroidered for her husband. Torello bids farewell to his guests with warm feelings.

Torello;        God speed you Sirs, -but one word ere we part  
I know not who you are-nor do I ask  
To learn, more than it pleases you to tell-  
But pardon me-I'm moved by some strange impulse  
Who e'er you are you will not leave me with  
Aught of belief, that you are merely merchants,  
I recommend you both to God.    Farewell.

Saladin:        It may be strange accidents oft happen  
That some day you may see our merchandize  
And that confirm our credit-go with God. (1)

After these meaningful words Saladin and Achmet leave for their homeland. Torello prepares to leave for Palestine. In a prolonged scene between him and Adalita he convinces her that it is honour and not glory which cause him to go to war.

The fourth Act reveals a sad Adalita anxious for the news of her husband. Neither her brother, Vincenzo, nor her uncle, the abbot of Pietro, have anything definite to communicate. The audience is not kept in suspense for

---

(1) MSS Shelley, Add.d.3, fol.15.

long. The following scene is shifted to Alexandria. Torello is safe but in danger of being held a captive. He must escape soon. In the next scene Saladin learns the news of Torello's supposed death from Achmet and expresses deep sorrow. Next, Torello is seen planning his escape with Francesco, a fellow survivor, and discloses his reasons for wanting to return to Pavia immediately. If rumours of his death are confirmed, Adalita, Torello fears, will be forced by her uncle to marry Sismondi. Back in Pavia, the last scene of the fourth Act shows Sismondi telling the Abbot how reluctantly Adalita had received his suit.

The fifth Act begins with Adalita before a crucifix in her room. The Abbot brings pressure on her. In the meanwhile Torello has been captured and brought before Saladin. The Sultan recognizes him and after much ceremony arranges for his safe departure. The dramatist takes advantage of Torello's voyage home to prepare the stage for a magnificent scene. He has seldom introduced more than two characters in conversation on the stage, a pattern Shelley had adopted in The Cenci. The court scene with Saladin in Alexandria was brief and without music but the fourth scene of the fifth Act certainly shows that the dramatist had the Covent Garden stage in mind.

"A splendid saloon in Torello's house, with a vista of pillars on which are seen shields flags arms etc. to a chapel, the large doors of which are open and discover an altar laid out, many lights burning-church attendance within swinging incense..(1)

As the procession approaches

"music soft at first advancing quicker. Those who form the procession arrange themselves on either side the hall- the rest enter, being met by the Abbot in his robbery. Scene closes with solemn music..(2)

---

(1) MSS Shelley, Add.d.3, fol.57.

(2) Ibid., fol.58.

In the meanwhile the ships escorting the hero have reached the harbour. The final scene is laid in a chamber in Torello's house. The guests have assembled, the feast is set. When all the characters have taken their position on the stage and a scene pleasing to the eye arranged, Torello's identity is discovered. Adalita finds happiness in the reunion with her husband, Sismondi gains a friend in Torello and everybody is generally pleased. Music strikes as little boys and girls enter and sing the marriage song Shelley had composed for the occasion. The Epithalamium, as it is called, appears in folio 50 in the manuscript in Shelley's own hand. It was first published by Medwin in his Life of Shelley in 1847.

It is not possible to do full justice to the nature and extent of help Shelley gave to Williams in this short chapter. Peck has partially revealed it by noting down cancellations and substitutions of words, lines and passages, insertion of some material suggested by Shelley, alterations in punctuation and various other changes.<sup>(1)</sup> For instance, in the third Act of the revised manuscript, after Saladin and Achmet had taken their leave, Torello begins a soliloquy with "That some day you may see our merchandize". These significant words had already been spoken by Saladin<sup>(2)</sup> and were introduced at the head of the soliloquy at Shelley's suggestion. Williams originally had begun it with "I do mistrust them-it is strange-most strange" and retained it afterwards as the second line. Another instance of Shelley's contribution may be found in the alteration from a "Library in Torello's House" to a "Room in Torello's House". Shelley may have wished for fewer scene changes or he may have found an apartment a more congenial place for<sup>a</sup> tender scene than a room lined with books. All these variations

---

(1) Peck, pp.365-380.

(2) See p.32.

accepted by Williams show on one hand the reverence he felt for Shelley's judgment on drama and on the other hand the keen interest Shelley took in the attempts of a would-be dramatist. It is characteristic of Shelley to have described himself as "the sparrow educating the young of the cuckoo". Williams returned the compliment by remarking that Shelley's "greatest fault was his ignorance of his own worth".

Shelley, it must be observed, did not hold any exaggerated opinion of his friend's dramatic talents. The rhapsodic strain in which he greeted Byron's dramatic achievements is entirely absent from his comments on Williams' work:

"Williams' play, if not a dramatic effort of the highest order, is one of the most manly, spirited and natural pieces of writing I ever met with. —it is full of observation both of nature and of human nature; the theatrical effect and interest seems to be strong and well kept up. I confess that I was surprised at his success, and shall be still more so if it is not universally acknowledged on the stage. It is worth fifty such things as Cornwall's 'Mirandola'." (1)

Shelley had never reciprocated Cornwall's appreciation of his own poetry. He had read Mirandola, a story of frustrated love, revenge and murder, without any enthusiasm. It was the popularity of the stage production of Mirandola which among other things led Shelley to suppose ~~that~~ Williams' The Promise would be ultimately presented on the stage.

Byron's arrival in Pisa in November 1821, followed by Trelawny expanded the Pisan circle and added a fresh stimulant to the drama enthusiast. Williams was dazzled by his Lordship's personality but he was not quenched. He continued to weave new plots and gather fresh material. He meditated a tragedy on the life of Celestine 5th and

---

(1) Julian, X, p. 37.

Boniface 8th. He consulted Gibbon's Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, Giovanni Villani's Historia Fiorentina and Sismondi's Histoire des Republiques Italiennes.<sup>(1)</sup> He made a sketch and showed it to Shelley. Shelley said that it would not perform.<sup>(2)</sup> Williams wrote a part of the first scene and took it to Shelley. The teacher was still discouraging; Williams had become too ambitious and undertaken a task which exceeded the limits of his dramatic powers.<sup>(3)</sup> Williams however continued with the tragedy consoling himself with the thought that "the attempt however unsuccessful would at least be improving. For nine solid days the industrious pupil worked on the opening scene and at last succeeded in extracting reluctant praise from his supervisor. The last reference to Boniface is made in an entry for January 29, 1822:

" . . . . . read a scene to Shelley who advises me by all means to continue." (4)

In acting against Shelley's advice Williams did not behave like a rebellious pupil. On the contrary, beneath his stubbornness lurked a desire to continue revising until the teacher had recognised some improvement. Nothing remains of this much-written first **Act** of Boniface. All that survives is the vivid impression conveyed by these entries in Williams' Journal, of the patience exercised and the time spared by this "man of most extraordinary genius" and generous impulses. Shelley often encouraged his friend in the hope that even if his drama failed to achieve the satisfactory standard it would still be "improving".

A certain amount of improvement seems to have distinguished Williams' final attempt before his death.

---

(1) Williams, p.125.

(2) Ibid., p.124.

(3) Ibid., p.125.

(4) Ibid., p.126.

As usual Williams turned to Shelley for advice on the plot of Gonzaga, Duke of Mantua. Shelley's immediate approval revived Williams' spirits and he felt a confidence on beginning this play which he had never felt before. (1) Shelley found some faults with the first Act but on the whole was pleased with it. It was a drama on which the eyes of all the principal members of the Pisan circle were focused. Medwin and Trelawny spoke so favourably of Williams' efforts that Byron "promised to write a Prologue and Epilogue and insure its reading and success if it possessed the least merit as a drama". (2) Further he suggested that the title should be changed to the 'Secret'. Encouraged by this concerted effort on the part of Shelley, Byron and their friends to help him, Williams went to work with a determination which eclipsed all his previous attempts. He made at least four drafts of the first Act and each of these was subjected to Shelley's criticism. Once he incorporated alterations offered by Mary.

Williams' tragedy was interrupted by "the affair with the dragoon". He returned to it but without any success. His entries during this period are pathetic in tone. He felt so discouraged that he decided to alter the entire plan of the drama. He took the new plan to show to Shelley who gave him a "long lecture on the drama". (3) This put Williams in very bad spirits with himself. It certainly puts Shelley's readers in bad spirits with Williams for not putting on record Shelley's lecture on the drama.

Apart from this day-to-day account of the close collaboration between Shelley and Williams, the Journal gives many intimate glimpses of the life of this remarkable

---

(1) Williams, p.130.

(2) Ibid., p.134.

(3) Ibid., p.144.

group of exiles. It shows, for instance, Shelley acquiring proficiency in hitting half crowns, turning physician during Jane's illness, spending an evening at home with Mary dressed in a Turkish costume and Jane in a "Hindostanee"<sup>dress</sup>. Williams' entries are fuller than Mary's and one is a little more grateful for that much of extra information. To Williams we owe our knowledge of the fact that the last play Shelley ever saw was Alfieri's Rosamunda.<sup>(1)</sup>

Although the relationship between Byron and Shelley will be discussed in another chapter it may not be inappropriate to find out in what light Williams viewed this relationship. The companion of Shelley on his last journey was given neither to ~~pe~~varication like Medwin nor to exaggeration like Trelawny. The opinions that he held may have been governed by his deep devotion and his high regard for Shelley's character and poetry but none the less they were genuine. While he shared with Shelley his enthusiasm for Byron's poetry he still suspected that Byron entertained a high opinion of the younger poet not always apparent to others.

"The style of his Lordship's letters to him is quite that of a pupil such as asking his opinion and demanding his advice on certain points etc. I must tell you that the idea of the tragedy of 'Manfred' (1817) and many of the philosophical or rather metaphysical notions interwoven in the composition of the fourth Canto of 'Childe Harold' (1818) are of his suggestions. But this of course is between ourselves."<sup>(2)</sup>

Williams wrote to Trelawny. Williams never grudged the fame he had found "one morning" but he often wished for the same recognition for his friend. His entry for January 8, 1822, one of the most revealing in the entire Journal betrays

---

(1) Williams, p.145.

(2) Morpurgo, p.7.

the sequence of his thoughts as they move from the success of the noble Lord to the comparative failure of his friend.

"Mary read to us the two first Acts of Lord B's 'Werner'. . . . As to S(helley)'s 'Charles the First'-on which he sat down about 5 days since, if he continues it in the spirit (of) some of the lines which he read to me last night, it will doubtless take a place before any other that has appear(ed) since Shakspeare, and will be found a valuable addition to the Historical Pla(y). It is exceedingly to be regretted that S(helley, does) not meet with greater encouragement. (A) mind such as his, powerful as it is, requires gentle leading.-"(1)

Perhaps Trelawny who was more familiar with Byron had discussed this matter with him. Perhaps Byron did reply in the words Trelawny has ascribed to him:

"If we puffed the Snake it might not turn out a profitable investment. If he cast off the slough of his mystifying metaphysics he should want no puffing. "(2)

---

(1) Williams, pp.123-124.

(Morpurgo, p. #32.

CHAPTER III

Shelley and Byron.

On May 27, 1816 Shelley caught his first sight of Lord Byron as he stepped out of his boat on the Lake of Geneva. Claire Clairmont who may very well have engineered this meeting, introduced the two poets to each other. That evening Byron, Shelley, Mary, Claire and Polidori dined together in the Hôtel d'Angleterre and there began one of the most famous friendships in literary history. There is no record of the first impression they made on one another but an entry in his diary revealed how well-informed Polidori was-

"Percy Shelley, the author of Queen Mab came bashful, shy, consumptive, twenty-six (sic) seperated from his wife; keeps the two daughters of Godwin who practise his theories; one L(ord) B(yron)'s."(1)

Byron had read Queen Mab with interest but without knowing the author's name.<sup>(2)</sup> Out of the 250 copies of Queen Mab published in the summer of 1813, Shelley had distributed some 70 among his friends and distinguished men of letters. In turn, the author of Childe Harold was a poet whose works Shelley had read and admired with some reservation.<sup>(3)</sup>

It is just possible that Claire had introduced Byron to the melancholy verses contained in the Alastor volume. If the increasing use of such symbols as clouds and caves, serpents and eagles, boats and streams exasperated him, Shelley's disillusion with the political situation in Europe after the battle of Waterloo, his hatred of tyranny and oppression and his interest in the contemporary literary scene in England must have found an echo in Byron's heart.

---

(1) The Diary of Dr John William Polidori. Edited by W.M.Rossetti, 1816, p.101.

(2) White, I, p.653.

(3) Julian, IX, pp.198-199.

From this day until Shelley's departure for England in August 1816, the two poets spent a considerable time in each other's company. Sailing in the morning, reading in the afternoon, more sailing in the evening filled their days. Sometimes there were evening gatherings at the Villa Diodati, the conversation, ranging from the topic of ghosts to Byron's association with Drury Lane, ~~which~~ lasted until early morning. Once at Montalegre, where the Shelleys lived, the young egocentric physician insisted on having Byron read to the company a tragedy he had written. When the audience almost laughed at the passage beginning with " 'T is thus the goiter'd idiot of the Alps" (1) Byron remarked with perfect candour that he had heard far worse things during the term served on the Drury Lane Committee! The number of plays upon the shelf was five hundred and not one which could be conscientiously tolerated. He felt obliged "to give a civil answer, and hearing and<sup>a</sup> reading", to "the authors and authoresses and the milliners and the wild Irishmen - the people from Brighton, from Blackwall, from Chatham, from Cheltham, from Dublin, from Dundee - who came in upon him." (2) Shelley during his stay in London had been an indifferent theatre-goer and as yet not desirous of breaking into the dramatic form; nevertheless he must have listened with interest and registered the fact that England in the second decade of the nineteenth century showed an appalling lack of good playwrights. Sheridan's death that summer must have evoked fresh memories of Byron's association with Drury Lane and the young Shelley must have been regaled with many anecdotes from the lives of dramatists,

---

(1) Thomas Moore, Life of Lord Byron, 1851, III, p.276.

(2) L.J., III, p.235.

actors and managers connected with the theatre world. Byron claimed that his association with Drury Lane had given him <sup>s</sup>uch contempt for the stage that if he wrote anything in the dramatic form he would make it quite unfit for the stage. Consequently when he wrote his "witch" drama Manfred introducing supernatural beings moving in regions lying beyond the limits of this world, he made it quite clear to his publishers that it was to be treated as a closet drama. (1)

Manfred was conceived during Byron's association with Shelley. Shelley himself wrote little and studied even less but his reading list for 1816 shows that he read a number of Greek plays, including <sup>the</sup> Prometheus Vinc-tus of Aeschylus. (2) If Medwin is to be relied upon, Shelley read it aloud to Byron. (3) While Manfred must ultimately be studied in relation to Childe Harold Canto III and the Letters and Journals of 1816 there is no denying the spiritual link between Manfred and Shelley's conception of Prometheus. Both poets had been fascinated by the figure of Prometheus. When Jeffrey, the reviewer was reminded of the Aeschylean tragedy in "the tone and pitch of the composition as well as in the character of the diction of the more solemn parts" (4) of Manfred, Byron proudly acknowledged the debt.

"The Prometheus if not exactly in my plan has always been so much in my head, that I can easily conceive its influence over all or anything that I have written." (5) he wrote to Murray. It was one of the plays he read three times a year in school. He had translated a part of a chorus from Aeschylus which was first published in the

---

(1) L.J., IV, p.55.

(2) Hutchinson, Mary's note p.532.

(3) Medwin, p.161.

(4) L.J., IV, p.174, n.1.

(5) L.J., IV, pp.174-5.

Fugitive Pieces and later included in the Hours of Idleness. References to the theme abound in his letters and poems. In July 1816, when Shelley was still near, Byron paid his homage to the Titan in a poem. To Shelley as to Byron the Titan was

"..... a symbol and a sign  
To mortals of their fate and force  
Like him man is in part divine  
A troubled stream from pure source." (1)

Manfred echoes these sentiments when he describes human beings as "half dust, half deity". Although some of the elements in his character do not bear any trace of Prometheus - sin, mystery, passion and power being the traits of a Gothic hero, of the Byronic hero in particular - Manfred in several passages achieves the stature of suffering Prometheus. He does not share with Shelley's hero either the missionary zeal to render less "the sum of human wretchedness" or his humility but he shares with him the endless torment, the dignity, the endurance and above all the defiance which brings him closer to Shelley's idea of Prometheus rather than that of Aeschylus.

" Slaves scoff not at my will!  
The mind, the spirit the Promethean spark,  
The lightning of my being, is as bright,  
Pervading, and far darting as your own,  
And shall not yield to yours, though coop'd in clay!"<sup>(2)</sup>

such is the note of authority in the voice of the tormented Manfred.

Shelley liked Manfred better than anything Byron had written except for the third Canto of Childe Harold, composed in the same year, 1816.

"I have read ~~your~~ "Manfred" with the greatest admiration. The same freedom from common rules that marked the 3rd Canto and "Chillon" is visible here; and it was that which all your earlier productions except "Lara",

---

(1) Byron, Poetical Works. 1904. p 96

(2) Act I, Scene I, ll.153-157.

"wanted... "Manfred" as far as I learn, is immensely popular; it is characterised as a very daring production."(1)

Shelley did not make any specific comments on the form of Manfred, only an oblique one, by his reference to the "common rules" which had marred Byron's Eastern tales written in rhymed couplets. Shelley's marked preference for Manfred, matched only by his enthusiasm for the Third Canto of Childe Harold, showed that he appreciated the setting and characterisation which placed it above his other poems. Rejecting the poetic conventions he had advocated in The English Bards and Scotch Reviewers Byron had broken into a form not attempted by any other English romantic poet before and created a world where a mortal holds conference with a witch and where the Hall of Arimanes is within ~~an~~ easy reach of the Jungfrau. Undoubtedly Shelley felt very much at home in the congenial company of spirits wandering at Manfred's beck and call, of destinies holding a rendez-vous on the mountain summit, of Manfred on his interstellar trip to the Abode of Evil and his reach for the shadowy form of Astarte.

Shelley was quite aware of the stir Manfred had created in the English literary world and took <sup>a</sup> keen interest in the comments and criticism which appeared in various periodicals. He was displeased with the critical praise The Edinburgh Review bestowed upon it and disagreed with Hunt in his qualified approval of Manfred.

"The Edinburgh Review praises "Manfred" excessively, yet far less than it deserves; because their praise, though unbounded is studied and cold. You know I live out of the world, and hear nothing. Hunt who has a very great esteem and interest for you, thinks with me that the 3rd Canto is the finest specimen of your powers yet exhibited. His taste considerably

---

(1) Julian, IX, p.233.

"differs from mine in some other respects. He does not like "Manfred", not because it is defective in power and imagination, but because, as he alleges it administers to a diseased view of things. I should say that some of your earlier writings had that tendency, but that "Manfred" was free from it."(1)

This particular reviewer attributed the chief inspiration to Marlowe's Dr. Faustus while others accused Byron of "plagiarising" from Goethe's Faustus. "The Devil may take both the Faustuses, German and English. - I have taken neither", Byron retorted in exasperation.<sup>(2)</sup> If Shelley observed any resemblance between the opening scenes of Manfred and Faust he did not comment on it. He would know of course that in August 1816 Monk Lewis had visited Switzerland, and both Byron and he had heard Lewis translate scenes from Goethe's masterpiece.<sup>(3)</sup> Shelley himself, as an exercise in German had made a literal translation from the opening portion of Faust in his adolescent period.<sup>(4)</sup> It is highly likely that Lewis' reading stimulated a discussion on Goethe's treatment of the legendary figure of Faust and the form he had chosen to portray his spiritual conflict. One of the things they had in common was the fact that they were frequently drawn to the same personality, that is, Prometheus, Job, Tasso and Faust, representative of man's unconquerable spirit. They both realized the dramatic potentialities of such indomitable figures and the superhuman forces with which they had come in conflict.

Although the drama had been described as "a very daring production", Shelley found nothing in it to shock his sensibilities. On the contrary Manfred's defiant spirit, his intense suffering and the calm resolution with which

---

(1) Julian, IX, p.246.

(2) L.J., IV, p.177.

(3) L.J., IV, p.97.

(4) ~~Prose Works~~, III, pp.321-325., Julian VII pp.277-78.

he meets his end found ready sympathy in Shelley's heart. The incest motive with its tragic overtones added poignancy to the situation.

"Incest is like many other incorrect things a very poetical circumstance. It may be the excess of love or hate. It may be the defiance of everything for the sake of another which clothes itself in glory of the highest heroism, or it may be that cynical rage, which confounding the good and the bad in existing opinions breaks through them for the purpose of rioting in selfishness and antipathy."(1)

It was the "excess of love" which caused Shelley to introduce the lovers as brother and sister in Laon and Cythna and in the first version of Rosalind and Helen, to address Emilia Viviani as "Spouse! Sister! Angel!" and it was something worse than cynical rage which drove Count Cenci to violate his own daughter.

Shelley had only one fault to find with Manfred, its morbid tone.

"But it made me <sup>dreadfully</sup> ~~excessively~~ melancholy and I fear other friends in England too. Why do you indulge this despondency?"(2)

Shelley failed to enter fully into sympathy with a man who is tormented by a species of remorse, the cause of which is only partially explained. Reading through Shelley's poetry, essays and correspondence, one is struck again and again by the absence of a sense of guilt, of remorse, the only exception being the brief single moment when Giacomo in The Cenci is overcome by the horror of parricide.<sup>(3)</sup>

Remorse has been treated dramatically by Wordsworth in The Borderers, Coleridge in Remorse, Byron in Manfred, but Shelley's poetry betrays no sign of his being under its stress. One is left to wonder if this species of remorse is something that goes with virtues such as those Wilson Knight attributes to Byron - "the awareness of the ineradicable

(1) Julian, X, pp.124-125.

(2) Julian, IX, pp.233.

(3) Act V, Scene I, l. 10-11.

taint of sin, his superstitious reverence for the Deity and his respect for the Church."<sup>(1)</sup> Manfred, personally, showed little reverence for the Deity and even less for the Church, qualities which undeniably endeared him to the younger poet who liked to sign himself as an atheist. What disturbed Shelley was Manfred's preoccupation with guilt and its consequence, remorse, which threw a pall of gloom over Manfred's world.

It is very difficult to assess with any exactitude the degree of influence Shelley exercised over Byron either through his interpretation of Prometheus and Faust or by virtue of being what he was, the least earthy of Byron's companions in Geneva. We know that they had heard with absorbed attention Monk Lewis's translations of some scenes from Faust; that Shelley had most probably read Prometheus Bound to Byron, that they beguiled many evenings indulging their passion for ghost lore. In the discussions that followed particularly on their favourite figures of Prometheus, Job and Faust<sup>s</sup> moving against the divine background a great interplay of thoughts and feelings took place and in this exchange of ideas the two poets gave one another what can only be sensed in their poetry and not measured in words or figures. If Shelley absorbed from Byron something of the latter's knowledge of the contemporary theatre and caught some of his interest in it, it may be true to say in return Byron assimilated some of Shelley's vocabulary, his turn for abstract thinking and his interest in the spirits of earth, air and ocean. By introducing these disembodied beings as dramatic personae and not mere figures for the purpose of creating "atmosphere", by moving up into super-terrestrial regions, Byron showed the dramatic

---

(1) G. Wilson Knight, The Plays of Lord Byron. Reprinted from the Times Literary Supplement, February 3, 1950.

potentialities of this machinery and paved the way for such metaphysical dramas as Prometheus Unbound.

The words Byron used to describe his drama - "wild", "metaphysical", "inexplicable"<sup>(1)</sup> could to some extent be applied to Shelley's drama on the subject of Prometheus' victory over Jupiter. Prometheus Unbound, "a lyric and classical drama" was begun in the autumn of 1818, a few weeks before Shelley's reunion with Byron in Venice and completed the following year. Shelley's treatment of the old myth was so different from that of Aeschylus that he felt obliged to emphasise the difference particularly with regard to the use of "characters and mechanism" which, he claimed, had not <sup>been</sup> attempted before.<sup>(2)</sup> Because of the obvious link between Prometheus Unbound and Manfred as metaphysical dramas, dramas in which the supernatural element is blended with the physical, some scholars have been puzzled by this claim on Shelley's part and by his failure to see that some of the supernatural machinery operating in a world infinite in space and eternal in duration, had already been exploited for dramatic purposes in Manfred. Although Prometheus Unbound is essentially Shelleyan in spirit and therefore quite unlike Byron - it produces a totally different effect on the reader - it possesses certain features which bear a family resemblance to Manfred. An anthology of the metaphysical dramas of the early nineteenth century ranging from the supernatural to the philosophical, would certainly include both Manfred and Prometheus Unbound. And yet Shelley failed to comment on the kinship between the two dramas. Further he claimed in his letter to Olier:<sup>l</sup>-

"It is in my judgment of a higher character than anything I have yet attempted and is perhaps less an imitation of anything that has gone before it."<sup>(3)</sup>

---

(1) L.J., IV. pp 54-55  
(2) Julian, X, p.48.  
(3) Julian, X, p.79.

When Shelley made this singular claim he knew, of course, that many years before Aeschylus had employed similar machinery and some of the same characters to depict the cosmic struggle which shook Olympus. He was sufficiently familiar with Faust to know that Goethe had drawn upon the Spirit of Earth and included her in the dramatis personae. He had read, admired and commented on the chief merits of Manfred, taking into account the form which set it apart from Byron's other works. And yet he failed to acknowledge the fact that some of the mechanism he had employed in Prometheus Unbound had already been used by the three poets first mentioned and that some of the characters had been handed down to him by Aeschylus himself. In his preface to Prometheus Unbound Shelley acknowledged his debt to Aeschylus, as he did to Milton, emphasising the difference between his Prometheus and the legendary Titan on one hand and Milton's Satan on the other. As for his debt to Byron his ~~his~~ drama is so different in conception and purpose that it probably never occurred to him to see that in the mechanism at least Manfred had anticipated him. Considering the exaggerated opinion Shelley entertained of Byron's poetical powers all through his life it does not seem likely that it was from any reluctance to be associated with Manfred that Shelley omitted a public acknowledgement of this fact. Consequently when he wrote and told Peacock whose enthusiasm for the Greek poets and familiarity with Shelley's bent of mind had aroused his curiosity, that he had employed "characters and mechanism not attempted before", he - this is only a conjecture - meant no more than that the meaning and significance he attached to things and persons in his allegorical drama were so peculiar to him as to make it less of imitation than anything he had written.

Before Shelley launched into the Aeschylean drama, he employed the summer of 1818, collecting material and planning the tragedy on the life of Tasso. There is no

evidence in the correspondence of Shelley and Mary that he was aware of Goethe's tragedy on the Italian poet in which a reconciliation had been effected between Tasso and his rival in love and poetry, Antonio. Shelley was familiar with Byron's The Lament of Tasso which he had seen eight months earlier. It has been suggested that after the publication of Byron's poem Shelley felt too inhibited to go on with the tragedy, having written a short opening scene and abandoned it in favour of the more metaphysical theme of Prometheus. Our knowledge of the brief history of this abandoned drama forces us to reject this explanation and accept the view that, if anything, Byron's Lament stimulated Shelley to start work on the tragedy. Shelley did not begin until the spring of 1818, at least eight months after he had seen the Lament and was given sufficient time in which to decide whether he was adequate to the task of writing a tragedy, his very first, on the same subject as Byron's Lament. Although he had enjoyed reading certain passages, it did not produce the shattering effect which Cain was to do later upon his mind nor fill him with an exaggerated sense of his own inferiority. He admired the Lament much less than Manfred and did not think it was "so perfect and sustained a composition".<sup>(1)</sup> He was particularly moved by the lines in which Byron had described "the youthful feelings of Tasso, that undistinct consciousness of its own greatness, which a heart of genius cherishes in solitude, and neglect and contempt."<sup>(2)</sup> It made Shelley's head wild with tears. Shelley did not visit any of the spots hallowed by Tasso's presence until the autumn of 1818 but he had read Gierusalem Liberata, Aminta and Life of Tasso. It is possible that The Lament of Tasso re-inforced the inspiration Shelley drew from the life and works of Tasso

---

(1) Julian, IX, p.245.

(2) Ibid.

and acted as the spring board from which <sup>he</sup> (Shelley) plunged into the dramatic form.

Byron did not learn of Shelley's dramatic ventures until after The Cenci was rejected by Mr Harris of Covent Garden. Byron had not read it but on the basis of rumours that it was too horrible for words he wrote to his friend Hoppner whose opinion of Shelley had declined:-

"I regret that you have such a bad opinion of Shiloh, you used to have a good one. Surely he has talent and honour, but is crazy against religion and morality. His tragedy is sad work; but the subject renders it so. His Islam had much poetry."(1)

This from a man who normally adapted his tone to suit the listener is high praise indeed. Shelley was not in the habit of showing his works to Byron but he would have gladly sent him a copy had Byron expressed the wish to see it. It ~~is~~ <sup>was</sup> only when Byron asked Shelley to see The Cenci that he sent him a copy in the hope that he would find it less horrible than he had been led to believe. After all it had been "based on facts". Byron did not think much of The Cenci as drama. His scanty criticism of Shelley's only tragedy throws <sup>n</sup> considerable light on the fundamental difference in the approach of the two poets to the whole question of stage drama. Shelley stood for the Elizabethans and the English tradition, Byron for Alfieri and the Greek tradition. In the only surviving letter in which Byron discusses Shelley's poetry with him he writes:-

"You know my opinion of that second-hand school of poetry - you also know my high opinion of your own poetry - because it is of no school. I read Cenci - but, besides that I think the subject essentially undramatic I am not an admirer of our old dramatists as models, I deny that the English have hitherto had a drama at all. Your Cenci, however, was a work of power and poetry."(2)

---

(1) L.J., V, p.74.

(2) L.J., V, p.268.

The Cenci, said Lord Byron, had poetry and power but the subject was essentially undramatic. Byron did not refer to this drama again and we will never know whether he meant that the nineteenth century standards of morality would make it impossible for the dramatist to treat the incest theme satisfactorily or whether the incestuous passion of a monstrously wicked father for his angelic daughter was incapable of being treated dramatically.

Shelley did not subscribe to Byron's views on the "old dramatists" but he was in no mood to enter into a controversy. Although Byron had publicly entered into a literary contest with Bowles and asserted the supremacy of the "little man of Queen Anne" over his contemporaries Shelley had not realized the extent to which Byron had applied his literary theories to the plays he was writing in Ravenna. He still hoped that Byron would revive the golden age of the English Drama:

"We look to you for substituting something worthy of the English stage for the miserable trash which from Milman to Barry Cornwall has been intruded on it since the demand for tragical representation."<sup>(1)</sup>

As for taking models he did not think any one writer, however great, ~~as~~ a fit model for the succeeding generation for "true genius indicates to itself an exemption from all regard to whatever has gone before."<sup>(2)</sup> The differences in their views on the dramatic form suitable for England grew and finally flared up in an open conflict when Shelley visited Byron in Ravenna. Byron set off the spark when he read parts of his Marino Faliero and gave him the general outline of the plot.

Byron's chief object in writing Marino Faliero was to see how far he would succeed if he put his theories into practice. His views scattered through his correspondence

---

(1) Julian, X, p.265.

(2) Julian, X, p.266.

sprang from his genuine admiration for the classical school of poetry, from his deep conviction that the English stage needed reform and from a streak of perversity in his own character. Shelley's views were a direct outcome of his Romantic temperament, his comparative study of the dramatists of Greece, England, Italy and Spain, and from intuitive understanding of the English temperament. Too much emphasis has been placed on the influence of Plato and Dante and other European writers on Shelley's poetry, too little on the soil which nurtured him. Byron antagonised Shelly<sup>e</sup> by rejecting Shakespeare at the very outset - "the worst of all models though the most extraordinary of writers".<sup>(1)</sup> He rejected the Elizabethans whose plays were "full of gross faults, pardoned only for the beauty of their language".<sup>(2)</sup> While Shelley deplored the excesses committed by the imitators of the Elizabethan dramatists from Milman to Barry Cornwall, he would not concede that England had no drama. Shelley would have whole-heartedly supported his rejection of the extreme classicism of the French and their imitators in England. Byron's models were the Greeks in a modified form - merely the outline of their conduct, adapted to our times and circumstances and without the chorus.<sup>(3)</sup> He favoured the unities without a slavish adherence. Shelley had read, studied, marked, quoted, parodied and commented on the Greek tragedians as no other Romantic poet had done. Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides were in his opinion, perhaps the three of the four greatest dramatists Europe had ever produced but he did not think their form suitable for the English drama. He still preferred the fourth member of the quartet as his

---

(1) L.J., V, p.243.

(2) L.J., V, p.217.

(3) L.J., V, p.217.

model. Byron sought to base his style on Alfieri's plays<sup>(1)</sup> but Shelley would rather have Calderon who was a greater poet and a dramatist.<sup>(2)</sup> Byron's model play would have to be "rigidly historical"<sup>(3)</sup> in "good English"<sup>(4)</sup> with "poetry broken down to common language",<sup>(5)</sup> with a "severe approach to the rules"<sup>(6)</sup> laid down by the Greeks and "compression of the Speeches in the more severe situations".<sup>(7)</sup>

Byron's rigid theories applied to Marino Faliero provoked in Shelley an outburst of indignation, the more remarkable for being the only instance of his adverse criticism of Byron's poetry. He had discussed "Poetry and such matters" with Byron and "as usual differed" and Shelley notes with regret "more than ever". The cause is made clear in his letter to Mary -

"He (Byron) affects to patronise a system of criticism fit for the <sup>production of</sup> mediocrity, and although all his fine poems and passages have been produced in defiance of this system; yet I recognise the pernicious effects of it in the "Doge of Venice"; and it will cramp and limit his future efforts however great they may be unless he gets rid of it."<sup>(8)</sup>

Shelley is more cryptic and severe in his letter to Hunt- "if Marino Faliero is a drama, ~~the~~ Cenci is not, but that between ourselves."<sup>(9)</sup> Byron had found the subject of The Cenci essentially undramatic and now Shelley found himself questioning the dramatic quality of Marino Faliero. He found the form too severe and the verse devoid of harmony. It made very dull reading. He did not think it was "one of the most perfect works of art in our literature",<sup>(10)</sup> nor that

(1) L.J., V, p.323.

(9) Julian, X, p.319.

(2) Julian, X, p.324.

(10) Wilson Knight, Byron

(3) L.J., V, p.323.

Foundation Lecture,  
Nottingham University, 1953,  
p.3.

(4) L.J., V, p.243.

(5) L.J., V, p.323.

(6) L.J., V, p.243.

(7) L.J., V, p.372.

(8) Julian, X, p.297.

it would ever come to life on the stage. Yet it did when in 1958 Miss Valerie Hovenden revived it at the Hovenden Theatre Club and presented a tactfully pruned version of Marino Faliero. Reviewing the play, the anonymous critic wrote:-

"Romantic tragedy... One expects, all too rightly as it usually turns out, turgid and wordy pieces full of fine language weighed down with long monologues and poetic patches. Sometimes in the plays of Shelley or in Death's Jest Book, they can spring splendidly to life on the printed page, but others of equal distinction ... fail miserably in their dramatic excursions.... Byron of all the people might seem the most unlikely candidate for a revived reputation as a dramatist, and undeniably his plays do not read very well but in the theatre his direct and unadorned blank verse comes over much better than the more highly charged and poetic verse of his contemporary would-be-dramatists."(1)

Byron followed up with Sardanapalus and The Two Foscari which fortunately for Shelley he did not see until after Cain. They were very much in the style of the Doge and therefore not at all to Shelley's taste. As Shelley learnt that Byron was engaged in writing more plays his faith in him as the leading dramatist of the early nineteenth century revived. Although Byron was determined to follow the "wrong road" paved by the French tragedians and Alfieri Shelley was convinced that his views would "expand" as he proceeded.

"Genius like his is destined to lead and not follow..... I believe he will produce something very great, and that familiarity with the dramatic power of human nature will soon enable him to soften down the ~~se~~ severe and unharmonising traits of his Marino Faliero"

Shelley declared. (2) Shortly afterwards Shelley convinced himself that Byron was building a drama such as England had not yet seen <sup>n</sup>/<sub>k</sub> a noble task of which Byron alone was worthy.

---

(1) The Times, 21 May, 1958, p.3.

(2) Julian, X, p.324.

In a way Byron also believed in his mission to reform the English stage. He remained undaunted by the lukewarm reception accorded to Marino Faliero both as a closet drama and as stage production.

"No reform succeeded at first... I want to make a regular drama, no matter for the stage or not, which is not my object - but a mental theatre."(1)

Byron with his gift for the right phrase for the right occasion had hit upon a term which defined in two words the type of theatre for which Prometheus Unbound and Hellas were written. Once again the two friends found a point of contact. The "mental theatre" offered great scope for full play of their imagination. Hence Byron could dramatise the entire Old Testament and Shelley give ~~fresh~~ fresh dramatic interpretations of the mythological figures without being restricted by a sense of ~~line~~ <sup>time or</sup> space. Here Manfred could defy Arimanes in his own abode, or Cain sign a pact with Lucifer, or Asia visit Demogorgon in his cave without any fear of violating stage conventions. The "mental theatre" afforded Shelley the opportunity to portray conflict on the physical, moral and spiritual level, indulge his love of metaphysical ideas and employ symbols and metaphors for which only the devoted reader in his study would find sufficient time. Every now and again they would forsake their own aims - Byron his intention of writing "regular" drama in the style of Alfieri, Shelley his desire to write for the stage in the best traditions of England, and write dramas for the mind.

Shelley was often right about Byron. Cain which was published in 1821 in the same volume as Sardanapalus and The Two Foscari showed that Byron had got a little tired of his own rigid theories and wished to write more in the "Manfred metaphysical style" than the severe and unharmonious

---

(1) L.J., V, p.347.

style of Marino Faliero. Shelley was overjoyed. His enthusiasm for Cain surpassed his admiration for anything Byron had written, including the best of Manfred, the last two cantos of Childe Harold and some of Don Juan. Cain is hailed as a herald of God by Shelley and his friends. No letter to his friends in England, no entry in their Journals, no discussion on Byron is complete without a reference to Cain. Lord Byron's last volume, wrote Shelley,

"contains finer poetry than has appeared in England since the publication of Paradise Lost. Cain is apocalyptic - it is revelation not before communicated to man."(1)

Mary was unsparing in her praise of the sublimity of the composition. Williams was dazzled. So long as he wrote dramas like Cain Shelley did not care what theories Byron propounded or who he affected to imitate. Cain carried the mark of Byron's genius.

There were many reasons for the powerful effect Cain produced on Shelley's mind. The cosmic nature of the tragedy, poised between heaven and earth, its timelessness, its divine background inflamed his imagination. Shelley recognised a kindred spirit in the questioning, rebelling Cain, powerless against the All-powerful. Shelley himself had reflected, more deeply than Cain, on the problem of Good and Evil and posed similar questions. A closer kinship existed between Prometheus and Cain who suffered for mankind as Manfred did not. One wonders if some of Shelley's arguments went into the making of Cain's speeches, or if Byron saw any resemblance between his Cain and the disinherited son of Sir Timothy. Viewed in conjunction with his admiration for Manfred, Shelley's extravagant enthusiasm for Cain reveals a marked preference for Byron's "metaphysical" dramas both for reasons of form and content.

---

(1) Julian, X, p.354.

Although here as in his criticism of Manfred Shelley does not dwell specifically on the form, the technique employed in both dramas is so integral to the subject matter that it is hardly likely that Shelley enjoyed Manfred's 'Incantation' passage independent of its setting or thrilled to Cain's Titanic declamations without realizing the full significance of its cosmic background. The defiant tone of Cain's speech and the not too unattractive figure of Lucifer led Thomas Moore to suspect the pernicious effects of Shelley's poetry on Byron's Cain. Byron, needless to add, passed this information on to Shelley who was completely taken aback by such an accusation. He wished Moore to know that he had never succeeded in exercising the slightest influence on Byron in the matter of religion. Were it in his power he would gladly have purged Byron's "great mind" of the "delusions of Christianity". Cain had been conceived many years ago and begun before Shelley saw Byron in Ravenna but

"How happy should I not be to attribute to myself, however indirectly, any participation in that immortal work." (1)

Shelley was so overcome by his own sense of inferiority in the presence of this supernatural composition that in a mood of self-abasement he wrote a sonnet to Byron

"Who dares these words:- the worm beneath the sod  
May lift itself in homage of the God." (2)

With Byron's arrival in Pisa in the winter of 1821, a fresh stimulant was added to the lives of the Pisan circle. There were many occasions for night-long discussions and better opportunities for a closer contact with each other's poetical efforts. Shelley since their Geneva days together had applied himself to the study of Faust and approached it with a fervour matched only by his enthusiasm for Calderon. Byron whose fame had already spread as far as Weimar and whose

---

(1) Julian, X, p.378.

(2) Hutchinson, p.651.

interest in Faust had developed with years, still searched for a translator. Shelley had hoped that Coleridge would undertake the noble task<sup>(1)</sup> but when he found nothing forthcoming from that quarter he translated two scenes the Prologue and the May-Day Night. A weak but faithful translation had appeared in Pisa. Not satisfied with these Byron wished for a complete translation and Shelley keeping Claire's identity secret, persuaded her to start work on it. It was during one of these Faust sessions that Shelley earned the nick-name "Snake" from Byron.

They talked about Shakespeare also. On one occasion, moved, perhaps, by his disgust with "Cant Shakespeare" prevalent in England then, Byron denounced him in the presence of Shelley, Samuel Rogers and others, but Shelley "in his usual meek yet resolute manner defended the Bard".<sup>(2)</sup> Shelley had made a fairly intensive study of the Greek tragedies, of Goethe's masterpiece, of Alfieri's Myrrha, of Calderon's plays and of course, the English dramatists and finally had come to the conclusion that King Lear was the greatest of them all.<sup>(3)</sup> Byron, one presumes, demanded to disagree.

To Shelley goes the credit for introducing Calderon to Byron, widening their field of European dramatists. He translated some scenes from the Magico Prodigioso as a basis for a paper on Calderon and Goethe, he had undertaken for The Liberal. Shelley found a striking resemblance between Faust and the Magico Prodigioso and believed that Cypriano had furnished the germ of Faust as Faust may have furnished the germ for other poems, although it was as "different in structure and plan as the acorn is from the oak."<sup>(4)</sup> This observation should have pleased Byron enormously, who,

---

(1) Julian, X, p.371.

(2) Table Talk of Samuel Rogers, pp.194-195.

(3) A Defence of Poetry, Julian, VII, p.120.

(4) Julian, X, p.371.

despite his reverence of Goethe, had become rather sensitive over the question of Manfred's debt to Faust. Shelley is said to have stimulated Byron into planning a drama on a theme believed to have originated from Calderon.<sup>(1)</sup>

According to Washington Irving Shelley after reading Embozado or Encapotado with its theme of a man pursued by his own shadow suggested it to Byron who proposed treating it in the manner of Faust. Washington Irving whose information was based solely on his conversations with Thomas Medwin, was so intrigued by this tale, establishing another of those fascinating links in the Goethe - Byron - Shelley - Calderon chains that he made persistent inquiries about the identity of the play during his visit to Spain. We will never know the truth, Medwin being our only source of information, but Irving's search for a play which might have furnished the germ for an unwritten drama by Byron leads us to suppose there was some basis for Medwin's statement.

Byron wrote two and a half plays between Cain and Shelley's departure for Pisa. If Werner showed a return to "the beaten road of old romance" and recalled the manner of Marino Faliero and Sardanapalus Shelley did not betray any signs of agitation. Heaven and Earth, a tame sequel to Cain did not merit any special mention either. Shelley thought poorly of The Deformed Transformed which Byron left unfinished. He was content to see Byron employed in writing Don Juan which surpassed everything he had written except for the 'Incantation' in Manfred, a great favourite with Shelley, parts of the last two cantos of Childe Harold and Cain. While Byron was tossing off his dramas and more cantos of Don Juan Shelley kept struggling with Charles <sup>the first</sup>. He partly blames Byron for his failure to do anything creative. Whenever Shelley is reminded of the

---

(1) Washington Irving, An Unwritten Drama of Lord Byron, New Jersey, 1925.

poetic powers of his friend he bursts into Biblical metaphors. Byron had been compared to Lucifer but not to the Lord, until Shelley wrote of him:-

"I have lived too long near Lord Byron and the sun has extinguished the glow-worm, for I cannot hope with St. John that the light came into the world, and the world knew it not."(1)

Byron, we know, did not put the same value on Shelley's poetry. Shelley enjoys the unique position of not being mentioned in his poetry. Byron's letters to his friends contain very few references to Shelley's works whereas Shelley consistently discussed Byron's latest products, published and unpublished, with his friends and even sought to cure Peacock and Hogg of their bias against Byron. Shelley had an easy access to Byron's works and many opportunities to hear Byron read aloud. He had heard some of Childe Harold Canto III, Marino Faliero and Don Juan before they were sent to the press. Shelley himself felt too diffident to show any of his own poetry to Byron. The Cenci was sent to him after Byron expressed a wish to see it and Prometheus Unbound after <sup>The</sup> Cenci. Byron was shown Hellas immediately after its publication, possibly because he happened to be in Pisa. It would be idle to speculate on the possible effect of Byron's active interest in Shelley's dramatic projects. He, with his knowledge of the theatrical world, his considered views on the dramatic form and his personal influence in the realm of the theatre, had a great deal to offer. Had he not encouraged Coleridge to proceed with Zapolya after the success of Remorse, a tragedy which both Byron and Shelley had admired? During his brief association with Shelley's friend Williams, Byron showed more than a cursory interest in Williams' dramatic efforts. But after his comments on the power

---

(1) Julian, X, p.392.

and poetry of <sup>The</sup> Cenci there is no reference to Shelley's dramatic talent. Byron showed considerable respect for Shelley's judgement especially when it was exercised on his own works. During the storm which had broken over the appearance of Cain Hobhouse reminded Byron that he would never have dared publish anything remotely resembling Cain in the days of Pope, Johnson and even Churchill. Byron defends himself by quoting Shelley who had backed Cain against Hobhouse's trinity.<sup>(1)</sup> Shelley had been vindicated.

An investigation of the literary relationship between Byron and Shelley inevitably leads us to the conclusion that in such relationships the question of influence exerted upon one another is not of paramount importance. What is of importance is the reciprocal nature of their friendship, the exchange of ideas and a sympathetic understanding of each other's poetic powers. Their poetry and prose reveal many differences which arose from their widely differing temperaments. Byron had early revealed the two strains pulling him in the opposite direction until they blended in Don Juan. Shelley followed a consistently romantic approach to literature. It is a matter of regret that Mary who could have acted as a Boswell was not present at many tête-à-têtes between Byron and Shelley. There was so much to be said on both sides. She had come to associate Byron's voice, "a peculiar one" with Shelley's so strongly that three months after Shelley's death when in a most melancholy mood she recalled those evenings she dwelt on their voices and not their words. And when Byron spoke and Shelley did not answer, it was "as thunder without rain - the form of the sun without heat or light ..."<sup>(2)</sup>

---

(1) Medwin, p. ~~187~~ Conversations of Lord Byron, 1824, p 187

(2) M.S.J., p.184.

CHAPTER IV

Prometheus Unbound.

Shelley made his first acquaintance with Aeschylus at Eton. He submitted to the traditional method of learning classics and based a considerable number of prose and verse exercises on classical authors. His knowledge of Greek was superficial at that time and his leisure hours were divided between Gothic romances and scientific exploits. It was not until he met Hogg that he was stimulated to learn the language well enough to read his favourite authors in the original. Peacock's inclusion in the Shelleyan circle in England reinforced his interest and very soon Shelley's early passion for "the ghost seers of Germany" gave way to his ever increasing enthusiasm for the "philosophers of Greece". These "philosophers" included the three tragedians whom Shelley read both for the wisdom they displayed and the form in which it was contained. Shelley's love of the Greek authors, developed so gradually, became such an integral part of his life, that they were soon his most familiar companions in his wanderings.<sup>(1)</sup> The names of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides made frequent appearances in the correspondence of Shelley and Mary and their friends and filled their conversations. Shelley made a careful study of the Agamemnon and wrote a critical commentary on some of the passages in the tragedy in a note-book;<sup>(2)</sup> Oedipus Rex had filled him with pity and horror; Ion he found exquisitely beautiful; in Antigone he saw the sublime picture of a woman. Yet none of these laid such a powerful

---

(1) Hutchinson, Mary's Note p.267.

(2) Note-Books, II, pp 128-140

hold over his imagination as the Prometheus Bound of Aeschylus. It carried him beyond the plane of "human vicissitudes into the mighty passions and throes of gods and demi-gods" and the titanic stature of Prometheus filled him with "wonder and delight". (1)

The figure of Prometheus made a strong appeal to the poets and composers of the Romantic Age. Young Goethe wrote a hymn to the creator of the race of mortals which is how Prometheus appeared to him at that time. He had hoped, in his old age to write a drama on Prometheus who had become the personification of doing, not dreaming, good to his fellow-men. In 1797, Vincenzo Monti in his Prometheo likened Napoleon to the Titan, viewing each as a rebel against tyranny! Beethoven composed music for the ballet, The Men of Prometheus and introduced the theme in the finale of the Eroica symphony. Byron, as we have already seen felt his influence on almost everything he had written and absorbed him in Manfred and Cain. Shelley saw Prometheus as the embodiment of "the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature, impelled by the most purest and the truest motives to the best and noblest ends." (2)

On the 12th March, ~~1810~~<sup>1818</sup>, Shelley left England never to return. As the Shelleys crossed Les Echelles, the overhanging rocks a thousand feet in perpendicular height evoked the sublime vision of the suffering Titan bound and nailed to a desolate rock in the remote Caucasus.

"The scene is like that described in <sup>the</sup> Prometheus of Aeschylus. Vast rifts and caverns in the granite precipices, wintry mountains with ice and snow above; the loud sounds of toppling rocks, only to be scaled as he described, by the winged chariot of the ocean nymphs." (3)

*of unseen  
waters and  
within the  
caverns and  
walls*

(1) Hutchinson, p.267.

(2) Hutchinson, Preface p.201.

(3) Julian, IX, p.293.

Shelley made the inevitable choice. He must unbind Prometheus.

It is in his Preface to his lyrical drama Prometheus Unbound that Shelley comments on his choice of the Greek myth.

"The Greek tragic writers, in selecting as their subject any portion of their national history or mythology, employed in their treatment of it a certain arbitrary discretion."(1)

He illustrates his argument with an example from the Agamemnon story which "was exhibited on the Athenian theatre with as many variations as dramas."(2) He also had before him similar variations in The Libation Bearers of Aeschylus and the Electra of Sophocles. In his next statement Shelley indicates the precise nature of this "arbitrary discretion" he was to exercise.

"The 'Prometheus Unbound' of Aeschylus supposed the reconciliation of Jupiter with his victim as the price of the disclosure of the danger threatened to his empire by the consummation of his marriage with Thetis... I was averse from a catastrophe so feeble as that of reconciling the Champion with the Oppressor of mankind."(3)

Shelley had reflected on the problem of reconciling this universe, which appeared to him to be quite amoral, <sup>with</sup> ~~which~~ the supposed wisdom and benevolence of the Being who controls it. Aeschylus reminds us that there is always a champion who defies the Supreme Being, suffers for it and ultimately compromises. The Greeks tended to see right on both sides. While they pitied Prometheus for the pain he endured, while they admired him for the sacrifices he made for mortals, they could not forget that he had violated the divine law. The choice, therefore, lay between reconciling the two powers, the choice Aeschylus is said to have made in his Prometheus Unbound, or allowing the Supreme Being to fall. Shelley,

---

(1) Hutchinson, Preface p.201.

(2) Ibid.

(3) Ibid., p.203.

at the age of twenty-six, made the second choice. By following Aeschylus, he thought, he would destroy

"the moral interest of the fable, which is so powerfully sustained by the sufferings and endurance of Prometheus." (1)

The reason for this choice is explained when Shelley states the specific purpose for which he wrote his drama.

"My purpose has hitherto been simply to familiarise the highly refined imagination of the more select classes of poetical readers with beautiful idealisms of moral excellence." (2)

While Aeschylus wrote his tragedy for the Athenians who represented all shades of thought and feeling, Shelley deliberately addressed himself to the highly sensitive, highly reflective few. Aeschylus wrote his trilogy with the Athenian stage in view; Shelley for the stage of the imagination. Aeschylus introduced such characters and machinery as the Athenian conventions would allow. Shelley chose not to follow any one model or adhere to any set rules, Classical or Romantic. What he sought was freedom of movement, the right to expand the Universe; nothing short of that would do for the unbinding<sup>of</sup> Prometheus, and fill his cosmic stage with characters, spirits, voices and sounds never before introduced in a drama, at least not for the same purpose and not on such a vast scale. Although he introduces very many variations on the Aeschylean theme Shelley was fully conscious of his debt to the great tragedian. It was Aeschylus who had supplied the title and the protagonist and to Aeschylus goes the credit for enticing Shelley away from the narrative form of The Revolt Of Islam. In his Preface to his drama Shelley himself points out his indebtedness to the Prometheus Bound.

---

(1) Hutchinson, Preface p.201.

(2) Ibid., p.203.

What in fact Shelley did was to borrow such materials from the Greek drama as suited his purpose and insist upon his right to treat that material in his own manner. And "it is largely when we come to know what he owes to the Greek", Bennet Weaver writes in his article on the two Prometheus dramas, "that we may take up the essential task of scholarship to essay the worth of his own genius".<sup>(1)</sup> In this article, Weaver examines the similarities in setting, action, character and story in order to separate from them the essential dissimilarities. Our task, therefore should be confined to the examination of such essential dissimilarities as fall within the scope of this thesis in order to see what evidence they give of Shelley's dramatic talent.

It is very difficult to give a coherent analysis of the form of Prometheus Unbound. Although Shelley drew upon some of the characters in the Greek drama and introduced some elements common to Manfred and Faust, as a composition it is so unlike anything Greek, German or English that one searches in vain for any common standards by which to measure his achievement. It is only in the first act that the structure retains its dramatic qualities as we understand it. It is not as if it is entirely missing from the rest of the play but Shelley, once he has shifted the scene from the high Caucasus to the Indian Vale moves in such a rarefied atmosphere that he requires the aid of other mediums, music for instance beside the simple dramatic speech and characters to convey his meaning to the reader. For all its nebulous character Prometheus Unbound has been acknowledged as his most significant work and it is the only one which has been accorded a variorum edition. It is a mine of symbols and metaphors "which elude the ordinary reader by their abstraction and delicacy of distinction".<sup>(2)</sup>

---

(1) PMLA, 64, 1949, p.115.

(2) Hutchinson, Mary's Note p.268.

It is tremendous in its range and variety of metrical forms and contains some of the most exquisite lyrics Shelley ever wrote. But for our purpose we must restrict ourselves to the examination of the dramatic structure of the first Act and see it in its relation to the rest of the drama.

Shelley had always enjoyed reading the Prometheus of Aeschylus aloud. In spite of his "cracked contralto" the variety of tones and intensities of feeling which he displayed in the finest passages produced an electric effect upon his audience. Some of these passages, the address to the firmament of Gods in particular, made such a deep impression on his mind that when he set out to unbind Prometheus he let words, metaphors and images flow from the Greek tragedy into the first Act of his drama. In the opening scene Shelley is very close to Aeschylus in setting, in form, in diction, and, in consequence of, retains some of the solid features of the Greek drama. The Greek Prometheus is bound in chains riveted to a rock in the remotest part of the earth. For ten thousand years he has suffered pain unrelieved by sleep and exposed to the pure flame of the sun by day and the biting hoar frost at night. The second scene discovers him addressing the firmament of gods calling upon it to see the unjust punishment Zeus has inflicted on him for bestowing the gift of fire on man. He waits for the place and the hour when his misery will end; until then he must endure.

Shelley opens his drama in a 'Ravine of icy Rocks in the Indian Caucasus'. Prometheus is discovered bound to the precipice but he is not alone. Asia's companions Panthea and Ione are seated at his feet. The Aeschylean note rings clear through the heavens as Prometheus begins:-

---

" Monarch of Gods and Daemons, and all Spirits  
 But One, who throng those bright and rolling worlds  
 Which Thou and I alone of living things  
 Behold with sleepless eyes! regard this Earth  
 Made multitudinous with thy slaves, whom thou  
 Requitest for knee-worship, prayer, and praise,  
 And toil, and hecatombs of broken hearts,  
 With fear and self-contempt and barren hope."  
 (Act I, 1-8.)

Shelley's Prometheus also has known

" Three thousand years of sleep-unsheltered hours,  
 . . . . .  
 Nailed to this wall of eagle-baffling mountain,  
 Black, wintry, dead, unmeasured; without herb,  
 Insect, or beast, or shape or sound of life.  
 Ah me! alas, pain ever, for ever!

No change, no pause, no hope! Yet I endure.  
 I ask the Earth, have not the mountains felt?  
 I ask you Heaven, the all-beholding Sun,  
 Has it not seen? The Sea, in storm or calm,  
 Heaven's ever-changing Shadow, spread below,  
 Have its deaf waves not heard my agony?  
 Ah me! alas pain, pain ever, for ever! (Act I, 20-30)

Shelley's Prometheus also waits for the "inevitable hour"

" "The wingless, crawling hours, one among whom  
 — As some dark Priest hauls the reluctant victim —  
 Shall drag thee, cruel King. . . . .  
 (Act I, 48-50)

Prometheus alters his tone at this point and expresses a sentiment that we do not associate with <sup>the</sup> Prometheus of Aeschylus. The two dramatists part company here. Shelley is primarily concerned with the liberation of Prometheus and the overthrow of tyranny. But this liberation cannot take place until Prometheus has undergone a spiritual regeneration. The fact that he needed to undergo this moral change is made explicit in his invocation to the spirits of the mountains, the springs, the whirlwinds and air asking them to repeat again the curse that he had made. Prometheus had defied the "Monarch of the Gods" and filched

the fire from heaven for which act he was punished. Shelley saw this deed calculated to confer immeasurable benefits on mankind as a noble one and its punishment as an act of tyranny on Jupiter's part. What Shelley would not support is the intense hatred Prometheus had come to feel for the tyrant. Prometheus must find salvation for himself before he saves mankind and he can achieve this only by casting out the last vestige of evil from his own mind. In addition to having "courage and majesty and firm and patient opposition to omnipotent force", he must be "susceptible of being described as exempt from the taints of . . . 'revenge'".<sup>(1)</sup> Prometheus as we find at the end of the fifty-second line of the first act has already been purged of this taint. The conflict in his mind has been resolved. Shelley does not dramatize the conflict which presumably was there during the interval between the original utterance and line 52. What Shelley does in the next three hundred lines is to re-create for our benefit the extreme state of anguish and bitterness in which Prometheus had uttered the fateful curse and then show the sudden drop from intense hatred to deep pity, thus achieving great effect by vivid contrast of emotional states.

It is not difficult to understand why Prometheus uttered that curse. Although Shelley has not presented to the imagination the scene of the actual impaling of the Titan - his drama begins three thousand years later - he has, like Aeschylus, repeatedly emphasized the intensity of continued physical pain which the hero suffers. The subtle means of torture which Jupiter employs with the aid of natural instruments are conveyed by rich dramatic imagery of contrasting effects.

---

(1) Hutchinson, Preface p.201.

"The crawling glaciers pierce me with the spears  
Of their moon-freezing crystals, the bright chains  
Lat with their burning cold into my bones."

(Act I, 31-3)

"Heaven's winged hound", the "shapeless sights", the "earthquake-fiends" and "the genii of the storm", evil and grotesque contribute further to the intensification of pain. Shelley's Prometheus has in addition suffered mental anguish on account of his separation from Asia. Like his Greek ancestor he has endured moral indignation at the cruel treatment he has received from Jove. And now the English Prometheus wants to recall the curse ; not in disdain but in pity.

" . . . . . I speak in grief,  
Not exultation, for I hate no more,  
As then ere misery made me wise . . . . .

(Act I, 56-58)

He had forgotten the "dread words" but he was aware of the powerful effect they had produced on the elements. They would remember and perhaps repeat the words.

"Though I am changed so that aught evil wish  
Is dead within; although no memory be  
Of what is hate, let them not lose it now!

Act I, 70-73)

Voices from the mountains, the springs, the air and the whirlwinds answer in quick succession and in their words is revealed the fearful impression made on them by the curse. Shelley does not disclose the precise motive for the recall yet. In the scene with the Voices and the Earth he aims at expressing the full impact of the "evil wish" on heaven and earth. Prometheus had asked to hear again his own voice and instead he heard "a sound of voices". They have responded to him but not answered in his words and he misunderstands them. Reproachful in his tone and utterly human in manner he turns to the Earth-

" Mother, thy sons and thou  
 Scorn him, without whose all-enduring will  
 Beneath the fierce omnipotence of Jove,  
 Both they and thou had vanished, like <sup>thin</sup> mist  
 Unrolled on the morning wind. Know ye not me,  
 The Titan? He who had made his agony  
 The barrier to your else all-conquering foe?"  
 (Act I, 113-9)

Believing himself forsaken by mankind, overcome by a sense of isolation, he seeks comfort in the tender recollection of those days when

" . . . . . deep <sup>be</sup>low,  
 Through . . . o'ershadowing woods I wandered once  
 With Asia, drinking life from her loved eyes;"  
 (Act I, 121-3)

Turning to the elements again he asks

"Why answer ye not, still? Brethren!

They dare not for fear of the Oppressor. The Earth dare not lest the tyrant link her to "some wheel of pain". Their fear is the measure of Jove's oppression. He may not appear in person but his omnipotence is felt everywhere. It was not until Prometheus uttered his imprecations that hope was kindled in many hearts. The mountains, the springs, the air and the whirlwinds had been suspended in their natural functions at the voice of his "unrest", but together with the Earth they had thrilled with sweet joy.

"Thy curse, the which, if thou rememberest not,  
 Yet my innumerable seas and streams,  
 Mountains, and caves, and winds, and you wide air,  
 And the inarticulate people of the dead  
 Preserve, a treasured spell."  
 (Act I, 180-4)

Since Prometheus cannot repeat the curse having vowed that no evil word should escape his lips he at the recommendation of the Earth calls up the Phantasm of Jupiter.

The cancelled stage directions following I, 221 suggest that although Shelley was not writing for the

"regular" stage he was, at first, quite anxious to create the appropriate atmosphere by the use of sound effects.

The Phantasm of Jupiter is announced by volcanic sounds

"The sound beneath as of earthquake and the driving of whirlwinds - the Ravine is split, and the Phantasm of Jupiter rises, surrounded by heavy clouds which dart forth lightning."(1)

Shelley may have cancelled these stage directions after and incorporated them into Panthea's lines:

"The sound is of whirlwind underground,  
Earthquake, and fire, and mountains cloven;"

(Act I, 231-2)

Both Ione and Panthea in this scene perform the function of a movie-camera. Ione through her diaphanous plumes has sensed

"A Shape, a throng of sounds

(Act I, 226)

and Panthea continues with a vividly coloured description as Jupiter comes in full view:

"Clothed in dark purple, star-inwoven,  
A sceptre of pale gold  
To stay steps proud, o'er the slow cloud  
His veined hand doth hold.  
Cruel he looks, but calm and strong,  
Like one who does, not suffers wrong."

(Act I, 234-9)

At no time in the entire duration of the drama does Prometheus come face to face with his foe. The closest Shelley ever came to achieving a confrontation of the protagonist with the antagonist is in this scene where the shadowy form of Jupiter, divested of all his powers appears before the chained Titan. The Phantasm does not recognize Prometheus but he obeys his command. The Earth waits with a joyous expectancy. The mountains, the Springs, the Air, the whirlwinds who had witnessed unnatural events

---

(1) Hutchinson, p.265.

when the curse was first delivered, wait in silence. The fearful look on the Phantasm's countenance is best suggested by the terror it strikes in Panthea and Ione:

Panthea            See how he lifts his mighty looks, the Heaven  
                      Darkens above.

Ione                    He speaks!    O shelter me!

(Act I, 256-7)

The Phantasm is possessed by a spirit as it were and assumes the expression Prometheus wore when he poured out his imprecations. For the first time the dramatist gives a word picture of Prometheus under the stress of extreme anguish.

" I see the curse on gestures proud and cold,  
And looks of firm defiance, and calm hate,  
And such despair as mocks itself with smiles,  
Written as on a scroll . . . . .

(Act I, 258-261)

The Phantasm repeats the curse. The intense hatred accumulated over a long period of tyranny is expressed here in its most concentrated form.

" But thou, who art <sup>He</sup> God and Lord: O, thou,  
Who fillest with thy soul this world of woe,  
To whom all things of Earth and Heaven do bow  
In fear and worship: all-prevailing foe!  
I curse thee! let a sufferer's curse  
Clasp thee, his torturer, like remorse;  
Till thine Infinity shall be  
A robe of envenomed agony;  
And thine Omnipotence a crown of pain,  
To cling like burning gold round thy dissolving brain.  
Heap on thy soul, by virtue of this Curse,  
    Ill deeds, then be thou damned, beholding good;  
Both infinite as is the universe,  
    And thou, and thy self-torturing solitude.  
An awful image of calm power  
Though now thou sittest, let the hour  
Come, when thou must appear to be

That which thou art internally;  
 And after many a false and fruitless crime  
 Scorn track thy lagging fall through boundless space  
 and time."

(Act I, 282-301)

The storm is over, the light appears. "Bowing his head in pain"<sup>(1)</sup> the Titan recants the curse in tones that are gentle but firm:

" . . . It doth repent me; words are quick and vain;  
 Grief for a while is blind, and so was mine.  
 I wish no living thing to suffer pain."

(Act I, 303-5)

From the fifty second line of the first Act Shelley has built up the "curse" scene through a series of effects varying from the terror felt by the mountains, the joy felt by the Earth to the high pitch of the curse itself only to culminate in this simple, explicit statement of repentance. The Earth is bewildered and fears the worst. Even Ione is torn by doubts and dismisses his recantation as a passing phase. The moral regeneration, the change from hate to love, from disdain to pity has taken place quietly and peacefully unknown to his supporters and sympathisers. Asia would know but that is another matter related to the allegorical strain of the play. Shelley gave a clear indication of this state of mind in the opening scene and yet felt compelled to dramatize it so that the reader may the better appreciate the development of Prometheus from ~~the~~ most daring but revengeful of Jupiter's victims to "the type of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual value".

Jove, perhaps suspects what has happened for he clearly changes his tactics. He has realised that physical tortures have only increased the Titan's moral resistance.

---

(1) Walter Edwin Peck, /1927, p.128, n.27.  
Shelley his Life and Work,

In the Greek drama Zeus had sent Hermes to Prometheus to cajole and threaten him alternately. Shelley introduces Mercury, a strange compound of the wily Hermes, the kind hearted Hephaistos and a diluted version of Milton's Satan. He appears followed "by a train of Furies, whom he represses with a wand"<sup>(1)</sup> or as Ione says:

"Stretching on high from his right hand  
A serpent-cinctured wand."

It is Ione again who gives a richly coloured picture of the second visitor as he approaches the scene of action. Like Hermes Mercury has come to persuade Prometheus to yield up the secret of Jove's dethronement and be reinstated among the Gods. Like Hephaistos he admires him for his courage and despises the task entrusted to him. Like a watered-down Satan he tempts him with his promises of eternal life full of sensual pleasures.

In a straightforward piece of dialogue both the Titan and the tyrant's <sup>s</sup>emisary reveal their essential characters.

Mercury. If thou might'st dwell among the Gods the  
while  
Lapped in voluptuous joy?

Prometheus. I would not quit  
This bleak ravine, these unrepentent pains.

Mercury. Alas! I wonder at , yet pity thee.

Prometheus. Pity the self-despising slaves of Heaven,  
Not me, within whose mind sits peace serene,  
As light in the sun, throned; how vain is talk!  
Call up the fiends.

(Act I, 424-432)

What a difference there is between Prometheus now and Prometheus at the time of the curse! His language, his tone, his demeanor have changed since then. Panthea has

(1) Walter Edwin Peck, Shelley his Life and Work, 1927, p.128, n.28.

noticed:

"The Titan looks as ever, firm, not proud."

(Act I, 337)

The emphasis in his speech had shifted from "punishment" to "pity". Mercury, defeated in his mission, vanishes into "the sunlight of the dawn".

Jupiter has exploited all modes of imaginable tortures to subdue the Titan's will. The elements, the tempests and earthquakes, "the alternate frost and fire" have been tried but these have proved unsuccessful. He has sent misshapen creatures to deride and humiliate him but without the desired results. When these modes of inflicting physical pain proved ineffective he sent his diplomatic representative to try the persuasive power of words. Mercury returned defeated. Jove in the next scene makes one last bid in his struggle with Prometheus in Shelley's drama and sends the Furies to break the inner peace the Titan claims.

The Furies are creatures of extraordinary ugliness. The beautiful Oceanides can scarcely bear their loathsome sight as they come:

"Blackening the birth of day with countless wings."

There is something so sinister and at the same time so fascinating about them that the onlooker feels compelled to gaze upon them. Prometheus feels that if he looks at them long enough he will

" . . . . . grow like what I contemplate,  
And laugh and stare in loathsome sympathy."

(Act I, 450-4)

Their chief characteristic is to glut on others' agony and exult in their deformity. Ugly in the extreme, fearful to the core these tempest-walking hounds with their hydra-tresses and iron wings, their loud voices and wild

gestures introduce a different note into the drama. They create an atmosphere of sound and fury in striking contrast to the interstellar silence of the air which greeted Prometheus before his address to the Gods. They are the ministers of pain and fear, mistrust and hate, disappointment and despair; they wind their way by devious methods into a person's heart and sow the seeds of "foul desire".

The question might be raised as to why Shelley wishes to introduce a fresh element of torture when the Titan has achieved his inner peace. Although references have been made to the modes of torture employed over a period of three thousand years, the reader has not seen Prometheus in the coils of anything so fearsome and fiendish as the Furies and is not able to envisage the Titan's reaction in such a situation without Shelley's assistance.

Prometheus laughs in scorn as the Furies try subtle psychological methods of suggesting doubts within his mind.

First Fury. Thou think<sup>e</sup>st we will rend thee bone from bone,  
And nerve from nerve, working like fire within?

Prometheus. Pain is my element, as hate is thine;  
Ye rend me now; I care not.

Second Fury. Dost imagine  
We will but laugh into thy lidless eyes?

Prometheus. I weigh not what ye do, but what ye suffer,  
Being evil. Cruel was the power which called  
You, or aught else so wretched, into light.

Third Fury. Thou think'st we will live through thee, one  
by one,  
Like animal life, and though we can obscure not  
The soul which burns within, that we will dwell  
Beside it, like a vain loud multitude  
Vexing the self-content of wisest men;  
That we will be dread thought beneath thy brain,  
And foul desire round thine astonished heart,  
And blood within thy labyrinthine veins  
Crawling like agony? Act I (475-491)

His answer remains the same. Let the Furies do their worst.

He will continue to defy his oppressor until the appointed hour. The Furies break out in the first chorus of the drama. They sing like the Sirens to entice the rest of the Furies from the ends of the earth, putting emphasis on the refrain "come, come, come":

" Oh, ye who shake hills with the scream of your mirth,  
When cities sink howling in ruin; and ye  
Who with wingless footsteps trample the sea,  
And close upon Shipwreck and Famine's track,  
Sit chattering with joy on the foodless wreck;  
Come, come, come!" (Act I, 498-503)

Then quickening the tempo

" Leave the bed, low, cold, and red,  
Strewed beneath a nation dead;  
Leave the hatred, as in ashes  
Fire is left for future burning:  
. . . . .  
Come, come, come!  
We are streaming up from Hell's wide gate  
And we burthen the blast of the atmosphere,  
But vainly we toil till ye come here. (Act I, 504-7)  
(Act I, 517-520)

The Reinforcement, <sup>in</sup> comes, as the cancelled stage directions read, rushing by/groups of horrible forms; they speak as they pass in Chorus. Drawn by the irresistible magic of the Furies' music the second group come leaving behind fields and plains, palaces and persons where death reigns supreme. As the fifth Fury proceeds with her account of her favourite haunt of destruction another Fury suddenly interrupts her, ordering her to be silent. No-one must speak, no-one must whisper while she casts her spell and conjures up a series of visions showing the inevitable corruption of good in this world. The veil which conceals these visions is lifted. Prometheus watches like a character who is presented with a transformation scene on the stage as each succeeding scene is flashed before him. The Furies draw his attention to the wide horizon where:

"Many a million-peopled city  
Vomits smoke in the bright air"

(Act I, 551-2)

A shadow of Christ passes over the scene and Prometheus hears a piercing cry.<sup>(1)</sup>

"'T is his mild and gentle ghost  
Wailing for the faith<sup>he</sup> kindled."

(Act I, 554-5)

Christ wailed for the perversion of the faith he had kindled. His words after His death became poison contaminating the gospel of truth, peace and pity He had taught. The Furies in their next 'scene' show the picture of France, free from the illusions of religion, building on the wrecks of desolation a new faith dedicated to Truth, Love and Liberty. The scene changes swiftly from the France of early Revolution days to the France under the Reign of Terror when fratricide tore the struggling world. The Furies by presenting these visions wished to emphasise the futility of suffering in the face of the inevitable perversion of truth and thereby hoped to undermine the Titan's will to suffer.

From the moment he addressed the elements until the disappearance of the Furies Prometheus has felt pity, boredom and contempt but never such deep anguish as now. It cannot be that Jupiter has at last succeeded in making a crack in his moral armour. Yet something has happened to the Titan. A low yet dreadful groan has escaped from his lips. One wonders if it is the physical pain which is tearing his heart. But the Titan's agony stems from something more powerful than the most excruciating form of physical torture. The dramatic effect of the scene with the last Fury is heightened by the brief interval in which Panthea describes to Ione the woeful sights she has seen

---

(1) C.D. Loccock, An Examination of the Shelley MSS in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, 1903, p.34.

of a youth "with patient looks nailed to a crucifix", of the world peopled with thick shapes of human death, the world Prometheus had tried to save.

The scene shifts to the Titan. The Fury has waited for the psychological moment to show how unprofitable it is to suffer for mankind. As Prometheus tries to suppress his groans the Fury shows him the vision of the noblest Being who sacrificed His life so that others may live in peace. As Prometheus looks up at the "wise, mild, lofty and just Being" he breaks out in agonising tones:-

"  
Remit the anguish of that lighted stare;  
Close those wan lips; let ~~that~~ thorn-wounded brow  
Stream not with blood; it mingles with thy tears!  
Fix, fix those tortured orbs in peace and death,  
So thy ~~s~~ick throes shake not that crucifix,  
So those pale fingers play not with thy gone."

(Act I, 597-602)

The Furies, it must be noticed, speak of Christ with sympathy; it is man who provokes their bitter comments. The Fury had expected to convince the Titan that man was undeserving of any sacrifices that Christ had made for him and that if Prometheus continued in his determination to defy Jove he would bring no more happiness and peace to many than the suffering Christ had done. By presenting the contrast between the sufferings of Christ and the perversion of his faith they had hoped to disillusion Prometheus. But the confrontation of Prometheus nailed on the rock with the figure of Christ on his crucifix produced the opposite effect. The English Prometheus dyed in the hue of Christ's mantle accepts his anguish and pities those that do not feel it.

"  
. . . . . for, though dread revenge,  
This is defeat, fierce king, not victory.  
The sights with which thou torturest gird my soul  
With new endurance, till the hour arrives  
When they shall be no types of things which are."

(Act I, 641-645)

This then is the Titan's reply to the threats of the Omnipotent Jove.

The <sup>n</sup>concluding scene presents a striking contrast to the wild scene with the Furies. Shelley had never intended to conclude this act with the Aeschylean thunder and lightning. He employs a different technique and introduces the <sup>p</sup>Chorus of spirits to celebrate the spiritual victory of Prometheus over his foe. Panthea and Ione describe them as they come "Like flocks of clouds in spring's delightful weather", "Like fountain vapours, when the winds are dumb". After the solid ugly bodies of the Furies with their dark iron wings these disembodied beings with their diaphanous plumes create a radiant atmosphere of light and music. Their "liquid" melodies fill the heavens with "something sadder, sweeter far than all" and their "soft smiles light the air like a star's fire". Shelley has justification for introducing this variation on the concluding scene of Aeschylus' drama. The Spirits do not contribute to the conduct of the plot but they bridge the gulf between the first Act with its firmer qualities and the succeeding Acts where the dramatic element is sacrificed to the lyrical elaboration of higher truths. The Chorus and the solos help create a mood of joy and hope as the chorus and arias would in an opera or a pure dance movement in a ballet.

Shelley in this drama makes every possible attempt to create images of his characters dwelling on their shapes, forms, movements and tones of voices. Beginning with the statuesque poses of Ione and Panthea with their silvery wings folded over their eyes and ears Shelley gives a series of pictures, of the imperial figure of the Phantasm, of the "golden sandalled" Mercury, of the deformed Furies with their "hydra-tresses", of the Spirits sustained on their wings of "skiey grain", suggesting the possible influence of some of the ballets he had watched with great

delight both in England and Italy.

Prometheus Unbound is a lyrical drama whose essence - and this applies to the first act - is not in movement and action but dramatic emotion and its intensification. The real dramatic movement here is one which takes place in the mind of the immovable Prometheus. Externally nothing has changed. Prometheus at the end of the first Act is exactly where he was at the beginning with no definite certainty that he will fulfill his destiny. He has changed from within and Shelley has presented this reformation through the dramatic use of the curse and his employment of such supernatural machinery as the voices of the elements, of the Earth and the Phantasm of Jupiter. Shelley gives us the full measure of Jove's power and an equal measure of the Titan's continued defiance by concentrating on the interplay of elements, by introducing such fiendish creatures as the Furies. The fluctuations in the mind of Prometheus are conveyed in a series of carefully arranged relations. His fear that he is despised, his longing for Asia and his anxiety to recall the curse are revealed in his scene with Earth. His humility and his calm in the scene with the Phantasm; his exasperation with Mercury; his stoicism with the first group of Furies; his anguish born of sympathy in his final encounter with the remaining Fury. Throughout he feels pain, intense pain and he endures it.

When we consider with what object in view and material in mind Shelley started on his "lyric and classical" drama we cannot but marvel at the dramatic quality of the first act. It would make admirable theatre in the hands of an imaginative producer.

Shelley took four months to write the first act of Prometheus Unbound. Begun at Este in September 1818,

it was completed in Naples in January of the following year. He considered "poetry very subordinate to moral and political science" and if it had not been for his poor health he could have "aspired to the latter".<sup>(1)</sup> The spring found him in Rome and he began work on the following two acts. They were

" . . . chiefly written upon the mountainous ruins of the Baths of Caracalla, among the flowery glades, and thickets of odiferous blossoming trees, which are extended in every winding labyrinths upon its immense platforms and dizzy arches suspended in the air." (2)

The scene has [been] shifted from the remote part of the Caucasus to the Indian Vale. Asia is discovered making an address of welcome to spring inspired by

"The bright blue sky of Rome, and the effect of the vigorous awakening spring in that divinest climate, and the new life with which it drenches the spirits even to intoxication. . .".(3)

Asia is joined by Panthea and discovers the smiling image of Prometheus in her companion's eyes. They hear a Dream calling out "Follow! Follow!". Soon the cry is taken up by unseen Echoes who with their liquid sounds lure them away.

The forest path through which the "lovely twain" have passed is described by Semichoruses of Spirits in the second scene. Two fauns entering discuss where these spirits hide and give a richly imagined description of their habitation.

The third scene brings Asia and Panthea to a pinnacle of rock among mountains. This is the realm of Demogorgon. A Chorus of Spirits is heard out of the mist, directing them

"To the deep, to the deep,  
Down, down!,"

---

(1) Julian, X, p.21.

(2) Hutchinson, Preface p.201.

(3) Ibid.

where the Cave of Demogorgon is.

The two Oceanides are at the Cave in the fourth scene. Singing is suspended. Asia makes her famous speech describing first the destruction heaped on earth by Jove and then the manifold gifts of Love, of fire, of speech, of science and of arts. She also indulges in a little talk on eternal verities with Demogorgon.

Suddenly cars with rainbow-winged steeds appear through the purple night. Demogorgon tells them that they belong to the immortal Hours one of whom will carry them with him. Asia learns from her guide the nature of his destiny and the time of its fulfillment:-

" . . . . . ere yo<sup>u</sup>r planet  
Has set, the darkness which ascends with me  
Shall wrap in lasting night heaven's kingless throne.."

(Act II, Scene IV,  
147-9)

The Oceanides enter the car as the spirit sings in praise of the steeds' speed.

" I desire: and their speed makes night kindle;  
I fear: they outstrip the Typhoon;  
Ere the cloud piled on Atlas can dwindle  
We encircle the earth and the moon:  
We shall rest from long labours at noon.."

(Act II, Scene IV, 169-73)

Shelley has moved into wider regions beyond and above the icy rocks of Caucasus to which Aeschylus had limited the action of his drama. All is made clear and we know now what the poet meant when he wrote to Medwin

" I am delighted with your approbation of my Cenci, and am encouraged to wish to present you with "Prometheus Unbound", a drama also, but a composition of a totally different character... "Prometheus Unbound" is in the merest spirit of ideal Poetry, and not, as the name would indicate, a mere imitation of the Greek drama, or indeed if I have been successful, is it an imitation of anything."(1)

(1) Julian, X, pp.191-192

In the final scene of the second act the curtain rises on the Car with its three passengers as it pauses within a cloud on the top of a snowy mountain. This scene could be described as the unveiling of Asia and her transfiguration through love. Prometheus at the end of his last scene had only one thing to look forward to

" Most vain all hope but love; . . . (Act I, 808.)

Asia knows the hour is approaching when she says

" yet all love is sweet,  
Given or returned. Common as light is love,  
And its familiar voice wearies not ever.  
Like the wide heaven, the all-sustaining air,  
It makes the reptile equal to the God:  
They who inspire it most are fortunate,  
As I am now; but those who feel it most  
Are happier still, after long sufferings,  
As I shall soon become."

(Act II, Scene V<sup>39</sup>-47)

Here follows the Song of an Enamoured Spirit one of the most exquisite in the whole drama. Asia's reply is another instance of Shelley's wonderful lyrical power.

The third Act is set in Heaven. Jupiter is on his Throne. This is the only scene in the entire drama in which the tyrant appears in person. He is more dramatic than any character Shelley has introduced since Asia. Within the self-imposed limitations Shelley shows him in a varying degree of authority with his Deities, with Thetis and in his references to his progeny. Shelley has carried out his <sup>h</sup>treat by marrying him to Thetis. Between the two of them they have produced a "strange wonder" who the obtuse Monarch believes will destroy the soul of man at the appointed hour. "The fatal child" but waits ~~to~~

" . . . . . the destined hour arrive,  
Bearing from Demogorgon's vacant throne  
The dreadful night of ever-living limbs  
Which clothed that awful spirit unbeheld,  
To redescend, and trample out the spark."

(Act III, Scene, I, 20-24.)

"Victory! Victory!" Jove shouts as he hears the chariot thundering up its way to Olympus.

We have all waited for the hour. Prometheus on the desolate crag, Asia on the top of a snowy mountain and Jupiter in Heaven have all waited for the hour. Here is a situation crying out to be dramatised but Shelley reduces it to a coup d'état. He dismisses the whole business of the dethronement of the upstart Monarch in no more than thirty one lines. Had Shelley not written the first Act, we might have questioned his dramatic abilities. Had he not stated, over and over again, the purpose for which he wrote his drama, his motives behind the treatment of the "anti-climax" scene might have been doubted. But Shelley knew what he was doing. In an earlier version of Act I we find a revealing note that has a bearing on the passage under discussion. In the margin opposite 'I, 349', of what Locock describes as an intermediate draft of Prometheus Unbound the following appears:

" "The contrast would have been completer if the sentiment had been transposed but wherefore sacrifice the philosophic truth, that love however monstrous in its expression is still less worthy of horror than hatred."(1)

This may be treated as an index to Shelley's attitude towards the form of his favourite composition. If the choice lay between the philosophical truth and the dramatic form, there can be no question about which Shelley in Prometheus Unbound would sacrifice [first].

The strife which had dimmed the sun is ended. Ocean and Apollo have taken some time off to meet at the mouth of a great river in the Island Atlantis. Shelley's Ocean resembles Aeschylus' Ocean in name only. His words however acquire special significance for those who have

---

(1) C.D.Locock, op.cit., p. 34

paced the sands of Via Reggio:

"It is the unpastured sea hungering for calm.  
Peace, monster; I come now. Farewell."

The entire purpose of the scene is to foretell the benefits to earth as a consequence of Jupiter's overthrow. Also, Shelley wants some time before we return to the Caucasus mountains.

Prometheus is unbound by Hercules in the presence of Ione, the Earth, Spirits, Asia and Panthea who have been brought by the Spirit of the Hour in his winged car. In a long speech, he invites the Oceanides to go and live with him and Asia and share in the enjoyment of Music, Painting, Sculpture, Poesy and other arts. He directs the Spirit of the Hour to speed over the earth and sound from a mystic shell, the song of man's redemption. In another prophecy of the millenium that is about to dawn, the earth promises freedom from disease and pain and a fresh attitude to death. She bids a Spirit in the likeness of a winged child to convey Asia beyond the Indus and its five tributaries to a temple beside a cave.

The fourth scene finds Prometheus, Asia and the Oceanides with the Spirit of the Earth outside the Cave. The millenium has been attained. First the Spirit of the Earth and then the Spirit of the Hour give a glowing picture of the wonders that have been wrought since Prometheus was unbound.

"The loathsome mask has fallen, the man remains  
Sceptreless, free, uncircumscribed, but man  
Equal, unclassed, tribeless, and nationless,  
Exempt from awe, worship, degree, the king  
Over himself; just, gentle, and wise: but man  
Passionless? - no, yet free from guilt or pain,  
Which were, for his will made or suffered them,  
Nor yet exempt, though ruling them like slaves,  
From chance, and death, and mutability,  
The clogs of that which else might oversoar  
The loftiest star of unascended heaven,  
Pinnacled dim in the intense inane."

(Act III, Scene IV, 193-204)

In a letter dated September 6, 1819, Shelley wrote to the Ollier brothers:-

"My 'Prometheus' which has long been finished, is now being transcribed, and will soon be forwarded to you for publication. It is, in my judgment, of a higher character than anything I have yet attempted, and is perhaps less of an imitation that has gone before it."(1)

In the same letters he mentions that he will send his publishers another work calculated to produce a very popular effect and totally in a different style from anything he yet composed. Shelley definitely considered his composition finished when he concluded the third Act and soon after started work on The Cenci.

In October 1819, Shelley and Mary moved from Leghorn to Florence. They had suffered deep sorrow from the loss of their two children. Mary was at the end of a new pregnancy and Shelley in the mood which inspired The West Wind. Perhaps it was another walk in the Cascine woods, the sense of a "new birth" about him, or simply dissatisfaction with the way he had concluded his lyrical drama that caused Shelley to add the fourth Act. Had he re-arranged his third Act leading it off as it were to the choral movement of a symphony Shelley's drama would have gained in artistic unity.

Prometheus Unbound has no stage history to boast<sup>s</sup>. No professional theatre has considered it suitable for production. It has been attempted, however, by amateurs once at least in this country, at the initiative<sup>ti</sup> of Miss Eileen Melvish. Here is an extract from a letter by Miss Melvish who produced the play in her school.

"I did indeed, attempt an outdoor production of Shelley's 'Prometheus Unbound' - or at least selections from it - using girls of all ages from 11 years to 18 years. . . . I followed the sequence

---

(1) Julian K, p.79.

"of the poem I remember, and tried to keep the balance between the different voices, groups of Spirits and Furies as near to the balance of the original as possible. We used a good deal of choral speaking, and set some of the lyrics to music. We used music very freely with simple dance movements for group of Spirits. The Furies had an exciting time working out ferocious movement to the accompaniment of various percussion instruments. We did not alter a word of the original drama; we merely selected what was possible for school-girls to interpret and tried to keep the flow and continuity with the help of music and dance."

The principal role was played by a "gifted Sixth form girl with a really beautiful voice of rich quality, strong dramatic power and poetic sensibility and the dignity which made it possible for her to give a strangely beautiful and moving performance." About a hundred girls took part and "the wide stretch of the open-air stage, the big numbers, the music, dance and choral speech", gave it "some of the qualities of a Greek drama".

Prometheus Unbound undeniably has great dramatic moments chiefly concentrated in the first Act. It reveals at times some of the features of an opera. Selections from the four Acts have been successfully broadcast over the air, a feature which would have thrilled Shelley. The school performance showed that some dance movements were not out of place. Yet when we consider the theme of the drama, regeneration through suffering and the redemptive power of love, the story of a being who endured continued pain so that mankind might be saved, great moments of dramatic emotions, the emphasis on music and song, passages of superb blank verse for recitative purpose, the thought comes to the mind that it might be successfully performed as an Oratorio. One definition of Oratorio fits Shelley's drama admirably.

"A dramatic poem, usually of a sacred but not liturgical character, sung throughout by solo voices and chorus, to the accompaniment of a full orchestra,

"but - at least in modern times - without the assistance of scenery, dresses or action."(1)

Prometheus Unbound, a lyrical drama in four acts, contains several solos sung by the Spirits and the Oceanides, choruses of the Furies and the Spirits and has tremendous scope for orchestral music. It has already inspired incidental music. In the nineteenth century it inspired Hubert Parry to present his first important choral work, the Scenes from Prometheus Unbound at the Gloucester Festival.

"It was not a success, but it is none the less interesting on that account; it undoubtedly marks an epoch in the history of English music, and the type of composition of which it was the first specimen had great consequences in the development of British national art. The dramatic monologue of Prometheus had a new note of sincerity in it..."(2)

Perhaps some day a composer will discover its potentialities and compose [a] music for it that will be more in the strain of the Messiah than the Eroica. For Shelley's drama in spite of his protests against God and Church is intensely religious in spirit.

Shelley did not expect to sell more than twenty copies of his favourite composition. He kne<sup>w</sup> that the structure and imagery would render communication with an unsympathetic reader quite impossible. He had hoped to familiarize "the more select classes of poetical readers", this may include poets as well, with "beautiful idealisms". With all its 'mystical' character the drama has fulfilled its author's hopes. The nineteenth century reviewers were shocked by the irreverent, irreligious, impious and and blasphemous tone of the drama. Some eighty-five years later a kindred spirit, one who was gifted with a highly refined imagination justified the form only because it

---

(1) Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians. Edited by Eric Bloom, Vol.VI, N-Q, 1954, p.248.

(2) Ibid, p.562.

suited the religious tone of the drama. W.B.Yeats wrote:-

" I have re-read his Prometheus Unbound for the first time for many years, in the woods of Drim-da-rod among the Echte hills and sometimes I have looked towards Slieve-ran-Orr, where the country people say the last battle of the world shall be fought till the third day, when a priest shall light a chalice, and the thousand years of peace begin. And I think this mysterious song utters a faith as simple and as ancient as the faith of those country people, in a form suited to a new eye, that will understand with Blake, that the holy spirit is 'an intellectual fountain', and that the kinds and degrees of beauty are the images of its authority."(1)

---

(1) W.B.Yeats, Ideas of Good and Evil. (Collected Works of William Butler Yeats, Vol.VI, 1908 ), p.87.

CHAPTER V

The Cenci.

" My Prometheus is finished, and I am also on the eve of completing another work, totally different from anything you might conjecture that I should write; of a more popular kind; and if anything of mine could deserve attention, of higher claims.- 'be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck, till thou approve the performance". (1)

Shelley wrote to Leigh Hunt from Livorno on the 15th August of his *Annus Mirabilis*. Hunt was not kept innocent for long. This work "totally different" from his other composition, "of a more popular kind", composed after the third Act of Prometheus Unbound which he then considered finished, was none other than Shelley's only completed tragedy The Cenci.

Shelley did not approach the medium of dramatic form with the inexperience of a novice when he decided to write his tragedy. It is true that while in England he did not attempt to disguise his dissatisfaction with his contemporary plays and their authors and left his friends with the impression that he possessed neither the gift nor the inclination necessary for play-writing. Yet the desire to write for the stage must have lurked somewhere for it manifested itself immediately on his arrival in Italy and in less than two months he is discovered meditating a tragedy on the madness of Tasso.

" I have devoted this summer, and indeed <sup>the</sup> next year, to the composition of a tragedy on the subject of Tasso's madness, which I find upon inspection, is if properly treated, admirably dramatic and poetical. But, you will say, I have no dramatic talent. Very true, in a certain sense; but I have taken the resolution to see what kind of a tragedy a person

---

(1) Julian, X, p.68.

"without dramatic talent could write. It shall be better morality than Fazio, and better poetry than Bertram, at least."<sup>(1)</sup>

Shelley wrote to Peacock. It was Peacock who had sought to cure him of his dislike of the theatre and had noted with satisfaction the powerful impression Miss O'Neil's rendering of the tragic heroine in Fazio had made on his friend. Shelley had both read and seen this tragedy. There is no reference in their correspondence to suggest that the Shelleys had seen Maturin's Bertram, although they had both read it.<sup>(2)</sup> Shelley may have learnt about the successful production from Lord Byron through whose influence it had been produced at Drury Lane in 1816.<sup>(3)</sup> Both tragedies had met with popular success and neither had earned Shelley's unqualified praise. It appears that far from being discouraged by the deplorable state to which drama had sunk in the second decade of the nineteenth century, Shelley was emboldened by the popularity of the inferior works of his lesser contemporaries to try his hand at a tragedy. Uncertain as he felt about the ultimate success of his intended drama on Tasso, in matters of morality and poetry at least, he hoped to surpass some of the successful playwrights.

On April 6, 1818, Mary and Shelley began reading Tasso's Aminta together and Shelley began reading Manso's Vita del Tasso.<sup>(4)</sup> While Mary occupied herself with translating from Italian, Shelley busied himself with collecting material and planning the plot of the tragedy.

---

(1) Julian, IX, p.298.

(2) M.S.J., p.61.

(3) Julian, IX, p.299.

(4) M.S.J., p.96.

All that survives of the project is a short opening scene, Song for Tasso, a short lyric, and a sketch of two scenes. The short scene of twenty-two lines shows that Shelley had already acquired the dramatic technique for handling an exposition scene. The curtain rises showing four characters: Courtier Maddalo is surprised at being denied an audience with the Duke of Ferrara; Pigna, the State Minister waits for the signature of the Duke who cannot spare any of his time for him; Malpiglio, the pompous versifier, arouses the mirth of Albano, the usher, who repeats Leon<sup>o</sup>ra's witticisms at his expense. The principal characters remain within. The scene concludes:-

Albano. Buried in some strange talk. The Duke was leaning,  
His finger on his brow, his lips unclosed,  
The Princess sate within the window seat,  
And so her face was hid; but on her knee  
Her hands were clasped, veined, and pale as snow,  
And quivering - young Tasso, too, was there.

Maddalo. Thou seest on whom from thine own worshipped heaven  
Thou drawest down smiles-- they did not rain on thee.

Malpiglio. Would they were parching lightning<sup>s</sup> for his sake  
On whom they fell. (1)

The Song for Tasso refers to Tasso's incarceration in the palace dungeon at Ferrara.<sup>(2)</sup> The lover, the lunatic, the poet are all represented in the character of Tasso. Shelley's sketches of the two scenes show that he had planned the conduct of the plot beyond the opening scene.<sup>(3)</sup> The first of these refers to Tasso reading "the sonnet which he wrote to Leon<sup>o</sup>ra, to herself as composed at the request of another". Also there are hints for a scene with Tasso's sister and a suggestion

---

(1) Hutchinson, pp.554-555

(2) Ibid. p 555

(3) A. Koszul, p.148.

that Shelley was to consider the character of "Laura the Poetess". Also jotted down are isolated words like 'Sorrentum', where the Italian poet had written his sonnets to Leonora, the "character of M" perhaps the same as Maddalo introduced in the scene he wrote, and "Malvaggio" who may have been the original of Malpiglio introduced in the published fragment. The sketch for the other scene mentions spring as perhaps being the time of the year when Tasso left Ferrara. A hint is given for the scene with his sister which was to show Tasso "disguising himself in the habit of a shepherd and questioning his sister in that disguise concerning himself and unveiling himself."<sup>(1)</sup> The composition of this fragment cost Shelley so much effort that he abandoned the project in favour of a more abstract theme based on the Greek myth of Prometheus.<sup>(2)</sup>

Mary was not aware of the existence of the fragment which was first published by Edward Garnett in 1862 or of the sketches for the "Drama of Tasso" first published by A.Koszul in 1910. She knew of the existence of the Song.<sup>(3)</sup>

"He meditated three subjects as the ground work for lyrical dramas. One was the story of Tasso... The other was founded on the Book of Job... The third was Prometheus Unbound..."<sup>(3)</sup>

It was perhaps at this time that he tried to work off his frustration, consequent upon his abortive attempt on Tasso, by dramatizing Job. "The sublime dramatic poem", as he described the Book of Job, with its theme of cosmic contest between Jehovah and Job, expressed through "the boldest imagery afforded by the human mind and the material world"<sup>(4)</sup> had always aroused Shelley's wonder and admiration. It

---

(1) A.Koszul, p.148.

(2) Hutchinson, Mary's Note p.331.

(3) Ibid., p.267.

(4) Julian, Essay on Christianity, VI, p.229.

would be idle to speculate on the alternative dénouement with which Shelley would have concluded the conflict. No evidence remains of his having started the drama. If he did, as Mary suggests, give some thought to it it was very likely absorbed in Shelley's version of Job's Greek kindred.

Although Mary refers to Tasso as a lyrical drama the structure and style of the published fragment and the hints for the subsequent scenes indicate that the tragedy of Tasso if completed would have fallen in the same category as The Cenci and not Prometheus Unbound. Also, the reference to the tragedies of Milman and Maturin, in Shelley's letter to Peacock suggests that the Tasso was going to be treated with Covent Garden in mind.<sup>(1)</sup>

The preparation for the tragedy on Tasso's madness was not in vain. Some of the studies for his character flowed into the conversation-poems of 1818, providing Shelley with his first opportunity to speak in a "certain familiar style". At a time when Wordsworth and Coleridge started the literary world with their revolutionary theories of poetic diction it would not be inappropriate to hear Shelley's views on the language of conversation in poetry. Apropos Julian and Maddalo he writes:-

"I have employed a certain familiar style of language to express the actual way in which people talk with each other whom education and a certain refinement of sentiment have placed above the use of vulgar idioms. I use the word vulgar in its most extensive sense; the vulgarity of rank and fashion is as gross in its way as that of Poverty, and its cant terms equally expressive of bare conceptions and therefore equally unfit for Poetry. Not that the familiar style is to be admitted in the treatment of a subject which relates to common life, where the passion exceeding a certain limit touches the boundaries of that which is ideal. Strong passion expresses itself in metaphors borrowed from objects alike remote or near, and casts over all the shadow of its own greatness."<sup>(2)</sup>

*wholly ideal,  
or in that  
part of a  
subject*

(1) Julian, IX, p.298.

(2) Julian, X, p.68.

Shelley undoubtedly practised these theories, first attempted in his conversation-pieces Rosalind and Helen, and Julian and Maddalo, when he came to the writing of The Cenci.

Rosalind and Helen was begun at Marlow in 1817 and put aside. Mary, ever anxious for her husband's reputation, which, in her opinion, suffered on account of the abstruse nature of his poetry, bullied Shelley into finishing the Eclogue in Italy. This may be offered as yet another explanation as to why he abandoned Tasso. The poem is set on the shores of Como where Rosalind and Helen meet after an absence of years. Rosalind had loved and lost, the object of her devotion being her own brother. She enters into a loveless marriage, but misery pursues her even after the death of her husband, who had accused her of atheism and adultery. Helen, on the other hand, had found ideal union with Lionel who is Laon and Alastor rolled into one. Something of Tasso has crept into Lionel. While his frustrated love is expressed in words similar to those in the Song for Tasso,<sup>(1)</sup> his temporary mental derangement looks forward to the madman of Julian and Maddalo. In his resistance to tyranny and his spiritual isolation he bears slight resemblance to both Prometheus and Beatrice. The poem on the whole is sentimental and dreary. What is of importance is Shelley's concern with the extremes of human agony so inadequately expressed in the Eclogue, more successfully delineated in Julian and Maddalo and so powerfully portrayed in The Cenci.

In Julian and Maddalo Shelley commemorates the evening he spent with Byron on the Lido after their reunion in Venice. An enigmatic character is introduced in the Madman. The mystery surrounding the Maniac's identity has baffled the Shelleyan sleuths since its inception.

---

(1) Hutchinson, Rosalind and Helen, pp. 176, 764-779.  
Song of Tasso, p.555.

Was he intended as another study for a Shelleyan hero and the poet's mouthpiece or did Shelley stand outside and watch this "noble mind overthrown" pour out his heart in the way Tasso might have done had Shelley proceeded with the plan of the tragedy? Shelley made no overt attempt to dramatize speech in The Eclogue or Julian and Maddalo, both of which consist of long monologues. But surely something was gained, not all lost, when Shelley began to probe the human heart and learn its language. It is worth emphasising, as Carlos Baker does, that "the extremes of human agony were central to the Job story, as also to those of Rosalind, the Maniac in Julian and Maddalo and Beatrice Cenci."<sup>(1)</sup>

This would appear to be a very roundabout way of dealing with The Cenci. Indeed, it would be so but for Shelley's detractors, who reject The Cenci as a stage drama on the grounds that he had no knowledge whatsoever of stage-craft, no interest in men and women as they really are, and no experience of dramatic writing and consequently no talent for tragedy at all. It is necessary, therefore, to emphasise every aspect of dramatic talent he exhibited in Prometheus Unbound, in his fragments and conversation-pieces and also his knowledge of stagecraft acquired in England and Italy and enriched by his conversations with his friends, Byron in particular, before we attempt to examine The Cenci.

Shelley gives the reason for his choice of subject in his Preface to the tragedy.

"On my arrival ~~at~~ Rome I found that the story of the Cenci was a subject not to be mentioned in Italian society without awakening a deep and breathless interest; and that the feelings of the company never failed to incline to a romantic pity for the wrongs, and a passionate exculpation of the horrible deed to which they urged her, who has been mingled two centuries with the common dust."<sup>(2)</sup>

---

(1) Carlos Baker, Shelley's Major Poetry. p 121

(2) Hutchinsohn, p.272.

The story possessed that inestimable dramatic advantage of a previous existence in the popular consciousness as a source of tragic emotion. It was "this rational and universal interest" which the story still produced among the Italians of all ranks that first suggested to Shelley "the conception of its fitness for a dramatic purpose". Shelley had before him the examples of King Lear and the two Oedipus plays. Having explained his reasons for the choice of the subject, Shelley goes on to make the next most important statement concerning the purpose of the tragedy. The Cenci, Shelley declares, must not be taken for a vehicle of the author's ideals. It was not motivated by a desire to propagate or preach. In his dedication to Leigh Hunt Shelley wrote:-

"The drama which I now present to you is a sad reality. I lay aside the presumptuous attitude of an instructor, and am content to paint, with such colours as my own heart furnishes, that which has been." (1)

His youthful compositions had been impersonations of "dreams of what ought to be, or may be". The Cenci concerned that which had been. This emphasis on the factual and historical aspect of the drama, on its realism, on the absence of metaphysical ideas is repeatedly made in his letters to various friends. Shelley is careful to point out the proper place of moral purpose in tragedy.

"The highest moral purpose aimed at in the highest species of the drama, is the teaching the human heart, through its sympathies and antipathies, the knowledge, of itself; in proportion to the possession of which knowledge every human being is wise, and just, sincere, tolerant and kind. If dogma, can do more it is well: but a drama is no fit place for the enforcement of them." (2)

---

(1) Hutchinson, Dedication p.269.

(2) Hutchinson, Preface p.273.

Shelley, it appears, would reject drama which had a 'palpable design' on the audience. The moral, he would say, was implicit in the tragedy and every attempt should be made to make it dramatically effective. In Prometheus Unbound he had aimed at communicating "beautiful idealisms" to the select few, in The Cenci at discovering the human heart. The "starry" poet realised that there were objects this side of the "veil" which deserved attention. At the age of twenty-seven in the most creative period of his life, between the third Act and the fourth Act of Prometheus Unbound Shelley wrote his tragedy.

If after these explicit statements on the choice and purpose of the drama, some of Shelley's critics still persist in viewing Count Cenci as the archetype of the tyrant he hated from Jove to Jehovah and Beatrice as the personification of innocent suffering, it could only mean one of two things - either that Shelley's execution falls far below his intention or that the critics have extended their prejudices, founded on Shelley's earlier compositions, to The Cenci. The Cenci is assuredly not one of the four great tragic masterpieces of world literature, it does not rank with King Lear, but how far below the great and how far above the average it is, <sup>is</sup> the question we must try to answer.

In May 1818, Shelley found himself in possession of the manuscript of the Relations of the Death of the Family of the Cenci. The Papal Government had taken the most extraordinary precautions against the publication of facts which "offered so tragical a commentary on its wickedness and weakness that the communication of the manuscript had become a matter of some difficulty."<sup>(1)</sup> On Monday 25th<sup>May</sup> 1818, while at Leghorn Mary finished copying

---

(1) Note Books, II, p.89.

the Cenci MS.<sup>(1)</sup> Shelley failed in his attempt to start her on the tragedy. A year later the Shelleys went to Rome. On April 22nd they visited the Palazzo Colonna and saw what was then believed to be the picture of Beatrice Cenci by Guido Reni.<sup>(2)</sup> That set off the spark. Perhaps it was about this time that Shelley made an abstract,<sup>(3)</sup> faithful to the original of the manuscript, indicating his intention to adhere closely to the source material.<sup>(3)</sup> On May 11, 1819 Mary visited the Casa Cenci, briefly described in the concluding part of the Preface to The Cenci.<sup>(4)</sup> Three days later, the same day on which Claire read the manuscript, Mary made the following entry in her journal:

"Work. Drawing lesson. Read Livy, and the 'Decamerone'. Shelley writes his Tragedy ('The Cenci'). Will sit to Miss Curran."<sup>(5)</sup>

Their little 'Wilmouse' died on June 7. Shelley had spent sixty agonising hours by his son's side. He returned to the tragedy and finished it by the middle of August.<sup>(6)</sup> On September 16<sup>th</sup> 1819, Shelley sent the manuscript of his tragedy copied in Mary's hand to Peacock, to be shown to the manager of Covent Garden.<sup>(7)</sup> Peacock's little note speaks volumes on the subject of its rejection.

"The Oedipus of Dryden and Lee was often performed in the last (eighteenth) century; but never in my time. There is no subject of this class treated with such infinite skill and delicacy as in Alfieri's beautiful tragedy, Myrrha. It was the character in which Madame Ristori achieved her great success in Paris; but she was prohibited from performing it in London. If the Covent Garden managers had accepted The Cenci I doubt if the licenser would have permitted the performance."<sup>(8)</sup>

(1) M.S.J., p.98.

(2) Ibid., p.120.

(3) Note Books, II, p.85.

(4) M.S.J., 121.

(5) Ibid.

(6) Julian, X, p.73.

(7) M.S.J., p.124.

(8) Julian, X, p.82, n.2.

Consequently The Cenci came to be treated as a closet drama until a hundred and three years later when Sybil Thorndike in the role of Beatrice, intended by its author for Miss O'Neil, convinced critics like James Agate and Maurice Baring that not only was Shelley a great poet but that England had lost a great dramatist in him.<sup>(1)</sup> By a most unpredictable piece of luck it was revived at the Old Vic this year and despite the prejudiced reviews, confirmed the view taken by Baring and Agate that Shelley possessed considerable dramatic talent. A careful examination of the plot, dramatic speech and characterization should make this abundantly clear even to those who missed the opportunity, so rarely given, of seeing The Cenci on the stage.

Shelley called his drama The Cenci because the entire family of the Cenci was involved in the tragedy. The action takes place principally at Rome but changes during the fourth Act to Petrella, a castle ~~among~~<sup>in</sup> the Apulian Appenines. The Cencis lived during the Pontificate of Clement VIII and the horrors which ended in the extinction of one of the noblest and richest families of Rome took place in the year 1559. Shelley followed the source material with fidelity, making just the necessary alterations and compressing the action into as brief a compass as could be done with plausibility. For instance, in his manuscript of The Relation of the Death of the family of the Cenci there are two long intermissions of time, one immediately after the murder of Cenci and the other after Marzio's recantation. Shelley placed the discovery of the murder immediately after it had been committed and did not permit the recantation of Marzio to give the prisoners more than a few hours respite.<sup>(2)</sup> The dramatic advantage of

---

(1) Maurice Baring, The New Statesman, November 18, 1922, p.204.

(2) Julian, II , The Relations pp 159-166

of these changes will become clear after a closer look at some of the scenes and characters.

There is a good deal of evidence furnished in the Preface, in Mary's Note on The Cenci and in Shelley's correspondence to show that the poet paid considerable attention to the conduct of the story. He was aware that the popular effect he aimed at depended chiefly on the successful handling of the plot and a careful sequence of scenes. Shelley divided the play into five Acts. The *first* Act contains three scenes, the second and third Acts two each and the fourth and fifth Acts four each, bringing the total <sup>to</sup> fifteen. The exposition scene sets the pattern for the succeeding scenes which "consist in a dialogue between two persons, or a succession of such dialogues with changed speakers."<sup>(1)</sup> Bates points to the Greek models in the arrangement of these scenes, while Carlos Baker, acknowledging the parallel maintains that "Shelley handled in this way every major scene in every major poem from Queen Mab to Prometheus Unbound, so that habit rather than classical influence probably fixed his course in The Cenci."<sup>(2)</sup>

Shelley in his use of the source material rejected what was dramatically superfluous and cleaned up where delicacy demanded. Although the Count had been three times convicted for sodomy, the crime in the drama has been changed to murder and only a subtle reference was made to his perversions.

"... - I am what your theologians call  
Hardened; - which they must be in impudence,  
So to revile a man's peculiar taste."

(Act I, Sc. i, 93-95)

---

(1) Bates, p.57.

(2) Baker, p.151.

Shelley attributes to the Count three motives for the tyranny he exercised over his family. The first of these, his sexual perversion is conveyed by the use of <sup>the</sup> term "peculiar taste". The second of his major vices is avarice. The Count buys "perilous impunity" for his "manifold and hideous deeds" with his "gold" and conserves his depleted wealth by depriving his sons of what is ~~is~~ their due by birth. The third and the most diabolic of his vices, developed after his youthful appetites had begun to pall, is the lust for power over the soul of his victim.

" I rarely kill the body, which preserves,  
Like a strong prison, the soul within my power,  
Wherein I feed it with the breath of fear  
For hourly pain."

(Act I, Sc.i, 114-117)

Cenci's soliloquy at the end of the scene gives the first hint of his intentions regarding Beatrice:

" . . . . . Thou, pavement, which I tread  
Towards her chamber, - let your echoes talk  
Of my imperious step scorning surprise,  
But not of my intent! . . .

(Act I, Sc.i, 141-144)

He orders Andrea to bid Beatrice wait for him in her chamber at midnight and alone.

The second scene laid in the Cenci garden, introduces Beatrice whose sweet looks, Camillo has told us, make "all things else beauteous and glad". More light is thrown on her misfortunes as we discover that she had loved and lost wily Orsino. Even now as she refuses her trust in him he meditates treachery. The petition he has promised to send to the Pope will never reach its destination, because he means to bring her and her dower under his control. Meanwhile Beatrice, with a premonition of coming evil, prepares for the banquet which has been arranged at the express command of the Count after he has received "some happy news" from Salamanca.

By the end of the second scene the personalities

of the protagonist and the antagonist are set in clear relief and the stage is prepared for the first open clash between the two. The confrontation takes place in the banquet scene which, as the Old Vic production so recently demonstrated, is the best proof Shelley had yet given of his talent for theatrical effects. Visually this is the most impressive scene and dramatically one of the most successful. Shelley employs several devices such as anticipation, surprise and horror, as the news of the violent deaths of Rocco and Cristofano is gradually broken to the assembled guests. The tension rises as Beatrice makes her unexpected appeal to the Princes and kinsmen, pleading in succession to Prince Colonna, to the Cardinal, to the Pope's chamberlain, to Camillo the chief justiciary, and for a moment arouses them to response. The extent of Cenci's power and the magnitude of his evil are measured by the promptness with which they put their swords back into their sheaths. Beatrice pleads and pleads in vain. In his second soliloquy, Cenci's sinister purpose is explicitly stated.

The second act reveals more fully than any other some of the weaknesses of the drama. Having promised so much in the first Act Shelley fails to live up to our expectations. In the true Elizabethan style he moves from a public scene to a domestic one, showing Lucretia, who had spoken only once in the banquet scene, and her son Bernardo, another victim of Cenci's tyranny. They are joined by Beatrice who is filled with horror at the proposal made by her father in her room after the banquet. For a moment it looks as though the act had taken place, Shelley, restricted by conventions, could not depict the scene showing Cenci's defeat by Beatrice as an Elizabethan might have done. Intended for a nineteenth century audience, the subject of incest had to be treated with

great "delicacy". The remaining part of the scene is dominated by Cenci who has come to give orders for a journey to Petrella. Another soliloquy restates for the third time his evil purpose. Arthur Hicks, credited with a successful production of The Cenci in Washington, justifies this scene on the ground that "each succeeding scene in which Cenci appears marks an intensification of his will to evil, while the delay indicated in Act Two arises from the equally strong opposing will of his daughter."<sup>(1)</sup> If that is what Shelley intended, a device employed in his lyrical dramas, he could have gone on creating similar scenes holding up the action indefinitely. Moreover the equally opposing will of Cenci's daughter had been effectively dramatized in the banquet scene. The Beatrice we meet in this scene is a little subdued. She shrinks back and covers her face at Cenci's unexpected entrance. She staggers wildly towards the door, seeking protection from God, her only refuge now. Where is the "brow superior", "unaltered cheek" and "fearless eye" with which she had faced him the evening before? The only justification for the delay then would be to show Cenci exulting in power and also to remind us that Beatrice is after all a young girl. This in turn, would lay Shelley open to the charge that he was more interested in the delineation of minute and subtle distinctions of feeling than the conduct of the plot.

A variation on the theme of Cenci's tyranny and the Pope's attitude is created between Camillo and Giacomo, Cenci's eldest son, in the second scene, laid in a chamber in the Vatican. Camillo, full of sympathy, discloses that the Pope has once again declared himself on the side of parental authority and Giacomo, dispossessed of his worldly goods by his avaricious father, is left in despair.

---

(1) Hicks, p.51.

A more opportune moment Orsino could not have found for the execution of his plan, which is to lure Giacomo to the thoughts of parricide. It is ironic that four out of the six main characters should have either talked or thought about the possibility of Cenci's death by foul means. It was Cenci himself, who in one of those characteristic moments of reading people's minds, a trick of the family, as Orsino shrewdly observed, gives a graphic account of the possible means Lucretia and her children could adopt to rid the world of him. Giacomo has buried the wish in the depths of his consciousness until Orsino with the cunning of a minor Iago, forces it upon his conscious self. This scene would have taken its rightful place between the spectacular banquet-scene and the climax, if Shelley had been more economical with his soliloquies and infused a little of the Cenci energy into Giacomo. These two factors, however, will be considered at length when we examine Shelley's use of dramatic speech and characterisation.

The Cenci may not rank with the world's greatest plays but the scene with Beatrice immediately after her violation is among the most powerful ever written. From the moment she enters staggering and speaking wildly until (180 lines later) she retires absorbed in thought, she goes through such an intense sequence of emotions, that only an actress who combined Sybil Thorndike's power of rising to tragic heights with Barbara Jefford's beauty and movements would succeed in doing full justice to it. Beatrice after wrestling with her conscience makes her fateful decision alone. If only someone had muzzled Giacomo, the scene would not have been prolonged beyond its necessary duration. He willingly enters into the plot, of which Beatrice is the architect, Orsino the chief instrument, and Lucretia the only other accomplice. In the final scene Shelley, who appears to have treated the character of Giacomo in a half-hearted manner, came to

identify his situation with Othello's in the bed chamber scene, a fact to be deplored by all those who would otherwise have willingly entered into the mood of suspense created by Cenci's escape.

Count Cenci makes his last grand appearance in the opening scene of the fourth Act. The air is rent with his curses and imprecations as Lucretia tries to get him to confess before he meets his doom. He, on the other hand, looks forward to the repetition of his act. He must poison and corrupt his daughter's soul. Shelley in presenting the conflict between two opposing wills has used another device here. The first time he confronted Beatrice with Cenci was in the presence of the nobles and prelates before she became aware of his intentions. The second time they came face to face Beatrice had not recovered from the horror of his suggestion and had, in consequence, lost her imperious manner. In this scene Shelley keeps her off-stage in flagrant defiance of Cenci's orders, so that the curse would throw into high relief the struggles Beatrice has to undergo until the last moment of the catastrophe.

The theatrical value of the scene with the murderers is generally recognised. What is not recognised is Shelley's intention to adhere to the source material in spite of the obvious resemblance to Macbeth. The manuscript of The Relations of the Death of the Family of the Cenci had shown the murderers held back by pity. They could not overcome their repugnance to killing in cold blood a sleeping old man. Beatrice in anger threatened to kill him and then told the assassins,

"Since you have not courage to murder a sleeping man, I will kill my father myself; but your lives shall not be long secure."

Fearing

"the tempest would burst over their own heads",

the murderers took courage and re-entered the Count's chamber.<sup>(1)</sup>

An unexpected note of irony is introduced in the following scene. The charge sheet Savella carries against Count Cenci was pure invention on Shelley's part. The murder must be discovered as quickly as possible and what could be more ingenious than this sudden change of heart on the Pope's part. The swiftness with which this act moves leaves little time for speculation and Shelley succeeds in carrying the audience with him.

A serious charge, however, is laid against the fourth Act. The disappearance of Cenci from the stage is said to reduce the dramatic interest of the action. The Old Vic production did not suffer from the Count's absence. This might have been the case if Shelley had not compressed the events between the murder of Cenci and the sentence of death on his family. Cenci is dead but the forces which his evil deed had unleashed are still operating and his malignant spirit hovers until Beatrice hears the judgment.

Beatrice's trial, her denial and the sentence show Shelley in full command of his dramatic powers. The opening scene emphasises the spiritual isolation of Beatrice. Orsino is about to make his final exit by taking flight. This would not have altogether surprised Beatrice who had had misgivings about him from the start. The second scene, probably the most controversial from the point of view of characterization, is admirably conducted. The Old Vic failed to exploit its full dramatic value. Marzio after hours of torture, is brought before Beatrice and proclaims her innocence. The hired assassin dies the death of a martyr, reducing both Orsino and Giacomo to

---

(1) Julian, II, The Relation, p.161.

insignificant beings. The third scene, beginning with Beatrice asleep on a couch, moves through a sequence of emotions showing Beatrice in bitter indignation at the weakness of her mother and brothers, Beatrice spurning physical tortures - her "pangs are of the mind and of the heart, and of the soul" - and friendly as her gentle self, soothing her mother with a song. The fourth scene is indeed one of the most moving in English literature. The young girl finds herself robbed of the sweet sunshine she had just discovered and is temporarily overcome by fear of life beyond death. And she feels forsaken by God in whom until that very minute she had reposed complete faith. The vacuum in her heart becomes insupportable. Beatrice recovers her strength of will and welcomes death with <sup>the</sup> calm resolution and dignity we have come to associate with her.

The poignancy of the last lines has yet to be contested. The play had begun on a high note with Camillo alluding to Cenci's crimes. It ends on the soft note of Beatrice's voice as she repeats a common service she had shared with her mother. In words of monosyllabic choice she concludes:-

" . . . . . Here, Mother, tie  
My girdle for me, and ~~bind~~ up this hair  
In any simple knot; ay, that does well.  
And yours I see is coming down. How often  
Have we done this for one another; now  
We shall not do it any more. My Lord,  
We are quite ready. Well, 'tis very well."

Shelley had "just cause" to be proud of the two concluding lines of the play. (1)

It appears from all his references to The Cenci that Shelley was fully conscious that he was attempting what for him was an unusual kind of composition. This is the most significant point which emerges from his letters

---

(1) Julian, X, p.192.

to Peacock, Hunt, Ollier, Byron, Medwin and Keats. It is emphasised in the Preface, amplified by Mary in her Note and recalled by Shelley's friends in their Memoirs. Shelley stresses the qualities which distinguish this "sad reality" of The Cenci from his other works -

"I have been cautious to avoid the introducing faults of youthful composition; diffuseness, a profusion of inapplicable imagery, vagueness, generality, and, as Hamlet says, words, words." (1)

From the time Shelley turned his thoughts to dramatic composition, that is, before he wrote his conversation piece Julian and Maddalo, he seemed to make a clear distinction between the two types of poetic diction he was going to adopt. The ideal, metaphysical and somewhat obscure imagery would be reserved for such compositions as Prometheus Unbound. The lucid, simple and "real language of men in general", calculated to produce the greatest degree of popular effect, would distinguish such compositions as The Cenci and the unfinished Charles <sup>the first</sup>. While Prometheus Unbound was addressed to the subtle reader, The Cenci was directed to the average theatre-goer. Its appeal was to the human heart and its strength lay in its highly impassioned language. The style adapted to convey the feelings and passions of the principal characters in this tragedy is so pointed and concentrated, the economy with words so startling and the absence of metaphysical imagery so conspicuous, that it has led several critics like Graham Hough to describe the composition as "unShelleyan". (2)

In his chapter on the Style of The Cenci, Bates quotes four instances of "pure poetry" opposed to dramatic poetry in the entire drama. (3) "Heroic self-denial" is the ironic

---

(1) Hutchinson, Mary's Note, p.334.

(2) Graham Hough, The Romantic Poets, Grey Arrow edition, 1958, p.138.

(3) Bates, p.83.

comment made by Graham Hough.<sup>(1)</sup> The importance of this fact must not be overlooked. When we consider the natural scenery which Shelley viewed from what he playfully called his Scythrop's tower in the Villa Valsovana where he composed The Cenci, we are astonished at his self discipline. About his study Mary writes in her Note on The Cenci:-

"It looked out on a wide prospect of fertile country, and commanded a view of the near sea. The storms that sometimes varied our day showed themselves most picturesquely as they were driven across the ocean; sometimes the dark lurid clouds dipped towards the waves, and became water spouts that churned up the waters beneath, as they were chased onward and scattered by the tempest. At other times the dazzling sunlight and heat made it almost intolerable to every other; but Shelley basked in both and his health and spirits revived under their influence." (2)

The picturesque effects of this scenery, the speed of the wind and the cloud, the images of the ocean, earth and sky found no place in The Cenci but the lurid colours and the tempestuous note flowed into the lusts and passions which brought ruin to the Cenci family. The only time Shelley introduces the dazzling sunlight, it is "Loud, light suspicious, full of eyes and ears". It disturbs Cenci, bringing out in sharp contrast the dark depths of his evil purpose. But Cenci is not afraid. His deed shall confound both day and night.

Shelley has not banished imagery altogether from his drama. His notes on imagery in Shakespeare<sup>(3)</sup> and Agamemnon<sup>(4)</sup> reflect his preoccupation with dramatic imagery. A search for the most judicious use of imagery in a dramatic composition, illustrated in the finest works of Shakespeare led to the following conclusion.

---

(1) Graham Hough, The Romantic Poets, p.139.

(2) Hutchinson, Note, p.332.

(3) Note Books, pp 98-102

(4) Note Books, pp 127-140

"In a dramatic composition the imagery and the passion should interpenetrate one another, the former being reserved simply for the full development and illustration of the latter. Imagination is as the mortal God which should assume flesh for the redemption of mortal passion".(1)

This then was the standard Shelley aimed at. If the gap between his theory and practice at times proved too wide, Shelley could still content himself with the knowledge that few dramatists at the age of twenty seven have achieved the balance between imagery and passion in their first tragedy.

His skill in the use of dramatic imagery is most successfully displayed in his treatment of incest. For one who purified what he wrote it was not very difficult to define what is repulsive. The problem which faced Shelley must be viewed in relation to the age in which he lived - how to present the situation in which a father has raped his own daughter without offending the moral susceptibilities of the people at whom the play was directed. The task of acquainting the audience with Cenci's intentions, with his 'defeat' during the first encounter with Beatrice and finally with the outrage itself without once mentioning it by name, required that Shelley should exploit to the utmost his poetic powers and his newly awakened dramatic interest.

Let us now consider the matter of incest from the moment Cenci conceived it until the moment of its disclosure to Lucretia, Orsino and Giacomo. The first hint is given in Cenci's speech in which he dwells on his sexual excesses and sadistic crimes:-

" . . . . . and now  
Invention palls:-Ay, we must all grow old-  
And but that there yet remains a deed to act  
Whose horror might make sharp an appetite  
Duller than mine-I'd do-I know not what.  
(Act I, Sc.i, 98-102)

(1) Hutchinson, Preface, p.274.



with his children's blood. He had thirsted for their blood, and they were dead. Now he longs to destroy Beatrice and the charm, he thinks, will work. If a man can find exhilaration in the blood of his children, revive his manhood through it, draw strength ~~from~~<sup>for</sup> his villainous purpose, is there anything left for him but to work this "charm"?

" . . . . . The charm works well; It must be done; it shall be done, I swear!

(Act I, Sc.iii, 177-8)

With these words we leave Cenci to work his will on Beatrice.

A distracted Beatrice rushes in to seek refuge in her mother's apartment. It is more than the parental tyranny she has been subjected to, which has altered her imperious manner. Lucretia for a moment thinks her daughter has gone mad. From the depths of her anguish Beatrice appeals to God.

" Thou, great God, Whose image upon earth a father is, Dost Thou indeed abandon me? . . .

(Act II, Sc.i, 16-18)

Lucretia, of course, does not understand. Such things are not dreamt of in her philosophy. We have been in two minds about it. The issue is made clear when Beatrice says:-

" Men, like my father, have been dark and bloody, Yet never-Oh! Before worse comes of it 'Twere wise to die: it ends in that at last.."

(Act II, Sc.i, 55-57)

The worst has not happened yet. But Beatrice knows of Cenci's intent. Stronger words are reserved for Cenci's other minor acts. He has made the blood stream down her cheeks, he has given them all ditch-water to drink and fever-stricken flesh to eat. But the unnameable deed is expressed differently, simply:

"It was one word, Mother, one little word;  
 One look, one smile. . . . .  
 (Act II, Sc.i, 63-4)

. . . . .  
 . . . . .but now!  
 What could I say?  
 (Act II, Sc.i, 72-3)

Shelley varies his technique in the next scene. In a superb passage of twenty lines, where imagery and passion have interpenetrated one another, Cenci makes the final declaration of his intentions. The contrast between the all-beholding sun and the busy stir of the outside world, on one hand, and the deadly gloom pervading the Cenci palace and the threat hanging over Beatrice on the other is brought out with powerful effect.

"The all-beholding sun yet shines; I hear  
 A busy stir of men about the streets;  
 I see the bright sky through the window panes:  
 It is a garish, broad, and peering day;  
 Loud, light, suspicious, full of eyes and ears,  
 And every little corner, nook, and hole  
 Is penetrated with the insolent light.  
 Come darkness! Yet, what is the day to me?  
 And wherefore should I wish for night, who do  
 A deed which shall confound both night and day?  
 'Tis she shall grope through a bewildering mist  
 Of horror: if there be sun in heaven  
 She shall not dare to look upon its beams;  
 Nor feel its warmth. Let her then wish for night;  
 The act I think shall soon extinguish all  
 For me: I bear a darker deadlier gloom  
 Than the earth's shade, or intel<sup>l</sup>un<sup>ar</sup> air,  
 Or constellations quenched in murkiest cloud,  
 In which I walk secure and unbeheld  
 Towards my purpose.-Would that it were done!"  
 (Act II, Sc.i, 174-193)

Shelley begins with the literal image of the all-beholding sun which shines upon men below, and its metaphorical meaning makes itself felt in the continuous imagery of day and night. Day is slightly personified and is endowed with eyes and ears that peer and penetrate with a searching

look every corner, nook and hole, concealing nothing. "Come darkness!" says Cenci. But what need has he for darkness? The deed he threatens to execute will make chaos of both night and day. It is Beatrice who should ask for night. The contrast between day and night is carried through verbal forms, like "peering" and "penetrated" which are characteristic of day while "confound", "grope", "extinguish" and "quenched" are characteristic of night. A striking contrast is given between the first sentence with its images of light and the last sentence from which the slightest suggestion of day has been excluded. The first sentence abounds in terms like "all-beholding sun", "shines", "see", "bright", "garish", "peering", "light", "eyes" and "penetrated". The middle of the sentence carries both images of "confound", "grope", "bewildering mist", "sun", "look", "beams" and "warmth". The last sentence, intense in feeling and concentrated in imagery, is in violent contrast to the garish light of the all-beholding sun. It is all "extinguish", "darker deadlier gloom", "earth's shade", "interlunar air", "quenched", "murkiest Cloud" and "unbeheld".

"Would it were done!" were Cenci's last words. It has been done and a distraught Beatrice staggers in. Shelley dramatises her state of mind with its minute variations and describes all the accompanying elements of her pain. The negation of all normality and security as a consequence of an unnatural deed is conveyed through the physical strength of a selection of verbs. The pavement "sinks" and the world around her "reels". Some of her words have been anticipated by Cenci.

" 'Tis she shall grope through a bewildering mist  
Of horror: if there be a sun in heaven  
She shall not dare to look upon its beams;  
Nor feel its warmth."

Beatrice after her violation cannot see the sun. Her heaven is "flecked with blood". Cenci has, metaphorically speaking, shed the blood which he thirsted to drink.<sup>(1)</sup>

The sunshine on the floor is black. She gropes through "a clinging, black contaminating mist". Beatrice breathes the air of a charnel-house. The hideous nature of the crime is conveyed through the imagery of the graveyard, dissolving "flesh to a pollution", "putrefying limbs" that "shut round and sepulchre" her soul, the possible "poisoning" of her pure spirit.

Beatrice has yet to tell Lucretia and later Orsino and Giacomo. Shelley works round the deed, showing Beatrice's varying reactions to her mother's persistent question as to the cause of her agony, amplifying these variations stage by stage until her resolution to remove the cause of her misery. Beatrice's wandering mind shifts from the unconscious utterance of the word 'Parricide' to the origin of her pain and from there to her father.

" . . . . . yet its father  
Never like mine . . . O, God! What thing am I?"  
(Act III, Sc.i, 37-38)

The unnatural act of incest has cast doubts on her own identity. She does not answer her mother's question directly but her mind is still tormented by the horrible deed. Shelley employs overt sexual imagery to convey her meaning to the audience.

"Horrible things have been in this wide world,  
Prodigious mixtures, and confusions strange  
Of good and ill; and worse have been conceived  
Than ever there was found a heart to do.  
But never fancy imaged such a deed  
As . . . . .  
(Act III, Sc.i, 51-56)

"Prodigious mixtures" fails to convey anything to Lucretia

---

(1) Act I, Sc.i, 176-177.

who still keeps asking what her husband has done to her daughter. Beatrice has recognised her mother, found her identity and with that comes the realization that what she in her distraught frame of mind had believed to be a nightmare was a reality,

" . . . a truth, a firm enduring truth,  
Linked with each lasting circumstance of life,  
Never to change, never to pass away."

(Act III, Sc.i, 61-2)

She does not answer directly but hints that her father has robbed her of her "innocence":

" . . . . . Is it my crime  
That one with white hair, . . . . .  
. . . . .  
. . . . . should call himself  
My father, yet should be!-

She halts and then asks

Oh, what am I?

(Act III, Sc.i, 70-4)

Lucretia comes nearer to the truth when she asks what he had done

"Of deadlier outrage or worse injury"

(Act III, Sc. i, 80)

She uses the very words Orsino will later employ to express the act. Beatrice does not name the crime. She talks of doing something that will destroy

"The consequence of what it cannot cure."

(Act III, Sc.i, 91)

She would take her own life if she could

"Wash away the crime, and punishment"

(Act III, Sc.i, 98)

by which she suffers, but her faith in God cannot be obscured by agony. It is the extremes of pain ~~that have~~ <sup>wrong from</sup> ~~penetrated~~ to her inmost self that cause Lucretia to suspect "some bitter wrong". Fear of disclosure to the world still prevents Beatrice from naming it. But Lucretia has learnt

the secret when she says

"Whate'er you may have suffered, you have done  
No evil. . . . ."

(Act III, Sc.i, 121-2)

Orsino understands immediately. It is not the nature of the crime he wants to learn, but the perpetrator who has thus "injured" her. She must not allow him to live, lest he with his crime infect her "element" until she is subdued to the 'hue'. He tells Giacomo about the "outrage" and after some elucidation Giacomo realizes that Cenci has made a "ravage" of Beatrice.

The most overt allusion to incest is made in Cenci's curse beginning: "That if she have a child etc." By now as Shelley himself pointed out everyone knew what it must be, although it was never imaged in words.

The tragedy of The Cenci, which is in some respects a domestic tragedy, does not rest on its poetry and imagery for its total effect. Shelley knew that the ordinary business of the play must be conducted in familiar language, appropriate in the mouths of Lucretia, Bernardo, Giacomo, Camillo, Orsino and the minor characters. There is hardly a word which would require the assistance of a dictionary, hardly an allusion beyond the comprehension of the average theatre-goer. The characters delineated belonged to a Catholic society of the late sixteenth century and the audience, required to understand them, to the Protestant society of the early nineteenth. Shelley, it appears, found no difficulty in establishing a satisfactory medium between them. Not the least remarkable quality of this play is its lucidity, achieved by means of a careful sentence structure. Shelley avoided introducing long sentences, such as those in Prometheus Unbound which left the reader gasping for breath. A sentence in The Cenci may begin in the middle of a line or even at the end and

it may end there likewise, so that the effect of natural conversation is maintained. Shelley uses several devices, as pointed <sup>out</sup> by Bates in his study of The Cenci, to achieve different effects. He employs the cumulative repetition of phrase construction, rhetorical questions, apostrophes, exclamations, antithesis and irony. In these respects it differs radically from his normal poetic style and offers not what Graham Hough calls a "diversion from the main line of Shelley's work"<sup>(1)</sup> but a proof of his versatility.

Shelley has been criticised for introducing long speeches and too many soliloquies. Of the twelve soliloquies four are monopolised by Orsino and six by Cenci. The author has credited his principal characters with an introspective turn of mind, "a trick of the family" of the Cenci, and the monologues in their solitary moments do not sound so unnatural. The long speeches -they are longer than Shakespeare's' but shorter than Byron's- sound awkward to the modern ear but the patrons of Covent Garden were accustomed to hearing their favourites, Kean and Miss O'Neil, declaim in the grand style of acting, popular until the middle of the nineteenth century. Although the intense pitch at which Cenci's speeches are kept throughout tends towards monotony, they are not always devoid of changes of tone. Beatrice's speeches, with their sequence of emotions, are perhaps the best illustration of the fully dramatic style Shelley had evolved. This is apparent throughout the drama, even in those scenes which do not necessarily contribute to the development of the plot. A close examination of the dramatic speech in the domestic scene ~~of~~ which opens the second Act should bear out these observations.

A distracted Beatrice seeks refuge in her mother's

---

(1) Graham Hough, p.139.

arms. It looks as though the fight has gone out of her. To her mother's persistent questions and her little brother's pleading she answers, very slowly at first

"It was one word, Mother, one little word;  
One look, one smile."

(Act II, Sc.i, 63-4)

The words come tumbling down, each act of cruelty emphasised by the use of conjunctives.

" . . . . . Oh! He has trampled me  
Under his feet, and made the blood stream down  
My pallid cheeks. And he has given us all  
Ditch water, and the fever-stricken flesh  
Of buffaloes, and bade us eat or starve,  
And we have eaten.- . . . ."

(Act II, Sc.i, 64-69)

More unbearable than these tortures has been the sight of Bernardo.

" . . . . . - He has made me look  
On my beloved Bernardo, when the rust  
Of heavy chains has gangrened his sweet limbs,  
And I have never yet despaired-

(Ibid., 69-72)

What she suffers now has eclipsed her past misery

" . . . . . "but now!  
What could I say? (Ibid., 72-3)

Beatrice recovers herself as she looks at her brother and her mother

" . . . . . Ah, no! 'tis nothing new.  
The sufferings we all share have made me wild:  
He only struck and cursed me as he passed;

(Ibid., 73-5)

The memory of that moment unnerves her again and she emphasises each gesture of her father as she recalls:

"He said, he looked, he did;-nothing at all  
Beyond his wont, yet it disordered me."

(Ibid., 76-77)

She regains her composure finally as she turns to her mother and brother:

"Alas! I am forgetful of my duty,  
I should preserve my senses for your sake."

(Ibid., 78-9)

Lucretia's reply is characteristic of the affectionate mother she had been to her step-children. Calm and collected in Cenci's absence, confident of her faith in God, she offers solace to her unhappy daughter.

"Nay, Beatrice; have courage, my sweet girl,  
If any one despairs it should be I  
Who loved him once, and now must live with him  
Till God in pity call for him or me."

(Ibid., 80-3)

How incredible her words sound at this moment, and yet time was when Lucretia had loved Francesco Cenci! The note of tenderness which distinguishes this passage between mother and daughter from other scenes is made still more appealing by Bernardo's words. His natural simplicity stands in striking contrast to the deliberately cultivated and steadily developed evil nature of Cenci, who enters soon after Bernardo has given his pledge to his mother.

"And I am of my sister's mind. Indeed  
I would not leave you in this wretchedness,  
Even though the Pope should make me free to live  
In some blithe place, like others of my age,  
With sports, and delicate food, and the fresh air.  
Oh, never think that I will leave you, Mother!"

(Ibid., 98-103)

With Cenci's entrance the entire atmosphere changes. He commands Beatrice to stay, dismisses Bernardo with abuse and strikes fear into Lucretia with his menacing questions.

"Nor you perhaps?  
Nor that young imp, whom you have taught by rote  
Parricide with his alphabet? Nor Giacomo?  
Nor those two most unnatural sons, who stirred  
Enmity up against me with the Pope?"

(Ibid., 130-4)

"

. . . . .  
 You were not here conspiring? You said nothing  
 Of how I might be dungeoned as a madman;  
 Or be condemned to death for some offence,  
 And you would be the witnesses?—This failing,  
 How just it were to hire assassins, or  
 Put sudden poison in my evening drink?  
 Or smother me when overcome by wine?  
 Seeing we had no other judge but God,  
 And He had sentenced me, and there were none  
 But you to be the executioners  
 Of His decree enregistered in Heaven?  
 Oh, no! You said not this?

(Act II, Sc.i, 137-48)

The irony in Cenci's description of the possible ways of destroying him would scarcely escape the audience. His menacing tone changes to pure wrath when he threatens to kill Lucretia, should she so much as dare contradict him. He bursts into violent abuse calling her "blaspheming liar" who should be damned for lying to him. Suddenly altering his tone and manner, he talks to her about going to Petrella and even describes the Castle. There is something sinister about the way Shelley causes Cenci to describe first the manner by which he will die and then the place of his destruction:-

"

. . . . . you know  
 That savage rock, the Castle of Petrella:  
 'Tis safely walled, and moated round about:  
 Its dungeons underground, and its thick towers  
 Never told tales; though they have heard and seen  
 What might make dumb things speak.—Why do you linger?

(Ibid., 167-172)

Cenci dismisses Lucretia who has stood in fear all this time, interrupting him occasionally to defend her daughter against charges of inciting her brothers and friends to murder Count Cenci. The concluding part of the speech has been examined elsewhere.<sup>(1)</sup> Having sent away one

---

(1) See page 118

after another Beatrice, Bernardo and Lucretia, Cenci meditates on the "mischief" he has conceived.

There are scenes and passages elsewhere in the drama which upon examination would yield the same results, that is, that Shelley, in spite of the influence the Elizabethans exercised on his form, had evolved a dramatic style entirely his own.

Shelley in spite of his declaration to the contrary has been accused of plagiarism. Since the play first appeared the number of those who have detected verbal echoes, phrases and images borrowed from Shakespeare, Webster, even Milman, has increased. G.H. Lewis, Buxton Forman in the nineteenth century and St. John Ervine, Maurice Baring and Hicks in the twentieth century while acknowledging Shelley's debt to Shakespeare and other dramatists have acclaimed The Cenci as a great masterpiece. Others like Wagner, Woodberry and Bates and several recent critics have expressed dismay at the frequency with which the echoes appear. Articles have appeared examining Shelley's "debt" to Shakespeare followed by others giving further details. If this line of approach is continued, it is doubtful if Shelley's originality will be allowed to extend beyond the judicious use of prepositions and conjunctions. It would be foolish to deny that Shelley, who took Shakespeare as his model, allowed phrases, images and ideas to flow from several of Shakespeare's plays into his tragedy. The Bard had exercised<sup>a</sup> powerful influence in moulding the dramatic talent of the author.

Shelley discovered Shakespeare the day he learnt to read literature in school. In a letter written in 1848, Andrew Amos, his school-friend, recalled those days as he wrote:

"I think I still hear, as if it were yesterday Shelley singing, with the buoyant cheerfulness in which he often indulged, as he might be

"running nimbly up and down stairs, the witches' songs in Macbeth. I fancy I still hearken to his

Double, double, toil and trouble  
Fire burn, and cauldron bubble. "(1)

Shelley often carried a copy of Shakespeare during his travels, he enjoyed reading him aloud to Mary and their friends, he studied him with care making notes on some aspects of his poetry. Shakespeare made frequent appearance in the discussions he had with his friends in England and with Byron in Italy. Shelley's correspondence is strewn with allusions and references to the plays familiar to him, which included tragedies, comedies and historical dramas as well. His reverence for the Bard however did not blind him to the merits of the dramatists of other countries. He almost wished the English dramatists had been a little less secular, a little more religious though not quite to the same degree as Calderon. (1)

"Calderon, in his religious Autos, has attempted to fulfill some of the high conditions of dramatic representation neglected by Shakespeare."(2)

said the enemy of all religions in his essay ~~on~~ A Defenee of Poetry. But all in all, he felt, Shakespeare was the greatest dramatist the world had produced and King Lear "was the most perfect specimen" of the dramatic art existing in the world. The highest praise that he could bestow on any dramatist was to equate him with Shakespeare. Thus Sophocles becomes a Greek Shakespeare<sup>(3)</sup> and Calderon a Spanish Shakespeare.<sup>(4)</sup> In commenting on Shelley's enthusiasm for Shakespeare it is not suggested that Shelley was justified in detracting from the entertainment value

---

(1) Julian, VII, p.120.

(2) Ibid.

(3) Hutchinson, Note p.269.

(4) Julian, X, p.74.

of his drama by imitating, borrowing or plagiarising. The essential point to remember is that whatever the manner or the nature of the robbery Shelley remained unconscious of it. Or if conscious and asked to explain, he would have referred the critic to the seventh paragraph in his Preface to Prometheus Unbound:

"As to imitation, poetry is a mimetic art. It creates by combination and representation.... One great poet is a masterpiece of nature which another not only ought to study but must study... Poets not otherwise than philosophers, painters, sculptors and musicians, are in one sense, the creators and another, the creations of their age. From this subjection the loftiest do not escape. There is a similarity between Virgil and Horace. Between Dante and Petrarch, between Shakespeare and Fletcher, between Dryden and Pope; each has a generic resemblance under which their specific distinctions are arranged. If this similarity be the result of imitation, I am willing to confess that I have imitated."

"From this subjection" Byron in Shelley's times and T.S.Eliot in our times have tried to escape, with what results it is not within the scope of this thesis to discuss. This attitude is not to be taken as an attempt to exonerate Shelley from the petty piece of thieving he permits to the un-inspired Giacomo when he sits facing the lamp, nor from numerous other echoes which disturb the learned reader and the theatre-goer. The audience is most aware of these echoes when the dramatic pressure is low and this may be accounted for by Shelley's inability to sustain the dramatic tension or by his apparent indifference to characters who are not indispensable to the conduct of the plot. Fortunately such moments are quite rare, the notable among these being the scene with Giacomo before a lamp on a stormy night.

It is possible that a comparative study will yield similar results about the influence of Calderon whom Shelley had recently discovered and from whom he

intentionally plagiarised,<sup>(1)</sup> or of one or all the three Greek tragedians Shelley had studied with such devotion, This may seem like an anti-climax, but it will be quite appropriate to note down what Beddoes, who also knew his Shakespeare well and had read Shelley with interest and admiration, had to say about the author's models for The Cenci:

"To my mind the only error of *The Cenci* is, that its splendid author seemed to have the Greeks, instead of Shakespeare, as his model in the mind's eye; if he had followed the latter, I see no reason why he should not have been the second great dramatist." (1)

Some of the poets and critics of our times have held different views. Poets of the calibre of T.S.Eliot and critics of the temperament of F.R.Leavis, denying any talent to Shelley, have attributed the failure of this tragedy and the romantic drama in general to the overpowering personality of Shakespeare. The echoes, T.S.Eliot maintains, are the direct result of the quality of blank verse the Romantics employed. The ~~rh~~hythm, he argues, is so Shakespearean that imitation becomes unavoidable. The failure of the nineteenth century poets in drama, T.S.Eliot believes

"was due to their limitation to a strict blank verse which, after extensive use for non-dramatic poetry, had lost the flexibility which blank verse must have if it is to give the effect of conversation."(2)

T.S.Eliot is an eminent poet and critic and there is undoubtedly something ~~in~~ what he says. Sir Lewis Casson, is an eminent actor and producer, and has had many opportunities of interpreting great poetic tragedies to the audiences by paying special attention to the verse medium employed by their authors. To Sir Lewis Casson

---

(1) *The Works of Thomas Lowell Beddoes*. Edited with an introduction by H.W.Donner, 1935, p.578.

(2) T.S.Eliot, Selected Prose, Penguin edition, 1955, p.77.

goes the credit for the first public performance of The Cenci in which his wife Sybil Thorndike played Beatrice. On ~~the~~ <sup>January,</sup> 9~~th~~+10~~th~~ of 1947 he produced the first broadcast version of the tragedy and discovered the flexibility of vocal music, which distinguishes The Cenci:

"To me the poetry of the murder scene is as moving as anything in the British drama. . . . But whether for the theatre or radio Shelley's verse calls for an inventiveness and flexibility of vocal music that very few actors, radio and stage, Shakespearean or modern, left to themselves can provide."(1)

This emphasis on the quality of the verse Shelley employed would perhaps explain why Dame Sybil was saddened by the omission of some of her favourite passages when she went to see Barbara Jefford play the role and win the same degree of recognition that she had enjoyed in the early twenties. The Old Vic production aimed at a realistic interpretation of the drama, treating it as a dreadful and at the same time tragic history, purified by Shelley's poetry. Dame Sybil when she performed, saw in the conflict between Cenci and Beatrice another symbolic interpretation of Shelley's hatred of tyranny. Shelley, she maintains, saw incarnate in Cenci the Victorian God with his attendant vices of tyranny and avarice and in Beatrice a champion of the oppressed who opposed this God. Dame Sybil does not hold the monopoly of this view-point, ~~but~~ <sup>for</sup> she shares it with some other interpreters of The Cenci who cannot see Shelley write anything without obtruding his radical views on God, Church and State. Shelley as he so clearly indicates in his Preface was not averse to introducing a moral purpose provided it was implicit in the action but he most definitely refrained from allowing any of his own prejudices to determine the actions, behaviour and sentiments of the characters in the drama. If he wished to succeed as a

---

(1) PMLA, LXX 1957. p 636

dramatist he had to abjure invectives that he was wont to indulge in against the established church in his earlier compositions. Shelley's achievement in this field can be measured in terms of the degree of objectivity with which he treats his characters.

The defensive attitude adopted in an impartial examination of characterization of The Cenci may be pardoned by the fact that in spite of Shelley's objective approach especially in the matter of religion, some scholars persist in maintaining that in his treatment of individual characters he is entirely governed by his ethical and radical views. Bates while recognising Shelley's talent for character analysis does less than justice to the poet when he suggests that Shelley divided his world into three classes of men—

- (1) tyrants and priests - the oppressors of mankind
- (2) heroes and their soulmates - the saviours of mankind
- (3) slaves - oppressed by (1) and saved by (2).

So rigid is this, ~~so rigid is the~~ tripartite division of this world that in Bates' opinion, "the idea that one man in this different relationships might belong at the same time to more than one of the three classes <sup>seems</sup> hardly <sup>is have</sup> never occurred to Shelley."<sup>(1)</sup> This may have been the case with Shelley when, urged by a desire to reform mankind, he wrote Queen Mab and The Revolt of Islam. But he had matured beyond expectations in the year in which he wrote Prometheus Unbound and something entirely different from anything attempted so far, The Cenci. As he himself says:

" Alas! this is not what I thought life was.  
I knew that there were crimes and evil men,  
Misery and hate: nor did I hope to pass  
Untouched by suffering. . . . . "

It is out of these experiences that Shelley created his men and women who play subordinate roles in

---

(1) Bates, p.65.

the drama. If they fail to appear to be life-like, it is more likely from want of adequate attention than from any obvious intrusion of his political, moral or metaphysical ideas. Who would say of Marzio that he died like a slave, cringing and helpless; or of Camillo that he represented the inflexible tyranny of the priestly order? What of Giacomo distinguished from Olympio by virtue of birth; of Orsino, a grasping scheming priest not unmoved by Beatrice's beauty and suffering; of Lucretia, gentle and loving, but without the stoicism of a martyr; and of that monster Cenci, a tyrant, a fiend, call him what you will, in revolt against the existing order? And then there is Beatrice, soft spoken, young, beautiful and good, committed to an action wholly alien to her true nature. The tyrants in Shelley's immature works had always crushed those in revolt against the establishment; the heroes and heroines had worked their way to salvation through love and forgiveness, and the rabble, generally inarticulate, had benefited by the sacrifice of the saviours of mankind. This surely is not Shelley's approach to the characters in The Cenci.

Camillo, who opens the play, is at once the Pope's confidant and a passionate advocate of Beatrice's innocence. The source material had very little to offer to Shelley for the building up of Cardinal Camillo. There are two suggestions exploited by him in the trial scene; the first refers to the judge employed by Beatrice.

"The Pope being informed of all that passed by Sr. Ulysse Moraci the judge employed in the affair, became suspicious that the beauty of Beatrice had softened the mind of this judge, and committed the cause to another."(1)

---

(1) Julian, II, The Relations, p.162.

When the new judge also pleaded for Beatrice with the Pope,  
 "instead of retiring to rest, he spent the whole night  
 in studying the cause with the Cardinal di San  
 Marcello."(1)

Out of these two elements of compassion and trustworthiness Shelley created Cardinal Camillo, a venerable old man who enjoyed the confidence of each member of the Cenci family. By giving him the doubtful benefit of a life-long acquaintance with Cenci, Shelley is able to introduce him in the opening scene. The advantage gained is obvious. As the Pope's emissary he throws light on the latest of Cenci's crimes. As a friend of the family, he reveals the miserable plight in which Beatrice is placed at this moment in the history of the family. His lifelong acquaintance with the family and his familiarity with Cenci allow him to deplore the Count's dark and fiery youth, the desperate and remorseless manhood, both marked by a thousand unrepented crimes. He, however, is kept in the dark about Cenci's sinister intentions. There are moments when he thinks the Count is too evil to be true.

The Cardinal proves ineffectual in the banquet scene, unsuccessful in intervention with the Pope and helpless at the trial. In fact, he fails to carry out any mission successfully at any time. "Can we do nothing?" epitomises his impotence. But that is not entirely his fault nor the fault of the order he represents. He is as much a product of the society which he governed his actions as <sup>is</sup> Beatrice, and nothing short of a revolt against authority, Papal and Ducal, would have brought about the end of a social order which tolerated Cenci's crimes. Camillo is powerless in the face of authority but not inarticulate, as we see in his scene with Cenci and finally his audience with the Pope which is faithfully reported.

---

(1) Julian, II, The Relations, p.163.

He employs the necessary means at his disposal, his powers of persuasion and the confidence he enjoys of those around him. It is Camillo who makes the first reference to Beatrice in the drama.

"Methinks her sweet looks, which make all things else  
Beauteous and glad, might kill the fiend within you."  
(Act I, Sc.i, 44-45)

and it is to Camillo that Beatrice addresses her last words.

"  
My Lord,  
We are quite ready. . . . ."

It is this man, the only objectively drawn priest in Shelley's work, a man who exerts his influence for good, who combines piety with compassion, justice with mercy about whom Bates wrote:-

"a complacent conservative, who will hush up a scandal instead of destroying its cause, and who wishes above all things to maintain the existing order from which he derives his emoluments, but who is ready, nevertheless, to use such influence for good as he is able to exert without the slightest risk to himself."(1)

This statement serves to reveal the extent to which some scholars and critics have gone in applying their preconceived notions about Shelley to an interpretation of characters in The Cenci.

Shelley had more material to work on for the characterisation of Orsino. The model for Orsino in the source history is a handsome easy-going priest who loved Beatrice only a little less than his emoluments. The original of Orsino was genuinely moved by her suffering and was inclined to be led to participate in any action, good or evil.<sup>(2)</sup> While preserving some of the superficial traits, personable manners, eloquent tongue of his model

---

(1) Bates, p.69.

(2) Julian, II, The Relations, p.160.

Shelley provides Orsino with a far more complex motivation for his action than the manuscript story had warranted. Orsino too has been in love with Beatrice but has sacrificed their love for the greater love of wealth and position. In her present plight he finds a tempting opportunity for the gratification of his reviving desire for her beauty and her wealth. He will not deny himself the least of these and, in order to possess her and her dower and at the same time continue to enjoy the revenue from his sees, he incites Giacomo and Lucretia to murder the Count. His motive, springing from self-interest, is totally devoid of the redeeming features which give meaning to Giacomo's desire for murder, it throws up in sharp contrast Beatrice's urge to action which arose from the darkest experience of her innermost being. He is not disturbed by the fact that he serves both God and Mammon. Only once we glimpse the suggestion of a conflict in his mind, conflict between his love for Beatrice and his greed for gold.

"

Oh, fair Beatrice!

Would that I loved thee not, or loving thee  
 Could but despise danger and gold and all  
 That frowns between my wish and its effect,  
 Or smiles beyond it! . . . . ."

(Act II, Sc.ii, 128-132)

But these murmurings are no sooner uttered than suppressed and Orsino looks forward to the plot of his double treachery. He will pretend to send Beatrice's petition to the Pope, concoct an unfavourable answer and in the meanwhile hope that Giacomo will kill his father. An optimist by nature, he sees the conclusion of his machinations at the end of the second Act as almost reached:

"I see, as from a tower, the end of all."

Orsino is a hypocrite whose real nature is not fully revealed to any other character. Cenci never mentions him. He is not aware of Orsino's visits to his family.

Lucretia and Giacomo trust him implicitly. Whatever his motives, he throws himself wholeheartedly into the plot of murder, ranging himself on the side of the victims who have suffered at the hands of Cenci. It was he who engaged professional assassins to waylay Cenci and when that failed, he sought out Olympio and Marzio. Unlike Camillo who used his influence for good, Orsino exploits his position and wits to serve his own end. He is a villain, a diluted version of Iago but his villainy is of no consequence in a play which is dominated, two thirds of the way, by the magnitude of Cenci's evil.

Orsino's principal occupation consists of musing aloud. Shelley has awarded him four out of twelve soliloquies and shows him aiding or abetting in turn Giacomo, Beatrice and Lucretia to murder. He is credited with a degree of self-knowledge which brings him closer to Beatrice and Cenci than to Lucretia and Giacomo. His understanding of human nature is sharper than most and unlike Lucretia and Giacomo the nature of the outrage did not have to be explained to him.

Orsino may not be absolutely indispensable to the plot but his presence helps in the conduct of the story. Camillo could hardly have made up a lie on the Pope's behalf but Orsino does, emphasising once again the helpless position to which Beatrice has been reduced. He helps procure the assassins, a task that could not be entirely entrusted to the incompetent Giacomo. In devising his escape Shelley closely followed the source history.

Giacomo rather than Orsino reveals Shelley's unsuccessful attempt at dramatic characterization. Weak and whining, his appearance after the act contributes nothing to the dramatic interest of the action. Orsino's presence in his scene with Beatrice is justified by virtue of his being a foil to her. What justification is there

for Giacomo to repeat a tale of woe so unconvincing as to make one blush for Shelley? He wants us to believe that his wife, entirely devoted to him and her children credited Cenci's word against his own! The notorious debauchee, the infamous murderer actually succeeds with the daughter-in-law in alienating his son from his family. Giacomo suffers blows but his words are not mortal. He is helpless but not isolated. His capacity for taking exceeds his capacity for giving. His presence in the drama serves to throw up the spiritual isolation of Beatrice. Once only when he might have contributed to the suspense of the moment created by Cenci's escape, Shelley placed him in front of a lamp and Giacomo was lost in the poetry of Othello. The loss sustained by the play is not so much from Shelley's inability to conduct the plot or write dramatic speeches without borrowing from Shakespeare as from lack of adequate attention to some characters. Shelley does not enter into Giacomo's mind deeply enough to endow him with original thought or speech.

Giacomo's youngest brother Bernardo appears so rarely on the stage that the inconsistencies in his speech hardly affect the course of action. His age is anybody's guess. His natural simplicity is conveyed in the domestic scene in the second Act and we see him as a small boy who should be out with his playmates rather than witness<sup>ing</sup> the effect of the increasing tyranny of his father, on his step-mother and sister. He appears to be much older when in the scene with Savella after the murder. His replies are inconsistent with the age implied in the second Act. His presence in the prison adds to the poignancy of the last scenes. Together with Lucretia and Beatrice he provides the very few tender moments in this 'single-pulsed' drama. One of the most eloquent tributes to Beatrice's innocence is paid by her little brother:-

"

To see  
That perfect mirror of pure innocence,  
Wherein I gazed, and grew happy and good,  
Shivered to dust! To see thee, Beatrice,  
Who made all lovely thou didst look upon . . ."

(Act V, Sc. iv, 129-133)

There are only two women in this tragedy. No more were required, nor suggested by the source material. Shelley had never attempted a long poem without providing soul-mates for his hero. Laon had his Cythna, Lionel his Helen, and Prometheus his Asia. All of them were young and beautiful. Some of them, especially those inspired by Harriet and Mary, had borne children. Their features were not always distinguishable, bathed as they were in the light which radiated from them. A different treatment, one suspects, would have been accorded to Leonora, beloved of Tasso and his sister who had offered him refuge once. The suspicion is confirmed when Lucretia and Beatrice are brought before the mind.

Lucretia is the first middle-aged woman portrayed by Shelley. She is Cenci's second wife who has loved Beatrice and Bernardo as though they were her own children. Shelley has followed the source fairly closely in preserving her essential characteristics. Gentle and patient like her <sup>step-</sup>daughter, she does not possess Beatrice's strength of character, independence of spirit and capacity for continued suffering. Cenci has almost crushed her spirits and killed her initiative. Consequently the rôles have been reversed. It is Beatrice who offers protection in their confinement and allows her mother to draw consistently from her reservoir of strength. She is conventional and naive, a typical example of a good-natured woman who has given up the struggle under the stress of repeated torture. The fight has gone out of her and in <sup>this</sup> respect she stands at the opposite pole from Beatrice. The contrast between Beatrice

and Lucretia which is first brought out in the banquet scene is far more successfully maintained in the succeeding scenes than the contrast between Camillo and Beatrice, between Orsino and Beatrice or between Orsino and Giacomo. Both are pious but Beatrice's piety ~~savour~~<sup>seems</sup> rather <sup>that</sup> of a Protestant than a Catholic. Lucretia understands the nature of physical pain but the anguish of spiritual isolation remains a mystery to her. At no time has she been able to penetrate to Beatrice's soul; consequently she fails to understand the soul-filling joy Beatrice feels after Cenci's murder. With all her limitations she is likeable and humane.

Shelley practises the same self-abnegation in his treatment of Count Cenci as he had done in the case of Camillo, Orsino and Giacomo. Never one to exaggerate his own talents, he wrote to Peacock after he had finished his tragedy:-

"It is written without any of the peculiar feelings and opinions which characterize my other compositions; I having attended simply to the impartial development of such characters as it is probable the persons represented really were, together with the greatest degree of popular effect to be produced by such a development." (1)

Shelley could not have made Count Cenci more wicked, more tyrannical, more determined than he found him in the original source. Three times convicted of sodomy, notorious for entertaining courtesans in his wife's bed-chamber, parsimonious towards his family, he left little to be added to his monstrous nature. Shelley makes a passing reference to his perversions, briefly refers to his sexual excesses, retains his avaricious nature, so that the attention may be focused on his tyrannical behaviour towards his family. Shelley introduced one

---

(1) Julian, X, p.61.

important variation in his Count Cenci. The avowed atheist of The Relations of the Death of the Cenci is represented in Shelley's tragedy as a confirmed believer. He has built a chapel to St. Thomas where his family, whom he had tortured during his lifetime, would find eternal peace. Shelley's partiality for atheists, especially when it implied rejection of the Papal authority, may be offered as only one of the reasons for this change. The other reason with its dramatic advantages may be found in the striking contrast between Cenci's creed and his deeds, between Cenci's approach to God and Beatrice's approach, for both are believers. By altering his creed Shelley did not imply any adverse criticism of the Christian religion. The characters in The Cenci are all represented as Catholics, and as Catholics deeply tinged with religion.

Shelley's extensive reading of history and his first-hand knowledge of the Italians had taught him the part religion played in their lives. Aware of the gap which separated the English Protestant society of the era of the Industrial Revolution from the Italian Catholic society of the late Renaissance period, Shelley set out to explain the apparent contradictions in the Italian character to his northern readers. To a Protestant he feared

"the combination of a cool and determined perseverance in enormous guilt with an undoubting persuasion of the popular religion would appear incongruous," (1)

Yet it was quite possible for an atrocious villain like Cenci to

"be rigidly devout, and without any shock to the established faith, confess himself to be so." (2)

Religion in Italy was not necessarily interpreted as a

(1) Hutchinson, Preface, p.274.

(2) Ibid.

system of ethics, or a code of moral conduct:

"It is adoration, faith, ~~faith~~, submission, penitence, blind admiration . . . and is according to the temper of the mind which it inhabits a passion, a persuasion, an excuse, a refuge; never a check." (1)

Religion to Count Cenci was certainly not a check as it was with Beatrice, who rejected suicide as a means of escape; nor a refuge as it was with Lucretia, who placed her trust in Jesus; nor an excuse, for he needed none. At moments it amounted to a passion generated by a growing conviction that God was on his side. This is revealed in the manner in which he receives the news of the death of his children. Beatrice has also prayed to God but her prayers have remained unanswered. The contrast is best brought out through their own words.

"

God!

I thank thee! In one night didst thou perform,  
By ways inscrutable, the thing I sought."

(Act I, Sc.iii, 40-42)

"

And lifted up to God, the Father of all,  
Passionate prayers: and when these were not heard  
I have still borne, - . . . . ."

(Act I, Sc.iii, 118-120)

Each character can be identified on the strength<sup>th</sup> of their appeals to God. Cenci has lifted a prayer from a parent's heart to the great Father of All and has been answered. In the manner of the death of his sons he sees a manifestation of the special favour bestowed upon him. The banquet is turned into a thanksgiving feast. Meanwhile Beatrice wonders if there exists a God who would allow Cenci to boast of such a boon. The closer Cenci feels to God, the more abandoned Beatrice feels. Cenci tends to view God as a Patriarch who will bring ruin upon his children as a punishment for disobedience and rebellion.

---

(1) Hutchinson, Preface, p.274.

Wagner, who wrote a monograph on The Cenci in 1903, discerned a parallel between Cenci and old Sir Timothy Shelley. Is it necessary to mention that Sir Timothy was a law-abiding representative of the English gentry, who respected conventions and failed to understand any one who did not, such as his son Bysshe? Cenci flouts conventions and in his own way rebels against the existing order of society. Shelley provides Cenci with a justification for his renewed appeals to God. He is mildly contemptuous of the Pope, who depends on him for the increase in the fortunes of his family. His pride has no bounds. Cenci has no equal on earth. There is only one above him and that is God Almighty. As for morality, sin and repentance, let Cenci speak for himself:-

" 'Tis plain I have been favoured from above,  
 For when I cursed my sons they died.-Ay ...so ...  
 As to the right or wrong, that's talk...repentance...  
 Repentance is an easy moment's work  
 And more depends on God than on me. . . ."

(Act IV, Sc.i, 39-43)

The last line is characteristic. Even this unrepentant sinner relies on God for the final judgement. Elsewhere he tells us that ~~at~~ at the end of everything, he will commend his soul to Him to do His will. Fearlessness would be a desirable quality in Orsino, a positive virtue in Giacomo, but in Cenci it serves to throw up the diabolic nature of his evil. He has not ruled out the possibility of destruction at the hands of his victims as the self-appointed "executioners of His decree enregistered in Heaven". But he is not afraid.

Cenci makes his final appearance on the stage in the famous curse scene. The louder his denunciations, the more frequent are his appeals to God. He almost believes he is working in collaboration with Him, the bond between them cemented as it were, by the parental nature of their

authority. That he might offend Him or act in defiance of His wishes does not enter his thoughts.

"He does His will, I mine! . . ."

(Act IV, Sc.i, 139)

It is Beatrice who flouts his will, a father's will. Like Lear he appeals to God against his own daughter:-

"

The world's Father  
Must grant a parent's prayer against his child,  
Be he who asks even what men call me."

(Act IV, Sc.i, 106-8)

Cenci has fewer illusions about himself than Giacomo or Orsino. With the exception of Beatrice he is much more aware of himself than any other character in the play. In his curiously perverted way he is more honest in his relations with God than Orsino. His attitude to God and Church is strictly part of the characterization. Shelley makes subtle distinctions between the attitude of each character to God and the manner in which they enter into a relationship with God, viewing Him as a character analogous to their own.

"

The image of this invisible, mysterious being is more or less excellent and perfect, resembles more or less its original and object in proportion to the perfectness of the mind on which it is expressed . . . the reason of the belief of each individual also will be so far regulated by his conceptions of what is good. Thus, the conceptions ~~of~~ which any nation or individual entertains of the God of its popular worship may be inferred from their own actions and opinions, which are the subjects of their approbation among their fellow men." (1)

Cenci's religion is summed <sup>up</sup> by Lucretia:-

"

'Tis true he spoke  
Of death and judgement with strange confidence  
For one so wicked; as a man believing  
In God, yet recking not of good or ill."

(Act IV, Sc.ii, 8-11)

---

(1) Julian, VI, p.238-9.

There are at least sixty allusions to the name of God in the tragedy. To Medwin's objections Shelley answered with the same arguments he had offered in his Preface:

" . . . but we Catholics speak eternally and familiarly of the first person of the Trinity and amongst us religion is more interwoven with and is less extraneous to the system of ordinary life." (1)

Taken out of its context, how many of us would suspect Shelley to be the author of this passage? Shelley, as all his biographers and critics know, had never reconciled himself to the dogmas of the Roman Catholic Church, but during his writing of The Cenci he had entered so fully into the minds of his characters as to identify himself with the social and religious background which governed their actions. Not once, not even in his treatment of Beatrice, does he intrude his own views. And yet he had very definite views on the subject.

Shelley was not a Christian in the orthodox sense of the term, although he had been deeply affected by the teachings of Christ.

"It is the profound wisdom and the comprehensive morality of his doctrines which essentially distinguished him from the crowd of martyrs and of patriots who have exulted to devote themselves for what they conceived would contribute to the benefit of their fellowmen," (2)

he declared in his Essay on Christianity. Shelley in Prometheus Unbound had shown profound wisdom emanating from His sacrifice which had brought inner peace to Prometheus in his scene with the Furies. Shelley was not an atheist in the conventional sense of the word. He believed in the ruling Power of the Universe, pervading the frame of things, and he called this power God. He

---

(1) Julian, X, p.192.  
(2) Julian, VI, p.227.

made no distinction between what he believed to be Christ's conception of God and his own.

"God is represented by Jesus Christ as the Power from which or through which the excellent streams of all that is excellent and delightful flow; the Power which models, as they pass, all the elements of this mixed universe to the purest and most perfect shape which it belongs to their nature to assume:"(1)

Shelley accepted God who is

"the fountain of all goodness, the eternal enemy of pain and evil, the uniform and unchanging motive of the salutary operations of the material world."(2)

He rejected God as the vulgar represented Him, the Paternal Monarch subject to passion and capable of revenge. He had little to say in favour of the established Church, Protestant, Catholic or Orthodox. Much of his poetry is coloured by his religious sentiments but The Cenci remains an exception. If Cenci's relations with God reflect Shelley's distaste for the Church, what of Beatrice who believed and continued to believe in God? Cenci's God may be described in the words Shelley used to convey his impression of the Figure God painted by Michael Angelo on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, a Paternal Monarch ~~is~~ "leaning out of Heaven, as it were eagerly enjoying the final scene of the infernal tragedy he set up the Universe to act."(3) Beatrice's God is a calm, beneficent Being who seems, but seems only, to have abandoned His children. The author's sympathies for the heroine are so obvious that any condemnation of her faith would detract from the total effect of her character upon the audience.

Shelley in his Prometheus Unbound showed his hero rejecting hatred, admitting love and pity and triumphing

---

(1) Julian, VI, p.234.

(2) Ibid., p.235.

(3) Julian, X, p.33.

at last over the sufferings which beset <sup>the</sup> human mind. In The Cenci he showed Beatrice embracing hatred, discarding love and pity and finally accepting her fate under circumstances over which she had no control. Undoubtedly

"the fit return to make to the most enormous injuries is kindness and forbearance and a resolution to convert the injurer from his dark passions by peace and love."(1)

Undoubtedly "revenge, retaliation, aton<sup>e</sup>ment are pernicious mistakes."(2) Yet, if Beatrice had acted with kindness and ~~f~~orebearance, and if she had used the Promethean instruments of non-violence and passive resistance instead of appealing to the hatred which her mother and brother bore towards her father, she would not have been a tragic character. Although Shelley never sanctioned violence, he was prepared to concede that extremes of human indignation have sometimes hurried the noblest of beings "beyond the limits which his calmer mood has placed to disapprobation against vice and folly." It was the worst form of human indignation which drove Beatrice to resort to violent means to achieve peace and freedom. To Shelley she was admirable in spite of, not because of, resorting to violence and "perjury". His admiration for Beatrice is evident. He would question the wisdom of her actions but never doubt her innocence. The task which lay before him was one of engaging the sympathies of the audience and sustaining their belief in her innocence.

It was not an easy task. To show a young, gentle and amiable being, a creature formed to adorn and be admired, yield to the tyranny of circumstance and opinion, resort to bloodshed and deny her part in it and still preserve her innocence, was no small challenge. Shelley had to tax his talent to the utmost to create the picture

---

(1) Hutchinson, Preface, p.273.

(2) Ibid.

of a proud, noble, truthful woman whose gift for love was matched by her capacity for suffering, one on whose conscience a murder would lie heavy, on whose lips a lie would not rest lightly, were she guilty of either. In building such a character Shelley had to move step by step, so that no discrepancy might creep in.

There are three stages in the development of the character of Beatrice; first, Beatrice before she assumed responsibility for her mother and brother; second, Beatrice subjected to torments until the rape; third, Beatrice the sole arbiter of her wrongs. The first of these three is revealed through chance remarks, reminiscences of the past and references to her childhood. As a young girl she did not question her father's authority and patiently bore his blows as an expression of parental chastisement. When no doubt remained of the cause of his continued cruelty, Beatrice sought to move him by persuasion and soften his hard heart with tears and love. When that failed she turned to the "Father of All" and lifted up passionate prayers but He heard her not. Beatrice had, like others of her age, dreamt of love and marriage, but her lover proved false. She had brothers, but Giacomo was too preoccupied with his own troubles and Rocco and Cristofano had been dispatched to Salamanca. Lucretia, who had been her sole refuge in childhood, lost her initiative and allowed her ~~young~~<sup>step</sup> daughter to assume responsibility for her mother and little brother.

Then came the news from Salamanca followed by a sumptuous feast. Driven by desperation, she discarded her pride and appealed to the assembled guests to rescue her mother, Bernardo and herself. Her appeals were of no avail. Finally, in the presence of Princes and Prelates, she made her one final bid to convert Cenci.

"  
 Father, never dream  
 Though thou mayst overbear this company,  
 But ill must come of ill.-Frown not on me!  
 Haste, hide thyself, lest with avenging looks  
 My brothers'ghosts should hunt thee from thy seat!  
 Cover thy face from every living eye,  
 And start if thou but hear a human step:  
 Seek out some dark and silent corner, there,  
 Bow thy white head before offended God,  
 And we will kneel around, and fervently  
 Pray that he pity both ourselves and thee."

(Act I, Sc.iii, 149-159)

Cenci is not moved. The moral force of her arguments has only one effect upon him. His wrath is turned upon her with a concentrated force and his determination to bring her to his will becomes absolute. Beatrice failed to "convert the injurer from his dark passions by peace and love". She sent a petition to the Pope and when that was rejected she meditated suicide. Escape by such means could not be sanctioned by her religion. Although she wondered if God would countenance such wrongs she never doubted that He existed. Besides, she felt that she owed it to Lucretia and Bernardo to live and offer them protection. Her elder sister had won her freedom through marriage, but Beatrice would not contemplate separation from her step-mother and her little brother. "To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite" was the only course open to her. And so she did until the night of her outrage. Until then thoughts of murder were as alien to her as sentiments of love and mercy to Francesco Cenci.

Beatrice's reaction to her father's sinister suggestion after the banquet has been interpreted by Carlos Baker as the

"first sign that her will to endure is beginning to give away before her father's relentless pressure. The formerly imperious girl who openly defied him in the presence of the nobility and clergy of Rome cringes at sight of him and he is not long in following up his advantage." (1)

---

(1) Carlos Baker, Shelley's Major Poetry, 1948, p.149.

If, as Carlos Baker suggests, Cenci had succeeded in inspiring fear in Beatrice why ~~he~~ did<sup>he</sup> not execute his purpose that very night? The manner of his drinking and its motive leaves no doubt in the minds of the audience that Cenci intended to accomplish his end directly he sought Beatrice in her chamber.

" . . . . . The charm works well;  
It must be done; it shall be done, I swear!

(Act I, Sc.iii, 177-8)

These were his words before he made for her chamber. Beatrice's appearance in the following scene, her halting speech, her tremors and her staggering steps would still keep the audience in suspense. It was not until her mother appealed for an explanation that Beatrice makes it clear that the outrage had not been committed. The initial shock at the discovery of her father's intentions fills her with such horror and revulsion that, to the audience, denied a scene between the father and daughter, it would seem at first as if the deed had been accomplished. Shelley in this Act was working under restraints imposed by the nineteenth century idea of ~~prudery~~ and delicacy. It would be idle to speculate on what Shelley would have made of Cenci's confrontation with Beatrice, had he enjoyed the literary freedom which distinguished the plays of Jacobean dramatists. All that we learn is as follows:- Beatrice "had dared to look with disobedient insolence" upon Cenci, raising "a stern and enquiring brow" on what he meant, while he tried to hide that which he had gone to tell. "Fair and yet terrible" as she was, there was something in her manner and her appearance which weakened his resolution and he tried to cover up his momentary defeat, as it were, by giving her to understand that he had gone to her chamber only to acquaint her with his evil purpose. Cenci's defeat in the first round is frankly admitted by him.

" Then it was I whose inarticulate words  
Fell from my lips, and who with tottering steps  
Fled from your presence, as you now from mine."

(Act II, Sc.i, 112-4)

Beatrice's reaction to this, as dramatised by Shelley seems to be only the inevitable reaction of a young girl who, in spite of her living in close proximity to Cenci, had not until that hour realized the enormity of her father's evil. And it is at this point in Beatrice's life that Carlos Baker discerns the first crack in her armour!

Beatrice is violated and temporarily deranged. From the gloomy depths of her mind rise forms, clinging black and thick, poisoning the subtle, pure and inmost spirit of life. She did not know until then what the mad felt like. Lucretia with her love ~~re~~calls her back to reality, but there is no comfort in being alive now. Thoughts of suicide cross her mind again.

" . . . . . no, that cannot be!  
Many might doubt there were a God above  
Who sees and permits evil, and so die:  
That faith no agony shall obscure in me."

(Act III, Sc.i, 99-102)

Orsino suggests legal action but Beatrice, jealous of her reputation, will never name the crime and allow her name to be a byword. Also she was not unaware of Cenci's power and the value of his gold. And yet she could not contemplate a repetition of the act.

The Cenci contains many long speeches, ~~full of sound and fury,~~ but not ~~the~~ <sup>9</sup> ~~less~~ eloquent are its moments of silent acting. Beatrice retires to a corner of the stage to commune with God. She returns to join her mother and Orsino, strengthened by her faith in Him. In the world in which she lived there was no law, no vindication which could adjudge the wrong she had suffered. She must rid the world of Cenci lest ~~she~~ be preserved, day after day,

"To load with crimes an overburthened soul,  
And be ... what ye can dream not. ...."

(Act III, Sc.i, 217-8)

Beatrice had searched her soul and turned to God for light.

" . . . . . I have prayed  
To God, and I have talked with my own heart,  
And have unravelled my entangled will,  
And have at length determined what is right."

(Ibid., 218-221)

A clear indication, overlooked by Carlos Baker, of Cenci's failure to break Beatrice's will to resist him is given in Cenci's own words in his apartment in the Castle of Petrella where he hopes to repeat the act.

"I must give up the greater point, which was  
To poison and corrupt her soul."

(Act IV, Sc.i, 44-45)

Shelley's views on the rightness of her choice and his sympathetic interpretation of the circumstances culminating in that choice have already been touched upon. Had he been called upon to defend her action he would have offered the same arguments he had applied on behalf of Julius Caesar's murderers.

"His assassins understood justice better. They saw the most virtuous and civilized community of mankind under the insolent dominion of one wicked man, and they murdered him. They destroyed the usurper of the liberties of their countrymen not because they hated him, not because they would revenge the wrongs they had sustained . . . They would have spared his violent death if he could have deposited the rights which he had assumed. His own selfish and narrow nature necessitated the sacrifice they made. They required that he should change all those habits which debauchery and bloodshed had twined around the fibres of his inmost frame of thought, that he should participate with them and with his country those privileges which having corrupted by assuming to himself, he would no longer value. They would have sacrificed their lives if they could have made him worthy of the sacrifice." (1)

---

(1) Julian, VI, p.234.

There is not the slightest doubt in my mind that Beatrice would have willingly sacrificed her life if she could have made Cenci worthy of the sacrifice.

The most frequent objection to Shelley's treatment of Beatrice is that she has turned out to be an ignoble liar who permits her mother and brother to undergo protracted tortures and Marzio to suffer death. Since this behaviour appears inconsistent with the open nature and heroic qualities of her earlier acts, Shelley's admirably built fifth Act has come in for adverse criticism. In reading some of the criticisms of the trial or listening to post-mortems of the production of The Cenci one sometimes gains the impression that it is not Beatrice so much as the author who is up for judgment. Almost all these reveal a search for a deep psychological motive which is not always supported by any strong evidence from the play itself.

Leigh Hunt, Shelley's friend and critic heads the list of those who have been compelled to explain her inconsistent behaviour. In Hunt's opinion she could not confess to a crime she had not committed, that

"it was a notion, a horrid dream, a thing to be gratuitously cancelled from people's minds, a necessity which we're all to agree had existed but was not spoken of, a crime which to punish was to proclaim and make real- anything, in short, but that a daughter had killed her father."(1)

Hunt's statement still does not explain why she could not have denied the guilt but admitted the act. The second part of his vindication makes much more sense.

"... a little common frailty <sup>and</sup> inconsistency only renders the character more human and may be allowed a young creature about to be cut off in the bloom of life, who shows such an agonized wish that virtue should survive guilt and despair."(2)

---

(1) The Indicator, No. XLII, July 26, 1820.

(2) Ibid.

Hunt wrote his review of The Cenci during Shelley's lifetime, but the poet appears not to have been perturbed at all either by these criticisms or by their cause.

G.H.Lewes took up Beatrice's case when he reviewed the tragedy after its first translation into German in 1841. While accepting Hunt's interpretation as only a partial explanation, he found a stronger motive in Beatrice's sense of honour, a legacy "from centuries of high splendour". There is a strong measure of truth in Lewes' argument, fully supported by her address to Savella and later to Marzio, and her lament over her mother's confession.

" . . . . . stain not a noble house  
With vague surmises of rejected crime; "

(Act IV, Sc.iv, 150-1)

She persuades Marzio of her innocence by reminding him of the blot her death would make on her family honour.

" Think, I adjure you, what it is to slay  
The reverence living in the minds of men  
Towards our ancient house, and stainless fame!

(Act V, Sc.ii, 144-46)

When Beatrice discovers that both Lucretia and Giacomo have succumbed she breaks out

" Ignoble hearts!  
For some brief spasms of pain, which are at least  
As mortal as the limbs through which they pass,  
Are centuries of high splendour laid in dust?  
And that eternal honour which should live  
Sunlike, above the reek of mortal fame,  
Changed to a mockery and a byword? . . . "

(Act V, Sc.iii, 27-33)

Ever mindful of her reputation, she extends it beyond herself, to embrace the house of Cenci. The choice before Beatrice was not one of confessing her 'guilt' and sparing her mother pain, it was one of allowing Lucretia to make a wretched spectacle of herself, dragged at horses' heels with her hair sweeping the streets, or letting her

suffer physical tortures.

Those who saw the private performance in 1886, were considerably disturbed by Beatrice's denial. Although Alma Murray's performance reinstated their belief in Beatrice's innocence, some of the critics felt that Shelley had failed to make the subtle psychology of his motivation sufficiently clear to be understood by the ordinary theatrical audience. Bates, who apparently based his criticism on the reviews of this performance and articles published by the Shelley Society, offers an explanation and demolishes his own argument by suggesting that Shelley failed to work this motif into the trial scene. It is possible, says Bates, that Beatrice is determined to believe that God approves her act; if he does approve he cannot let her be punished for it, and yet in her heart she knows that, if she acknowledges the act, she will be punished, and God's justice will be mocked. She is accused of the murder of her father but the man she murdered was no father to her. If she be sentenced, injustice will have been proved more powerful than justice, Cenci more powerful than God. Not only her life but her faith in the moral order is at stake. If it be vindicated, what matter a few more tortures of herself or of Marzio, Lucretia and Giacomo. Shelley did work one motif into the trial, that the man she killed was no father to her. Barbara Jefford in her role of Beatrice gave sufficient emphasis to the phrase "he that was my father" to convey full significance to the audience.

A still more complex motif is attributed to Shelley by Carlos Baker. Shelley's intention, is to display the inevitable corruption of human saintliness by the conspiracy of social circumstances and the continual operation of a vindictive tyranny. This corruption had already set in when Beatrice rejected the moral position to which she had hitherto been devoted by making herself the prime agent of her father's destruction. "Lady Macbeth summoning to her

breast the murdering ministers is not more wilfully callous to all accepted moral codes than she . . . It is probable that through most of Acts III, IV, V Shelley wrote of Beatrice with one eye on Lady Macbeth."<sup>(1)</sup> That Shelley conducted some of the scenes in the fourth Act with Shakespeare in mind can scarcely be denied, but the analogy must end here. The trial scene brings The White Devil to one's mind, but that does not mean that Shelley identified his heroine with Vittoria. To extend an analogy suggested by one speech or one small act to embrace the entire personality is neither just nor reasonable. One is reminded of the rules of criticism advocated by Shelley in judging of the life, actions and words of a man who has acted any conspicuous part in the revolutions of the world:

"We ought to form a general image of his character and of his doctrines, and refer to this whole the distinct portions of actions and of speech by which they are diversified."<sup>(2)</sup>

wrote Shelley. Baker, in his attempt to disprove charges of inconsistency in the fifth Act and affirm Shelley's supremacy as a master of character analysis, has failed to observe this rule. Beatrice's denial, in his opinion, is the logical conclusion in the process of demoralisation first manifested in the scene after the banquet. To him it does not appear to be in contradiction to the earlier impression of Beatrice, as it has been to several of Shelley's critics and biographers, including those who have watched Sybil Thorndike and Barbara Jefford give their interpretation of this powerfully built character. To accept Baker's verdict would be to admit that Cenci had finally succeeded in tainting Beatrice's soul, that the victory was finally his. If this is what Shelley had intended from the start,

---

(1) Baker, p.150.

(2) Julian, VI, p.241.

what does it matter whether Beatrice tells one lie or more to save herself from the gallows? And yet this was not Shelley's intention.

Shelley's intention was to show a Beatrice, who, despite the strange cloud of crime and shame which had shut out the light, "lived ever holy and unstained". That is how all the characters who came face to face with her in the trial scene saw her. Camillo did not once waver in his belief in her innocence. He would sooner have tortured his own nephew,

" (If he now lived he would be just her age ;  
His hair, too, was her colour, and his eyes  
Like hers in shape, but blue and not so deep)  
As that most perfect image of God's love  
That ever came sorrowing upon the earth.  
She is as pure as speechless infancy! "

(Act V, Sc.ii, 63-69)

It was not Lady Macbeth who flitted across Shelley's mind but the image of little William with his blue eyes and golden hair, <sup>whom</sup> he had lost in Rome. At Camillo's suggestion Marzio is brought face to face with Beatrice. What else could have given him, a hired assassin, the strength to endure tortures unto death but his conviction that she was free from guilt?

" Torture me as ye will:  
A keener pang has wrung a higher truth  
From my last breath. She is most innocent!  
Bloodhounds, not men, glut yourselves well with me;  
I will not give you that fine piece of nature  
To rend and ruin. "

(Act V, Sc.ii, 163-168)

Fear and pain wrung confession out of Giacomo's lips but a deeper knowledge of her innocence causes him to describe her as

" . . . the one thing innocent and pure  
In this black guilty world, to that which I  
So well deserve! . . . . . "

(Act V, Sc.iii, 101-3)

The final tribute comes from Bernardo, as the curtain rises on the sleeping Beatrice. When did audience ever see Lady Macbeth sleep as Beatrice did after a night of torments?

Beatrice's own conviction that she is not guilty of parricide fills her with hopes of a "just pardon" from the Pope. There was also her faith in God to sustain her. She had never felt entirely abandoned.

" . . . . . The God who knew my wrong, and made  
Our speedy act the angel of His wrath,  
Seems, and but seems, to have abandoned us."

(Act V, Sc.iii, 113-115)

She breaks down once when the news of the sentence is communicated to her, only to remind us how young, how lonely she is. It is Lucretia's turn to console her with the tender promises of Christ. But these words do not reach her heart. As He in the extremes of agony had cried out to God who seemed to have forsaken Him, Beatrice too for the first time feels abandoned, and from the solitary depths of anguish says:-

"  
I  
Have met with much injustice in this world;  
No difference has been made by God or man,  
Or any power moulding my wretched lot,  
'Twixt good or evil, as regarded me.  
I am cut off from the only world I know,  
From light, and life, and love, in youth's sweet prime."

(Act V, Sc.iv, 80-86)

Turning to her mother she says

"You do well telling me to trust in God,  
I hope I do trust in Him. In whom else  
Can any trust?

And then the saddest words she has yet spoken

"And yet my heart is cold."

(Act V, Sc.iv, 87-89)

We, like Shelley, do not doubt that Beatrice is innocent. We are a little perturbed by the manner of her asserting her innocence. Shelley was not disturbed by it. A recently acquired sense of realism, inconsistent with his earlier works but evident in his letters (we have merely to glance at his comments on Tasso,<sup>(1)</sup> went a long way to help him understand the milieu in which Beatrice lived. She was, after all, a product of Catholic society in the Renaissance Italy, and, as such, conditioned by the morals and manners of that society. The concept of family honour would influence her actions far more strongly than those of a nineteenth-century character. The hiring of assassins would be accepted as a practice followed by the guilty as well as the innocent. The manner in which she defended herself would be supported by the author. In exercising her powers of persuasion, Shelley would say, Beatrice did not stoop to dissembling.

"The art of persuasion differs from that of reasoning; and it is of no small moment to the success even of a true cause that the judges who are to determine on its merits should be free from those national and religious predilections which render the multitude both deaf and blind... It is deeply to be lamented that a word should ever issue from human lips which contain the minutest alloy of dissimulation, or simulation or hypocrisy, or exaggeration, or anything but the precise and rigid image which is present to the mind, and which ought to dictate the expression. But this practice of entire sincerity towards other men would avail to no good ~~and~~ if they were incapable of practising it towards their own minds. In fact truth cannot be communicated until it is perceived. The interests, therefore, of truth required that an orator should so far as possible produce in his hearers that state of mind in which alone his exhortations could fairly be contemplated and examined." (2)

Beatrice succeeded in producing in her hearers this state of mind, but there was one marble form, symbol of "a rite, a law, a custom", who heard her not. Had the judges ~~who~~

---

(1) Julian, X, pp 340-341

(2) Julian, VI, p.242.

who finally decided her fate perceived the truth, Beatrice would have told them that she had killed Francesco Cenci and that she was innocent. In the imperfect society in which she lived she gave an imperfect answer.

In The Cenci, Shelley had endeavoured as nearly as possible to depict the characters as they probably were, and had sought to avoid the error of making them actuated by his own conceptions of right or wrong, false or true. He felt that had anything like the Promethean standards of moral conduct been employed in telling the story of Beatrice, the dramatic value of the tragedy would have been considerably diminished.

The Cenci was submitted to Covent Garden.

"Mr.Harris pronounced the subject to be so objectionable that he could not even submit the part to Miss O'Neil for perusal, but expressed his desire that the author would write a tragedy on some other subject which he would gladly accept."(1)

Shelley was disappointed. While he sometimes concealed his disappointment behind deprecatory remarks on his tragedy he showed enormous pleasure in the praise his friends bestowed upon it.

A year later, Shelley wrote to Medwin:-

"The people from England tell me it is liked. It is dismal enough. My chief endeavour was to produce a delineation of passions which I had never participated, in chaste language, and according to the rules of the enlightened art. I don't think very much of it, but it is for you to judge." (2)

---

(1) Hutchinson, Mary's Note, p.334.

(2) Julian, X, pp.165-6.

CHAPTER VI

Oedipus Tyrannus or Swellfoot the Tyrant.

Oedipus Tyrannus, Shelley's political satire, was written in August 1820, a year after The Cenci and Prometheus Unbound. Although cast in dramatic form, it is a composition of a very different character and stands in the same relation to his tragedy and the Aeschylean drama as Peter Bell the Third does to Julian and Maddalo and The Witch of Atlas. Shelley cared little for it, an attitude one sees reflected in his readers. Except for Edmund Blunden, no scholar has found much merit in it. This would not have surprised Shelley altogether. What would have surprised him, however, would be to see anyone studying these two acts with the same seriousness of purpose as Prometheus Unbound over which he had lavished so much care; or The Cenci, written expressly for Covent Garden; or Hellas, which celebrated a great cause. No lofty idealism inspired Swellfoot the Tyrant. Shelley had various projects for the stage, but these did not include a political satire.<sup>(1)</sup> The conflict dramatised in Swellfoot the Tyrant was the most ridiculous ever to attract Shelley's attention. It took Mary fifteen years before she could make up her mind to include it in the edition of Shelley's Poetical Works. However strongly she may have deplored "the abstract and dreamy spirit" of the Witch of Atlas, she still preferred to include this "wildly fanciful" poem in the Posthumous Poems of 1824 rather than the "political-drama" satirical drama with its "familiar style" and "homely imagery"<sup>(2)</sup>. She overcame her scruples when she

---

(1) Hutchinson. p.267

(2) Ibid.p.405

finally decided to include Peter Bell the Third and Oedipus Tyrannus in the second edition of Shelley's works in 1839. To these she appended a little apologetic note explaining that "these are conceived in a very different spirit from Shelley's usual composition. They are specimens of the burlesque and fanciful; but though they adopt a familiar style and homely ~~in~~ imagery there shine through the radiance of the poet's imagination, the earnest views and opinions of the politician and the moralist,"<sup>(1)</sup>. If only Mary had dwelt less on her husband's social conscience and more on his humour, his wit and his ability to treat a contemporary event in a familiar style, she would have served his cause better. ~~Shelley was writing~~ This was a singular occasion. Shelley was writing to entertain and not to elevate.

The circumstances which led to the writing of Oedipus Tyrannus have been described by Mary herself <sup>(2)</sup>. Lady Mountcashel or Mrs Mason, the name she had assumed, one of their few English friends in Pisa, visited them on the day a fair was being held in the square beneath the window of their house, Casa Prinni, at the Baths of San Giuliano, near Pisa. As Shelley sat down solemnly to read his Ode to Liberty, recently published in England, he found himself accompanied by the full-throated grunting of the pigs outside. Shelley was immediately reminded of the chorus of frogs in the satirical drama of Aristophanes. The Greek dramatists Shelley had studied with such devotion did not include Aristophanes, but the Frogs apparently had not failed

---

(1) M.W.Shelley. The Poetical Works of P.B.Shelley.  
London, 1839. p.XI.

(2) Hutchinson. p.407

to amuse him. The hilarity of the hour was marked by the Shelleys making one ludicrous suggestion after another until Shelley hit upon the idea of writing a satire on the royal scandal. The pigs, he declared, would serve as chorus - and on August 24th, 1820, Oedipus Tyrannus or Swellfoot the Tyrant was begun.

Shelley's interest in the royal scandal, which had become the chief topic of conversation among the English was partially tinged by his political views. He entertained no illusions about Caroline, whose indiscretions were whispered in the chief capitals of Europe. He would have liked the King and the Queen, like Punch and Judy, to fight out their disputes in person. "What silly stuff is this to employ a great nation about" <sup>(1)</sup>, he wrote to Medwin. But if there was to be a public contest, Shelley would ally himself with those who opposed the king. The contempt he felt for George IV and his Consort, the indignation aroused by the machinations of his ministers and surprise at the facile gullibility of the English nation are all reflected in his letter to Peacock. "Nothing, I think, shows the generous gullibility of the English nation more than their having adopted her Sacred Majesty as the heroine of the day, in spite of all their prejudices and bigotries. I, for my part, of course, wish no harm to happen to her, even if she has, as I firmly believe, amused herself in a manner rather indecorous with any courtier or baron. But I can not help adverting to it as one of the absurdities of royalty, that a vulgar woman, with all those low tastes which prejudice considers as vices, and a person whose habits and manners everyone would

---

(1) Julian, X.p.192

shun in private life without any redeeming virtues should be turned into a heroine because she is a queen, or, as a collateral reason, because her husband is a king; and he, no less than his ministers, are so odious that everything, however disgusting, which is opposed to them is admirable"<sup>(1)</sup>. Shelley sympathised with the Queen because she was less odious than those who persecuted her.

It is interesting to see the other-worldly lover of Emilia turning his thoughts from the kingdom of Plato and focusing his attention on the marital troubles of his King and Queen. Newman Iv<sup>e</sup>xy White, in his erudite article, "Shelley's Swellfoot the Tyrant in Relation to Contemporary Political Satire"<sup>(2)</sup> suggests that Shelley was sufficiently in touch with some of the anonymous cartoons and political satires on the subject to borrow some of their machinery and setting for his drama. He draws a parallel between Shelley's use of the Green Bag and that of the contemporary cartoonists. One of these ~~cartoons~~, entitled "Opening the Green Bag or the Friends of Hell Let Loose" represents the conspirators being routed by the dragons and serpents in the bag. Another cartoon, "The Filth and Lies of the Green Bag Visiting their Parents and Friends" shows the reptiles being poured over its owners. The Green Bag in Shelley's satire is a device on the part of the King's ministers to ruin the Queen. It is filled with poison, to be emptied over the head of the unsuspecting Queen, who is to be deceived into thinking it a fair test. The Queen, snatching the bag, empties its contents over the heads of her persecutors. Shelley also introduces the same scene as in the anticlimax **a**t the end of the last

---

(1) Julian X.p.186

(2) P.M.L.A. vol.36 pp.332-346

Act. If there has been any borrowing here, there is no doubt as to the identity of the borrower. White maintains that Swellfoot was published after these cartoons and only seven copies sold before it was withdrawn from publication. He points to another important factor, establishing a ~~connection~~ more convincing connection. A cartoon called \*A Kick lys in a Great House, published in August 1820, shows Caroline riding a snorting, kicking bull and calling "Justice" while the Archbishop, King and Counsellors are fleeing in panic and the table is overturned, spilling the contents of the Green Bag, which are labelled Horse Leech, Italian dagger, Milan Commission and Bill of Pains and Penalties".

In style, too, White detects the influence of some contemporary pamphleteers. The burlesque erudition and punning etymologies Shelley indulges in in the Advertisement and the use of terms like "Iona Taurina" and the "Ionian Minotaur" are paralleled by Theodore Hook in \*Teutamen\* and \*Molloy\* in the Acts of Adonis. "And they called him re-gent which in the Bullish language signifies, no longer blackguard" Molloy's words are faintly echoed by Shelley when he writes "The word Hoydips (or more properly Oedipus) has been rendered literally Swellfoot, without its having been conceived necessary to determine whether a swelling of the hind or the fore feet of the Swinish Monarch is particularly indicated"<sup>(1)</sup>. Further, White refers to \*A Speech from the Throne\*, another anonymous publication which reached its fifty-first edition in 1821, and observes a general resemblance in tone to Swellfoot's speeches:

---

(1) Hutchinson.p.384

Reform, reform, the swinish rabble cry,  
 Meaning of course, rebellion, blood and riot,  
 Audacious rascals!, You, my Lords, and I  
 Know it is their duty to be starved in quiet.

How much Shelley borrowed directly from contemporary satires and cartoons and how much he absorbed from the accounts current in this English society, it is a little difficult to assess. He corresponded regularly with Hunt and Peacock and showed healthy interest in the domestic politics of his country. He was familiar with certain terms which had passed into household vocabulary. His letters show him thinking in familiar metaphors when he discusses the royal scandal with his friends. "I wonder what in the world the Queen has done. I should not wonder, after the whispers I have heard, to find that the Green Bag contained evidence that she imitated Pasiphae, and that the Committee should recommend to Parliament a bill to exclude all *Minotaur*s from the succession"<sup>(1)</sup>.

The conception of the swine driven by their rulers, x according to Walter Peck, was not original with Shelley. Clues from the pamphlets referred to by White, were most probably blended with an article by Professor Porson on "A New Catechism for the Natives of Hampshire", which had appeared in Leigh Hunt's Examiner for August 20th, 1818. It is written in the form of a dialogue in which the questions are deliberately so chosen that the answers must of necessity give a picture of the deplorable conditions in which the hogs of Hampshire live.<sup>(2)</sup> The dialogue is brought to a finale with the chorus of the natives of Hampshire. The extract quoted here is from the concluding part of the "Catechism":

---

(1) Julian, X, p. 192

(2) Peck, pp. 394-401

What are the rights of a hog? -

To be whipt and bled by men.

What are the duties of a man? -

To whip and bleed hogs.

Do they ever whip and bleed you to death?

Not always; the common method is to bleed us by intervals.

How many ounces do they take at a time? -

That depends upon the state of the patient. As soon as he faints, they bind up the wound; but they open his veins afresh when he has ~~recovered~~ a little recovered his loss; hence comes the proverb to bleed like a pig.

What is the liberty of a hog? -

To chose between half starving and whole starving.

What is the property of a hog? -

A wooden trough, food and drink just enough to keep in life, and a truss of musty straw, on which ten or a dozen of us pig together.

What dish is most delicious to aa driver's palate? -

A hog's pudding.

What music is sweetest to a driver's ear? -

Our shrieks in bleeding.

What is a driver's favourite diversion? -

To set his dogs upon us.

What is the general wish of the hogs at present? -

To save their bacon.(1)

Chorus of hogs - Amen

Shelley was not a stranger to the use of the swinish multitude. In 1812, in a letter to Elizabeth Hitchner, dated May 7th, 1812, he had referred to the "swinish multitude" - such a\_s burnt the house of Priestly". Shelley doubtless owed a great debt to the writers of pamphlets and articles and to the cartoonists of his day, but for its original inspiration we must return to the riotous chorus outside his house in Pisa.

The chorus of the Italian pigs and its association with the immortal chorus of Frogs, the Green Bag with its poisonous contents, the slimy creatures pursuing the Queen, Pasiphae riding a Minotaur, all these Shelley employed to make a political farce in which George IV,

---

(1) Peck, p.400-401

Queen Caroline, Lord Liverpool and Eldon, Castlereagh, John Leach and others appeared under swinish skins. This short drama, consisting of seven hundred and forty lines, has been divided into two Acts. Shelley observes two of the unities at least by confining the action to the same day in the town of Thebes. Never before has Shelley devoted so much space to the stage directions. The temple of Dionysus has acquired some of the grotesque features of a Gothic vault. The first scene is laid in a magnificent Temple, built of thigh bones and death's heads and tiled with scalps. The Altar with the statue of Famine dressed in rags is no less loathsome than the structure of the temple.

It is possible to establish a superficial connection between the opening scene of Oedipus the King and the first scene of Shelley's drama. Oedipus, moved by the misery of his people, enquires into its causes, hoping to trace it to its source. The English Oedipus is also surrounded by his subjects who, crowned with thistle, shamrock and oak, "leaves devoted to the Furies", throng the steps of the temple, but the vain monarch is so rapt in the contemplation of his obese body that he remains supremely unconscious of their presence until they break in upon his smug speech with their grunting. Shelley possessed little taste for obscene jokes and showed no inclination to laugh at certain natural functions of the body as Aristophanes had done in Frogs and Lysistrata. He contents himself with attacking vices of the senses, dwelling on dullness, heartlessness, gluttony and lechery.

The scene begins with the half-witted Monarch addressing the Goddess of Famine in tones of unmistakable irony:

"Thou supreme Goddess! By whose power divine  
 These graceful limbs are clothed in proud array  
 Of gold and purple, and this kingly paunch  
 Swells like a sail before a favouring breeze.  
 And these most sacred nether promontories  
 Lie satisfied with layers of fat; and these  
 Boeotian cheeks, like Egypt's pyramid  
 (Nor with less toil were their foundations laid);  
 Sustain the core of my untroubled brain,  
 That point, the emblem of a pointless nothing!"  
 (Act I Sc.1.1-10)

To this sacred spot come Radical butchers, Paper-money millers, Bishops and Deacons and all those who have been blessed by the "plenteous Ceres". Here also come the multitude of swine, Boeotia is a free country, presenting by their emaciated and ill-clad bodies a striking contrast to Cere's' favoured few. Having discovered their king alone in front of the Altar, the pigs appeal to the royal virtue of pity, possibly a dig at Southey.

"I have heard your Laureate sing,  
 That pity was a royal thing: "

These poor pigs cherish a great many illusions about their ancestors who, they tell their Monarch,

"Were bless'd as nightingales on myrtle sprigs,  
 Or grasshoppers that live on noontide dew,  
 And sung, old annals tell, as sweetly too."  
 (Act I Sc.1.40-42)

Their present plight shows a reversal of their fortunes

"But now our sties are fallen in, we catch  
 The murrain and the mange, the scab and itch;  
 Sometimes your royal dogs tear down our thatch,  
 And then we seek the shelter of a ditch;  
 Hog wash and grains, or ~~anta~~-baga, none  
 Has yet been ours since your reign begun."  
 (Act I Sc.1, 43-48)

In doggerel verse and homely language most uncommon in Shelley, the sows, the pigs and boars first appeal to the Monarch's impulses of generosity and finally seek redress through law. Shelley's poetry has seldom come so close to ordinary conversation as in the brief passage after the Chorus:-

Æ "First sow:

My pigs, 'tis in vain to tug.

Second sow:

I could almost eat my litter.

First pig:

I suck, but no milk will come from the dug

Second pig:

Our skin and our bones would be bitter."

The Boars tend to be poetical with their use of alliteration:

"We fight for this rag of greasy rug,  
Though a trough of wash would be fitter!"

The satirical note in the Semichorus is heightened by an ingenious use of the name Solons which happily rhymes with "Colons"

"Now if your Majesty would have our bristles  
To bind your mortar with, or fill our colons,  
With rich blood, or make brawn out of our gristles,  
In policy - ask else your royal Solons -  
You ought to give us hog-wash and clean straw  
And sties well thatched; besides it is the law."  
(lines 61-66)

Oedipus' interpretation of the law differs from that of the Pigs. Infuriated by the insolence of his subjects he sends for the three Jews and orders them to make short work of the grunting swine. White, who has traced the origin of almost all the characters, has not succeeded in establishing the identity of Moses the sow-gelder, Solomon the porkman, <sup>and</sup> Zephaniah the pig butcher. Shelley has entrusted the Jews with a job in flagrant violation of their religious faith, without indicating his motives. Did he intend it

as a perversion of mentality in the kingdom of Boeotia? He had no personal prejudice against the Jewish race. The three Jews have not been credited with any sentiment or thought that would merit the poet's disapproval. On the contrary, Moses advises against antagonising the Boars, Zephaniah makes a plea against killing, on hygienic grounds and Solomon raises objections for reasons of economy, but these fall upon the deaf ears of Swellfoot. The satirical value of this scene fails to come through. It shows, however, an aspect of the blustering Monarch ready to sanction a wholesale massacre of his subjects, in order to ensure some peace for himself and his Wizards.

Swellfoot's troubles have just begun. In the first scene Shelley shows him in conflict with his subjects. The shadow of ~~the~~ Iona Taurina has not crossed his untroubled brain yet. Although the central theme of the play was intended to revolve round the royal scandal and the swinish multitude to serve as Chorus, Shelley has ~~z~~ already given the pigs a role a little too big for ~~a~~ the lighthearted farce. He has identified them with the oppressed class of people, who, he maintained at the time of writing his play, were being exploited by the King and his ministers. This attitude explains but not necessarily condones the note of indignation which breaks out whenever Shelley thinks of the "evils" - his term - of the standing army, paper money, taxation and absence of adult male franchise.

The scene moves a pace with the arrival of Mammon the Arch-Priest and Purganax, Chief of the Council of Wizards. White, after sifting the arguments forwarded by Todhunter, a nineteenth century Shelley scholar, concludes that Shelley had Liverpool in mind when he

created Mammon. Purganax is nervous and apprehensive, dimly aware of the rumblings shaking the state of Thebes. Shelley has captured the mood in which the Foreign Minister must have found himself before he committed suicide in 1824. The immediate cause of his anxiety is the oracle heard abroad: -

"Boeotia, chose reform or civil war!  
When through the streets, in stead of hare with dogs,  
A Consort Queen shall hunt a King with Hogs,  
Riding on the Ionian Minotaur."

(Act I Sc.1 112-116)

Mammon's manner is more confident and not without its brand of humour. Cryptic where matters of state are concerned, circumlocutious in his reference to ~~the~~ Iona's indiscretions, he becomes hysterical in his denunciation of radicals,

"Do the troops mutiny? - decimate some regiments,  
Does money fail? - come to my mint - coin paper,  
Till gold be at a discount..."

(Act I Sc.1 103-105)

Iona Taurina must not be allowed anywhere near the Swine because of their old connection.

↑ This Iona -  
Well - you know what the chaste Pasiphae did,  
Wife to that most religious King of Crete,  
And still how popular the late is here;  
And these dull Swine of Thebes boast their descent  
From the free Minotaur."

(Act I Sc.1 135-140)

Purganax believes that he has discovered the most ingenious devices for keeping Iona far from the shores of Thebes. The Wizards are less concerned with the discomfort her presence might cause to Swellfoot than with the possible alliance between her and the dull Swine and its resulting consequences. Purganax, so much more cunning than his King, proposes what he believes to be

a fool-proof <sup>scheme</sup> ~~of~~ keeping the Queen away from her subjects. It is interesting to find Browning's "sun-treader" searching for the <sup>most</sup> hideous creatures from the darkest depths of hell. Shelley had made the Gadfly's acquaintance when he read Prometheus Bound. The beast had practised his art on Io and the inhabitants of Babylon. The poet describes with a scientific detail his monstrous shape and his many virtues, implying the fascination he exercised over the weird imagination of the Chief of Wizards.

"Has a loud trumpet like the scarabee,  
His crook'd tail is barbed with many stings,  
Each able to make a thousand wounds, and each  
Immediate; from his convex eyes  
He sees fair things in many hideous shapes,  
And trumpets all his falsehood to the world,  
Like other beetles he is fed on dung -  
He has eleven feet with which he crawls,  
Trailing a blistering slime...."

(Act I Sc.1 157-165)

Purganax is a poetical fellow whose acquaintance with Homer, Aeschylus and Ezekiel equals that of Shelley. The grand manner in which he delivers himself, the ease with which he spouts the names of places through which Iona has been hunted, redeem the brutality which distinguishes his character. Shelley had never concealed his uncompromising hatred of Castlereagh. Essentially, there is no difference between Purganax as he appears in Swellfoot the Tyrant and Castlereagh, to whom Shelley had addressed the following lines in 1819

"Hearest thou the festival din  
Of Death, and Destruction, and Sin  
And Wealth crying Havoc! within?  
'Tis the bacchanal triumph that makes Truth dumb,  
Thine Epithalamium." (1)

There is, however, difference in the treatment of this character in the drama in so far as <sup>here</sup> he is depicted in relation to his King, his colleagues and the people.

---

(1) Hutchinson, p.568

While Purganax gloats over his ingenuity in devising the most gruesome means of torture for Iona, Mammon congratulates himself upon disinheriting his eldest son, Chrysaor, who holds radical views and filling the coffers of his daughter Banknotina. Shelley loses control over the situation when he allows his own bitter feelings to mingle with the words in which Mammon describes his grandchildren as if they were potential cut-throats:

"And then my little grandchildren, the gibbets,  
Promising children as you ever saw, -  
The young playing at hanging, the elder learning  
How to hold radicals. They are well taught too,  
For every gibbet says its catechism  
And reads a select chapter in the Bible  
Before it goes to play."

(Act I Sc.1 212-218)

The Bible in the hands of Mammon's grandchildren would have provoked a pungent comment from Byron. Shelley can indulge in savagery only.

Purganax's vivid account~~er~~ of the Gadfly did not contain a hint of her musical quality. The Leech can suck blood or muck; the Rat can squeeze blood out of her but the Gadfly can sing as well as wring the Queen. Her song with its double rhyme and a refrain at the end of each verse would not be out of place in a comic opera. There are not many amusing lines in the play, but among the few, we would number:

" From slumber I rung her,  
Loud as the clank of an ironmonger;"

Iona Taurina has been driven near the shores of Thebes, after having fallen in a state of stupor, by the repeated stings of the Gadfly. The Wizards have been taken unaware. Purganax's plans have misfired as the vociferous crowds outside hail their Queen.

Swellfoot appears on the scene in a state of chagrin. It is all Hymen's doing, to have 'wived' him all over again! The cursed image of his lawful wife had hunted him even when he lay in Adiposa's arms and he had borne the memory, but with Iona in Thebes he suffers the real presence. A loud tumult as of a crowd breaks out with the cries of "Iona for ever - No Swellfoot!" "Off with her head!" he commands in the manner of the Queen in Alice. Purganax is against anything so rash. He must first form a semblance of a jury or create a new class of pigs, better fed and more richly clad than others; he would give:

. . . . "Their Sows  
Some tawdry lace, and bits of lustre glass,  
And their young Boars white and red rags, and tails  
Of cows, and jay feathers, and sticking cauliflowers  
Between the ears of the old ones, . . ."  
(Act I Sc.1 228-302)

After all, that is all they <sup>were</sup> required to believe, that by the inherent virtue of these things they had all become imperial Pigs. Soon they would set about ripping each other's bellies up.

The Monarch will take no chances. He believes in quick, direct action and sends for Laoctonos. General Laoctonos, Wellington in disguise, is ordered to produce the Queen:

"It is my royal pleasure  
That you, Lord General, bring the head and body,  
If separate it would please me better, hither,  
Of Queen Iona."

(Act I Sc.1 308-311)

Laoctonos had already made a charge with his battalions:

"Called, from their dress and grin, the royal apes,  
Upon the Swine."

(line 313)

The pigs received the first attacks like so many rhinoceroses

and then, presenting a front of bare tusks and wrinkled snouts, retreated in good order, carrying the Queen with them.

Cries of "Long Live Iona!" "Down with Swellfoot" are heard again. Laoctonos' account of his defeat is followed by Dakry's ridiculous experience. Dakry, who has been identified with Eldon, is not so vividly drawn as Purganax or Mammon. He contributes little to the satirical element of the play. At a meeting where he addressed the Swine Dakry was so moved by the eloquence of his own harangue that tears welled up in his eyes. As each tear came trickling down it turned to a millstone until there were so many millstones that they rolled and hurled the sucking pigs into the air. Shelley refrains from putting any venom into his characterisation of Dakry, although he had had good reasons for hating him. He had worked off his hatred in a poem written after Eldon had deprived him of the custody of his children by Harriet.

With Swellfoot holding the centre of the stage, Purganax on one side and Laoctonos on the other, the stage is set for Mammon, the most wily of the Wizards, to appear with his master plan. He produces the Green Bag, the poisonous contents of which, when emptied, would change innocence to guilt and beauty to foul deformity. Swellfoot's expectations rise high as Mammon dwells over each component part of this "perilous liquor". Mammon assumes the manner of a self-assured member of Parliament who has suffered several immature stratagems to operate, and, his patience giving way, has finally produced what he believes to be a fool-proof scheme. The Bag is to be emptied over the Queen's head after the Pigs have been cajoled into believing

that it is a test of her innocence. Mammon ( in a tone of voice from which humour is not absent) paints a vivid picture of the Queen ascending to Heaven. He differs in this respect from Dakry and Laoctonos who are both humourless. This is the vision he would promise to the credulous pigs:

"And they will see her flying through the air  
 So bright that she will dim the noonday sun  
 Showering down blessings in the shape of comfits.  
 This, trust a priest, is just the sort of thing  
 Swine will believe. I'll wager you, we'll see them  
 Climbing upon the thatch of their low sties,  
 With pieces of smoked glass, to watch her sail  
 Among the clouds, and some will hold the flaps  
 Of one another's ears between their teeth  
 To catch the coming hail of comfits in."

(Act I Sc.1 394-403)

The first scene of the second Act shows how successfully Shelley had blended humour with satire and maintained the vividly dramatic quality of the scene. Purganax, briefed by Mammon, appears before a full assembly of the Boars. He begins his oration in the manner of Mark Antony before the Romans and works round the subject of the Queen's adultery until he has aroused the full interest of the gullible swine. He touches upon public matters, such as revenues, taxation and inflation, regarded by the "free born pigs" with jealous eyes". He fumbles for words in the true style of a practised platform speaker when he refers to the domestic plight of the pigs: -

"And, that the population of the Pigs,  
 Instead of hog-wash, has been fed on straw  
 And water, is a fact which is - you know -  
 That is - it is a state-necessity -  
 Temporary, of course."

(Act II Sc1 21-25)

Some Pigs had rebelled in the past. He reminds the Assembly how those who had committed an impious act

by defying the arch-priest's orders to genuflect, had been whipped into "an orthodox whine". The Boars have listened in silence, but as soon as Purganax mentions the name of Queen Iona they break out in chorus "She is innocent ! She is innocent ! ". This well-timed interruption gives the hypocritical Wizard opportunity to talk about the matter uppermost in his mind. It is precisely about her innocence that he wanted to speak to them, but the matter had got out of control. As soon as the Queen had set her foot on the shores of Thebes some sows and boars had whisked her off. They persuaded her to think, Purganax continues

"that we believe  
 (I mean those more substantial Pigs, who swill  
 Rich hog-wash, while the others mouth damp straw)"  
(lines ~~38~~ 38-39)

that she is guilty.

The less substantial members of the community were not concerned with the fair name of the Queen. They were out to create trouble for purely selfish reasons. They had Purganax continues, designs on

"that hog-wash, which has been  
 Your immemorial right, and which I will  
 Maintain you in to the last drops of -"  
(lines 41-43)

A little voice is raised at this stage

"What  
 Does anyone accuse her of?"

Purganax is ready with his answer:

"Why, no-one  
 Makes any positive accusation; - but  
 There were hints dropped, and so the privy wizards  
 Conceived that it became them to advise  
 His Majesty to investigate their truth; -  
 Not for his own sake."  
(lines 44-49)

Purganax is anxious for the Boars to understand the King's motive. The Monarch would connive at any of the Queen's

indiscretions if this self-sacrifice would benefit his subjects. But a loftier motive had urged him to take action. His Majesty

"fears the morals of the Swine,  
The Sows' especially, and what effect  
It might produce upon the purity and  
Religion of the rising generation  
Of Sucking-pigs, if it could be suspected  
That Queen Iona - " (lines 52-58)

Purganax makes a dramatic pause. He has aroused the curiosity of the Boars. "Well, go on" says the first Boar. Purganax veils Iona's discretion in sensuous images suggested by Iona's amorous ancestors:

"The milk-white bulls that feed  
Beside Clitumnus and the crystal lakes  
Of the Cisalpine mountains, in fresh dews  
Of lotus-grass and blossoming asphodel  
Sleeking their silken hair, and with sweet breath  
Loading the morning winds until they faint  
With living fragrance, are so beautiful!"  
(lines 60-66)

Purganax <sup>himself</sup> has no comments to make

. . . "But Europa rode  
On such a one from Asia into Crete,  
And the enamoured sea grew calm beneath  
His gliding beauty. And Pasiphae,  
Iona's grandmother - . . . . ."  
(lines 67-71)

He breaks off. Far be it from him to accuse their Queen of the indiscretions her ancestors had committed. Iona, says Purganax, is innocent. "Most innocent" adds the first Boar.

Purganax has sensed the mood of acquiescence. He holds up the Green Bag for the Boars to see. The very sight of a Green Bag raises a storm of protests. A representative of the assembly associates it with green scorpions, watersnakes, eels and verdigris, creatures that are poisonous. Purganax succeeds in quelling their doubts with successive visual images of Iona flying through the

air raining down blessings in the form of comfits upon her receding subjects. The Boars have been enticed away from the contemplation of the contents of the bag to dwell on the vision of the Queen ascending to heaven. In this lively crowd scene with Purganax, whose eloquent speech is balanced by the naive gullibility of the swinish multitude, Shelley gives a passage remarkable for its original imagery and vigour in style:

Second Boar:

How glorious it will be to see her Majesty  
Flying above our heads, her petticoats  
Streaming like - like - like -

Third Boar:

Anything.

Purganax:

Oh no !

But like a standard of an admiral's ship,  
Or like the banner of a conquering host,  
Or like a cloud dyed in the dying day,  
Unravelled ~~fr~~ on the blast from a white mountain,  
Or like a meteor, or a war steed's mane,  
Or waterfall from a dizzy precipice  
Scattered upon the wind.

First Boar:

Or a cow's tail

Second Boar:

Or anything, as the learned Boar observed"  
(Act II Sc. ~~ii~~ 97-107)

The lively but orderly character of the scene is transformed into a boisterous chaotic situation as a number of lean pigs and sows and boars rush in and disrupt the meeting at that very moment, when Purganax has ~~just~~ moved a resolution inviting her Majesty to the feast of Famine to receive "Daws of Apotheosis" upon "her chaste white body". In this mad rush of the lean faction, voices of the semichorus are heard, some shouting their assent, others their dissent. The atmosphere of a rowdy meeting is faithfully preserved in this passage with the First Boar calling out "Order! Order!" The scene takes a comic turn when the Second Boar

rises and in a solemn voice proposes an amendment that Purganax ~~rub~~ should rub a little of that stuff upon his face. Purganax is seized with terror at the unexpected turn the events have taken. From the platform where he stands, his heart is seen to beat through his waistcoat betraying his stupidity to the entire community of Pigs. This brings the Pigs together in a common cause of fighting for their rights and protecting the sacred person of her Majesty. Some of the lines addressed to the Queen by the chorus sound like slogans heard at a Communist rally:

"Those who wrong you, wrong us.  
Those who hate you, hate us.  
Those who sting you, sting us.  
Those who bait you, bait us."

(lines 147-150)

Now that the lean pigs ~~w~~ have formed a united front with the more favoured ones, the hour has come for the oracle to be fulfilled.

If the King of Thebes has acted in the interests of his loyal subjects, his Consort has allied herself to the rebels from equally worthy motives. Gracious and condescending in her manner, she accepts their protection out of sympathetic regard for their devotion to her. She abandons the easier course of walking through fire ~~and~~ unscathed to <sup>face</sup> the more exacting ~~idea~~ ordeal prepared for her. Purganax has met his match in Iona Taurina. The accused appears and offers herself to be taken into custody and tried. The wise old Boar suspects her meek demeanour, but Purganax remains innocent of her guile:

Purganax:

This magnanimity in your sacred Majesty  
Must please the Pigs. You cannot fail of being  
A heavenly angel. Smoke your bits of glass,  
Ye loyal Swine, or her transfiguration  
Will blind your wondering eyes.

An Old Boar (aside):

Take care, my Lord,  
They do not smoke you first.

Purganax:

At the approaching feast  
Of Famine, let the expiation be.

Swine:

Content! Content!

Iona Taurina:(aside)

I, most content of all,  
Know that my foes, even thus prepare their fall!"

(Act II Sc.i 183-191)

Thus this admirably built scene with its numerous situations and ironic speeches is concluded.

The scene shifts to the temple of Famine. The ceremony of the Apotheosis of the Queen is to take place within its sacred precincts, under the benign gaze of the goddess of Famine. The statue of the goddess, a skeleton clothed in "particoloured" rags rests on a heap of skulls and loaves. A number of exceedingly fat priests with marrow bones and cleavers in their hands stand on each side. A flourish of trumpets announces Mammon, the Arch-Priest, followed by the King and his Wizards, and the Queen, escorted by soldiers. The Swine enter from the other side. The priests in sing in praise of the goddess as Solomon, the Court Porkman accompanies them on his weird instruments. The grotesque setting, the wild orchestra, the perverted sentiments of the song sharply contrast with the preceding scene with its open-air atmosphere, the chorus of the Pigs and their simple utterances.

The Banquet scene, with the gouty Monarch and his Wizards dressed in resplendent costume, seated at a table magnificently covered and served by a retinue of attendants in bright uniform, relieves the dismal atmosphere of the Altar. A contrasting sight is provided by the some exceedingly thin pigs as they follow the attendants across the stage, licking up the wash that drips from the pails the attendants carry. Shelley retains his control over theatrical effects, but he has lost the balance between

good-natured humour and sharp satire he had revealed in the earlier scenes. Bitter and sardonic is the manner in which he handles the "toast" scene:

All:

A toast! A toast! Stand up, and three times three!

Dakry:

No heel taps. - darken daylights ! -

Laoctonos:

Claret, somehow

Puts me in mind of blood, and blood of claret!

Swellfoot:

Laoctonos is fishing for a compliment,

But 'tis his due. Yes, you have drunk more wine

And shed more blood than any man in Thebes." *Act II, scii, ll 34-39.*

While the merry feast continues, the Pigs in chorus address the ghastly skeleton of Famine, whose bondslaves they will become if she will intercede on their behalf. There is general consternation among the Wizards. Mammon's mind is filled with uncanny sounds and lurid images. Purganax becomes conscious of the blood which the sad Genius of the Green Isle has branded upon his brow:

"Which would stain all its seas

But which those seas could never wash away".

Into this macabre scene is introduced a note wholly alien and out of character with the play. As Mammon, Dakry, Laoctonos and Swellfoot move towards the Queen a graceful figure in a transparent veil passes unnoticed through the temple; the word Liberty is seen through the veil as if it were written in fire upon <sup>her</sup> its forehead. Her words, the stage ~~directions~~ <sup>directions</sup> tell us, are almost drowned in the furious grunting of the Pigs and the business of the trial. She kneels on the steps of the Altar and speaks in tones ~~inx~~ at first faint and low but which become louder ~~as she proceeds~~ <sup>as she proceeds</sup>. Neither her graceful figure clad in a diaphanous veil, nor her voice rising on

a wave of crescendo, distract<sup>s</sup> the King and *his courtiers* from their immediate pursuit. She has come to form a brief alliance with the goddess of Famine. Shelley, one suspects, took the contest between Swellfoot and the swinish multitude a little more seriously than he had originally intended. In this scene he clearly sees it as a conflict between the oppressor and the oppressed, between the Monarch and the Republicans. Liberty was their object and Famine their chief instrument, having obliged them to cast ~~their~~ lot together. But Liberty cannot survive without love and charity. In words characteristic of Shelley, Liberty reminds Famine that

"The earth did never mean her foison  
 For those who crown life's cup with poison  
 Of fanatic rage and meaningless revenge -  
 But for those radiant spirits, who are still  
 The standard-bearers in the van of **C**hange ."  
 (Act II Sc ii 92-96)

Liberty has no legitimate place in this satirical drama, but considered in the light of Shelley's political philosophy, her message is not devoid of significance.

In the concluding passage, the hoydenish scene comes to its own. Purganax, after unsealing the ~~Queen's~~ <sup>Queen's</sup> Green Bag, is gravely about to pour the liquor upon ~~the~~ <sup>Queen's</sup> head, when, suddenly snatching the Bag, she pours its contents over Swellfoot and his whole Court. What follows makes the rowdiest, noisiest scene Shelley has yet delineated. Although Swellfoot the Tyrant was addressed to the reader as opposed to the theatre-goer, it is not wanting in theatrical quality. The elaborate stage directions the extravagant setting, the crowd scenes requiring wide space and complicated machinery suggest the possible influence of spectacles which flourished in the nineteenth

century. There is no mention of any specific spectacle in Mary's diary, but one of the melodramas they saw of Isaac Pocock's, ~~and~~ Bombastes Furioso, a burlesque opera, no doubt combined elaborate stage setting with music and action. That Shelley was capable of enjoying fantastic spectacles on the stage is revealed by Mary in a letter she wrote to Peacock after Shelley's death. After she had been to see Weber's Der Freischuetz, she wrote:

"The incantation scene would have made Shelley scream with delight, flapping owls, ravens, hopping toads, queer reptiles, fiery serpents, skeleton huntsmen, burning bushes, and a chorus made up of strange concords and discords produced a fine effect in the, but for the stage, entirely darkened house." (1)

The "Uglification" scene, in Oedipus Tyrannus, with its filthy and ugly animals rushing out, the skeleton of Famine rising with a tremendous sound, the stampede of the Pigs, the skulls flying in the air, the ominous sounds, seems to have provided Shelley with a great deal of boyish fun.

The oracle is fulfilled. The Ionian Minotaur, alias John Bull, appears and gallantly offers his Taurine back to Iona. She puts on her boots and spurs, arranges her hunting cap, (Shelley observes) buckishly cocked on one side, tucks up her hair and leaps nimbly on the Minotaur's back. Followed by her loyal subjects, she chases the ugly animals with cries of "Tally ho! ho!"

The verdict of most reviewers on Swellfoot has been extremely severe. Elton found it "dismal and unreadable."<sup>2</sup> White found the setting revolting, the characters outrageous and the speeches and actions extravagant.

---

(1) New Shelley Letters. ed. by W.S. Scott p.151

(2) A Survey of English Literature 1780-1830. II, p202

Edmund Blunden, on the other hand, finds the burlesque "vigorous and resourceful", his passages "as witty and versification as entertaining as W.S. Gilbert in general gives us".

"If Shelley would forgive such a judgment, a gustier dramatic energy animated Oedipus than in found in the Cenci. Its occasion releases more of his habit of mind and knowledge of life than the loftier aimed tragedy. The wording is strong and the temptation to abstract symbols being away, we hear a master of ordinary affairs in almost every line. This is the man who had ~~he~~ been called upon to superintend agricultural properties, and the interests of country towns and village would have known what he was looking at and whether things were thriving".(1)

In his Prometheus Unbound, Shelley had concealed his ideas behind subtle metaphysical metaphors. In the Cenci he avoided "an over-fastidious" and "learned choice of words" and used the real language of refined men and women. If he employed "remote" imagery, it was to raise what was low and purify what was repulsive. In Oedipus Tyrannus Shelley avoids abstract symbols and the impassioned language of the heart. His drama was a parody of a Greek tragedy, ~~written~~ <sup>but its language</sup> in the style of Peter Bell the Third. In Oedipus Tyrannus, the language is closer to ordinary conversation than in any of his other dramatic efforts. Not even the "conversation poems" of Julian and Maddalo and Rosalind and Helen give a hint of the type of style Shelley has successfully adopted for his satirical drama. Here is yet another example of what may be described as an unShelleyan composition. The mystifying line under the title "translated from the original Doric" is entirely in character with the playful ~~line~~ <sup>tone</sup> of the Advertisement and shows that Shelley knew what he was doing. He had

---

(1) Blunden, pp.236, 238

written a broad burlesque in simple, even unrefined language, easily understood by the average reader.

Oedipus Tyrannus was published by J. Jon<sup>k</sup>stone of Cheapside, who produced it "for the author" without disclosing his identity. Only seven copies were sold; the remaining copies were surrendered by Jonstone who was threatened with an action by a loyal Alderman. It was one of the few works published in Shelley's lifetime. It has never found many readers. As Edmund Blunden has pointed out, the rumour~~h~~ that Shelley cannot make a joke has gone through the years; even the discrepancy in the date of its composition in the Oxford edition has passed by unnoticed. Oedipus Tyrannus is not a great work of art but it is an entertaining piece of work, the more remarkable ~~as~~ for coming from the same source as Prometheus Unbound.

CHAPTER VIIHellas.

"We are all Greeks. Our laws, our literature, our religion, our arts have their roots in Greece. But for Greece - Rome, the instructor, the conqueror, or the metropolis of our ancestors, would have spread no illumination with her arms, and we might still have arrived at such a stagnant and miserable state of social institution as China and Japan possess<sup>(1)</sup> writes Shelley in his Preface to Hellas. There are numerous references in his poems, essays and letters to suggest that Shelley held fast to this view throughout his life. Yet, he did not allow this view to obliterate the picture of contemporary Greece conveyed through books and reportage. He had read Thomas Hope's Anastasius "a very powerful and very entertaining novel, and a faithful picture they say of modern Greek manners"<sup>2</sup>, and admitted that history showed many instances of men "degraded by moral and political slavery to the practice of the basest vices it engenders"<sup>3</sup>. Shelley knew that important changes must be undergone before Greece could be regenerated; that before moral and spiritual regeneration is attempted political freedom must be sought. On April 1<sup>st</sup> 1821 Shelley learnt from his friend, Prince Mavro<sup>f</sup>ordato that Greece had declared ~~it~~<sup>her</sup> self free. Six months later when her fate still hung in the balance, Shelley composed Hellas.

The political back-drop against which Hellas was set is best described in Mary's own words in her Note on Hellas

"The south of Europe was in a state of great political excitement at the beginning of

(1) Hutchinson p. 442 (2) Julian X p. 308 (3) Hutchinson p. 442

the year 1821. The Spanish Revolution had been a signal to Italy: secret societies were formed; and when Naples rose to declare the Constitution, the call was responded to from Brundisium to the foot of the Alps.....  
 .... But the Holy Alliance was alive and active in those days, and few could dream of the peaceful triumph of liberty. It seemed then that the armed assertion of freedom in the South of Europe was the only hope of the liberals, as, if it prevailed, the nations of the north would imitate the example."(1)

So eager was Shelley for the swift triumph of liberty that he even abjured non-violence for the time being. When the forces of the combatants, as well as the merits of their respective causes were unequal, peaceful means of achieving liberty, he felt, were almost impossible. When he learnt that the Constitutional party at Naples had threatened to put to death all the members of their royal family if the Emperor of Austria made war on them, he described this threat as a "necessary and most just measure". It was, however, as a measure of expediency that Shelley supported the use of force on the part of the Spaniards, the Italians and finally the Greeks. He hoped that out of the turmoil in which the south of Europe found itself, a new race of liberty-conscious men would arise and revive "the golden years" which had illumined ancient Greece.

---

(1)Hutchinson p.475

Shelley describes his composition as a sort of imitation of the Persae of Aeschylus, full of lyrical drama, putting the emphasis, as it were, on the lyrical strain rather than the dramatic element. This treatment of the subject he tells us in his Preface, was governed by the historical nature of the contest he had set out to dramatise. The war between the Greeks and the Turks had barely entered its eighth month and at the time of this composition the Greeks had suffered such severe reverses that even an optimist like Shelley could not have forced a dénouement "parallel to the return of Xerxes and the desolation of the Persians" in Aeschylus' historical tragedy. Shelley, therefore, contented himself with exhibiting a series of lyric pictures, and with having wrought upon the curtain of futurity, which falls upon the unfinished scene, such figures of indistinct and visionary delineation as suggest the final triumph of the Greek cause as a portion of the cause of civilization and social improvement".<sup>(1)</sup>

There was also another obstacle to the treatment of Hellas as a historical drama with a proper plot and characters. Shelley's access to the source material was limited by the strict censorship which had been introduced both in Greece and Italy. The Italian newspapers occasionally carried some news but as Shelley points out in his Preface, an account of it, sufficiently authentic for historical material was not possible before the conclusion of the Greek war of Independence. "Common fame" was the chief source of information which Shelley used in the drama. Shelley had learned enough to convince him that "actions of the most exalted courage had been performed by the Greeks" and that even their defeats were "signalized by circumstances of heroism more glorious than victory".<sup>(2)</sup> The note of irrepressible excitement tinged with anxiety for the final outcome is unmistakable in the letter Mary wrote to Claire immediately after the outbreak of the war.

(1) Hutchinson pp 44-2 (2) Ibid p. 442.

"Greece has declared its freedom! Prince Mavrocordato has made us expect this event for some weeks past. Yesterday, he came rayonnant de joie - he had been ill for some days, but he forgot all his pains. Ipselanti, a Greek general in the service of Russia has collected together 10,000 Greeks and entered Wallachia, declaring the liberty of his country. The Morea - Epirus - Servia are in revolt. Greece will most certainly be free..... You may conceive the deep sympathy that we feel with his joy on this occasion tinged as it must be with anxiety for success made serious by the knowledge of the blood that must be shed on this occasion. What a delight it will be to visit Greece free. (1)

About this time Shelley learnt that the Russians were being bribed into espousing the Greek cause with the provinces of Moldavia and Wallachia. It was an unholy alliance. He would have preferred his country to break free from her obligations to the tyrants who ruled Austria and Russia and offer full support to Greece. But it was not to be in Shelley's life-time. There was no room for despair now that the Greek "slave" was going to cast off his yoke. Shelley's hopes rose high when he visited Byron in Ravenna. Byron had been engaged on the third Canto of <sup>Don Juan</sup> ~~Childe Harold~~. What a moment in literary history when these two English poets, united, among other things, by their love for Greece, sat under the same roof in Italy - Shelley thrilling to each word as Byron recited the famous lines:-

The mountains look on Marathon -  
 And Marathon looks on the sea  
 And musing there an hour alone,  
 I dreamed that Greece might still be free;  
 For standing on the Persian's grave,  
 I could not deem myself a slave.

(1) Mary's Letters. I p.136

It was out of these sporadic pieces of information supplied sometimes by Mavrocordato, sometimes by Byron, often gleaned from the newspapers that Shelley built his drama. As Mary said,

It is curious to remark how well he overcomes the difficulty of forming a drama out of such scant material. (1)

There is little action in Hellas but what there is has been admirably dramatised. In fact it is more dramatic than Shelley thought it was. "If recited on the Thespian waggon to an Athenian village at the Dionysiaca" it would have come in for a special mention. It is more compact, less abstruse than Prometheus Unbound and the characters in Hellas do not disintegrate like those in Prometheus.<sup>Unbound</sup> This indicates an examination of the dramatic qualities, such as there are, of Shelley's lyrical drama.

Contrary to the precedent set by Aeschylus, Shelley named his play Hellas. The title had been suggested by his friend Williams who was so proud of his contribution that he at once entered the fact in his Journal. The dramatic personae in the Greek model are all Persian and the place of action a town in Persia, Susa; the narrative recounting the heroic resistance offered by the Greeks is given by their opponents; and Aeschylus called it The Persians. Shelley set his drama in the enemy country,<sup>in</sup> Constantinople. Some of the characters are drawn from countries other than Turkey - the chorus of captive women from Greece, the plaintive slave from India and the nationless Ahas<sup>su</sup>verus possibly from a pre-Adamite age. He called his play Hellas rather <sup>than</sup> The Turks or even The Hellenes presumably from the associations the term evoked. Hellas was more than a geographical unit, more than a nation of Greek people. It was a symbol of the golden age which had suffered eclipse for nearly two thousand years and was about to return.

Aeschylus had addressed his historical play to the patriotic sentiments of the Athenians. Shelley entertained no illusions about reaching the average Greek. He aimed at the English reader and sought to move his heart to sympathy for the Greek cause. Shelley had searched for readers all his life but never before did he betray the urgency with which he urged Ollier to publish Hellas. "What little interest this poem may ever excite depends upon its immediate publication". (1)

The first edition of Hellas did not include the Prologue. The privilege of giving this unfinished fragment to the world goes to Edward Garnett who first published it in his Relics of Shelley. Garnett immediately detected the resemblance between the beginning of the Book of Job and the Prologue to Hellas. Having learnt from Mary's note on Prometheus Unbound that Shelley had never abandoned the idea of dramatising the Book of Job Garnett wondered if the Prologue were not the original sketch of that work which Shelley may have later discarded for the more dramatic but less ambitious Hellas. In presenting "the unpolished and mutilated remnant" Garnett felt confident that it would be accepted:

"as a worthy emanation of one of Shelley's sublimest moods, and a noble earnest of what he might have accomplished could he have executed his original design of founding a drama on the Book of Job". (2)

The Book of Job had inspired some of the greatest writers of the century. It is possible that Goethe had verses 6-12 of Chapter I in his mind when he composed his Prologue in Heaven for Faust. It is equally possible that Shelley had Goethe's Prologue in mind when he wrote his.

(1) Julian X, p335

(2) Garnett, Edward. Relics of Shelley. 1862 p 3

Faust had filled his thoughts in the closing years of his life. In the letter to Gisborne in which he announces the fact that he had been working on Hellas he quotes, or rather misquotes from Faust:

"I try to be what I might have been,  
but am not successful. I find that (I dare  
say I shall quote wrong)  
Den herrlichsten, den sich der Geist empfraugt  
Drängt immer freud und fremder Stoff sich an"<sup>(1)</sup>

Shelley's Prologue is distinguished for its originality rather than its resemblance to the passages in the Book of Job and Faust. Assembled before their Father's throne in the roofless senate-house are Christ, Satan and Mahomet. The Herald of Eternity presents through vivid images the present plight of Greece and turning to the sons of God appeals to them:

To speed or to prevent or to suspend,  
If, as ye dream, such power be not withheld,  
The unaccomplished destiny. Prologue 49-51

The chorus announces them as they rise to represent their cases. Christ, Satan and Mahomet are dramatic characters and not representatives of Shelley's views on religion. Shelley had <sup>no</sup> more prejudice against Islam than he had against Christianity:

"A Christian is a follower of the religion which has constantly gone by the name of Christianity, as a Mahometan is of Mahometanism..... each of these professors, ceases to belong to the sect which either word means when they set up a doctrine of their own, irreconcilable with that of either religion, except in a few instances in which common and self-evident morality coincides with its tenets.... It is then morality, virtue which they set up as the criterion of their actions, and not the exclusive doctrine

preached by the founder of any Religion - Why! your religion agrees as much with Bramah, Zoroaster, or Mahomet, as with Christ. Virtue is self-evident, consequently I act in unison with its dictates, where the doctrines of Christ do not differ from virtue there I follow them.... Surely you then follow virtue, or you equally follow Bramah and Mahomet as Christ.<sup>(1)</sup> Christ intercedes on behalf of Greece because he stands for justice, wisdom and goodness, virtues on which Plato had based his Republic :

..... By Plato's sacred light,  
Of which my spirit was a burning morrow -  
By Greece and all she cannot cease to be,  
Her quenchless words, sparks of immortal truth,  
Stars of all right..... Prologue 94-98

In his Prometheus Unbound Shelley recognised Kinship between the chained Titan and suffering Christ. In Hellas he draws a parallel between the wisdom of Christ and the "sacred light" of Plato. Satan seeks Anarchy and Tyranny since that is the only way he can maintain his sway over his portion of the empire. Christ rebukes him in words with which Ahasuerus later chides Mahmud:

Obdurate spirit!  
Thou seest but the Past in the To-come.  
Pride is thy error and thy punishment.  
Boast not thine empire, dream not thy worlds  
Are more than furnace-sparks or rainbow-drops  
Before the Power that wields and kindles them.  
True greatness asks not space, true excellence  
Lives ~~not~~ in the Spirit of all things that live,  
Which lends it to the works thou callest thine.  
Prologue 160-168

Mahomet pleads for the supremacy of Islam:

..... Haste thou and fill the waning crescent  
With beams as keen as those which pierced the shadow

(1) Julian VI p.107

Of Christian night rolled back upon the West,  
When the orient moon of Islam rode in triumph  
From Tmolus to the Acroceraunian snow. Prologue 169-173

Mahomet compares the triumph of Islam to the keen shafts of the moon and the defeat of Christians to darkness and night. Mahmud later in the drama retains the metaphor of the moon for Islam but introduces a beautiful image of a star to express the rise of Christian power. This fragment with its omission of words, lines and passages was written in the same book as the original MS of Hellas and is so blended with this in words and images as to be an integral part of it.

Shelley opens his drama with the chorus of Greek captive women.

The chorus in the Persae consists of men, selected by virtue of their rank and years to guard the royal abode. Their hearts are filled with misgivings because they have had no news of "the warriors, the flower of the Persian land" who under the banner of god-like Xerxes had set out "to cast the yoke of slavery upon Hellas". Shelley makes his first departure from his model by selecting Greek captive women to form the chorus. According to Medwin Shelley had acknowledged his debt to Calderon in the matter of the opening scene. During the late summer of 1819, about the time he wrote The Cenci Shelley had been introduced by his elderly friend Maria Gisborne, to "the flowery and starry autos" of Calderon. Together they read, Shelley with "inexpressible wonder and delight" many of his plays, which included the Principe Constante. "I have read Cisma de Inglaterra, the Cabellos de Absalom and three or four others", - he wrote to Mrs. Gisborne in a letter dated Florence No. 16. 1819, - "These pieces, inferior to those we read at least to the Principe Constante in the splendour of particular passages, are perhaps superior in their satisfying completeness". Two years later we find him writing and telling her that he has read all the autos "more than once". It is highly likely that the opening

scene in the Principe Constante with the Christian captives singing furnished the idea for the chorus in Hellas. The scene in the Spanish drama is laid in the gardens of the King of Fez by the Mediterranean sea. Zara one of the attendants, bids the Christian captives sing one of "Those songs whose air expresses Fond regrets", while Princess Phoenix dresses in her closet. A willing strain from a captive's heart, they declare, has never sprung. If they sing at all it is only to seek relief for their too bitter grief. Unwillingly they sing a few lines on the transience of all things. Unwillingly too, the Greek maidens sing to lull Mahmud to sleep. All too soon they forget the original purpose of their singing and sing to give expression to thoughts which lay close to Shelley's heart:-

Life may change, but it may fly not  
 Hope may vanish, but can die not  
 Truth be veiled, but still it burneth  
 Love repulsed, but it returneth      ll. 34-37

Although the contest described in the Principe Constante was also waged between the Christians and the Moslems, the analogy between Shelley's lyrical Drama and Calderon's tragedy must end here. The passions which st<sup>ir</sup>red the Portuguese and the Moors into violent action had their origin in the greater glory of their respective religions and not, as with the Greeks, in the ideal of liberty.

The chorus in the Persae, which has little in common with the chorus in Hellas, makes a substantial contribution to the conduct of the plot. In the expository scene when the elder men occupy the stage they give a resumé of the invasion of Greece by the Persians. Their description of the notable warriors and their equipment, the preparation laid out for the attack on land and sea are epic in quality. In the dialogue between Atossa and the chorus such is the nature of the questions put by Atossa that they emphasise the heroism of the Greeks. The tremendous impact of such a scene upon an audience, which numbered among them Athenians

who, like Aeschylus himself, had participated in some of the battles can never be overestimated. The tragic plight of the Persians and the triumph of the Greeks attain full significance in the final scene between the chorus and Xerxes who returns from the battlefield, unattended, his clothes torn and his body covered in mud. The Greek captives enter into conversation with no one. They have no facts to give, no questions to answer, no warriors to enumerate, no retinues to describe. They express emotions, feelings and moods according to the situation in which they are placed. Their language is musical and their rhythm varied. There is little concrete imagery in their speech; there is a great deal which is cosmic in quality. When they relate the history of Liberty they give its cosmic history beginning from chaos until its re-birth in ~~the~~ nineteenth century Greece. When they lament its absence darkness descends not only on Greece but <sup>on</sup> the whole world. The Universe is the backdrop against which the chorus of Greek women move and sing.

The theme of their song is liberty but they sing many variations on it. They hymn the dawn of liberty in Ancient Greece, lament its temporary eclipse by the clouds of Christianity and Islam, assert the immortality of thought against the transience of all objects, plead for love and tolerance, bemoan the fate of Greece and finally sing a song of victory.

Hellas was not written with the regular stage in mind but the opening scene suggests that Shelley was not indifferent to its visual appeal. He had revealed this tendency in Prometheus Unbound and Oedipus Tyrannus, neither of which was intended for the theatre. Aeschylus merely followed a convention when he introduced the chorus and gradually moved them to take their position on the steps of the temple so that the centre of the stage is left for Atossa. Shelley

opens the scene with the principal character asleep on his couch. The eastern despot lies in his seraglio surrounded by beautiful slaves of all colours and descriptions singing the story of liberty's birth. The semichorus concludes with the assertion that the fates of Greece and Liberty<sup>are</sup> so inextricably interwoven that no amount of outside pressure will put them assunder. The Indian maid, the only willing one, chides the Greek maids for waking Mahmud.

Mahmud wakes..... It is not the music of their voices which disturbs him. It is the nightmare which has haunted him three times. The dramatic opening of his speech reveals his fears:

Man the seraglio - guard! make fast the gate!  
 What! from a cannonade of three short hours?  
 'Tis false! that breach towards the Bosphorus  
 Cannot be practicable yet - who stirs?  
 Stand to the match; that when the foe prevails  
 One spark may mix in reconciling ruin  
 The conqueror and the conquered. Heave the tower  
 Into the gap - wrench off the roof! 117-121

Hassan's entry brings Mahmud back to reality:- Ha! What!

The truth of day lightens upon my dream  
 And I am Mahmud still. 121-123

Mahmud tells Hassan about his gloomy vision and like Atossa seeks an interpreter:

Thou didst say thou knewest  
 A Jew, whose spirit is a chronicle  
 Of strange and secret and forgotten things.  
 I bade thee summon him; 'tis said his tribe  
 Dream, and are wise interpreters of dreams.

Hassan describes the virtues of this Jew who has attained knowledge and wisdom through abstinence and meditation.

He cannot be summoned at will. The sage must be willing to be summoned. Hellas, as Shelley in his numerous references

said, is a lyrical drama. It was composed at a time when Shelley had fallen under the magic spell of Calderon. The Spanish poet in his dramas often introduced long lyrical effusions, beautiful no doubt, before he came to the point. Shelley also intersperses his dramatic dialogues with lyrical passages not only for their beauty but also for their symbolic value. The significance of the metaphors like the cave, the ocean, the isle have been treated with penetrating insight by several scholars including Neville Rogers. All the three appear in the vividly imagined description of the cavern by the sea where the sage-seer dwells:

Thence at the hour and place and circumstance  
Fit for the matter of their conference  
The Jew appears. 182-184

Hassan is interrupted by a shout from within. Mahmud would ~~for~~ converse with spirits, but he cannot ignore the drunken crew with whose aid he expects to crush the Greeks. His mood changes from thoughts of communion with higher beings to a violent desire to silence the mutineers and finally to a longing for peace:

When the omnipotent hour to which are yoked  
He, I, and <sup>all</sup> things shall compel - enough!  
Silence those mutineers - that drunken crew,  
That crowd about the pilot in the storm,  
Ay! strike the foremost shorter by a head!  
They weary me, and I have need of rest,  
Kings are like stars - they rise and set, they have  
The worship of the world, but no repose. 189-196

The change of scene is indicated by the chorus who contrast the immortality of the living and thinking beings which inhabit the planets with the transience of the noblest manifestations of the external world. They dwell on the perversion of the teachings of Christ, as the Furies had done in Prometheus Unbound, even describe him as a Promethean conqueror. Finally they prophesy the extinction of the

Turkish tyranny and wait for the return of the golden years.

In the following scene Mahmud enters as in conversation with Hassan, Daood and others. He appears as a ruthless general determined to adopt the most violent means to quell the mutineers. Shelley makes use of one of the few facts he had learnt about the Greek resistance in Mahmud's reference to the patriarch who "after having been compelled to fulminate an anathema against the insurgents was put to death by the Turks". Mahmud is bitter and sardonic in his references to the Jan<sup>2</sup>ar<sup>3</sup> for whom he feels nothing but contempt and curses the hour - how different from Mahomet in the Prologue -

When the orient moon of Islam rolled in Triumph  
From Caucasus to white Ceraunia! 266-267

He entertains no illusion about the disintegration which has set in among the followers of Islam. They have very nearly achieved what Satan had wished for all the inhabitants of this planet:

Ruin above, and Anarchy below;  
Terror without and treachery within;  
The Chalice of destruction full, and all  
Thirsting to drink; and who amongst us dares  
To dash it from his lips? and where is Hope?

Mahmud wakes from a nightmare, and Hassan offers to bring the sage Ahasuerus; Mahmud plunges into gloom, and Hassan attempts to revive his spirits. He compares the strength and numbers of the Moslem hosts from "the limits of utmost Asia" united under the crescent with the small band of Greek insurgents who had not yet succeeded in rallying round them the mighty forces of Austria, Russia and England, although they professed to follow the Cross. Hassan concludes the epic manner of his speech with the reminder they are still united. Mahmud sees further into things than Hassan. The dramatic contrast between the "crescent moon" and "one star" <sup>shows</sup> how different his assessment of the situation has been. †

Look Hassan, on yon~~n~~ crescent moon, emblazoned  
 Upon that shattered flag of fiery cloud  
 Which leads the rear of the departing day;  
 Wan emblem of an empire fading now!  
 See how it trembles in the blood-red~~h~~air,  
 And like a mighty lamp whose oil is spent  
 Shrinks on the horizon's edge, while, from above,  
 One star with insolent and victorious light  
 Hovers above its fall, and with keen beams,  
 Like arrows through a fainting antelope,  
 Strikes its weak form to death. 336-347.

Aeschylus had one supreme advantage over Shelley. The events in his drama had already taken place, and all he had to do was to find a suitable character to describe them. Shelley knew of one episode only which, although it had concluded <sup>in</sup> ~~in~~ victory for the Moslems, told such tales of courage and sacrifice as to recall Thermopylae. Mahmud had known that this battle of Bucharest had ended in triumph for him, but he was avid for a full account. Hassan's graphic description of the battle recalls the long speech in Calderon's The Constant Prince in which Maley, General to the King of Fez, describes the Portuguese Armada overtaken by a fierce tempest. This long lyrical passage as it appears in McCarthy's translation runs into two hundred and fourteen lines. Hassan's speech is occasionally interrupted by Mahmud who listens with absorbed attention to his account of the dying Greek who rose as if "out of the chaos of the slain" to address his foes. The Greeks' last words are significantly reminiscent of Christ's words in the Prologue:

'.....but ere the die be thrown  
 The renovated genius of our race,  
 Proud umpire of the impious game, descends,  
 A seraph-winged Victory, bestriding  
 The tempest of the Omnipotence <sup>of</sup> God  
 Which sweeps all things to their appointed doom,  
 And you to oblivion!' 445-451

Hassan has been so carried away by the recollection of the impact of the dying patriots that for the moment it is not clear where his sympathies are. Hassan may be a Turk but he is not insensitive to acts of heroism. Mahmud rebukes him, although he himself has remained silent during the speech. The Greeks, having vindicated themselves on land, have dealt in the same measure at sea. The contrast between the two navies brought out by Mahmud heightens the effect of their heroic resistance:

Our winged castles from their merchant ships!  
 Our myriads before their weak pirate bands!  
 Our arms before their chains! our years of empire  
 Before their centuries of servile fear!      462-465

The dialogue between the two, Mahmud and Hassan grows more like a narrator's speech assisted by a prompter as Mahmud introduces his pieces of information. In Hassan's speech of fifty lines Shelley reveals an aspect of his poetic personality not fully known until now. As a poet of naval warfare he excels himself:

First through the hail of our artillery  
 The agile Hydriote barks with press of sail,  
 Dashed:- ship to ship, cannon to cannon, man  
 To man were grappled in the embrace of war,  
 Inextricable but by death or victory.  
 The tempest of the raging fight convulsed  
 To its crystalline depths that stainless sea,  
 And shook Heaven's roof of golden morning clouds  
 Poised on an hundred azure mountain-isles. 484-492

Hassan concludes with the account of their reverses when Mahmud orders him to cease.

The drama gathers movement and tension as four messengers come one after another bringing news of fresh disasters on land and sea. The narrative is broken and action suspended as an attendant enters and announces the arrival of the Jew. The chorus breaks in. In this interval

between the timely arrival of Ahasuerus in the Palace and his appearance on the stage the chorus gives utterance to thoughts which are reiterated by the Jew in the following scene.

The metaphysical idea implicit in a great many poems of Shelley is made explicit in some of the lyrics and in the speeches of Ahasuerus the Jew. The Wandering Jew is an old friend of Shelley's. Shelley had formed a slight acquaintance with him in Lewis' The Monk. About the same time he picked up somewhere near Lincoln's Inn a loose sheet from a magazine, containing a translation of Schubart's German poem. The poem made such a powerful impression on Shelley's mind that he went to the Bodleian in an effort to collect more information about the poem. He immediately wrote a poem of his own The Wandering Jew and followed it up with The Wandering Jew's Soliloquy. Ahasuerus first appealed to Shelley because of his intense suffering, his eternal life. A kindred spirit who hated the author of his suffering as much as Shelley did then, the Wandering Jew appears as a character in Shelley's first long poem Queen Mab and a part of Schubart's translation is quoted in the notes. There is a passing reference to him in Alastor. He appears in The Assassins as a benevolent person. In his last appearance in Hellas Ahasuerus loses his original symbolic force, which had been absorbed by Shelley's various heroes, the most important being Prometheus, and becomes a type of wisdom achieved by means of meditation and asceticism.

In Aeschylus' drama Atossa, disturbed by the vision of two maidens, one Persian and the other Greek, yoked by Xerxes to his chariot, which results in his overthrow, summoned the ghost of her dead husband. Darius appeared and explained to her the cause and nature of her dream. In Shelley's drama Mahmud, who fills the stage in much the same way as Atossa, seeks the counsel of the sage to "unveil" the "unborn hour". Mahmud, when confronted with Ahasuerus, sheds off some of his imperious manner and approaches him

with the attitude of seeker before a divine. He would ~~faign~~ be what the philosopher is:

I honour thee, and would be what thou art

Were I not what I am;..... 751-752

Aware of his insignificance before his honoured guest, Mahmud fears he is despised. But Ahasuerus despises no one. He has grown wise and humble with years. He has acquired power over the minds of men, but he chooses not to exploit it. Mahmud on the other hand has inherited a miserable little empire to which he clings with all his might. Mahmud is obsessed with the "unborn hour". Ahasuerus' only concern is with eternity. Like Hamlet he surveys this magnificent firmament, and like Prospero he views it as a vision or, like Calderon, he sees it as the figment of a dream:

Earth and Ocean,  
Space, and the isles of life or light that gem  
The sapphire floods of interstellar air,  
This firmament pavilioned upon chaos,  
With all its cressets of immortal fire,  
Whose outwall, bastioned impregnably  
Against the escape of boldest thoughts repels them  
As Calpe the Atlantic clouds - this Whole  
Of suns, and worlds, and men, and beasts, and flowers,  
With all the silent or tempestuous workings  
By which they have been, are, cease to be,  
Is but a vision; - all that it inherits  
Are notes of a sick eye, bubbles and dreams;  
Thought is its cradle and its grave, nor less  
The Future and the Past are idle shadows  
Of thought's eternal flight - they have no being;  
Nought is but that which feels itself to be. 769-785

Mahmud is bewildered by these words. He wants to understand and receives a partial revelation through an excited vision of the sack of Constantinople. ~~as~~ Shelley employs almost the same technique as he had when Prometheus was given a vision of a plain covered with burning cities after the Furies had lifted the veil. Mahmud hears a whisper which is succeeded

by the sound as of the assault of an imperial city <sup>which</sup> ~~is~~,  
growing more tumultuous with the "hiss" of fire, the  
"roar" of cannons, the "earthquaking" fall of bastions  
and towers, the "shock" of crags, the "clash" of wheels,  
the "clang" of hoofs, the "crash" of mails, the "mad blasts"  
of trumpets, the "neigh" of horses, the "shrieks" of women,  
and, contrasting horribly with these, one sweet laugh.

The sulphur<sup>u</sup> mist is raised and Mahmud recognises  
the founder of the Turkish Empire leading his men to  
victory. But it all belongs to the past. Everything,  
palaces and towers, cities and empires, Ahasuerus points  
out, are subject to the inexorable law of mutability:

Inheritor of glory,  
Conceived in darkness, born in blood, and nourished  
With tears and toil, thou seest the mortal throes  
Of that whose birth was but the same. ll 849-852.

The Jew leaves Mahmud to commune with the spirit of his  
ancestor.

Mahmud's vision has been extended beyond the immediate  
past but it is still bound by time and consequently when  
he hears the Phantom prophesy the fall of Islam he breaks  
out in despair:

Spirit woe to all!  
Woe to the wronged and the avenger! Woe  
To the destroyer, woe to the destroyed!  
Woe to the dupe, and woe to the deceiver!  
Woe to the oppressed, and woe to the oppressor!  
Woe both to those that suffer and inflict:  
Those who are born and those who die! ll 893-899.

Mahmud's despair is the result of his partial realization  
that the end of Islam is near, that he and his men are  
"tangled in the grasp of its last spasms". But he has  
not become entirely reconciled to the idea of its extinction  
and would still like to know:

When, how, by whom, Destruction must accomplish  
Her consummation. ll 901-902.

The Phantom had found him slow of understanding but not senile when he prophesied the fall of Islam. But Mahmud's preoccupation with the immediate future, inevitable, irreversible as it seems, causes the Phantom to lose his patience with him:

fond wretch!

He leans upon his crutch, and talks of years  
To come, and how in hours of youth renewed

He will renew lost joys and — . . . 909-912

Suddenly and most unexpectedly shouts of "victory! victory!" are heard.

That is how the slaves interpret the disasters which have overtaken the Greeks. Mahmud, seeing further, views their success as something temporary:

Weak lightning before darkness! poor faint smile  
Of dying Islam! Voice which art the response  
Of hollow weakness! 915-917

Mahmud's vision, though extended beyond that of the common people, is limited by *in* comparison with that of Ahasuerus, who can endure the extension of his cosmic vision, and his imperfect understanding leads to despair. Like Satan he tends to <sup>see</sup> but the Past in the ~~Future~~ To-come:

Come what may,  
The Future must become the Past and I  
As they were to whom once this present hour,  
This gloomy crag of time to which I cling,  
Seemed an Elysian isle of peace and joy  
Never to be attained - I must rebuke  
This drunkenness of triumph ere it die,  
And dying, bring despair. Victory! poor slaves! 923-930

Mahmud is a despot, but a despot endowed with a certain amount of self-awareness which isolates him from the people he governs. His meeting with the Jew and his communion with the Phantom have expanded his vision and enlarged his understanding. In his last moments on the stage he appears a human and not entirely unsympathetic character.

The final scene shows the chorus in a lyrical conflict

with the "voices without". "They pass step by step through acknowledgment of Victorious wrong, conditional lamentation for liberty, a desire for escape to the west, a reaffirmation of a distant hope, <sup>to</sup> and the final verse when, perhaps exhausted by the spiritual effort and the cyclic vision they are invoking, they sink back into a cry for rest". (1)

1

(1) ~~J. M. S. Tompkins~~ indebted to Dr. J. M. S. Tompkins

CHAPTER VIII

Charles the First.

Shelley was engaged upon his lyrical drama Hellas, when he showed determined signs of returning to the writing of stage drama. It was two years since he had written The Cenci. The tragedy was censured on account of the subject being too "horrible", but its dramatic merits were not overlooked. Mr. Harris of Covent Garden rejected it and at the same time indicated that if Shelley wrote a tragedy on another subject he would accept it. Shelley was aware of it when he wrote in his Preface to Hellas:

"The only goat-song which I have yet attempted, has, I confess, in spite of the unfavourable nature of the subject received a greater and more valuable portion of applause than I expected or than it deserved."<sup>(1)</sup>

The winter of 1821-22 found at least three members of the Pisan circle engaged in dramatic writing. Byron completed his Heaven and Earth in the second week of December and started work on Werner, based on Lee's German Tale. Williams, undaunted by the rejection of A Promise, set out to collect material for his tragedy on an Italian theme. Shelley returned to the subject of Charles I, which had filled his thoughts from time to time since he first exhorted Mary to write a tragedy on the unhappy monarch in 1818.

Shelley was very ambitious for his tragedy, and conscious of it, too. It is obvious that the attempt caused him severe pain, and perhaps that is why, during the period from its conception in September 1821 and last reference to it in June 1822, Shelley allowed himself to be side-tracked by other projects. In his entry for December 30, 1821 Williams writes:-

"Shelley is thinking of a tragedy to be founded

---

(1) Hutchinson, p.442.

on the story of Timon of Athens but adapted to modern times. An admirable theme for him". (1)

It is strange that Mary should have remained silent about this project of her husband's. Shelley apparently had given more than a cursory thought to it and even jotted down two lines in one of his note-books.

Modern Timon

1st Act.

deserted by his mistress<sup>ress</sup> his sensations - his friend his plans of happiness. (2)

No more was heard about this tragedy. ~~(1)~~ Instead of adapting a Greek theme to his own times Shelley turned to English history and, on January 3, 1822, started work on Charles the First. He had barely written a few scenes when he was distracted by another composition written solely for the amusement of his friends.

The inspiration for his Unfinished Drama most probably came from Trelawny. The Shelleys and the Williams<sup>es</sup> had enjoyed his many anecdotes from his adventurous life and often talked about a play of his singular life and a plot to give it the air of romance. (3) Shelley's fragment, Mary writes in her Note - concerns,

An enchantress, living in one of the islands of the Indian Archipelago (who) saves the life of a Pirate, a man of savage but noble nature. She becomes enamoured of him; and he, inconstant to his mortal love for a while returns her passion but at length recalling the memory of her whom he left, and who laments his loss, he escapes from the Enchanted Island, and returns to his lady... A good Spirit, who watches over the Pirate's fate, leads, in a mysterious manner, the lady of his love to the Enchanted Isle. She is accompanied by a youth, who loves the lady, but whose passion she returns only with

(1) ~~Note Books~~ Williams p.121. (2) Note Books p 126  
(3) Williams, p.142.

a sisterly affection". (i)

The scene Shelley presents, takes place between the lady, who is probably Jane in disguise, and the youth, a mixture of Trelawny and Shelley himself. The fragment has caught some of the magic atmosphere of the Witch of Atlas and the sentimentality of A Sensitive Plant. The characters are sketchy, and the plot of what has survived, slight. Shelley had neither the <sup>general</sup> readers nor the theatre-going public in mind when he wrote it. It is interesting none the less, to see Shelley selecting the dramatic form, however inadequate, to introduce characters who vaguely resembled individuals he knew so well in Pisa.

The drama which really claimed his time and taxed his mental powers was Charles the First. Shelley started with high hopes and expected to finish it in the summer of that year:

"I am at present writing the drama of Charles the 1st, a play which, if completed according to my present idea will hold a higher rank than the Cenci as a work of art"! (2)

Trelawny records that Shelley chose from among Shakespeare's dramas, King Lear as his model and as a standard by which to measure his achievement. This would perhaps explain why Shelley looked upon Charles the First as the most daring composition he had yet undertaken. Shelley, had not entirely overcome his inhibitions as a writer, of tragedies. The same diffidence, the same misgivings, the same seeking after justification for undertaking a form of writing believed to be alien to his temperament, emerge from his numerous references to the project in his correspondence. He is equally emphatic about the exclusion of partisan views which had characterised some of his non-dramatic compositions:

"The historical tragedy of Charles 1st will be ready by the Spring.....I ought to say the tragedy promises to be good, as tragedies go; and that it is not coloured by the party spirit

(i) Hutchinson pp. 477-478.

(2) Julian X p. 349

of the author. How far it may be popular  
I cannot judge. (1)

When Shelley sent his tragedy The Cenci to Peacock he attached a copy of the Relations of the Death of the Family of the Cenci, for the reader to see that, except where the dramatic propriety required it, he had adhered closely to the original. When he returned to Charles the First he showed the same concern for facts and details, and consulted several books on the history of the Commonwealth. In spite of his avowed distaste for history, Shelley had read at least four different authors on the subject. Hume is mentioned by Medwin. Mary's entry for 9<sup>th</sup> October 1819 records "Shelley reads Clarendon aloud". Her reading list for 1816 includes Clarendon's four volumes. Mrs. Macaulay's History of England is contained in the reading list of 1820. Whitelock's "Memorials of the English Affairs from the beginning of the Reign of Charles the First to the Happy Restoration of Charles the Second" was one of the books recommended to Mary by Godwin when he proposed that she should write a book on the Commonwealth. Peck mentions another book, not recorded in Mary's reading list. Shelley's notes in his copy of Reliquiæ Sacrae Carolinae show with what thoroughness he studied the character of Charles I. (2)

Charles the First, as Kenneth Cameron has illustrated in his erudite article, offers unusual opportunities for studying Shelley's method of using source material. (3) His debt to Whitelock is revealed in his description of the mask in which Shelley often retains the original wording. Whitelock's account is as follows:-

"Then came the first chariot of the grand maskers, which was not so large as those which went before, but most curiously framed, carved, and painted with exquisite art, and purposely for the service and occasion. The form of it was after that of the Roman triumphal chariots and as near

(1) <sup>Julian X p344.</sup> Cameron. ~~Ibid quoted on p. 199~~ (2) Peck. pp 361-364

(3) Cameron, M.L.Q v. VI pp 197-210

as could be gathered, by some old prints and pictures of them. The seats in it were made of an oval form in the back end of the chariot so that there was no precedence in them and the faces of all that sat in it might be seen together. The colours of the first chariot were silver and crimson, given by the lot to Gray's Inn, as I remember; the chariot was all painted richly with these colours, even the wheels of it, most artificially laid on, and the carved work of it was as curious for that art, and it made a stately show. It was drawn with four horses abreast, and they were covered to their heels all over with cloth of tissue, of the colours of crimson and silver, huge plumes of red and white feathers on their heads and buttocks; the coachman's cap and feather, his long coat, and his whip and cushion, of the same stuff; and living sounding before them, so the first antimask being of cripples and beggars on horseback had their music of keys and tongs, and the like, snapping and yet playing in a consort before them. These beggars were also mounted, but on the poorest leanest jades that could be gotten out of the dirt-carts or elsewhere; and the variety and change from such noble music and gallant horses as went before them, unto their proper music and pitiful horses, made both of them the more pleasing." (1)

This is the stuff out of which Shelley drew the following pageant, giving a twist to the description of the beggars:

How glorious! see those thronging chariots  
 Rolling, like painted clouds before the wind,  
 Behind their solemn steeds; how some are shaped  
 Like curved sea-shells dyed by the azure depths  
 Of Indian seas; some like the new-born moon;

(1) Cameron, *ibid.* p. 199.

And some like cars in which the Romans climbed  
 (Canopied by Victory's eagle-wings~~s~~ outspread)  
 The Capitolian - See how gloriously  
 The mettled horses in the torch~~s~~ <sup>light</sup> ~~light~~ <sup>stir</sup>  
 Their gallant riders, while they check their pride,  
 Like shapes of some diviner element  
 Than English air, and beings nobler than  
 The envious and admiring multitude. 137-149

.....  
 A troop of cripples, beggars and lean outcasts,  
 Horsed upon stumbling jades, carted with dung,  
 Dragged for a day from cellars and low cabins  
 And rotten hiding-holes, to point the moral  
 Of this presentment and bring up the rear  
 Of painted pomp with misery!! 169-174

Cameron suggests that for his interpretation of some of the principal characters Shelley leaned in Mrs. Macaulay's direction. Catherine Macaulay had a pro-Commonwealth and anti-Royalist bias akin to Shelley's own. Clarendon was a Royalist and Hume a sceptic. It is to Shelley's credit that he did not accept the King as an absolute tyrant and allowed Clarendon and Hume to temper his judgment. Charles, an uxorious husband, is a little softhearted in Shelley's play (Scene ii, 353-357). The Queen, who praises French absolutism (scene ii, 14-25), urges despotic rule in England (scene ii, 114-34) and subtly moves Charles towards Catholicism, appears uniformly in all the sources. On Laud and Strafford Shelley wastes no more sympathy than did Catherine Macaulay. The situation in which Archy indulges his wit at the expense of Laud came from both Mrs. Macaulay and Hume who in turn got it from Rushworth. (1) From

(1) Cameron. Ibid p.205

Clarendon came hints for St. John and Cottington. These instances selected from Cameron's article throw light on the care Shelley bestowed upon this fragment and emphasise his ability to impose order on such a bewildering mass of material.

The opening scene is the key to the conflict revealed at once by the dramatic contrast of royal splendour with the Puritans' resentment of pomp and show. The masque, with its tremendous visual appeal, its splendour and movement gives evidence of an eye for theatrical effectiveness. Shelley had achieved some of these effects in his other dramatic compositions, including those written for the stage of the mind, but there is nothing in them so concrete and sensuous as the description of the masque. Always competent at handling expository scenes, he does even better in Charles the First. In one respect at least he has advanced since The Cenci. He shows increased skill in individualisation of many of the minor characters. His citizens are carefully distinguished; the first of these is moderate in his views; the second uncompromising in his hatred. The third citizen chimes in with the second, while the youth is overwhelmed by the beauty of the pageant.

First Citizen:

What thinkest thou of this quaint masque which turns,  
Like morning from the shadow of the night,  
The night to day, and London to a place  
Of peace and joy?

Second Citizen:

And Hell to Heaven

Eight years are gone,  
And they seem hours, since in this populous street  
I trod on grass made green by summer's rain,

For the red plague kept state within that palace  
 Where now that vanity reigns. In nine years sure  
 The roots will be refreshed with civil blood;  
 And thank the mercy of insulted Heaven  
 That sin and wrongs wound, as an orphans cry,  
 The patience of the great Avenger's ear.

A Youth: Yet, father, 'tis a happy sight to see,  
 Beautiful, innocent, and unforbidden  
 By God or man; - 'tis like the bright procession  
 Of skiey visions in a solemn dream  
 From which men wake as from a Paradise,  
 And draw new strength to tread the thorns of life  
 If God be good, wherefore should this be evil?  
 And if this be not evil, dost thou not draw  
 Unseasonable poison from the flowers  
 Which bloom so rarely in this barren world?  
 Oh, kill these bitter thoughts which make the present  
 Dark as the future! Scene, 12-25

The second scene, laid in Whitehall, introduces some of the principal characters, who are made to reveal something of themselves. Charles is weak and wilful and yet there is nobility and grace about him. The Queen is more clear-sighted and autocratic than her husband and, like Lady Macbeth, ambitious for the king. The third citizen had called her the Canan<sup>a</sup>itish Jezebel but in her scene with her husband she reveals a genuine love for her family. Strafford, thoroughgoing in his hatred of the people, is unswerving in his loyalty to the Monarch. Laud with every word that he utters reveals his bigotry and his lust for "blood and gold". Shelley has introduced what for him would be a bold step, Archy the fool. Some critics have been reminded of the fool

in King Lear, others have detected a family resemblance to the fool in Calderon's Cisma de Inglaterra. Shelley's fool, although conversant with Plato is not as witty as Shakespeare's. Besides, there is none of that deep human bond between Charles I and Archy which existed between Lear and his wise jester. Shelley commits a typical Elizabethan anachronism by making the fool crack a joke at Southey's expense. He offers Shelley the first opportunity to introduce prose in a dramatic composition.

In this scene with the King and his Counsellors the audience is made familiar with the nature of the conflict and the attitude of each side. The forces that are to work on the King's weakness and produce his ruin are made evident. These are the arrogance and ambitions of Henrietta, the single-minded fanaticism of Laud and the absolute intolerance of Strafford.

Charles obviously is not the embodiment of absolute tyranny that some of Shelley's critics have been led to believe. He has the misfortune to be surrounded by men and at least one woman who are strong-minded and unscrupulous. When he shows signs of weakening over the question of Parliament Henrietta rebukes and taunts him and finally appeals to his love for her:

Queen:

To a parliament?

Is this thy firmness? and thou wilt preside  
Over a knot of censors,

To the unswearing of thy best resolves,

And choose the worst, when the worst comes too soon?

Plight not the worst before the worst must come.

Oh, wilt thou smile whilst our ribald foes,

Dressed in their own usurped authority,

Sharpen their tongues on Henrietta's fame?

It is enough! Thou lovest me no more!

King. Oh, Henrietta!

Scene ii, 318-328

While the King takes her apart and placates her Cottington raises the question of money required to meet Strafford's "expedient" schemes.

Laud.

Without Delay

An army must be sent into the north;  
 Followed by a commission of the Church,  
 With amplest power to quench in fire and blood,  
 And tears and terror, and the pity of hell,  
 The intenser wrath of heresy. God will give  
 Victory; and Victory over Scotland give  
 The lion England tamed into our hands.  
 That will lend power, and power bring gold. Scene ii,  
 330-338

Laud is not afraid to call a Parliament and he gives the reason

..... If they serve no purpose,  
 A word dissolves them. 345-346

Charles would avoid resorting to wanton violence:

Oh, be our feet still tardy to shed blood,  
 Guilty though it may be! I would still spare  
 The stubborn country of my birth, and ward  
 From countenances which I loved in youth  
 The wrathful Church's lacerating hand. 353-357

Archy returns in time to warn the King in his inimitable manner of the dangers of signing a warrant for detention of Hazlerig, Hampden, Pym, Harry Vane, Cromwell and others of less note. But the King pays no heed to his counsel.

- Archy. If your Majesty were tormented night and day by fever, gout, rheumatism and stone and asthma, etc. and you found these diseases had secretly entered into a conspiracy to abandon you should you think it necessary to lay an embargo on the port by which they meant to dispeople your unquiet kingdom of man? Scene ii, 372-383
- King. If fear were made for kings, the Fool mocks wisely; But in this case - ..... 384-385

The King has all but forgotten the fool's words; he signs the warrant and bids Cottington to issue it forthwith. The Queen understands the Fool better. She has observed a change in his manner and mode of speech. "Archy is shrewd and bitter" - the comment reflects on the Queen's powers of observation. Shelley's fool speaks in a loftier strain than the jesters generally in the Elizabethan dramas do. It would be rash to pass a final judgment on Archy after meeting him three times. If in his first attempt at blending comedy with tragedy Shelley fails to attain the Shakespearean standards he had set for himself no critic will pass a harsh judgment upon him. It is interesting to observe what value he put on introducing the comic element in a tragic composition.

The modern practice of blending comedy with tragedy, though liable to great abuse in point of practice, is undoubtedly an extension of the dramatic circle; but the comedy should be as in King Lear, universal, ideal and sublime. (1)

---

(1) Julian iii. p.120

The second scene ends on a domestic note with Henrietta talking about the Italian airs and Correggio's paintings which Shelley himself had appreciated so much.

The third scene was not completed. The trial scene in the Star Chamber shows the author of The Cenci handling the characters and their speech with consummate skill. Bastwick before his execution is given his last opportunity to speak:

Laud:

Prisoner,

If you have aught to say wherefore this sentence  
Should not be put into effect, now speak.

Junon. If you have aught to plead in mitigation, Speak.

Bastwick. Thus my lords. If, like the prelates, I  
were an invader of the royal power,  
A public scorner of the word of God,  
Profane, idolatrous, popish, superstitious,  
Impervious in heart and tyrannic act,  
Void of wit, honesty, and temperance;  
If Satan were my lord, as theirs, - our God  
Pattern of all I should avoid to do;  
Were I an enemy of my God and King  
And of good men, as ye are; I should merit  
Your fearful state and gilt prosperity.  
Which, when we wake from the last sleep, shall turn  
To cowls and robes of everlasting fire.  
But, as I am, I bid ye grudge me not  
The only earthly favours ye can yield,  
Or I think worth acceptance at your hands -  
Scorn, mutilation, and imprisonment  
even as my Master did,

Until Heaven's kingdom shall descend on earth,  
 Or earth be like a shadow in the light  
 Of Heaven absorbed - some few tumultuous years  
 Will pass, and leave no wreck of what opposes  
 His will whose will is power.                      Scene<sup>iii</sup> 7 - 32

The speech is so much more effective for the restraint and dignity with which it is uttered. These are not the words of a rebel denouncing his King and clergy in vituperative language but the impassioned utterance of one who willingly lays down his life for God and his country.

The fourth scene shows the "rebels" about to make their departure. Hampden's speech on Liberty and England is almost Wordsworthian in quality. Shelley in this drama betrays a tendency towards lyricism which had been absent from The Cenci. This is not caused by his inability to write dramatic speech. At this stage in his dramatic career it would be superfluous to repeat instances of his talent for dramatic speech. The lyrical quality of Charles the First is most probably the result of intensive reading of Calderon whose dramas Shelley had read with such delight. The final scene in the fragment shows Archy singing a song of "A widow bird", perhaps the same which in the Fragments of An Unfinished Drama;

Hid in the deepest night of ivy-leaves  
 Renewed the vigils of a sleepless sorrow.      73-74

Shelley's note, edited by Buxton Forman, shows that he had planned the drama beyond the point where he ceased writing. The plan for the second act reproduced from the edited Note-books is as follows:-

" Act 2nd scene 1.

Chiefs of the Popular Party, Hampden's trial and its effects -  
Reasons of Hampden and his colleagues for resistance - young  
Sir H. Vane's reasons; the first rational and logical, the  
second impetuous and enthusiastic.

Reasonings on Hampden's trial p.222

The King zealous for the Church inheriting this  
disposition from his father.

This act to open between the two Scotch Wars.

Easter Day 1635

The Reading of the liturgy

Lord Traquai

The Covenant

The determined resistance against Charles and  
the liturgy -

Worse than the worst is indecision.

Mary de Medici the Queen came to England in 1638.

It was observed that the sword and pestilence followed  
her wherever she went and that her restless spirit embroiled  
everything she approached.

. . . . .

The King annulled at York

Many unlawful grants etc. in wh (...

Act 2

After the first Scottish War ( - "

Buxton Forman informs us that at the bottom of the page  
are the important words boldly pencilled:

" The End - Strafford's Death " (1)

(1) Note Books III, pp.103-105

On the evidence of these notes White concludes that Shelley had nearly finished his first act without having planned in advance more than one scene of the next. It is likely, he continues, that Shelley encountered serious difficulties in handling the plot and therefore abandoned the idea of completing the tragedy. And yet White admits that twenty days between his death and admission that he had ceased work is not sufficient lapse of time to show that he had abandoned it. (1) It is more likely than not that Shelley would have continued with the drama if he had returned to the white-washed house on San Terenzo where he had moved three months earlier. There are, however, some critics who, ignoring Shelley's plea that Charles the First was not coloured by any of his views, political, philosophical or religious, yield to their accustomed prejudices based on his youthful compositions. Wright explains the "failure" of the tragedy in terms of Shelley's partisan views. In Charles the First, writes Wright, Shelley saw the "possibilities for creating a tragedy, teaching an idea and appealing to a reviving interest in the history of England" and then realised that "once in his poetic career he had tried a dramatic form demanding characterization rather than a shadowy personification." (2) The only advice one can offer to such critics is <sup>to</sup> read Shelley's dramatic compositions from his fragment on Tasso to his unfinished Charles the First and preferably his Essay on Christianity, A Philosophical View of Reform and A Defence of Poetry and sift from these the shadowy personifications Shelley tried to pass off for flesh and blood characters.

---

(1) White, N.I., Shelley's Charles I, *Journal of English and German Philology*, vol XXI,

(2) Wright W.F. Shelley's Failure in Charles I. E.L. H VIII p.43.

### Conclusion

" On the 8th of July I finished my journal. This is a curious coincidence. The date still remains - the fatal 8th - a monument to show that all had ended then. "

Mary wrote in her Journal on October 2nd, 1822. It was about three o'clock in the afternoon of July <sup>8th</sup> 1822, that Roberts obtained permission to go up in the watch-tower of Pisa and saw the mighty breath of wind descend on Don Juan. Shelley was only thirty when he was drowned. How is one to assess the position of a diffident but a talented dramatist who died so young? What would be the history of English drama, if all the renowned dramatists, Shakespeare included, had failed to live beyond thirty?

Shelley showed a marked preference for the dramatic form from the day he arrived in Italy. While Peacock still laboured under the misconception that he had a prejudice against the theatre Shelley started to dramatize Tasso. Shelley also believed that he was too fond of the ideal to write with ease about human beings and employed himself with the task of unbinding Prometheus. Although the lyrical drama of Prometheus Unbound was ~~add~~ addressed to the stage of the mind he wrote a dramatic first Act, substantial and firm of texture. At the age of twenty seven, in his Annus Mirabilis, he wrote his masterpiece The Cenci for Covent Garden. The tragedy was rejected. When his friends at home and abroad exchanged gossip about the latest and the most ignoble of royal scandals Shelley wrote a satire in the form of a parody of a Greek drama. Swellfoot the Tyrant has more humour than is generally recognised

A year later Greece declared herself free and out of his twin love for Greece and liberty was born the lyrical drama Hellas. Shorter and more compact than Prometheus Unbound it shows on<sup>e</sup> again that Shelley had mastered the art of dramatic speech. He turned his thoughts to the English stage in the last months of his life and died while engaged upon the tragedy of Charles the First.

Shelley had many ambitious schemes. He hoped to dramatize The Book of Job, Timon of Athens and Napoleon. No one can say with any certainty that he would not have written dramas on one, or two, or all three subjects.

Shelley's concern with the theory of dramatic form, his wide reading and knowledge of European drama and his interest in the living drama, opera and ballet brought him much closer to several friends and acquaintances. He enjoyed his disputes with Byron and earnestly pleaded the cause of the Elizabethan dramatists. It gave him pleasure to help Mary with her pretty mythological pieces and Williams with his mediocre efforts. He solemnly advised Hunt to write dramas of his own and Trelawny to dramatize an episode from his life. He took<sup>a</sup> critical interest in the dramatic achievements of his contemporaries. While he condemned Milman and Maturin in one breath he showed genuine appreciation of Coleridge's dramatic powers. His understanding of the stage drama did not stem from his reading only. He had seen<sup>a</sup> sufficient number of stage productions both in England and Italy to give him an adequate idea of the requirements of a regular stage.

By the time Shelley came to write Charles the First he had evolved a fully developed dramatic style of his own. True, he stole words, metaphors, images and scenes from Shakespeare, the Jacobean dramatists, the Greek tragedians and Calderon, but the quality and quantity of the original scenes he depicted and the characters he created far outweigh his ill-gotten gains. It is a matter of very great regret that Shelley did not live to convince those who cling to the myth of the "ineffectual angel" that he was quite capable of writing more than one great tragedy of which England would have been justly proud.

The enthusiasm for dramatic writing he had kindled or fostered survived in some of his friends and associates. The Pisan Circle broke up after his death. Byron left for Greece in 1823 to write his name in a page great in Greek history. Trelawny also left for Greece, survived and returned to England to write memoirs of his friends and give glimpses of their dramatic activities. Medwin among other things published his translation of <sup>the</sup> Agamemnon which had been submitted to Shelley for corrections. Leigh Hunt returned to England without the promised articles on Goethe and Calderon. Years later he wrote his tragedy A <sup>Legend</sup> ~~Myth~~ of Florence founded on Shelley's Ginevra and saw it successfully produced on the stage. Jane, the widow of Shelley's friend and disciple Williams, returned to England and married Hogg who had weaned Shelley away from the Gothic romances by substituting the Greek tragedians. Peacock, who had remained in England, did not realize to the full Shelley's growing interest in the theory and practice of the dramatic form but he recognised his dramatic talent after The Cenci.

And Mary? Mary on her return to England hoped to write a tragedy out of her intense experiences. But then life with Shelley had neither been a comedy nor a tragedy. It had been an experience, inexpressibly unique, and Mary had lived it.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

(i) Manuscript sources :

- MSS Shelley e.1-3 in the Bodleian Library.  
 MSS Shelley add.d.3 in the Bodleian Library.  
 MS. Ashley 394 in the British Museum.  
 MSS Ashley 2819,i-iv, in the British Museum.
- 

(ii) Translations of Plays :

- Æschylus                    The Persians of Æschylus, trans. T.G. Tucker, 1935.  
 --- Prometheus Bound, trans. R.C.Trevelyan, 1939.  
 --- The Oresteian Trilogy, trans. Philip Vellacott, Penguin Classics, L.67.
- Aristophanes                The Frogs, trans. W.J.Hickie, Haarlem, 1937.
- Alfieri, Vittorio        'Myrrha' in The Tragedies, vol.I, ed. Edgar Alfred Bowring, 1876.
- Bosio, Laro de            Icaro, trans. Ruth Draper, 1933.
- Calderon, Barca de la, Six Dramas of Calderon, Freely Translated by Edward Fitzgerald, 1865.  
     Pedro de la            --- Dramas of Calderon, Translated by Dennis Florence M'Carthy<sup>1853</sup>  
 --- Scenes from the Magico Prodigioso, From the Spanish of Calderon, Percy Bysshe Shelley, in Hutchinson.  
 --- Stanzas from Calderon's Cisma de Inglaterra, Percy Bysshe Shelley, in Hutchinson.
- Euripides                    Hippolytus, Iphigenia in Taurus, Alcestis, trans. Philip Vellacott, Penguin Classics, L.31.  
 --- The Cyclops, trans. Percy Bysshe Shelley, in Hutchinson.
- Goethe                      Goethe's Faust, An abridged version translated by Louis Mac-Neice, 1951.  
 --- Scenes from the Faust of Goethe, Percy Bysshe Shelley, in Hutchinson.
- Schiller                    - 'The Piccolomini' and 'The Death of Wallenstein' in The Dramatic Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. Derwent Coleridge, 1852.
- Sophocles                    The Theban Plays, trans. E.F.Watling, Penguin Classics, L.3.  
 -E- Electra, trans. E.F.Watling, Penguin Classics, L.28.

Tasso Aminta, trans. Louise E. Lord, 1931.

-----  
also consulted :

Manso G.B. 'Life of Tasso' in Jerusalem Delivered,  
trans. John Hoole, 1767.

-----  
(iii) Byron :

Byron, Lord The Complete Poetical Works of Lord  
Byron, O.U.P., 1904.

--- Letters and Journals, 6 vols, ed.  
Prothero, 1904.

Chew, S.G. The Relations of Lord Byron to the Drama  
of the Romantic Period, Baltimore, 1914.

--- The Dramas of Lord Byron, Baltimore, 1915.

Hunt, Leigh Lord Byron and Some of his Contemporaries,  
1828.

Irving, Washington An Unwritten Drama of Lord Byron, New  
Jersey, 1925.

Medwin, Thomas Conversations of Lord Byron, 1824.

Moore, Thomas Life of Lord Byron, 1851.

Polidori, John Diary, 1911.

University of Nottingham : Byron Foundation Lectures :

Butler, E.M. Goethe and Byron, 1949-50.

James, D.G. Byron and Shelley, 1951.

Knight, Wilson, Byron's Dramatic Prose, 1953.

-----  
(iv) Other Dramatic Works :

Beaumont and The Maid's Tragedy, A Wife for a Month,  
Fletcher A King and No King. 1950

Coleridge 'Remorse' in The Dramatic Works of Samuel  
Taylor Coleridge, ed. Derwent Coleridge,  
1852.

Cornwall, Barry Marcian Colonna, 1820.

(W.B. Procter) Mirandola, a Tragedy, 1821.

Dramatic Scenes, 1822.

Ford, John and The Broken Heart, 'Tis a Pity She's a

Webster, John Whore, ; The White Devil, The Duchess of  
Malfi. 1954.

Hunt, Leigh A Legend of Florence, 1840.

Mason, William Caractacus, 1759.

Milman, Henry Hart Fazio, 1818.

Marlowe, Christopher The Dramas, ed. Havelock Ellis, 1951.

- Sheridan, R.B. School for Scandal, 1906  
 Wordsworth, William Works, ed. E. de Selincourt, Vol.I,  
 'Early Poems', 1940.
- 

(v) Theatre and Music :

- Genest History of Drama and Stage in England, 1832.  
 Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, vol.N-Q,  
 ed. Eric Blom, 1954.  
 Hicks, A.C. and A Stage Version of Shelley's Cenci, 1945.  
 \* Clarke, R.M.  
 Parry, C.H.H. Scenes from Shelley's Prometheus Unbound,  
Set to Music, 1881.  
 Paton, J.N. Compositions from Shelley's Prometheus  
Unbound, 1844.  
 Playfair, Giles Edmund Kean, 1939.  
 Walker, J.C. Drama in Italy,  
 ..... The Italian Opera, By the Author of the  
Star of La Scala etc., 1840.
- 

(vi) Mary Shelley :

- The Letters of Mary W. Shelley, ed. Frederick L. Jones,  
 Norman, 1944,  
Mary Shelley's Journal, ed. Frederick L. Jones,  
 Norman, 1947.  
 Mary Shelley Frankenstein, A Modern Prometheus, 1818.  
 --- The Last Man, 1826.  
 --- The Literary and Scientific Men of Italy,  
Spain and Portugal, 1830.  
 --- Proserpine and Midas, ed. A. Koszul, 1922.  
 --- Frankenstein or the Man and Monster, a  
 romantic melodrama, Lacey's Acting  
 Edition, Vol.75, 1850.  
 Church, Richard Mary Shelley, 1928.  
 Marshal, Mrs Julian The Life and Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft  
Shelley, 1889.  
 Norman, Sylva 'Mary Shelley: Novelist and Dramatist',  
 in On Shelley, 1938.
- 

(vii) Works, Biography and Criticism of Shelley and  
some of his Contemporaries :

- Shelley, Percy Bysshe : The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe  
Shelley, ed. Roger Ingpen and Walter  
 E. Peck, in 10 vols, Julian Edition,  
 1926-30.

\* Nicoll, Allardyce

Nineteenth Century Drama 1800 - 50, 2 Vols.

- The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley, ed. Thomas Hutchinson, 1935.  
 --- Posthumous Poems, ed. Mary W. Shelley, 1824.  
 --- Poetical Works, ed. Mary W. Shelley, 1839.  
 --- Poetical Works, ed. Mary W. Shelley, 1840.  
 --- Relics of Shelley, ed. Edward Garnett, 1862.  
 --- The Cenci, Shelley Society, 1886.  
 --- Hellas: a Lyrical Drama, with Choruses set to Music, by W.C. Selle, Shelley Society, 1886.  
 --- The Cenci, ed. G.E. Woodberry, 1909.  
 --- Shelley's Prose in the Bodleian, ed. A. Koszul, 1910.  
 --- The Note Books of Percy Bysshe Shelley, ed. H. Buxton Forman, 1911.  
 --- Verse and Prose, From the MSS of Percy Bysshe Shelley, ed. Sir John Shelley-Rolls and Roger Ingpen, 1934.  
 --- An Examination of the Shelley MSS in the Bodleian Library, ed. C.D. Locock, 1903.  
 ---- New Shelley Letters, ed. W.S. Scott, 1948.
- Beddoes, Thomas  
                   Lowell      The Works of Thomas Lowell Beddoes, ed. W.H. Donner, 1935.
- Baker, Carlos      Shelley's Major Poetry, Princeton, 1948.
- Blunden, Edmund      Shelley: A Life Story, 1946.  
 --- Leigh Hunt's 'Examiner' Examined, 1928.
- Bates, S.E.      The Cenci: A Study, New York, 1908.
- Cameron, Kenneth  
                   Neil      The Young Shelley: Genesis of a Radical, 1951.
- Eliot, T.S.      Selected Prose, Penguin 873.
- Elton, Oliver      A Survey of English Literature, vol. II, 1730-1780, 1920.
- Hope, Thomas      Anastasius, 1819.
- Hough, Graham      The Romantic Poets, Grey Arrow Edition.
- Ingpen, Roger      Shelley in England, 1917.
- Keats, John      Letters, ed. M. Buxton Forman (3rd edition) 1947.
- Leavis, F.R.      Revaluations, 1956.
- Madariaga, Salvador  
                   de      Shelley and Calderon, 1822.
- Medwin, Thomas      The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley, with Introduction and Commentary by H. Buxton Forman, 1913.
- Norman, Sylva      The Flight of the Skylark, Norman, U.S.A., 1954.
- Peck, Walter Edwin      Shelley, His Life and Work, 2 vols, New York, 1927.

- Robinson, H.C.      Diary, Reminiscences and Correspondence,  
1869.
- Rogers, N.      Shelley at Work, A Critical Inquiry, 1956.
- Rogers, S.      Table Talk of Samuel Rogers, 1869.
- Salt, H.S.      A Shelley Primer, 1887.
- Trelawny, E.J.      The Last Days of Shelley and Byron, ed.  
J. E. Morpurgo, 1952.
- and:      --- Letters, ed. H. Buxton Forman, 1910.  
The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley, As  
composed in the Life of Shelley by  
Thomas Jefferson Hogg, The Recollections  
of Shelley and Byron by Edward John  
Trelawny, Memoirs of Shelley by Thomas  
Love Peacock, with an Introduction by  
Humbert Wolfe, 2 vols, 1933.
- Ullman, J.R.      Mad Shelley, 1930.
- Wagner, W.      Shelley's The Cenci Analy~~s~~<sup>se</sup>, Rostock, 1903.
- White, Newman Ivey      In Memoriam, Durham, 1956.  
- The Unextinguished Hearth: Shelley and  
his Contemporary Critics, Durham, 1938.  
-- Shelley, 2 vols, 1940.
- and:      Maria Gisborne & Edward E. Williams,  
Shelley's Friends, Their Journals and  
Letters, ed. Frederick L. Jones, Norman, 1951
- Yeats, W.B.      Collected Works, vol. VI, Ideas of Good  
and Evil, Stratford-upon-Avon, 1908.

(viii) Periodical Publications and Newspapers :

- English Literary History      Vol. VIII, 'Shelley's Failure in  
1941      Charles I' by Walter F.  
Wright.
- The Indicator      No. XLII, 1820      Leigh Hunt on The Cenci.
- Journal of English  
and German Philology      XXI, 1922      'Shelley's Charles I,'  
Newman Ivey White.
- Keats-Shelley Journal,      Vol. VII, 'Shelley and Tragedy; The  
New York      1958      Case of Beatrice Cenci,'  
Melvin R. Watson.
- Keats-Shelley Memorial  
Bulletin, London      Vol. VI, 'A Letter from Leigh Hunt's  
1955      Favourite Son,' Sylva  
Norman.
- Vol. V, 'Beatrice Cenci & Alma  
1953      Murray,' Elsa Forman.
- Modern Language Notes      1922      'Shelley's Debt to Alma  
Murray,' Newman I. White.
- Modern Language Quarterly, VI, 1945      'Use of Source Material  
in Charles I,' K.N. Cameron.

- Nation and Athenæum March 19, 1921 for The Proserpine Fragment.
- Notes and Queries CCI, May, 1956 'Shelley and the Windsor Stage', W.G. Babington.
- P.M.L.A. Vol. XXXVI, 1921 'Shelley's Swellfoot in Relation to Contemporary Political Satire', N.I. White.
- Vol. XXXVII, 1922 'An Italian Imitation of Shelley's Cenci' N.I. White.
- Vol. XXXVIII, 1923 'Shelley and Spain', E. Herman Hespelt.
- Vol. XL, 1925 'Prometheus Unbound, or Every Man his own Allegorist', N.I. White.
- Vol. LIV, 1939 'Shelley and Shakespeare', D. Lee Clark.
- Vol. LV, 1940 'A Comparison of Othello and The Cenci', S.R. Watson.
- Vol. LX(ii) 1945 'The Stage History of Shelley's The Cenci', K.N. Cameron and Horst Frenz.
- Vol. LXIV, 1949 'Prometheus Bound and Prometheus Unbound', Bennet Weaver.
- The Shelley Society 1886 'Beatrice Cenci and her First Interpreter!'
- 1887 'An Interview with Alma Murray!'
- 1887 'Alma Murray as Beatrice Cenci!'
- 1891 'Alma Murray as Beatrice Cenci with Critical Notices containing four letters from Robert Browning.'
- Transactions of the Royal Society of Literature of the United Kingdom New Series, Vol. XVI, 'Shelley as a Dramatist', St. John Ervine.
- The Westminster Review Vol. 35, 1841 'Percy Bysshe Shelley' G.H. Lewes.
- The Winters' Wreath 1832 for Mary Shelley's Proserpine.
- 
- The Mercury Vol. VII, Dec. 1922 for theatrical criticism of the 1922 performance of The Cenci.
- The New Statesman Vol. XX, Nov. 18, 1922 for criticism as above.
- Saturday Review Vol. CXXXIV, 25 Nov. 1922 for criticism as above.
- The Spectator Vol. CXXXIX 18 Nov. 1922 for criticism as above.

The Times

21 May 1958

233.  
Review of Marino Faliero.

The Times Literary  
Supplement

3 Feb. 1950

for the Plays of Lord Byron,  
Wilson Knight.

-----  
-----  
-----