CHAPTER II

THE THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE CRITICISM OF SHELLEY AND KEATS
How can it be said that ethics (die Moral) belong merely to philosophy, when the greatest part of poetry relates to the art of living and to the knowledge of human nature.


Man is so various, capable of Triumph and agony, suffering and joy, malice and goodness that if he sees life in its wholeness he can accept not only suffering but active wickedness as an inevitable and necessary part of the human drama and can even rejoice in it as a testimony to the depths of man's feeling and his power to experience and endure.

From: Cleanth Brooks' essay on Wordsworth and Human Sufferings in From Sensibility to Romanticism ed. Frederich W. Hillas and Harold Bloom.

The second generation of the Romantic poets abided by the aesthetic codes that came into force during their lifetime. However, they trusted far more to the evidence of their own experiences to ratify these 19th century doctrines and theories and in the process evolved their own tenets. Shelley strikes a responsive chord with the Expressive theorists in his early works, viz., Zastrozzi, Original Poetry by Victor and Cazire.
The Wandering Jew, St. Irvyne or The Rosicrucian, where the champions the Romantic slide towards Gothic literature. In these works produced during 1908–11, where he is learning the fundamentals of art, he is closer to the mainstream of Romantic thought only to lambaste it as 'disterpered unoriginal', and 'intellectual sickness'. The significance of Shelley's transformation viewed by Kenneth Neill Cameron as "the transformation from an ivory tower romanticism to a consciousness of social problems and duties"¹ can be understood only in the perspective of the radical aspirations of Godwin's Enquiry Concerning Political Justice, Paine's The Rights of Man and Condorcet's Essaisse. All these works were directed towards parliamentary reformation along democratic lines, economic equality and open rebellion to alleviate the condition of the masses. Shelley, obsessed with this band of reformers and their idea of an egalitarian society, not only castigates the themes with which he had been experimenting in his earlier poems but also makes the arts subservient to social purpose — a media for propaganda, viewing them as a panacea to the moral and the political maladies of the age. This political slant in Shelley's thinking

was based on the vision of Godwin. Shelley, under the influence of Godwin, envisaged to redeem humanity from oppression by exhorting the defeated to act and bring down the despotic oppressor. Cameron's contention that with this turn to politics, Shelley "the votary of Romance has perished" is derisory as Shelley's utopian generalization is definitely symptomatic of a fundamental constituent of the Romantic temper presaged by M. Scilliere:

"Romanticism is the 'imperialistic' mood, whether in individuals or nations — a too confident assertion of the will-to-power, arising from the mystic feelins that one's activities have the advantages of a celestial alliance."  

The tremendous suffering and agony of the proletariat and a country famished by anarchy and financial collapses so ably reflected in Paine's *The Age of Reason* and Holbach were enough to turn Shelley from the dogmas of Christianity, to a sort of heterodoxy. Shelley's atheism, saturated in the 18th century materialistic creed, projected him as an imitator and representative of the commonsensical empiricism

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2The Young Shelley, p.135.

and remained a distinctive attribute of his critical procedure which hindered him from realizing the full scope of his powers. As Bates rightly observes, "Shelley's many faults were due to his failure to understand religious truth". Both the Necessity of Atheism and Refutation of Deism clearly manifest his intellectual agnosticism and were responsible for his brisk dismissal of the imaginative faculty, as a fanciful plaything defeating the senses, and his espousal of the role of reason and empirical evidence. Thus it was his excoriation of Natural Theology fostered by the incompatibility of the presence of evil and the existence of God and the teleological argument or the 'argument to design' which led to his abdication of the Romantic credo — the cynosure of the literary world at that time. It is interesting to note the degree to which Shelley rises above his mentors. His mentors advocated a moderate attitude in politics through gradual reform reorobatino outlandish revolution in the wake of the collapse of the French Revolution and in religion promulgated Deism which proffers some scope for the 'religion of the heart'. However, Shelley's liberal tendencies in political and religious thinking merge with the concurrent belief that "Romanticism spells anarchy in every domain."5

5. English Romantic Poets, p.5.
His disbelief in God and fashioning out a world from his imagination indicate his faith in the infallibility of human intellect. Shelley, at this point sounds a cautionary note against Imaginative indulgences and displays an inclination towards the 19th century ratiocinative faculty in his letters to Elizabeth Hitchener:

"With pleasure I engage in a correspondence which carries its own recommendation both with my feelings and my reason. I am now however an undivided votary of the latter .... Locke proves that there are no innate ideas ... thus overturning all appeals of feeling in favour of Deity .... To a belief in Deity I have no objection on the score of feeling, I would as gladly perhaps with greater pleasure admit than doubt his existence .... My wish to convince you of his non-existence is two fold: First on the score of truth, secondly because I conceive it to be the most summary - way of eradicating Christianity .... Imagination delights in personification; were it not for this embodying quality of eccentric fancy we should be to this day without a God .... this personification, beautiful in poetry, inadmissible in reasoning .... I recommend reason -- why? Is it because since I have
devoted myself unreservedly to its influencing, I have never felt Happiness. I have rejected all fancy, all imagination."

His deference to the 18th century representative perception to play down the existence of a benign God made him eliminate the marvellous and expound the leading ideas of the Lockean philosophy. In his own words, "The senses are the sources of all knowledge to the mind, consequently their evidence claims the strongest assent." But, he soon realized that his allegiance to the Lockean principles of art was a threat to his aesthetic of poetry as it would cast doubt on the power of imagination so necessary to shape a perfectible world in accord with his dreams and visions for the amelioration of mankind -- the position he never swerved from. Confronted with diametrically opposite strands, Shelley throws in his lot with the challengers of the Newtonian epistemology, without forfeiting his anti-Christian views, and his empiricism is seen to recede considerably in importance. However, his restoration of the effulgent imagination has its resonance in the 18th century aesthetic of sublime which slighted Locke's mental mechanism for its shortcomings.


This tradition of sublime, which Shelley confronted as well as assimilated, with its provenance in Longinus's treatise *On the Sublime*, had a radical impact on the 18th century philosophers with William Smith's translations in 1736 and 1739 respectively. It became the focal term to account for the presence of God who could be realized in the boundless, vast desolate landscape, especially in the irregularity and ruggedness of the natural objects against their contrived and ordered symmetry into 'neat-hedges' and 'straight paths'. The limitless magnitude and grandeur of natural objects inspired a kind of awe and admiration in the looker-on and remained a clear manifestation of the divine presence beyond the comprehension of the artist. Where this attitude was a rendition of the traditional tussle between nature and art, it also proved the most subversive to the 18th century laborious and formal craft and paved the way for the 19th century organologist aesthetic. However, the sublime remained at the outset a quality of the outside nature overwhelming the passive artist who stood in complete orstration before the creation of God. With Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (1790) the locus of the sublime shifted from the natural scenes to the inner correspondences of the artist.
Through this pre-occupation with psychological experiences, the artist came to acquire a power of vision and insight, while apprehending the indeterminable, and was freed from the constraints of the 'despotic eye'. The artist's autonomy and freedom, that no limits of realism could circumscribe, ostracized him from the world as he was held to be in direct communion with the divine presence. All the same, this idealistic vision being ineffable, language was held inadequate to render this power. But this linguistic insufficiency was said to be the 'sionpost' of the sublime vision, as deeper spiritual truth eludes concrete expression.

Shelley, too, in spite of himself, is struck by wonderment at the mystery of the universe, the vividness of the natural grandeur, the irregular magnificence of nature and one may gleam a suggestion of his total absorption in the natural scenes from his letters to Elizabeth Hitchener:

"This country of Wales is excessively grand; rocks piled on each other to tremendous heights, rivers formed into cataracts by their projections, and valleys clothed with woods, present an appearance of enchantment — but why do they enchant, why is it more effecting than a plain, it cannot be
innate, is it acquired? — thus does knowledge lose all the pleasure which involuntary arises, by attempting to arrest the(e) fleeting phantom as it passes — vain al(most) like the chemists aether it evaporates under our observation; it flies from all but the slaves of passion and richly and sickly sensibility who will not analyse a feeling."  

Again, although the liberation from the 'vegetative, corporeal eye' through his susceptibility to the Romantic concept of Imagination for its capacity "to cast a shade of falsehood in the records that are called reality," agreed with his explorative visionary utterances to transform the human condition yet, he found this tradition of sublime irreconcilable with his latent intellect and atheism and, therefore, set to contradict and cancel its theological content. Shelley personifies the invisible presence within the landscape into an anthropomorphic deity embodying the author's impulses and emotions to execute his unfulfilled desires to recompense the mundane world which

3 *shelley and the Sublime*, p.34.

3 ibid., p.37.
he found wanting. Assuming the special prerogatives of God, he never faltered in this conviction to remake the world and to image forth the eternal transcendental realities to lead men to a higher state of perfection — a preoccupation with unpalpable themes that shaped both his thinking about art/artist and his poetic productivity as is evident from his letter to Gisborne written in 1921:

"As to real flesh and blood, you know that I do not deal in those articles; you might as well go to a gin-shop; for a leg of mutton, as expect anything human or earthly from me."10

This reflection, however, is in no way independent of his political sentiments but is stirred by and modelled on the precepts of the French Revolution to overthrow irrelevant political and ecclesiastical authority. In his answer to the revolutionary failure, he recommends spiritual rejuvenation with an implicit Godwinian fear: "Revolution is engendered by an indignation against tyranny yet is itself evermore pregnant with tyranny."11 Thus, Shelley continued to foment the political compaign and came to be looked upon


that "poet who is bound by society's claim on him" out of step with the first generation of the Romantic writers who segregated themselves from the political crises through their counter-revolutionary stance as well as their solipsism. Having entrenched himself on the Romantic aesthetic of poetry, he draws eclectically on certain antiquated critical theories to meet the exigencies of his esoteric humanitarianism. This collocation of multifarious themes is nowhere more evident than in A Defence of Poetry — his treatise on the origin, scope and function of poetry and a response to Peacock's virulent attacks on poets and poetry but in essentials, a defence of Shelley's own practice as a poet.

To question the utility of poetry in a world that is highly mechanized became a common enterprise of some of the writers of the latter part of 19th century. These writers witnessed in the Romantics a propensity to overthrow much of the positive achievement of civilization in their eagerness to get back to primitivism and naturalism under the influence of Rousseau. Peacock's objections to the Lake poets in The Four Ages of Poetry for their "interminable pursuit of

empty visions" square with the queries raised by Shelley when he was enamoured of the intellectual climate of the 19th century, besides recalling to mind the favourable platitude of philosophers like Plato:

"The empirical model is for Peacock, as it was for Shelley, the model of progress, and consequently he banishes poetry of the sublime, from the republic of useful and progressive knowledge." 13

Allured by Jeremy Bentham's 'Utilitarianism', Peacock sounds a beacon flash to the Romantics who, in their defence of poetry, are seen to insinuate the dangers that beset unharnessed poetry in the face of materialism and utilitarianism. Keats in Lamia shrivels at the sight of "philosophy (that) will clip an Angel's wings," 14 and Wordsworth too, at the outset, evincing machines and technology as inimical to the flourishing of Romantic poetry, took some time to arrive at the ways in which poetry emulates its enemy. Shelley's Defence, however, presents poetry as a viable means of social reform, heralding the dawn of a new era of complete liberation of mankind. This political utility of poetry, one of the chief canons by which the Greeks, especially Plato judged it, was

13 Shelley and the Sublime, p.42.
a natural concomitant to the collapse of the French Revolution and had been anticipated by Blake:

"Blake turned to art itself to accomplish what he no longer thought politics capable of bringing about .... Originally Blake had looked to political revolution to liberate the artistic potential within man. But he eventually reversed his position to the poet where he saw artistic freedom as the necessary prelude to any improvement in man's political condition."15

This claim of poetry to regulate social organization was based on the belief about the independent, active power of the Imaginative faculty championed in the 19th century. The poet was no longer receptive to the immutable handiwork of God but potentially God-like creating a heterocosm distant from the world of ordinary experience. This transcending quality of Imagination was channelled by Shelley to dispel the unsurmountable influence of Milton's *Paradise Lost* by inverting his 'linear paradise-fall-paradise pattern,' and show man as willing his own destiny without any divine intervention or recourse to religious institution. Milton's *Paradise Lost* instigated him to confront the orthodox account of genesis shifting the responsibility of the fall from man...
to God and deify Satan for his rebellion to emulate divinity. His exploration and expatiation of Gnosticism was simply to express the dynamics of the individual temperament and challenge the potential tragedy of human nature:

"The deeds of Cain ... are ... a rebellion against what is perceived as the absurdity of human existence. This rebellion begins with an experience of the world order not living up to man's expectations of rationality and justice in events. This disillusionment leads man to lash out against the world order in any way he can, to assert his freedom in the face of blind necessity, to substitute, if need be, the arbitrariness of his own will for God's."\textsuperscript{16}

This task of presenting a richer world and redeeming mankind was entrusted to the poets — 'the unacknowledged legislators of the world' — who would also inspire the elite to guide the people through their socio-political upheavals. This particular brand of Gnosticism, based on the deification of Satan as Paul Cantor has pointed out received wide circulation among the Romantics, especially Blake and Shelley, who found it aesthetically and politically attractive. Aesthetically, it supplanted Rousseau's concept of self-development in its

\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Creature and Creator}, p.143.
demand for an unrestrained liberation of passions from the restraint of reason to secure full realization of man's potential, and politically it justified rebellion against the reigning despotic powers of oppression. For Shelley, however, his exploitation of Gnosticism remained both a vindication of the hierophantic powers of the poet to render possible the apocalyptic expectation implied by Milton's restoration of paradise and an avenue for the reflection of his heretical ideas. Besides, employing contemporary views and assumptions, Shelley's thesis is a manifest reworking of Renaissance criticism under the aegis of Philip Sidney's transformation of the 'brazen' world into a 'golden' one. The poet with his imagination becomes the harbinger of altruism leading man into the paths of righteousness by liberating him from his total absorption in "the principle of self ... the Mammon of the world." The key to man's redemption and salvation remained for all the Romantics in annihilating and transcending the self, destroying all barriers and communicating with humanity with a 'complete disinterestedness of Mind'. Dominated by the consideration of what should be, Shelley's normative poet images forth the great human virtues so that readers may be induced to

17 *Shelley's Prose*, p.293.
imitate them in their practical life by modelling their actual behaviours on these noble patterns, summed up in "... a going out of our own nature and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action, or person, not our own." Taking a hint from Plato's *Ion*, Shelley rehabilitates poetry against the ridicule of Peacock by making it serve purely moralistic and ethical purpose despite his solitary declaration that "didactic poetry is my abhorrence." In fact, Peacock's argument is turned against himself when even prose writing "and all the other fine arts; and finally all actions, inventions, institutions and even ideas and moral dispositions which imagination brings into being in its effort to satisfy the longing for perfection" are shown to be poetry. Although ostensibly, he steers poetry to leeward yet, in essentials Shelley weakens his argument by stretching it to embrace too many examples, and cancels the distinction between poets and other activities to suffer disfavour among advanced critics.

Shelley sketches a perfectibilian future wherein the tendency is to 'unperplex bliss from neighbour pain' and develops and re-emphasizes the idea which received extended

13 *Shelley's Prose*, pp.292-283.
treatment by classic and neo-classic writers, that "poetry imitates not the actual, but selected matters, qualities, tendencies, or forms, which are within or behind the actual." Shelley, however, remains impervious to the empirical theory of 'La belle nature' and proclaims his agreement with the transcendental theory, expanding abstract Platonism and states it to be a paradigm for poetic theory. The poet's imagination is shown in direct apprehension of the eternal, unfathomable 'forms' hidden from the mundane world. This cosmic extension of imagination leading to a supersensible reality with no counterpart in the external world was the dominant idea in the 19th century aesthetic of poetry but had been hitherto supplemented and blended with concrete realities by Wordsworth and Coleridge.

However, in his aesthetic appeal of poetry, some more aspects of the 19th century development of thinking on art are undeniably apparent but, he never follows them blindly and accepts and rejects things in accordance with his pre-conceived ideology vis-a-vis poetry. Shelley's reappraisal and modification of the Inspirational theory — the oldest account of poetic creation, sporadically lauded until the

19th century when it came into full swing after its disuse in the 18th century, enabled him to elevate poetry by presenting it as an unpredictable, indefinable and enigmatic phenomenon. At the same time it also served to be a 'mind-forged manacle' because of its theological connotations. The Inspirational theory of poetry served the Romantics to exalt the artist in his self-proliferation, independent of prior models, untouched by reflection or design, offering a religious vision of the highest kind whether breathed on by God, the muse or Apollo. Shelley's muse becomes his own imaginative insight as poetry comes to be viewed on the analogy of religion and, therefore, poetry for him was an externalization of the penetralia of the poet's secret mind."22

"... for the mind in creation is as a fading coal which some invisible influence like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness; this power arises from within like the colour of a flower which fades and changes as it is developed, and the conscious portions of our natures are unprophetic either of its approach or its departure."23

This passage, in fact, is the plainest utterance of his tragic despair in that any conscious reflection not only fails to vesture this divine afflatus but the very act of

22 The Mirror And the Lampa, p. 77.
23 Shelley's Prose, p. 294.
composition witnesses a decline of this radiance and remains a feeble representation of the ideal and eternal ideas, unable to replace the world surcharged with death, mutability and transience. His undertaking to "find a haven in the world" is befogged when, in his Defence, he finds himself overpowered by Peacock's charge that his poetry tries to 'pursue Phantoms' and is a vindication of his own doubts which he had harboured before taking to writing poetry.

Shelley's Defence embodying the theoretical views on poetry remains biography in disguise reflecting the contradictions and controversies of his life; questioning the moral codes in his active zeal for the rights and liberty of mankind — a philosophy for which he was prepared to make no compromise. Graham Hough utters a truism in his brilliant and profound observation:

"His (Shelley's) ideas came from his own mental processes from study from visions of the future of dreams of the past and not from the world around him and he pays the penalty of isolation from the world."  

Thus Shelley is seen corresponding to his own conviction that

"A poet is a nightingale, who sits in darkness and sings to

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cheer its own solitude. In fact, his poetry too, was to remain an expression and defence of his own imaginative experience projecting him as an elusive seeker of a distant ideal:

"For Shelley and Peacock ... art functioned within and for the community. In practice both were so allusive as to preclude ... being understood."27

Carlos Baker's remarks, "It is a limited and partial, and therefore misrepresentative view of Shelley which sees him only as Ariel,"23 and again, "Many of his biographers have sought to read his poetry as it were literal or nearly literal autobiography,"29 sound quizzical especially when Shelley himself, towards the end of his poetic career admits a complication in his ideal scheme. Shelley's apocalyptic vision came to the end of its tether in The Triumph of Life.

But prior to The Triumph of Life, Mary Shelley in Frankenstein followed by Byron's Cain and Keats in particular, revealed the tragic undercurrents of the Utopian dreamer in not facing up to the challenges of life. Keats's principal concern remained, at least in his letters, alien to the Romantic temperament therein.

26 Shelley's Prose, p.282.
27 Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries, p.182.
29 Ibid, p.15.
he refuted the 'erotic fantasia', while his poetry manifested a clear consciousness of this very refutation under which he envisaged to compose poetry of the highest order. His independence of national universities and insatiable literary curiosity led him to assimilate the most diverse influence, synthesize and expand his erudition into a concrete critical commentary which not only smacks of the established practice of the 19th century theory of art but represents an advance into something quite new.

In his rudimentary and minor poems he displays an unflagging resignation to the legacy of Hunt, Spenser and the general Romantic temper in his predilection for the "World of oberon and fairyland" and fascination with the elysium. Even in Sleep and Poetry, he is seen to follow the Shelleyan trajectory and echo the commonplace of Romanticism when he seeks to commiserate with the misery of others. But, unlike Shelley he does not try to achieve it by exorcising the sombre view of human life, and this difference has implications both for their poetic practices and for their opinions about their art. However, his propensity to 'luxuriate in pleasant smotherings', the lack of formal education and paucity of adequate resources deter him from
reconciling the pleasures of the world with its pain and he remains predisposed to the spirit of his time. Unable to transcend the limits of his time and temperament, he inherits the Romantic descent on Imagination as a protean faculty to heighten the sensibility and its appurtenances of Inspiration and spontaneity:

"I am certain of nothing but the holiness of the heart's affections and the truth of imagination -- what the imagination seizes as beauty must be truth -- whether it existed before or not -- for I have the same idea of all our passions as of love they are all in their sublime, creative of essential beauty ... The imagination may be compared to Adam's dream -- he awoke and found it truth. I am the more zealous in this affair, because I have never yet been able to perceive how anything can be known for truth by consequitive reasoning -- and yet it must be --"

Keats's acquiescence to the Romantic credo and distrust of reason as a partial apprehension of reality gives him an edge over Shelley who strengthened imagination at the expense of reason and, finally, betrayed the Romantic modulation towards

fancy as a delightfu! release from unpleasant experience. "... and yet it must be" deserves consideration as it implies Keats's nebulous faith in reason which was to ballast his easy flights of fancy and anchor his theory to the external world. Nevertheless, he continues to promote the Romantic faith in the fanciful and arbitrary and it is not until his critique on Endymion, that he lashes out indiscriminately at himself and at the contemporary literary world, that he shakes off the imaginative seductions. Here he is seen viewing himself on the threshold of a new development and unlike Shelley, not defending his o.r practice.

"The keys to the young poet's remarkable advance in power during the brief span of his working years could be traced largely to a natural reaction to his own serious thought on the nature of art and poetry." 31

This development in his own artistic powers is paralleled by his important discriminations with regard to the work of other writers. Sounding both apologetic and defensive in his prefatory remarks to Endymion, he registers sturdy resistance to the inadequate repertoire of his hitherto

admired models, especially Hunt, and turns to Shakespeare.

Having learned a lesson from the partial failure of Endymion, scepticism towards Romantic visionary ideals became the basic tenet of his philosophy. Art, for him, was not connected with the political events of the age and, therefore, not an avenue to the revolutionary transformation of the age but the means for overcoming the Romantic antinomy between the mundane and the transcendental worlds. This, of course, was a revival of the tradition of orthodox Christianity which asserted that man was doomed to go through the miseries of life and win redemption through his submission to the inevitable. Keats's emphasis in his letters is on experiencing life in its infinite variety and accepting the human condition with all its limitations. The ultimate source of a superior vision is to face up to painful truths and not to invert the inexorable processes of natural law by eschewing the gap between man's aspirations and the inexorable hand of divine providence — a common feat of Godwin Methodists:

"The whole appears to resolve into this — that man is originally 'a poor forked creature' subject to the same mischances as the beasts of forest, destined to hardships and disquietude of some kind or
other. If he improves by degrees his bodily accommodations and comforts — at each stage, at each accent there are waiting for him a fresh set of annoyances — he is mortal and there is still a heaven with its Stars above his head. The most interesting question that can come before us is, How far by the perserving endeavours of a seldom appearing Socrates Mankind may be made happy — I can imagine such happiness carried to an extreme — but what must it end in? — Death — and who could in such a case bear with death ... But in truth I do not at all believe in this sort of perfectibility — the nature of the world will not admit of it — ... For instance, suppose a rose to have sensation, it blooms on a beautiful morning it enjoys itself — but then comes a cold wind, a hot sun— it cannot escape it, it cannot destroy its annoyances — they are as native to the world as itself: no more can man be happy in spite, the worldly elements will prey upon his nature."?

His misgivings about the Biblical account of eventual salvation by divine providence reinforces and does not before his perception of the ethical end of man's redemption.

32 Letters of John Keats, p. 249.
and salvation through suffering which he viewed at the centre of human experience:

"The common coomon of this world among the misguided and superstitious is a 'vale of tears', from which we are to be redeemed by a certain arbitrary interposition of God and taken to Heaven — What a little circumscribed straightened notion! Call the world if you please "The Vale of Soul-making" ... that you may judge the more clearly I will put it in the most homely form possible — I will call the world a school instituted for the purpose of teaching little children to read — I will call the human heart the hornbook used in that school — and I will call the child able to read, the Soul made from that school and its hornbook. Do you not see how necessary a World of Pains and troubles is to school an Intelligence and make it a soul?"33

Keats's denial of divine intervention as a redeemer of the inadequacies of human conditions has been described by critics, especially John Clubbe and Ernest J. Lovell, Jr. as his anti-Christian inclination. It is hard to agree with this view as it overlooks those aspects of the development

33Letters of John Keats, p. 249-250.
of Keats's thinking which relate to the concept of eschatology: "... that we shall enjoy ourselves here after by having what we called happiness on Earth repeated in a finer tone and so repeated." 34 In fact, he is seen to carry the theological concept over into his letters and seek refuge in it while voicing his bewilderment at the sorrows of human predicament: "Is there another life? Shall I awake and find all this a dream? There must be we cannot be created for this sort of suffering ..." 35 Keats's vacillation to reach a settled conviction called forth a good deal of adverse criticism wherein he was generally attacked for sheer inconstitude. On the contrary, these mutually re-inforcing contraries remain his tour de force throughout his brief poetic span as they arose from his observation of the complex workings of human life and are an indication of his standard of aesthetic theory to remain contented with 'half-truths'. Mayhead's interpretation of Keats's procedure, in this context, is more tenable and restrained: "Though not a fundamentally irreligious man, Keats adhered to no religious orthodoxy." 36 Equally apt is Jeffrey Baker's contention that Keats's letter of 'The Vale of Soul-making' manifests a

34 Letters of John Keats, p.37.
surrogate religion which affords a good deal of satisfaction to man's deeper religious apprehensions. It is because of this isolation from, (rather than ignorance of), contemporary religious conservatism and political and public movements that Keats takes exception to the obtrusive and didactic overtones of contemporary poetry and reveals a strikingly critical and historical sense in an age where "the central conception of poetry ... did not encourage poets to critical thoughts." He sounds a proleptic warning against poetry as a reflection of the poet's personal thoughts, sentiments and philosophy. Shelley's escape from mundane reality is what, according to Keats, stimulates his Romantic indulgence to propagate a personal philosophy which is startlingly at variance with the general experience of mankind. Keats reveals the central hollowness of Shelley's endeavour to manipulate poetry in the interests of some propagandist statement in his refusal to be tantalised by the latter's fugitive prospects, clinging to his "unfettered scope," and proposes self-discipline:

"... an artist must serve 'ammon; he must have "self-concentration" selfishness perhaps. You I am sure will forgive me for

37 In the Poetry of Keats, p. 39.
33 Letters of John Keats, p. 27."
sincerely remarking that you might
curb your magnanimity and be more of
an artist, and 'load every rift' of your
subject with ere. The thought of such
discipline must fall like cold chains
upon you, who—perhaps never sat with
your wings furl'd for six Months
together."

Likewise, "Byron, whom everyone knew to wear his heart on
his sleeve"\textsuperscript{40} is slighted on the ground of self-dramatizat-
ion. His personages are personifications of his personal
traits and the genesis of his works is hardly understood
without seeing its fundamental subjective basis. Similarly,
Keats side-steps the 'ecstatical sublime' of Wordsworth who
marshalled his poetic material to delineate his own attitudes
and proclivities, with his objective and out-ward looking
temperament, Keats echoes Coleridge who indicted Wordsworth
for 'ventriloquism' in making poetry an expression of his own
settled point of view:

"We hate poetry that has a palpable design
upon us — ... Poetry should be great and
unobtrusive, a thing that enters into one's
soul, and does not startle it or amaze it

\textsuperscript{39} Letters of John Keats, p. 390.
\textsuperscript{40} The Mirror and The Lamp, p. 244.
with itself but with its subject — How beautiful are the retired flowers! how would they lose their beauty were they to throng into the highway crying out, "admire me I am a violet! dote upon me I am a primrose! ... I don't mean to deny Wordsworth's grandeur and merit, but I mean to say we need not be teased with grandeur and merit — when we can have them uncontaminated and unobtrusive. Let us have the old Poets, and Robin Hood. Your letter and its sonnets gave me more pleasure than will the 4th Book of Child Harold and the whole of any body's life and opinions." 41

His polemics against poetry tinctured with self-portraiture and philosophy of the poet lead him to evolve his own terminology and evaluate various artists under the broad distinction of 'Men of Power' and 'Men of Genius'. His pronouncements on poetry and poets spring from his deep penetration into those authors who profoundly influenced his own writing and for whom his literary appreciation for one reason or the other never ceased but this does not preclude him from highlighting their weak points. He diverges strongly from 'Men of Power' who feature on a

41 Letters of John Keats, p. 61.
subordinate plane in his canon as they have an axe to grind in advocating a personal philosophy of which they are clearly aware in advance:

"All the stubborn arguers you meet are of the same brood — they never begin on a subject they have not prereolved on. They want to hammer their nail into you and if you turn the point, still they think you wrong." 42

His hostility is directed towards that tribe of poets who, in their enthusiastic espousal of certain doctrines, use poetry to validate their personal tastes and therefore work for purposes other than that of poetry. Therefore, "the only means of strengthening one's intellect is to make up one's mind about nothing — to let the mind be a thoroughfare for all thoughts. Not a select party." 43 His disinclination or his failure to become frozen in any given role provided him a sure foot-hold to get out of the doctrinal and theological impasse of the age by a method which spread out like a panorama for the later critics to brood over. Political interests, as has been noted by A.C. Bradley, Cadricatts and some other writers, occupied a marginal and not a central

42 Letters of John Keats, p. 326.
position for Keats unlike his contemporaries who looked upon political action as a means of achieving universal salvation. Keats steps back from the threshold of Romantic submission to politics and represents the Romantic disillusionment with politics. Again, the complete absence of self-assertiveness enabled him to meet the constant danger of overt didacticism and obsessive concern with the self and be more of an objective artist. This intense empathy with nature and the life around him was in Hazlitt's words the main quality of Shakespeare: "He had only to think of anything in order to become that thing... He was nothing in himself, but he was all that others were, or that they had become." The act of annihilating and transcending the self had for Blake, Wordsworth and Shelley (in particular) ethical implications. It was valued as a viable means to universal salvation because only by being lured out of selfishness could man cater to the service of humanity through fellowship, brotherhood, companionship and awaken and stimulate the hope to recapture paradise or to humanize nature and society. This sympathetic attitude towards fellowmen was grossly marred by their pre-occupation with the nuances of their personality, which rendered them as the dropouts of the society, full of

the very faults they attacked. As a result of this, the object of their contemplation never gained its autonomy, but was smothered by subjectivity. Byron's coinage of 'mobility' which has the characteristic quality of Keats's 'chameleon poet' does not forestall the subjective and self-conscious indulgences of a poet whose personal concerns come crowding back. With Keats we witness the renascence of the objective philosophy of art as he shows an inclination towards the dramatic form in preference to the dominant lyric mode of the age. In this kind of high receptivity the poet functions almost like a medium losing his ordinary self to gain an artistic identity:

"As to the poetical Character itself, (I mean that sort of which, if I am anything, I am a Member; that sort distinguished from the Wordsworthian or eocistical sublime; which is a thing per se and stands alone) it is not itself -- it has no self -- it is everything and nothing -- It has no character -- it enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated -- It has as much delight in
conceiving an Iago as an Imogen. What shocks the virtuous philosopher, delights the camelion Poet. It does no harm from its relish of the dark side of things any more than from its taste for the bright one; because they both end in speculation. A Poet is the most unpoetical of anything in existence; because he has no identity — he is continually in for — and filling some other Body — The Sun, the Moon, The Sea and Men and Women who are creatures of impulse are poetical and have about them an unchangeable attribute — the poet has none; no identity — he is certainly the most unpoetical of all God's Creatures. 45

This tendency had flourished, and was exemplified, in the works of Shakespeare but it was Keats who, after Coleridge, first brought it into the critical limelight in an intrinsically undramatic literary milieu where the chief end and aim was subjective development. It not only enabled him to divorce poetry from its ethical interests and revolutionary sympathies but also break from the contemporary proclivity to fret over the past and encroach upon the future.

Instead, it engendered a total absorption in the moment:

"I scarcely remember counting upon any happiness — I look not for it if it be not in the present hour — nothing startles me beyond the moment. The setting sun will always set me to rights — or if a sparrow come before my window I take part in its existence and pick about the gravel." 46

Deeply receptive to widely ranging experiences, Keats was in a position to comprehend the whole of human life in its mingled joy and sorrow which, he realized, cannot exist in fragmented isolation from each other:

"I wish for death every day and night to deliver me from these pains, and then I wish death away, for death would destroy even those pains which are better than nothing." 47

His concept of 'Negative capability' not only counter-balances the short-comings of the Romantic endeavour after visionary ideals but leads to the eventual reconciliation of the ideal and the real in its poised response to the miseries of the world. In its susceptibility to draw sustenance

45 Letters of John Keats, p. 33.
from doubts, it recommends an oxymoronic approach in art and life and is thereby a resonance of Coleridge's "mulcteity in unity", or "reconciliation of opposites", Wordsworth's perception of "similitude in dissimilitude" and Blake's "marriage of contraries" — all of whom have their literary pedigree in the Metaphysical poets:

"the excellence of every Art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate, from their being in close relationship with Beauty and Truth — Examine King Lear and you will find this exemplified throughout, ...

several things dovetailed in my mind, and at once it struck me, what quality went to form a Man of Achievement especially in Literature and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously — I mean Negative capability, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason—" 43

It seems, it seems, shakes the Romantic aesthetic of poetry through a sieve and upholds those aspects which come through and which are capable of surviving all vicissitudes yet, in a curious volteface (but in conformity to his idea of

43 Letters of John Keats, pp. 42-43.
the 'chameleon poet') we find him commending Shelley's subservience of the arts to the claims of social life towards the end of his poetic career. His firm critical discrimination in *The Fall of Hyperion* between the dreamer and the poet left him wide open to refutation as it implied the representation of those tendencies which he had considered incompatible and had striven to exclude them consciously from his poetry:

"'None can usurp this height', ...
'But those to whom the miseries of the world are misery and will not let them rest.'""40

But, it would be going a little too far in stating that Keats goes badly astray, in the above poetical exemplification of his opinion, from his poetic ambition and dominant impulse manifested in his letters and moves much nearer to Shelley. On the contrary, this distinction points further to the fundamental divergence in the philosophy of the two. His critical self-awareness and condemnation of his own practice in the distinction between the dreamer and the poet, which as has been pointed out by Pettet, is what places him on a superior plane to Shelley, is a facet of his critique about poetry in general. If Keats, in *The Fall of Hyperion*, condemns his production on account of objectivity and self-discipline

which he had viewed to be the standard of artistic excellence as against the fanciful and arbitrary flights of the 'deceiving elf', it is because it enforces a growing isolation from the real world and warps the relation of art to human life. Nevertheless, he is more exasperated at Shelley's aesthetics of poetry which, because of its refusal to come to terms with the facts of human condition, draws him away from the world he wants to ameliorate. In fact, the distinction between the dreamer and the poet once again throws into sharp relief his distrust of art as an expression of the poet's speculation:

"The very conflict between the egoistic outlook of the Romantic and the social concern of the epic are the matter of debate between the narrator and Moneta." 50

This debate, which concentrates on the claims and responsibilities of the world on the artist, reveals Keats close to Wordsworth's Immortality Ode which he held to be the quintessence of the poet's higher experience. This goes with the mainstream of Keats's development and should not be viewed as a dissent from his earlier opinion. The clues to Keats's meaning and intention have been well epitomized by

Jeffrey Baker asserts:

"Keats grew ... not from a shallow otherworldly romanticism to a grimly realistic desolation, but from an aesthetically selective vision of reality to a comprehensive and bewildered one."\(^{51}\)

Keats's failure to acclimatize this "comprehensive and bewildered" nature of reality is well summed up by him in the 'Letter of Tensions', which lies behind the intermezzo in his productivity, besides placing the utility and millenial endurance of poetry in its active role in human affairs:

"I compare human life to a large Mansion of many apartments, two of which I can only describe, the doors of the rest being as yet shut upon me -- the first we step into what we call the infant or thoughtless chamber, in which we remain as long as we do not think -- we remain there a long while, and notwithstanding the doors of the second Chamber remain wide open, showing a bright appearance, we care not to hasten to it; but are at length imperceptibly impelled by the awakening

of the thinking principle -- within us --
we no sooner get into the second Chamber,
which I shall call the Chamber of Maiden-
Thought, than we become intoxicated with
the light and the atmosphere, we see
nothing but pleasant wonders, and think
of delaying there for ever in delight:
However among the effects this breathing
is father of is that tremendous one of
sharpening one's vision into the heart and
nature of Man -- of convincing ones nerves
that the world is a full of Misery and
Heartbreak, Pain, Sickness and oppression
-- whereby This Chamber of Maiden Thought
becomes gradually darken'd and at the same
time on all sides of it many doors are set
open -- but all dark -- all leading to dark
passages -- we see not the balance of good
and evil. We are in a Mist -- we are now
in that state -- we feel the "burden of
the Mystery", To this point was Wordsworth
come, ... and it seems to me that his
Genius is explorative of those dark passages
.... Here I must think Wordsworth is
deeper than Milton -- ... I hope it is not
too presuming, even between ourselves to
say, his Philosophy, human and divine, may
be tolerably understood by one not much
advanced in years."52

52 Letters of John Keats, p. 95.
Shelley in his prefatory remarks to *The Revolt of Islam* stated that the writers of a particular age cannot evade marked resemblance with the literary movement of the time. Yet, one would fain agree with Graham Hough, A.C. Bradley, T.S. Eliot and others that Shelley and Keats envisage a diametrically opposed aesthetics of poetry. Their critical concepts were collateral and the differences between them emerged, in the case of Shelley, from his rhapsodising on and over-usino the enigmatic aspect of poetic source with a view to grant it a divine indulgence. In the case of Keats, the difference resulted from his efforts to rescue poetry from the realm of supernatural. His poetry was marked by his resolute insistence to project the objective world with a view to preserve the fundamental distinction between poetry and the other arts. Where Shelley's reliance and exhaustion of the partial concept of the Romantic aesthetics of poetry had the most disconcerting influence on the Romantic sensibility, Keats's balanced and comprehensive version of certain principles, re-oriented towards a new centre, had a wider import. Their theoretical critical stance determined both the content and form of their poetry and a greater part of it is an evidence to it. Shelley's poetry is a poetic exemplification of his theory, moral concerns, and political
sympathies. Keats, on the other hand, tried to bring his poetry in line with the standards he expounded in his letters and his poetry remained less impressive than what he intended but progressed continually towards the goal he had set himself.

In fact, the great difference which is noticeable in their theoretical principles is at times blurred in their poetry. Some of the poems of Keats follow the Wordsworthian creed and the Shelleyan train of thought. This is clear from *Indymion*, which shares much in common with Shelley's *Alastor*.

*Alastor*, in its yearning for the ideal reflects Shelley's ambivalence when he finds the Romantic quest for solitude thwarting ordinary human sympathies or the longings for human love. Much ink has been spilled on this dilemma with critics pulling in two opposite directions. On the one hand Mrs. O.W. Campbell, N.I. White and R.D. Havens have accepted Shelley's title and some lines in the preface as an aberration from the poem. On the other hand, Floyd Stovall, H.L. Hoffman and Carlos Baker have found this available evidence slender to account for any contradiction and cancellation of Shelley's surface intention of a 'quest-motif' explicated in the first paragraph of the preface and the poem. Carlos Baker not only points out that the poem does not represent solitude
as evil but also offers some justification for Shelley's entitling the poem as *Alastor* or 'evil genius'. One may agree with him that the nomenclature was readily adopted by Shelley without any serious premeditation or reflection and was appended to the poem after its completion. But, this kind of a reading would definitely, as it does for Carlos Baker, belie the didactic overtones of Shelley and Mary Shelley that one should abstain from turning one's back on human love and sympathy as it was marked with tragic undercurrents. Such a reading will also fail to explain the lines in the poem where the poet is condemned because "he lived, he died, he sung, in solitude," these lines are, unfortunately, over looked by Carlos Baker. *Alastor*, in fact is a clear manifestation of the emotional undercurrents of Shelley's life and personality and his initiation towards the Romantic pre-occupation with the processes of the poet's mind and as such sounds a note of caution against the Romantic poet's obsession with the private world of his own fantasies. *Endymion*, too, remains a clear manifestation of the quest-motif reflecting the protagonist's active sympathy for the unhappiness of others. Shelley's callow dismissal of earthly love as a stepping-stone to a higher experience leads

to something less impressive than what he intended. No matter how much he intended to depreciate it, he was either thrown back on it or led to defy the palpable reality in toto only to create a shadowy world. For Keats, on the other hand, the earthly and Platonic aspirations do not act at cross-purposes and he reveals his kinship with John Donne by balancing the two. In fact, his coalescence of the moon-goddess and the Indian maid towards the end of *Endymion* is a strong indication of his alliance with common experience which was to be warranted by his later poetry and he comes close to counteracting unobtrusively but, none-the-less, positively the disconcerting tone of the Romantic isolation. This particular departure from *Alastor*, besides being a sign of Keats's refutation of the fanciful and arbitrary, has also been held by critics to signal his abstention from all Platonic considerations. Pettet extinguishes all soarks of allegorical interpretation and, views the poem as an embodiment of Keats's adolescent eroticism. He further proclaims the validity of this viewpoint by tracing it to the inexorable processes of an experience to which everyone is now and again a victim. Pettet's interpretation, however, looks dwarfish especially when it is gauged by Keats's acclimatisation of the idea of a mortal's love for an immortal
which was the pinnacle of Greek poetry and got into full swing in the Romantic period because of its being a subject of the Romantic drive towards the infinite and divine. However, Keats's conformity to this idealistic philosophy is acknowledged by Pettet in his peroration but viewed as a deliberate contrivance to diverge from the reprehensible failure of the sickly-sentimentalism of Shelley. As Jeffrey Baker aptly puts it:

"...the supposedly allegorical elements may be an attempt to stiffen a defence which Keats knows to be shaky, and particular passages may be attempts to cope with the disturbances of maiden thoughts as they arise."

Both Alastor and Endymion, therefore, remain committed to explore the Romantic world of Imagination besides serving as the stage which eventually gave way to the indigenous tendencies of their authors, where Keats was later to depreciate Endymion as a work of sheer ineptitude and also refuse to ape the Shelleyan attributes in his future works, Shelley remained in touch with the claims and responsibilities of the world. In his appraisal of Endymion Shelley, therefore, not only makes his condemnation of the utopian

54 John Keats and Symbolism, p.64.
dreamer explicit but also hints at his own dilemma in 
Alastor. Both poets, although they outwrote this state, 
kept on returning to the subject at times. Alastor 
represented a dichotomy between Shelley's idealistic and 
altruistic beliefs, but Queen Mab written much before 
Alastor remained the incubus for his poetic productivity. 
Setting the agenda for his political poems, it is free from 
the dialectical tension evident in Alastor. The coalescence 
of the diverse elements in Queen Mab and the amplitude of 
it's scope has been ably put forth by Keneth Neill Cameron:

"Its overall political theory drew upon 
Godwin, Paine, Condorcet and Volney; 
its metaphysics combined concepts from 
the skepticism of Hume, the materialism 
of Holbach, the dualism of Pope, the 
idealism of William Drumond; its science 
was compounded from many sources including 
(in verse) Poore and Erasmus Darwin; its 
literary style was influenced by Southey 
Campbell, and Milton."

Cameron points to Shelley's indebtedness to his precursors 
to whom the poet turns in quest of basic political and moral 
principles to rouse the mind and spirit of his countrymen 
and to dispose the minds of men to a similar habit of thinking.

55 The Young Shelley, pp.266-267.
Cameron, however, ends in apparent self-contradiction when he, like Bernard Shaw, qualifies his statements on Queen Mab with the epithet of original. Cameron's contention as to the originality of Queen Mab is contravened both by Shelley's remark to the contrary and his own quotes from Shelley's lineage revealing Shelley's kinship and subservience to his models. Shelley's loyalty to economic, political and moral principles reveals that Queen Mab is more of descendant from 17th and 18th century historical tradition and divorced from the main developments in the poetry of his age:

"Were it not for its new nomenclature and its more ambitious scope, Queen Mab would long ago have taken its place in literary history ..." 56

Or again, "As for Shelley's taste in poetry, it was false." 57

The didactic character of Queen Mab and Shelley's thinly disguised self-assertion and self-projection was with him, at this stage, a germination of that attitude which broadened and deepened into a continuous pre-occupation independent of the 19th century Romantic aesthetics. Shelley gleams through both the spirit of Ianthe guaging the corruption, vice, injustice and oppression in the world order and the

56 The Young Shelley, p. 24.
57 Ibid, p. 23.
noddess Mab in pointing the way towards a perfectabilian condition which ought to be obtained in human society.

Queen Mab is a commentary on the social and moral structure holding together certain incompatible notions for the reform of existing institutions and for ushering in an order of beauty and peace. With his revolutionary enthusiasm and an intense involvement in the sufferings of the people, Shelley seeks to transform the human condition through political means. He criticizes the corrupt influences of Governments which circumscribe man's freedom and suggests certain radical reforms to lead men out of this slavery. One of the reforms of debilitating evil in a society is to herald a democratic community of free and creative individuals. Governments, unless imbolded by the purest and truest motives to the best and noblest ends, are but forms of tyranny and, yet they are necessary to discipline the corrupting forces within man which imperil his integrity. Since one can fight vice and reform society through spiritual regeneration, Shelley advocates moral purification which, together with the political reforms, can lead to the establishment of an egalitarian structure. He, among other things, recommends a vegetarian diet for the improvement of
morals and holds flesh diet to be the cause of the continued degeneracy of man:

"Comparative anatomy teaches tus that man resembles frugivorous animals in everything, and carnivorous in nothing; he has neither claws wherewith to seize his prey, nor distinct and pointed teeth to tear the living fibre."\(^5\)

In his conviction to attribute man's moral degeneracy to diseased organisation resulting from flesh diet, he subverts the concurrent belief when he traces the origin of human predicament to Adam and Eve having partaken of an 'unnatural diet,' the forbidden fruit. In his determination to exorcize evil and bring about a complete liberation of mankind, he challenges ecclesiastical authority. He not only holds the account of Jesus Christ as the begotten Son of God suspect but also questions man's eventual salvation and redemption by divine providence. His heretical ideas spring from the hiatus he perceives between the institutional dooms of Christianity and the moralistic teachings of Jesus Christ and his atheism reflects itself in his belief about Christianity as yet another form of tyranny. All these views,

\(^5\)Shelley's Prose, p. 33.
undoubtedly, were directed towards a revolutionary transformation of mankind. In his rampage of synthesizing the best from his diverse antecedents to make possible his utopia, he trembled upon the concept of necessity. This concept subverted the pinnacle of his philosophy which was based on the concept of free will.

Shelley adopted the concept of necessity to unnerve the mystery of the first cause. Experimenting with diverse themes in order to give a direction to his egalitarian propaganda and to disparage the Christian orthodoxy, Shelley proclaims assent to pantheism but subjects this animating power to the principle of "Necessity, thou Mother of the World." The concept of Necessity squared with his denial of a creative God and attributed evil to the mysterious, omnipotent and governing power of life. Shelley, in his note to Queen Mab makes this quite clear:

"But the doctrine of Necessity teaches us that in no case would any event have happened otherwise than it did happen, and that, if God is the author of good he is also the author of evil; ..."

This determinism was not quite in conformity with his poetic ideals:

59 Shelley's Prose, p. 112.
"Every human being is irresistibly impelled to act precisely as he does act: in the eternity which preceded his birth a chain of causes was generated which, operating under the name of motives, make it impossible that any thought of his mind, or any action of his life, should be otherwise than it is."  

The young Shelley soon realized that he could not hold these paradoxes in balance and therefore, set out to explore ways of resolving them. These paradoxes are present in the Queen Mab. This work not only stimulated his plans for a number literary undertakings but also led to an apocalyptic vision -- an apocalypse which paradoxically left Shelley in many respects, bewildered and dark throughout his life. It was The Revolt of Islam which transmuted into a powerful creative expression this adumbration at the close of Queen Mab. Shelley expanded the rudimentary speculations in a way as is done in the traditional epic form which served him with a paradigm for the dynamics of the individual potential. At the same time, he associated the epic form to an allegorical representation of the French Revolution. The failure of the French Revolution had led to disillusionment among the masses vis-a-vis any and every sort of insurgency.

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57 Shelley's Prose, p.109.
and had re-inforced their submission to and endurance of the inevitable. The collapse of the French Revolution led Shelley to a maturer view of revolution. In *The Revolt of Islam*, Laon and Cythna in their resistance to hypocrisy, treachery and tyranny address the benevolent and rational powers of men to thwart the incursion of evil. Although in the martyrdom of Laon and Cythna and the continuation of despotism Shelley continues to be booted down by the unsurmountable thrust of determinism, yet in projecting the revolutionary force of such moral qualities as fortitude, forbearance, hope and love he points to a vision of complete human freedom and equality.

In *The Revolt of Islam* we also witness the resuscitation of the divergent pulls of idealism and altruism -- the tussle foreshadowed in *Alastor*, which Shelley had held to be detrimental to the idea of revolution. Both Cythna and the Hermit are frequently trapped to play the fugitive but soon realize that their ascetic approach to life will blight all prospects of their comforting vision which is the complete liberation of mankind from evil and the minions of evil. This enthusiasm on the part of Shelley to throw off the stultifying prejudices of determinism and escapism and project man as the resolute foe of oppression by virtue
of his moral regeneration is the offspring of the young revolutionary's single dominating purpose and belief in the necessity of reform.

The Revolt of Islam is also an examination of aesthetic functions and values. In spite of Shelley's assertions in its preface to the contrary, the poem remains a reappraisal of the role of the poet as the political crusader guiding the masses through socio-political upheavals. The didactic role of the poet and poetry was a settled conviction of Shelley on which he could never make any compromise whatsoever. McNiece's otherwise incisive analysis of The Revolt of Islam is clouded by his agreement to Shelley's prefatory remarks about the absence of the didactic element in the poem: "Unlike the didactic Queen Mab, The Revolt of Islam, is organised as a narrative." The Revolt of Islam wrenches itself free from the clutches of the prefatory remark, revealing Shelley's didacticism as the central component of his poetic craft according to which his poetry would henceforth be modelled. This point has been made by Carlos Baker in the following remarks:

"Shelley professed to abhor, and after Queen Mab sought to avoid writing,

51 Shelley and the Revolutionary Idea, p.191.
straight didactic poetry. But he was all his life a didactic poet. The roots of the problem lay in his conviction that poetry is one of the most moral forces at work in the world. Shelley's reforming instinct is a constant among variables."^{52}

The Revolt of Islam like Queen Mab is not free from authorial intrusions and Shelley's characters, situations are but personifications of his impulses, emotions and philosophy. The Revolt of Islam develops and re-emphasizes the biographical note of Queen Mab more because it was in harmony with the peculiar conditions of Shelley's own age. The Revolt of Islam unlike Queen Mab, is largely an outcome of the contemporary critical climate in which Shelley wrote. The evidence for this response to the contemporary literary climate is borne out by Shelley's own remarks in the preface to the poem:

"I have avoided, ... the imitation of any contemporary style. But there must be a resemblance, which does not depend upon their own will, between all the writers of any particular age. They cannot escape from subjection to

^{52} Shelley's Major Poetry, p. 63.
a common influence which arises out of 
an infinite combination of circumstances 
belonging to the times in which they 
live..."63

Unlike the hazardous foundations of Queen Mab and 
Alastor, Shelley's intellectual horizons are well defined 
in The Revolt of Islam. Against the assertions of Scholze 
who adjudges Queen Mab to be a better rendition of Shelley's 
ideals than The Revolt of Islam, one can assert that the 
latter imposes a restraint on Shelley's spasmodic adherence 
to conflicting creeds and, definitely unties the innumerable 
knots of his earlier products.

However, the martyrdom of Laon and Cythna alloyed his 
sanguine picture of the revolutionary transformation of 
human condition and, Shelley turned to Prometheus Unbound 
not only to develop and re-emphasize ideas which had 
received less extended treatment in his earlier work but 
also to contrive a work of art on a much happier note. 
Prometheus in Prometheus Unbound becomes the phoenix, as it 
were, rising from the ashes of Laon and Cythna and Prometheus 
Unbound a sequel to The Revolt of Islam. It is a moderate 
rendition of the struggle of human will to bring down

63 Shelley's Prose, p. 318.
oppressive governments and despots, an apocalyptic moment of liberation materialized and accomplished by human nature. The broad aim of the poem seems to enthuse the masses whose revolutionary sympathies had dried up as a result of the volte-face of The French Revolution.

It is apposite here to consider Angela Leighton’s statement regarding *Prometheus Unbound* that it is "Shelley’s most consistently optimistic expression of the revolutionary purpose of writings." This statement does not wholly correspond with Democriton’s appeal in *Prometheus Unbound* because Democriton sounds a note of despair lurking beneath an 'optimistic expression'. By subjecting the apocalyptic phase to "Fate, Time, Occasion, Chance and Chance", Shelley is once again entrapped by the concept of determinism. However, it should be added in his defence that he, at least, insinuates his comprehensive evaluation of realistic strains in giving utterance to his tragic despair. He definitely deflects from his anti-religious and idealistic propensities but gives his story the air of credulity and conviction by bringing it in close proximity to the world of ordinary experience. If Shelley succeeds in showing that Prometheus’s moral revolution accentuates human happiness he is not able to sustain this compensatory dream-world when he makes

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54 *Shelley and the Sublime*, p. 73.
Democorom refer to its transitory and precarious essence. In any case, Shelley has come a long way off from the dilemma of Queen Mab and proved to a certain extent that "... mankind had only to will that there should be no evil, and there would be none." Prometheus, Asia, Panthea, Ione the allegorical representation of forbearance, love and hope join together and put up a courageous resistance to evil. And, therefore, if Shelley is seen confronting the earlier paradoxes in Promethes Unbound it is only to represent a development out of them into something quite new.

Shelley's treatment of both content and form in his poems brings him in line with the larger intellectual and literary movement of his time. The dramatic form would have disciplined his fanciful imagination, but since the atmosphere of his age was not favourable to it "he embarked on lyrical drama -- a fusion "between an external, empirical model of representation and an internal, sublime mode." But, however, failed to keep these conflicting claims in balance as his preoccupation with psychological experiences came to represent a "marked shift from a dramatic and eternal mode of communication to a lyrical and internal one." Shelley is

55 Shelley: Poetical Works, p. 271.
56 Shelley and the Sublime, p. 77.
57 Ibid, p. 81.
forced to undermine the dramatic autonomy to the extent that the dialogue, too, at times, recedes into a monologue especially when Prometheus wants to recant his curse and finds the phantom of Jupiter doing so only as a replica of his own self. Despite his panoramic survey of literature at this juncture, Shelley remains pre-disposed to his familiar theme of subordinating the claims of art to the claims of social life and not only in the subject matter but also in the form does he remain faithful to his ideal. This point is further strengthened when Shelley adopts the dramatic genre for *The Cenci* and uses it to illustrate his belief and fidelity to his own experience. The Romantics had revealed their growing uneasiness with the drama as a genre. In spite of their lapses into it, the romantics could not mitigate their retreat into increasingly subjective interests. Shelley, whose poetry by now was more suggestive than before of the death of the Romantic creed, succumbed more readily and easily to the spirit of his age and resorted to the drama to expound the themes that particularly attracted him. Shelley, however, went ahead of the other Romantics in that he remained indifferent to the essential character of the genre as he was bent upon making it conform more closely with his basic socio-political beliefs unlike the others who took to drama and gradually discovered their inability to exonerate it from their personal utterances.
Queen Mab, The Revolt of Islam and Prometheus Unbound were all explorations of his revolutionary enthusiasm despite the general gloom which pervaded these continuous attempts to remake the world and escape from painful reality. And finally it was The Triumph of Life, his last fragmentary poem wherein the tragic undercurrents of his idealistic impulse come to surface poignantly. This poem sounds the knell to the Romantic romantics and quests for the eternal as such quests are inevitably productive of despair and, instead, chronicles the Triumph of the World of reality. However, Shelley continued to re-orient his metaphysical, philosophical learning to the pursuit of the dominant impulse in his writing — amelioration of mankind. In fact, Shelley's fading sense of inadequacy towards the end of his poetic career justifies that literary disrepute which he came to suffer at the hands of modern sensibility:

"Modern sensibility ... wants no Prophetic poetry, at least no poetry of millenial prophecy ... It insists that since the experience of the actual world is always a complex of the pleasant and the disgusting, of the beautiful and the ugly, of attraction and horror, poetry must hold the discordant elements together, not allow them to separate." 58

Keats, on the contrary, was not only temperamentally detached from contemporary philosophic and political movements but was, due to the lack of formal education, not so eruditely learned about the psychology of poetic creation. He, therefore, fertilized his mind by reading various poets and his early minor poems are but a development of basically simple and familiar poetic techniques. Most of the striking passages in these poems are not only derivative but the poems suffer from an extremely loose relation of the parts. But, all the same, they testify to Keats's reverence and tribute to various literary genuises as is evident from the rubrics of some of the poems: Imitation of Spenser, To Lord Byron, To Chatterton, and Great Spirits now on earth are Sojourning. However, it is Sleep and Poetry wherein he makes a statement about his settled conviction vis-à-vis poetic vocation which can be broadly divided into two categories: Susceptibility to luxuries conjured up by the poet's fancy and to maintain a vital contact with human misery. These poetic aims besides being resonant of the contemporary tradition of poetry have impressive affinities with Shelley's poetic theory. However, despite his claims to plunge into the cares and stresses of the world in a decades time, Keats vacillates between his idyllic hopes and altruistic concerns in Endymion.
One can take exception to E.C. Pettet's interpretation of Endymion that it is concerned with the evocation and delineation of dream-states. Pettet, quite naturally, substantiates his viewpoint by quoting Keats's avowed aim as evidence:

"O, for ten years, that I may overwhelm Myself in poesy; So I may do the deed that my soul has to itself decreed ... First the realm I'll will pass Of flora, and old pan: sleep in the grass,..." "And can I ever bid these joys farewell? Yes, I must pass them for a noble life, where I may find the aoonies, the strife of Human hearts...."59

Pettet seems to be ignoring the innumerable echoes in the poem of Keats's intellectual capacity to participate in the aoonies and strucoalles of the human heart, which he had earlier foreseen. His letters, besides having a significant bearing upon his poetry, not only exemplify this intellectual bent of his mind but also testify to this progressive and beneficial chance:

"I am continually running away from the subject — sure this cannot be exactly the case with a complex Mind — one that is imaginative and at the same time

59 Keats: Poetical Works, pp. 43-44.
careful of its fruits — who would exist partly on sensation and partly on thought — to whom it is necessary that years should bring the philosophic Mind."  

Keats's subservience to Shakespeare as the model and his aspirations to achieve the complexity of a philosophic mind would never allow him to consider 'Sensation' and 'Thought' or the world of treacle and that of human misery apart from each other. In fact, the one does not preclude the other. Both are seen actively and passionately criss-crossing each other so that what is vouchsafed is a view of the world with its joy and sorrow mingled together. These notable variations from his avowed aim both in the letters written at the time of the composition *Endymion* and in the poem itself raise doubts about the validity of Pettet's interpretation:

"... Wherein lies happiness? In that which becks
Our ready minds to fellowship divine,
A fellowship with essence; till we shine,
Full alchemiz'd, and free of space....
Feel we these things? — that moment have we slept
Into a sort of oneness, and our state
Is like a floating spirits'.

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70 *Letters of John Keats*, p. 38.
Richer entanglements, enlivenments far
More self-destroying, leading, by decrees.
To the chief intensity; the crown of these
Is made of love and friendship, and sits high
Upon the forehead of humanity ....
Of light, and that is love: its influence,
Thrown in our eyes, renders a novel sense.
At which we start and fret; till in the end.
Melt into its radiance, we blend,
Mingle, and so become a part of it.—"71

It is true that Keats's scrutiny of spiritual and neo-
Platonic matters is strewn here and there carelessly and
rapidly in *Endymion* and nowhere does it reach the depth and
magnitude of the survey of Shelley who found in these
profound human experiences a wealth of material yet, for
Keats they are enough to indicate his ground plan for his
subsequent development. Both the poetic norms which Keats
laid out in *Sleep and Poetry* may be attributed in part to
that literary tradition in which he was working and, in
particular, to the Shelleyan poetic mode. In Keats, both the
sensual and the abstract, the physical and the ideal are
presented as complimenting each other and, eventually he
ends on revealing the ideal to be a property of the visible
world. This has been made evident not only in the coalescence
of Cynthia and the Indian Maid (as has been pointed out

71*Keats: Poetical works*, pp. 74-75.
earlier in this chapter), but Endymion's benevolence and humanitarianism. This humanitarian doctrine led naturally to the freedom from egotism and was reinforced by the strain of self-effacement which was to be treated by Keats as an aesthetic principle. Of Endymion's speech on happiness, Keats had written to his publisher:

"It sets before me the gradations of happiness, even like a kind of pleasure thermometer, and is my first step towards the chief attempt in the drama, the playing of different natures with joy and sorrow."72

So, what is emerging simultaneously is the picture of Keats's observation on the art of poetry -- the juxtaposition of joy and sorrow and the artistic manifestation of his complex response to joyful and sorrowful experiences, neither of which exclude the other. Despite Keats's misgivings about the literary worth of Endymion, one cannot but agree with John Middleton Murry: "... It is the poem of maiden experience and maiden thought, indeed, but they are conscious of their doom."73

Deeply influenced by the literary spirit of his time, Keats, nonetheless, realized the danger of the Romantic

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73 Quoted in John Keats and Symbolism, p. 54.
manipulation of poetry for self-assertion, which according to him was the only lacuna in the Romantic aesthetics. He, therefore, laboured hard to steer clear of this tempting poetic norm. In connection with the debate whether poetry was "a mere jack-o'-lantern to whoever may chance to be struck with its brilliance"74 or whether poetry should be given to an acceptance and manifestation of the interplay of grief and joy, Keats drops a clue to his own dilemma of being pulled in both directions.

Yet another poem of Keats, Lamia, is a bewildered expression of Keats's tragic despair as he finds it difficult to pull through the contemporary influences streaming upon him and ends by betraying the tendencies of the incoherent and vague dreamer of Alastor.

In the Eve of St. Agnes, Keats is seen commenting on the necessity of poetry to orate the essential condition of the world outside — the interplay of joy and grief. The Godwin Methodist makes life miserable by refusing to rest content with the human condition with all its limitations. On the contrary, for Keats this life is more rewarding than the apocalyptic states sketched by the visionary idealist Madeline renounces all luxuries and festivities to plunge into the

74 *Letters of John Keats*, p. 73.
poetry remains deeply informed by moral considerations despite his disavowal of the scriptures. This close proximity between his beliefs and the embodiment of those beliefs in his poetry wins him the favour of C.S. Lewis, who deflects from T.S. Eliot's literary canon by placing Shelley on a higher pedestal than Dryden on this count:

"... Shelley produces words which, though not perfect, are in one way more satisfactory than any of Dryden's long pieces: that is to say, they display a harmony between the poet's real and professed intention,..."\(^2\)

Contrary to this, Keat's poetry remains chequered in its continuous development to come to grips with his continuously evolving vision of the world and critical statements emanating from this source. Pre-disposed to make inordinate transcendental claims for poetry, Shelley consistently seeks to find in natural objects a symbol for his own abstract imaginings and, for an expression of such individual perceptions and feelings, transcends the limits of a conventionally communicable idiom only to provoke the latter-day critique of F.R. Leavis regarding this "weak grasp on the

of intense happiness and the alluring attractions provided
by sweet fancy are but a momentary release throwing us back
on the distressing and drab reality:

"... Ay, in the very temple of delight
veil'd Melancholy has hersovran shrine,..."76

Yet, Keats by composing in the 'Hamlet mood' is very much
in the Romantic camp betraying how much he stood to inherit
from the surcharging and overwhelming Romantic literary
milieu and the poem depicts his struggle to accept the
inextricable mingling of the pleasurable and the painful in
human life. He explores ways of escape from the drab reality,
but not like Shelley into a world which is markedly
different from the one we are actually experiencing but by
delving into the earthly beauties of this ever-changing world
of matter:

"But when the melancholy fit shall fall...
Then glut they sorrow on a morning rose,
Or on the rainbow of the salt sand-wave,
Or on the wealth of olosed peonies;
Or if thy mistress some rich anger shows,
Emprison her soft hand, and let her rave,
And feed deep, deep upon her peerless eyes."77

76Keats's Poetical Works, p.220.
77Ibid, p.220.
The *Ode to a Nightingale* throws into sharp relief the feverish agitation peculiarly characteristic of a Romantic poet to escape from unpleasant experiences in human existence. And, if we ignore the simple evidence of Keats's stoical response to the painful experiences of human life in the earlier *Ode*, then in this *Ode* the poet—appears to recede from this poetic goal and is seen as reviving his interest in the easy flights of fancy. This becomes evident when the poet desires to succumb to a state of intoxication in order to identify himself with the bird who is free from the stresses of ordinary world. He, however, cannot divert himself and continues to be festered by his vivid consciousness of physical sickness and fleeting beauty of the ever-changing world of reality. He, then, perseveres to escape with the help of "viewless wings of Poesy" which for Keats meant a reaction against the subjective vision of the Romantics and, instead, denoted a condition of mind in which the self is annihilated and the subject emphatically responds to the object contemplated. Although the poem falls within the gamut of escapism, yet the poet is seen challenging and falsifying his own temptation of seeking refuge in fabrications. Keats is pre-disposed to his familiar theme of distorting the fanciful and arbitrary since his bird
banishes all possibilities of certitudes:

"Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird! No hungry generations tread thee down;..."\textsuperscript{78}

The poem significantly ends with the words:

"... Do I wake or sleep?"\textsuperscript{79}

bringing the poet's openness to all kinds of experiences within the compass of a single poem.

Similarly, \emph{Ode on a Grecian Urn} is another of Keats's attempts to escape from the inevitably changing and transient real world into the contemplation of the fanciful and enrapturing concept of art which is finally proved to have a semblance of the permanent and beautiful. Keats once again begins by celebrating the superiority of the Urn -- the symbolic representation of the Romantic mode of aesthetics -- over the ephemeral aspects of life:

"O Athic Shape: Fair attitude! with brede Of marble men and maidens over wrought,... Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral! ..."\textsuperscript{80}

The Lover, the trees, the melodist all enjoy an insular kind of happiness. Keats grants them beauty beyond change, eternal youth but also robs them of certain beauties which \textsuperscript{78}Keats: Poetical Works, p.208. 
\textsuperscript{79}Ibid, p.209. 
can be enjoyed only in a temporal existence. The pictures on the Urn breathe an air of discontentment because they are not doomed to decay, chance and extinction. The Urn as a symbol of eternity is, as Jeffrey Baker rightly puts it, 'a prison' and, therefore, for Keats not worth the pursuit and yet he is eager to sustain this world of Romance:

"... When old age shall this generation waste,
Thou shalt remain in midst of other woe
Than ours, a friend to man, ...")

Keats, however, disengages himself from the debate only to allow the Urn — the symbolic representation of art — to supply us with the perfect emblem on the nature and function of art:

"... 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty', — that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."\(^{32}\)

These Odes remained poised between two modes of thought, yet their general course is one of continuity, development and revival as they emerged from the dichotomy between the actual and potential Keats. In the Odes, he fails to come to grips with his critical statement which focussed on the dramatic in the delineation of one's experiences. In these poems, he was unable to exclude his personal emotions and


conflicts from his consciousness and live by a poetic sensitiveness to both joy and sorrow. Both the Ode to a Nightingale and Ode on a Grecian Urn bring the garrulous self back to the surface of the poet's consciousness. However, it is To Autumn which rises to the level of workmanship of Keats's dramatic aspirations as it breathes an air of contentment, serenity, calm poise; neither suggesting anything beyond itself nor disturbed by any Romantic craving. Even if we agree with Doulas Bush that there is an undertone of pathos: "... we cannot escape the melancholy implications of exuberant ripeness." The ripe fruitfulness of autumn makes the poet experience a mood of perfect complacency as he describes it in its minutest details without wishing it to be anything else. And, if his earlier anouish peeps out in the last stanza, it is immediately stifled:

"Where are the sons of spring? Ay, where are they? Think not of them thou hast thy music too,..." Keats guards himself against self-indulgence and maintains a dramatic detachment from the object of his contemplation.


Hyperion and its revised version, The Fall of Hyperion, proceed along the same development as the Odes and it is hard to agree with the view that these poems are startlingly at variance with the hallmark of Keats's earlier poetry as he is seen to betray a characteristic Shelleyan modulation towards social concerns. Keats was impervious to the Shelleyan drive of advocating radical proposals for the reform of society and existing institutions. His going out of his self is, in fact, a poetic necessity for an empathetic involvement in the unhappiness of others. Whether this proclivity could have eventually deepened and broadened into a characteristic poetic method cannot be finally settled as Hyperion, in both versions, remains a fragment. Keats is unable to find a way out of the dilemma created by conflicting tendencies and gives up the poem in despair. As Rajan aptly remarks:

"Such a programme is not easy to carry into poetry, particularly when the mind that carries it and that is now committed to the sorrow of the actual still clings to the proposition that beauty may be truth." 35

Ronald A. Sharp agrees with this when he says that the commonplace subjective tendencies were far from dead in Keats during his composition of *Hyperion* and *The Fall of Hyperion*. In these poems the Titans and the Olympians recede into the background and the autobiographical element steals the limelight.