Chapter - VII

THE FOURTH PHASE (1818-1819)

In March 1818, Shelley hurriedly left England and reached Italy. Whether Shelley left England to save his skin from some of his creditors as alleged by some of his critics or out of extreme frustration, the fact remains that at that time he had no idea that he would not return to England any more. Of course his journey to Italy proved to be a blessing in disguise because it was in Italy where his genius came “all at once into bloom” and his poetry which “before was propagandist and edifying” became more truly philosophical.

Commenting on the influence of Italy on Shelley, Carl Grabo observes the “esthetic effect of Italy upon him was profound. Peacock had awakened in him a taste for music and opera but Shelley seemed to have cared little for painting, sculpture and architecture until the museums and and ruins of Italy, no less than the scenery, discovered in him new depths of perception and appreciation.”

2 Ibid., p. 231.
3 Ibid.
**L Isis Written Among the Euganean Hills** (1818) is a turning point in Shelley's mode of thinking so far as his idea of evil is concerned. At this stage we discern in Shelley a belated triumph of optimism over pessimism. In Queen Mab he felt genuinely sorry to see the ruins of the kingdoms of the bygone days -- Palmyra, Athens, etc. But in this poem he overcomes the initial shock and frustration and dives deeply to find out the causes of such degeneration. He realizes that selfishness is a positive evil and that selfishness combined with indifference to one's fellow-beings have turned this world into the 'wide sea of Misery'. He forcefully opines that to make life meaningful and to turn this mass of revolving clay into a habitable globe 'love' and 'friendship' are pre-conditions.

What, if there no friends will greet;  
What, if there no heart will meet  
His with love's impatient beat;  
Wander wheresoe'er he may,  
Can he dream before that day  
To find refuge from distress  
In friendship's smile in love's caress?

*(L Isis Written Among the Euganean Hills, 27-33)*

The reality of tyranny, especially physical tyranny, represented by King and his agents, is a lifelong obsession with Shelley and even while describing different objects of Nature, his imagery conveys the sense of kingly tyranny: the sea-mews sailing over the bellows of the gale, or the up and down howling of the whirlwind suggest the domination
of the strong over the weak. The phenomenon is... like a slaughtered town,

When a king in glory rides
Through the pomp of fratricide.

(Ibid., 57-59)

At the sight of Venice, the passion for freedom glows anew in Shelley. The past and the departed glory of the city are immediately conjured up in Shelley and he makes the 'pollution-nourished' people of Venice aware of their degenerate state and urges them to rise and regain their real freedom:

Where a hundred cities lie
Chained like thee, ingloriously,
Thou and all thy sister band
Might adorn this sunny land;
Twining memories of old time
With new virtues more sublime.

(Ibid., 154-159)

He makes a pointed reference to 'many domed Padua' (215) where 'the sickle to the sword/Lies unchanged' (225-226). He broods over the cause of degeneration of Padua and is convinced of the fact that slavery and darkness brought about sin among the people of Padua. Here Shelley's conviction and political creed find poignant and articulate expression:

Men must reap the things they sow,
Force from force must ever flow;
Or worse; but 'tis bitter woe
That love or reason cannot change
The despot's rage, and the slave's revenge.

(Ibid., 231-235)
It is an irony that such a philanthropist, as Shelley was, is portrayed as one who abhorred the masses; and the portrayal is based on a single line of this poem -- 'The polluting multitude (356). "In the first place", wrote Ellsworth Barnard, "he did not believe in the natural goodness of human nature. His ideal humanity was a beautiful vision, but for men and women in the mass he had little sympathy." But before accepting such sweeping generalisations, we must remember that any judgment based on a single line, that too taken out of context, is bound to be erroneous. To make a correct assessment of Shelley's attitude towards mankind, we should consider the whole gamut of his creative work and then we will immediately see that his feeling towards the masses was one of deep and genuine sympathies. This particular poem also is expressive of Shelley's prophetic vision, his views "on the fate of Venice, on the University of Padua, on freedom and tyranny" and shows his passion for freedom and protest against tyranny.

Though Shelley and Byron had few characteristics in common, even then they mutually influenced each other to a great extent and Julian and Maddalo (1818) is a record of Shelley's second meeting with Byron at Venice in August 1818, the poem being an unmistakable expression of Shelley's optimism. The characters of Julian and Maddalo are placed in

4 Ellsworth Barnard; Shelley's Religion: New York; 1964, p. 112.
5 Edmund Blunden; Shelley - A Life Story: Oxford; 1965, p. 177.
juxtaposition. Julian is "an Englishman of good family, passionately attached to those philosophical notions which assert the power of man over his own mind, and the immense improvements of which, by the extinction of certain moral superstitions, human society may yet be susceptible." He endeavors to find ways and means to make the good triumph over evil. Maddalo, on the other hand, is a "Venetian nobleman of ancient family and of good fortune.... But it is his weakness to be proud; he derives, from a comparison of his own extraordinary mind with the dwarfish intellects that surround him, an intense apprehension of the nothingness of human life." These two characters in the poem, i.e., Julian and Maddalo are Shelley and Byron respectively with their distinctive characteristics.

Unlike Byron Shelley was a champion of the doctrine of the freedom of the will. Shelley, in the guise of Julian, discards the idea that the divine and eternal aspirations of the human soul are mere delusions. He does not deny the importance of Necessity but he boldly asserts that man can be chained to Necessity only by the permission of his will. If this will is strengthened, man can attain lofty ideals. Maddalo is sceptic and he speaks of human destiny in a pessimistic vein; but Julian professes the doctrine of the freedom of the will:

... if man be
The passive thing you say, I should not see
Much harm in the religious and old saws

6 Preface to Julian and Maddalo, p.190.
7 Ibid., p.189.
Shelley moves a step further and declares that it is the individual will which will determine whether men shall free themselves from all sorts of tyranny or will remain eternal slaves. Political and social tyranny, the abuses of wealth and all sorts of organised evil exist simply because men permit them to exist.

... it is our will
That thus enchains us to permitted ill --
We might be otherwise -- we might be all
We dream of happy, high, majestic.

(Tbid., 170-173)

These lines of Shelley have given a very good handle to his critics who tried to prove that Shelley's idea about the origin of evil as well as his suggestion for remedying evil is superficial and puerile and contended that the above-quoted lines betray Shelley's lack of proper understanding of the forces working in human societies. Unfortunately Mary Shelley's note to Prometheus Unbound also supported this mistaken approach to Shelley's theory of evil. "The prominent features of the Shelley's theory of the destiny of human species," writes Mary Shelley, "was that evil is not inherent in the system of creation, but an accident that might be expelled. Shelley believed that mankind had only to will..."
that there would be no evil, and there would be none. That man could be so perfectionized as to be able to expel evil from his own nature, and from the greater part of the creation, was the cardinal point of his system. But a serious study of Shelley's *Queen Mab*, *The Revolt of Islam*, and *Prometheus Unbound* will show that Shelley never so lightly dismissed evil by suggesting that it could be removed by one stroke. On the contrary he said on many occasions that of the two broad divisions of evil, the subjective evil (i.e., evil which emanates from man) could to a great extent be minimized with the concerted and conscientious effort of man but that too would take a long time and even the conception of time should be changed before the disappearance of that evil. But about the other type of evil, i.e., the objective type, which befalls mankind, Shelley said that nothing could be done to minimize it, not to speak of to eliminate it. Of course when we pass from *Queen Mab* and *The Revolt of Islam* to *Prometheus Unbound* we notice a positive change in Shelley's stand so far as his attitude towards the problem of evil is concerned. In *Queen Mab* and *The Revolt of Islam* Shelley believes in the environmental theory of the origin of evil as put forward by Godwin, Tom Paine, and others but in *Prometheus Unbound* he gives a metaphysical twist to the treatment of evil mainly under the influence of Plato. Shelley also tried to give a Platonic interpretation to the doctrine that evil is, at least partially, subjective. Man himself creates darkness which in turn immerses him and consumes the 'Heaven's light'.

8 Mary Shelley: *Note to Prometheus Unbound*, p.
in its darkness.

For Love, and beauty and delight,
There is no death nor change; their might
Excel our organs, which endure
No light, being themselves obscure.

(The Sensitive Plant, Conclusion)

The British government used to boast of the freedom of its people and the ignorant masses were also made to believe that the freedom they enjoyed was unthinkable to any other race under the Sun. But Shelley, like many reformers of his time, was fully aware of the miserable plight and the inhuman level of existence of the poor of England. Ridiculing the doctrine of Malthus that the evils of the poor arise from an excess of population, Shelley paints a realistic picture of the common man of England when in A Philosophical View of Reform he writes, "they have been stript naked by the tax-gatherer and reduced to bread and tea and fourteen hours of hard labour by their masters... The frost has bitten their defenceless limbs, and the cramp has wrung like a disease within their bones, and hunger has stamped the ferocity of want like the mask of Cain upon their countenance...."

In Lines Written During the Castlereagh Administration (1819) Shelley exposes the cant of the rulers and ridicules the pernicious effects of so-called freedom of the British people. He makes a scathing attack on the oppressors for their despotic atrocities:

9 A Philosophical View of Reform, p.247.
Corpses are cold in the tomb;  
Stones on the pavement are dumb;  
Abortions are dead in the womb,  
And their mothers look pale -- like the death-white shore  
Of Albion, free no more.

(Lines Written During Castlereagh Administration, I-5)

The masses are 'of senseless clay' (7) and they are 'stones in the way' (6) and Liberty is 'smitten to death' (10). The oppressor is the 'sole lord and possessor / Of her corpses' (13-14). The Aristocracy hears the 'festival din' / Of Death and Destruction, and Sin' (16-17).

Wealth cries 'Havoc' and it is 'the Bacchanal triumph which makes truth dumb. In a sarcastic tone Shelley heaps curses on the tyrannical monarch:

Ay, marry thy ghostly wife;  
Let Fear and Disquiet and Strife  
Spread thy couch in the chamber of Life;  
Marry Ruin, thou Tyrant: and Hell be thy guide  
To the bed of the bride:

(Ibid., 21-25)

The patience of Shelley seems to have come to an end, his horror and disgust at the sight of oppression all around having reached great height. In Song to the Men of England, Shelley for the first time gives an open call for revolution by asking the masses of the producing class stand against those of the possessing class. Antedating Karl Marx by a few decades, Shelley boldly declares that the workers should have the right to consume what they produce. Without mincing matters he asks in the very opening paragraphs:
Men of England, therefore plough
For the lords who lay ye low?
Wherefore weave, with toil and care;
The rich robes your tyrants wear?

Wherefore feed, and clothe and save,
From the cradle to the grave,
Those ungrateful drones who would
Drain your sweat -- may, drink your blood:

(Song to the Men of England, 1-8)

The toiling masses have no 'leisure', 'comfort', 'calm',
'shelter', 'food' or 'love's gentle balm' because they always produce
but seldom consume:

The seed ye sow, another reaps;
The wealth ye find, another keeps;
The robes ye weave, another wears;
The arms ye forge, another bears.

(Ibid., 17-20)

Very reasonably and predictably Shelley's sympathies go to the
proletariat. He tries to bring it to their consciousness that they are
the real producers of national wealth and as such they should stand
against parasites and demand their legitimate rights as mere begging
or appealing won't persuade the aristocracy to part with their excess
and share it with the have nots:

Sow seed, -- but let no tyrant reap;
Find wealth, -- let no impostor keep;
Weave robes, -- let not the idle wear;
Forge arms, -- in your defence to bear.

(Ibid., 21-24)
Shelley's profound concern over the exploitation of the toiling people is an enigma to many. It is a mystery as to how he could transcend his aristocratic heritage and cling to socialistic thought. This culmination in him might have come through his objective experience and subjective analysis of the currents and cross-currents responsible for social changes. His enthusiasm for economic liberty of the labouring class shows that his socialistic creed was born of deep conviction and reasoning.

In *Fragment: To the People of England* (1819) Shelley shows in unmistakable print his socialistic bent of mind. He draws the extremes of squalor and splendour, labour and idleness. It is a strange irony that the labourers 'toil' and 'groan' in suffocating oppression of those very parasites whom they nurse 'from the cradle to the grave'. It is befitting the exploiting class that they repay the unique service rendered to them by the labourers with blood-curdling torture and inhuman exploitation. Shelley was a life-long hater of monarchy and aristocracy but his rage against those becomes scathingly bitter and vehement in *Sonnet: England in 1819*. The poem starts on a high pitch with Shelley making a direct attack on the King George III who is 'An old, mad, blind, despised and dying King', (1) as well as on the Princess who is 'the dregs of their dull race, who flow/Through public scorn -- mud from a muddy spring' (2-3). They are insensible and heartless rulers 'who neither see, nor feel, nor know' (4) but who suck the blood from the pale bodies of their famished subject. They are indifferent to the 'people starved and
stabbed in the untilled field' (7). Shelley exhibits a wide awareness of the corruption of the man-made institutions:

An army, which liberticide and prey
Makes as a two-edged sword to all who wield;
Golden and sanguine laws which tempt and slay;
Religion Christless, Godless--a book sealed;
A Senate,--Time's worst statute unrevoked;--
Are graves, from which a glorious phantom may Burst, to illumine our tempestuous day.

(England in 1819, 8-14)

Notwithstanding the pretext of the colonial countries to justify the maintenance of their colonies, Shelley could very clearly see the various evils associated with colonisation. An Ode: Written in October 1819 is a unique expression of Shelley's understanding of the evils of colonisation which proves his sagacity in judging the importance of freedom in the development of a nation. As on earlier occasions he sided with the oppressed people, here also he stood firmly by the side of the slave countries and pleaded immediate granting of freedom to such countries. The very thought of the dawn of liberty in Spain moved him to white heat with ecstasy and made him celebrate his happiness in this poem. To the Spaniards Shelley unmasks their oppressors who have slain 'Your sons, your wives, your brethren' (6), urges them to rise against their oppressors and clearly reminds them that 'There is blood' on the earth that denies ye 'bread' (2). Though Shelley asks them to raise their banner high in defiance of freedom, he does not, unlike in his poem Song to the Man of England, give a call for armed revolt. Rather in a mild way he suggests that the Spaniards should use 'hope', both as the weapon and as the
shied, in their just struggle for freedom.

Blind, blind every brow
With crowns of violet, ivy, and pine;
Hide the blood-stains now
With hues which sweet Nature has made divine.

(Written in October 1819, 29-32)

Confronted with the problem of resolving the contradiction between his inherent rebellious nature and his rather gentlemanly reformist approach, Shelley needed some manifestation of the analogies in the natural world by which to confirm his profound conviction that "regeneration follows destruction, that change does not mean extinction, and that there is yet hope for the world if it will pay heed to those unacknowledged legislators, the prophetic poets." And hence the composition of the Ode to the West Wind (1819) which is hailed even to day as the best specimen of consummate art and lyricism and emotional fervour.

Of late Shelley has come to realize that revolutionary process of change destroys evil as well as good because the society itself is interwoven with the opposite threads of evil and good: 'Black rain, and fire, and hail will burst' and shatter the calm of the Blue Mediterranean — an emblem of peace — near Baal's bay which had been a scene of "social splendour, solemnity and injustice." The unique role of the west wind is that it is both destroyer as well as preserver. It is the west wind

'from whose unseen presence the leaves dead/Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing.' (2-3).

While composing *Ode to the West Wind* Shelley was going through cruciating experience and he was all the time trying to boost his spirit as he believed that one is never defeated until he admits defeat. "By the time he left England in March 1818 his political disillusionment, began in 1812 at the time of his experiences among the Irish, had been completed by the personal disaster of 1817 when the Lord Chancellor had ruled that owing to his views he was unfit to bring up the two children of his first marriage. From then on the poet in him, somewhat overlaid in the past by the political and theological enquirer, began to come into his own and into the poetry now went the crusading zeal formerly diverted into ever-ambitious or quixotic attempts at practical social reform." One of the reasons of Shelley's sudden departure to Italy was that he was terribly apprehensive that of the two surviving children born to Mary, one having died in England, might be lost to Lord Chancellor as Harriet's children had been lost. But that die not help; Clara died and the Shelleys received profound shock when "... without warning, three-year-old William, delight of his parents, fell ill of an intestinal disorder and died too."14

12 Here Shelley reverses the popular simile. In reality the enchanter is seen and the ghosts are unseen. But here the enchanter (the West Wind) is unseen and the ghosts (dead leaves) are seen.
14 Ibid., p.213.
All these sad developments, both outer and inner, made a qualitative change in Shelley's thought process. He superseded Godwinism and other eighteenth century doctrines by Platonism, giving to Platonic notion of 'love' the place of supreme importance in his scheme. Stretching the point to the logical culmination, Rogers points out that, "The Prometheus who triumphs over tyranny after abjuring vengeance is the Shelley of late 1819, bowed beneath his sorrows yet recovering his courage secure in the conviction that good can triumph over evil and love over hate and tortures and that so long as the human will remains strong the hour of triumph will come round just as the seasons come round in turn."  

The West Wind is both destroyer and preserver and wind itself is the symbol of life — animating forces and naturally it has a peculiar attraction for Shelley. His prayer to west wind to make him its lyre shows his eagerness to awaken the oppressed. He implores the Wind to lift him as a wave, a leaf, a cloud (all symbols of himself) because, says he, 'I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed.' Shelley then goes a step further and requests the wind to

15 N.Rogers: op.cit.; p.212.
16 Though T.S.Eliot dismisses the line as banal and prosaic, Shelley miserably failing in the art of communicating his feelings through the technique of 'objective correlative', I think he was rather unkind to Shelley deliberately neglecting the subtle touch of self-abnegation and the merger of the individual 'ego' into a larger unity.
"'New birth', as we know, was a phrase very near the top of Shelley's consciousness in those late October days of 1819; Mary's child, the future Percy Florence Shelley, his second name not lightly given, was born on 12 November and, just as a new child had come to defy the 'swift and sudden spirit of decay' which had taken William, so Shelley's poetry would re-arise, regenerated in time as 'Earth's decaying leaves' were regenerated by the season." 17

As to these 'dead thoughts' we get some idea from his Prometheus Unbound and A Philosophical View of Reform. His main object was to 'Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth/Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind'(66-67). Shelley throughout his life tried to eliminate one of the most rampant of all evils which was ignorance and because of his prophetic bent of mind, he wishes to make his poetry 'The Trumpet of a Prophecy' -- prophecy of how the degenerate humanity will achieve emancipation and regeneration. He always endeavours to hold the hope to the oppressed by making them conscious of the Necessitarian Law that evil is not permanent and that it is inevitably followed by good, that destruction is succeeded by creation and that oppression is succeeded by liberty. His optimism reaches its form when he writes 'when winter comes, spring cannot lag for behind' and he gives this line a supreme lyrical

17 N. Rogers: op. cit., p.227.
excellence by re-writing it as 'If winter comes, can spring be far
behind?'

Even the minor poems of this period, though some of them are no
better than "sentimental album-pieces", show that there is heart-
felt compassion as well as indignation compassion for the oppressed and
indignation against the oppressor. These pieces also show that "Shelley
loved the people; and respected them as often more virtuous; as always
more suffering; and therefore more deserving of sympathy than the
great."19 Mary Shelley has rightly observed that Shelley "believed that
a clash between the two classes of society was inevitable, and he eagerly
ranged himself on the people's side."20

The Cenci (1819), in spite of Shelley's assertion that it is
written "without any of the peculiar feelings and opinions which
characterise my other compositions," contains his ideas about parental
tyreanny, incestuous passion, religious hypocrisy, and the evils of power
and self. Although he has tried to put aside "The presumptuous attitude
of an instructor," there is moral instruction even in the Preface to
The Cenci: "The fit return to make the most enormouos injuries is kindness
and forbearance, and a resolution to convert the injurer from his dark
passions by peace and love."23

19 Note by Mrs. Shelley on Poems of 1819, p. 588.
20 Ibid.
22 The Cenci - Dedication to Hunt, p. 275.
23 Preface to The Cenci, p. 276.
The Cenci adds a new dimension to Shelley's concept of evil. In The Cenci Shelley for the first time accepted, and never later on rejected, the idea that good and evil cannot be separated into watertight compartments and he took a modern view of the problem when he realized that there is good in evil and evil in good. Apparently "Cenci is all evil, and Beatrice and Lucretia represent the good." But a deeper insight will reveal that the evil-incarnate Count Cenci has many good qualities; he is brave, courageous, spirited, undaunted and possesses sufficient manly vigour. On the other hand, Beatrice, the embodiment of beauty and innocence, is not fully devoid of vices; she is shockingly outspoken and revengeful and she incites her mother to assist her in her inhuman design of parricide. "The young maiden, who was urged to this tremendous deed by an impulse which overpowered its horror, was evidently a most gentle and amiable being; a creature formed to adore and be admired, and thus violently thwarted from her nature by the necessity of circumstances and opinion." 

Shelley represents the opposite elements of good and evil through the introduction of historical characters though his knowledge of history was not based on objectivity because the history he read about the Cencis was wrong history and the supposed portrait of Beatrice which he was moved to see was not her portrait actually. Count Cenci has brought 'perilous impunity' with his gold; his 'desperate and remorseless method'

and dishonoured age/Charged with a thousand unrepealed crimes' have
been directed towards nothing except 'lust, pleasure' and 'honey sweet'
and in utter disregard to the law of the land with unholy blessings from
the connivance of the Church, he gets his two sons murdered for their
impudence and rapes of his daughter, Beatrice, for opposing and exposing
him.

Significantly Beatrice, her brother, Bernardo and step-mother,
Lucretia, stand united against their common oppressor. Their innocence
and virtue have no effect on Cenci, who cannot be converted from his
wickedness by peace and love. Their suggestions fail to pacify his
'dark and bloody' designs; on the contrary, they augment his high-
headedness. When Beatrice appeals to the guests of the great banquet
for help and exposes the evil-nature of her father, who has thrown this
party to rejoice at the murder of his two recalcitrant (?) sons, Count
Cenci is infuriated and his 'firm', 'cold', 'subtle' villainy sets to
work; he returns Beatrice's suggestion for becoming a loving and generous
father by inflicting mental as well as physical tortures on her.

There is a conflict between the strong and the weak -- the great
war between the old and the young -- and the tyrant is not converted into a

26 In the great war between the old and the young
I, who have white hairs and a tottering body
Will keep at least blameless neutrality.

(The Cenci, Act II, Scene II, 36-40)
benevolent man but killed by the young and consequently, the oppressed
and the young suffer under the injuries of the law and Church, which
are controlled by the old and the powerful. Not only that, the two
institutions are in league with the tyrants; the Church survives on
the mercy and flourishes on the money of the rich and the old who
inflict pain and punishment on the young and the weak, and manage to get
a clean-chit from all evils by paying money.

That palace walking devil Gold
Has whispered silence to his Holiness.

(The Cenci, Act II, Scene ii, 68-69)

Pope, controlling both 'Law' and the Church, is in no mood to
listen to the predicament of Beatrice caused by her father and he orders
the outright execution of Beatrice on the charge of parricide, her innocence
notwithstanding.

Parricide grows so rife,
That soon for some just cause no doubt the young
Will strangle us all, dazing our chairs,
Authority, and power, and hoary hair
Are grown crimes capital.

(The Cenci, Act V, Scene iv, 20-24)

The wild lamentations of Beatrice on hearing the order of her
execution make us shockingly conscious of the miserable plight of the
innocent in this life and the lack of hope for them in the life
beyond.
I
Have met with much injustice in this world;
No difference has been made by God or men,
Or any power moulding my wretched lot,
'Twixt good or evil, as regarded me.

(Tbid.)

Beatrice meets with her tragic end not because she has any
dearth of virtue or good qualities but simply because, unlike Prometheus,
her evil within is not conquered by good, her revenge is not subdued by
Love.

Thus The Cenci shows Shelley's firm conviction that social, political
and religious institutions are designed to maintain the supremacy of
the powerful, the oppressors, and the old over the weak, the oppressed,
and the young.

Shelley's Song of Experience,^27 Prometheus Unbound (1819) marks a
radical departure from Aeschylus' version of the legend because Shelley
had "boundless faith in the perfectibility of man".26 Shelley at places

27 Prof. Tillyard in his book entitled Milton mentions Prometheus
Unbound as Shelley's Song of Innocence. But S.U.Khan refutes the
arguments of Prof. Tillyard and opines that Shelley's Queen Mab
is his Song of Innocence and that one of his two Songs of Experience
is Prometheus Unbound. "He never went back on his revolutionary
principles like Wordsworth, Coleridge or Southey but his approach
to man and to the problem of evil underwent complete transformation
by the time he wrote Prometheus Unbound. If we consider this lyrical
drama as Shelley's Song of Innocence, which is, in fact, Shelley's one of
the two Songs of Experience it means that we do not recognise the rapid
growth of his maturing mind. It is a common mistake, to quote Mr.Spender,
to remember the boy of eighteen who wrote Queen Mab without remembering
the man of twenty-nine who remarked: 'If I die tomorrow, I have lived to
be older than my father'. My submission, therefore, is that Prometheus
Unbound is Shelley's Song of Experience..." S.U.Khan: Shelley's Song
of Experience: Milton and the Devil's Party and other Essays; Allgarh

26 C.R.Nerhood: Shelley in the Cambridge History of English Literature;
Vol.12, p.64.
altered the story of Prometheus to fit his social, political and religious ideas into it. He did not appreciate Aeschylus' treatment of the plot of Prometheus especially the end was farthest from Shelley's scheme of things and he accused Aeschylus of 'arbitrary discretion' in *Prometheus Bound* where Prometheus is reconciled to Zeus. Shelley was "averse from a catastrophe so feeble as that of reconciling the champion with the oppressor of Mankind." The only way that the oppressed can end the oppression of the oppressor is by perseverance and fortitude and never by weak and weak appeals to the tyrants. That is why Shelley vindicates the stand of Prometheus in not surrendering to Zeus in spite of prolonged inhuman torture. Prometheus is the champion of man and he should not speak or act in a manner which is below his dignity. "The moral interest of the fable, which is so powerfully sustained by the sufferings and endurance of Prometheus, would be annihilated if we could conceive of him as unsaying his high language and quailing before his successful and perfidious adversary." Prometheus remains in torment until the time is ripe for Demogorgon to overthrow his father; and after the downfall of Jupiter, Prometheus is unbound by Hercules. Apparently it seems that the great change comes without notice or any preparation on the part of man. But to know the process of this tremendous change we are to take note of the profound influence of Plato and especially his concept of 'love' on Shelley. The yesterday of man was bright but the today is dark and abysmal, because it is the principle of hate and the manifestation of

29 Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, p.205.
30 Ibid.
revenge which guide man's activities. And hence, to attain the new age of perfection man must forget 'Hatred' and allow 'Love' to dominate instead. There is a qualitative change in Prometheus; now he cannot hate even an arch enemy and oppressor, Jupiter; on the contrary, he has all love for him. Previously he hurled curses on Jupiter; but now he wants to withdraw those curses to make them ineffective:

... for I hate no more,
As then ere misery made me wise. The curse
Once breathed on thee I would recall.

(Prometheus Unbound, Act I, 57-59)

And Prometheus further continues in the same vein:

Grief for awhile is blind, and so was mine,
I wish no living thing to suffer pain.

(Ibid., 304-305)

Since he has forgotten those curses, he requests the elements of the Earth to tell him what the curse was:

... If then my words had power,
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.

(Ibid., 62-72)

Unlike his previous stand, the present stand of Shelley in according the highest place to 'Love' and 'Forgiveness' has a close resemblance to the Christian concept of 'love' and 'forgiveness'. "He had once denounced Christianity, Christ and God as evils which debased man's mind but now he
fervently believed in the intensely Christian ethics of forgiveness of injuries and the necessity of opposing brute force by spiritual resistance. By this time he was able to distinguish between the temporal evil God, Jupiter, and the One or the Eternal God. Jupiter was the creation of man's own mind and was the symbol of that accumulated religious corruption which has viciously manipulated the enslavement of man's mind and spirit and trampled upon his happiness. Man had worshipped this evil God for centuries and the only record had been 'fear, self contempt and barren hope'. It was against this evil God that Prometheus, the mind of man and the symbol of suffering humanity, had revolted. The One or the Eternal God was the benevolent source of all life in this Universe, the unconquerable, without which the fierce omnipotence of Jove would have obliterated humanity and the populous earth.31

Shelley hated religion in general and Christianity in particular and though he did not fully bracket Christ with Christianity, he had no high opinion about Christ either. But of late "Shelley had learnt to love and respect Christ and look upon him as the apostle of truth, peace and pity."32

One came forth of gentle worth
Smiling on the sanguine earth.

(Proteus Unbound, Act 1, 546-547)

Shelley's deep love of Christ inspired the memorable lines which were spoken by Prometheus on beholding the emblem of crucified Christ.

31 S.U.Khan, op.cit., p.51
32 Ibid.
Shelley could see through the nasty design of the clergy in distorting the teaching of Christ. In *A Philosophical View of Reform*, Shelley wrote, "Names borrowed from the life and opinions of Jesus Christ were employed as symbols of domination and imposture, and a system of liberty and equality (for such was the system preached by the great Reformer) was perverted to support oppression -- not his doctrines, for they are too simple and direct to be susceptible of such perversion, but the mere names. Such was the origin of the Catholic Church, which, together with the several dynasties then beginning to consolidate themselves in Europe, means, being interpreted, a plan according to which the cunning and selfish few have employed the fears and hopes of the ignorant many to the establishment of their own power as the destruction of the real interest of all."  

*Prometheus Unbound* makes a positive departure so far as Shelley's concept of evil is concerned. Shelley dives deep into the problem and realizes that there are two distinct types of evil -- the objective and the subjective; the one which befalls us and the other which emanates from us. Commenting on this singular development of Shelley, Mr. S.U. Khan

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remarks: "Shelley had believed in the immediacy of social and political reform because he considered evil to be an external burden which could be eradicated by external change. His pantheistic and Manicheistic explanations of the existence of evil were only passing references. In *Prometheus Unbound* Shelley realized that evil is the creation of man's own mind. To ameliorate the condition of suffering humanity, man must transform himself. He must replace hate with love and conquer his self to enable him to forgive his enemies. Unless this happens, man will remain divorced from the great and benevolent power Love which was the active principle behind the universe."34 In his preface Shelley also points to the same thing "... until the mind can love, and admire, and trust, and hope, and endure, reasoned principles of moral conduct are seeds cast upon the highway of life, which the unconscious passenger tramples into dust..."35

In *Prometheus Unbound* various shades of evil are there; metaphysical as well as political and social. On completing the first act Shelley writes "I consider poetry very subordinate to moral and political science, and if it were well, certainly I should aspire to the latter; for I can conceive a great work, embodying the discoveries of all ages, and harmonizing the contending creeds by which mankind have been ruled."36 Cameron pointed out that "Although it has long been recognised that there is a certain political content to *Prometheus Unbound*, there has, so far, 

34 S.U.Khan: *op.cit.*, pp.52-53.
35 Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*.
been no attempt to make a consistent interpretation of it in terms of this content" and he made a deep probe into this poem to extract its socio-political thought. There is a pointed reference to the French Revolution as to how the love of freedom led the French to stand against despotism of monarchy and Clergy who tried to blight the prospect of liberty, equality and fraternity. But the Revolution failed because the motto was not clear and destructive elements like hatred and revenge were the guiding force and consequently the enthusiasm soon turned into fratricidal conflict in which blood flowed like water.

The picture is also suggestive of contemporary France and England where the rich and the privileged oppressed and exploited the poor and the weak. The furies in the drama represent "all the satellites and agents of court and State by means of which -- as well as by its armies -- the ruling aristocratic class kept itself in power." They scattered chaos everywhere and filled the hearts of the masses with pain, fear, disappointment and mistrust. Consequently, the agents of monarchy and religion began to

Track all things that weep, and bleed, and live,
When the great King betrays them to our will.

(Prometheus Unbound, Act I, 456-57)

Wars with other countries are the machinations of these social parasites and drones; constant warfare has resulted in the National Debt

38 K.N. Cameron: op.cit., p.105.
and ultimately the oppressed and the poor had to bear the brunt of that. 'When Rome burns, Nero fiddles' and when cities sink howling in ruin 'the earthly tyrants' reverberates hills with the scream of their mirth and revelry.

Jupiter represents tyranny. He tortures Prometheus. But Jupiter had no power and ironically it was Prometheus who endowed Jupiter with power. When Mercury, an agent of Jupiter, comes to Prometheus and requests him to purchase his release by surrendering before Jupiter and telling him the secret about Jupiter's fall which Prometheus alone knows, Prometheus of Shelley, unlike Prometheus of Aeschylus, firmly and politely replies:

*Evil minds
Change good to their own nature. I gave all
He has; and in return he chains me here...*

*(Prometheus Unbound, Act 1, 390-392)*

Jupiter's tyranny can be given a political interpretation and his rule may be supposed to be symbolical of the tyrannical rule of Metternich, Castlereagh and their surrogates, because their cruelty would have put Jupiter to shame. Thus for Shelley, the pre-condition of building up a new social order is that the great evil, monarchy, should be done away with. The moment monarchy becomes a thing of the past, other evils like hate, disdain, self-love and self-content will also become things of the past. The new dispensation is without the hierarchy
of monarchs and aristocrats.

Thrones, altars, judgement-seats, and prisons; wherein,
And beside which, by wretched men were born
Sceptres, tiaras, swords, and chains, and tombs
Of reasoned wrong, glozed on by ignorance,
Where like those monstrous and barbaric shapes,
The ghosts of a no-more-remembered fame;
Which, from their unworn obelisks, look forth
In triumph over the palaces and tombs
Of those who were their conquerors.

(Ibid., Act III, iv, 164-72).

The foul shapes of the manifestations of the various
social, political and religious institutions, abhorred by both God and
man, were worshipped 'under many a name and many a form/Strange, savage,
ghastly, dark and execrable. But with the advent of the golden age the
leathsome mask of hypocrisy and injustice will fall away from the face
of things and man will remain

Sceptreless, free, uncircumscribed, but man
Equal, unclassed, tribeless, and nationless;
Exempt from awe, worship, degree; the King
Over himself; just, gentle, wise.

(Ibid., 193-96)

Shelley's ideal of a perfect society based on love, equality and
freedom is feasible only when man is equal, unclassed, tribeless and
nationless. Under particular circumstances Shelley accepted non-violence,
but the doctrine of non-resistance to evil is infused in Prometheus
Unbound: the titan 'nailed' to the wall of eagle-baffling mountains'
for thirty thousand years of 'sleep-unsheltered hours', suffers untold
misery, physical as well as mental. Prometheus Unbound affirms Shelley's faith in valiantly standing against tyranny and oppression. The liberation of man will be brought about gradually and peacefully and; under the influence of Hope and Faith, the earth will become a happy and peaceful abode of equal and unselfish men.

Since in his scheme of things Love occupies the central position, Shelley advocates women's cooperation in the freedom movement, because, woman, for him, was a symbol of Love. For Prometheus Asia is Love incarnate and immediately at the sight of Asia, Panthea and Ione, he forgets his own suffering:

How fair these airborne shapes; and yet I feel
Most vain all hope but love; and thou art far Asia.

(Prometheus Unbound, Act I, 807-809)

Woman in Shelley's scheme always performs an active and positive role and is never at the receiving end only. She is a sharer of man's pains and pleasures. Since love exists only when there are feelings of generous comradeship and equality, Shelley's ideal society is inhabited by equal men and women. Thus in Prometheus Unbound Shelley shows how Asia was separated from Prometheus -- period of suffering in solitude -- and how her union with Prometheus brought about his smooth release.

Prometheus Unbound is undoubtedly a proof of Shelley's maturity of thought. Shelley believes that if man-made institutions are changed for the better and if men are perfected from within, the world would
gradually obtain millennium: "Jupiter's fall means reform's triumph. Prometheus represents the enlightened thinkers of Shelley's day. Mercury the supine drudges in the pay of the governing classes (Jupiter), and the Furies the sycophants who grow fat on the spoils of their master and lit off steam by persecuting reformers." 39

In accounting for the positive shift in Shelley's stand so far as his concept of evil is concerned, Carl Grabe remarks "Prometheus Unbound was written amid the beauty of an Italian summer and autumn, but from it the enthusiasm and faith of Shelley's youth are gone. Besides Prometheus Queen Mab is no more than an eloquent piece of rhetoric, but it is ardent, hopeful: the golden age is imminent; reform and the principles of the Revolutionary philosophy are soon to transform the world. The immediacy of that hope, that faith is in Prometheus absent. Prometheus, the mind of man, himself the creator of the Gods, is yet by them bound to torture, is enchained by the evils of his own creation, and must endure all but endless woe before he frees himself. The ultimate despairing hope remains that he will, he must, do so. But Utopia is no longer a matter of few reforms and the overthrow of kings and priests. Man must change his own character; love must displace hate. Prometheus Unbound is the work of a poet who has ceased to be a reformer and has become a philosopher." 40

39 Desmond King-Hall: op. cit., p. 198.
The overthrow of Jupiter and the liberation of Prometheus in quick succession confused many critics about Shelley's message and the role of Demogorgon has made confusion worse confounded. To understand this apparent enigma, we are to proceed to the whole issue from cosmic perspective. Jupiter is bound to fall not because, as Aeschylus believed, he produced mightier offspring but because of Prometheus attaining perfection from within since he has transcended Fate. "Indeed, Shelley's play in no way provides for the possibility that Jupiter could have prevented his fall by avoiding Thetis; the causal chain stretches back from Demogorgon to Asia and to Prometheus' repenting of his curse and his refusal to submit by revealing any 'secret'.... Deprived of omnipotence by Prometheus' retention of his will, Jupiter is under the illusion that by marriage to Thetis he can propagate his own omnipotent perpetuity, only to find himself, in ironic fact, confronted by the force that will undo him."\(^1\)

Jupiter expects that 'from Demogorgon's vacant throne' the 'dreadful night' would appear in the 'destined Hour' to trample out man's rebellious spirit. "But of course Demogorgon's throne is not vacant -- at least not in the sense that Demogorgon no longer exists -- as Jupiter in his blinding pride believes. Nor is Demogorgon an embodied spirit."\(^2\) Of Demogorgon Panthea says that she sees a 'mighty darkness'


\(^{42}\) Ibid., p. 88.
Filling the seat of power, and rays of gloom
Dart around, as light from the meridian sun,
Ungazed upon and shapeless; neither limb,
Nor form, nor outline; yet we feel it is
A living Spirit.

(Prometheus Unbound: Act II, Scene iv, 2-6)

The concept of Demogorgon is somewhat akin to the Hindu concept of 'Amogh Niyati' (the inevitable collective fate). It is some sort of pre destined Necessity working through inscrutable ways for the ultimate good. The change brought about by this agent often seems to be sudden and unexpected since its long-process of silent spade work is often incomprehensible.

In Prometheus Unbound Shelley tries to accomplish the apparently impossible task of fusing three diverse elements, Revolutionary social philosophy, Neo-Platonism and scientific speculation into a unified whole. "He must reconcile materialism and idealism, physics and metaphysics, science and religion. Prometheus Unbound is the expression of Shelley's effort so to do."43 And tracing the history of Shelley's intellectual development, as to how from a rebel he turned a reformer and then almost a philosopher. Carl Grabe says "Shelley's intellectual history, his ardent advocacy of utopian ideals in extreme youth and his grudging surrender of his hope in their immediate realisation, is in no way unusual or peculiar. It is the experience of idealistic youth the

43 Carl Grabe: Prometheus Unbound: op.cit., p. 10.
world over. The world proves more formidable, less amenable to reason, than youth can credit. With the shock of realization several consequences are characteristic. In ill-balanced minds fanaticism becomes a habit. In the weak, worldly self-interest leads often to complete apostasy; the anarchist and communist of twenty becomes at forty the typical bourgeois, hostile to all reform. But those who retain their idealism and whom disappointment does not make pessimists become the reformers who effect the slow alterations in society which we call progress. If practical expression is denied such, as in the instance of Shelley, the passion to improve the lot of man finds often an outlet in some form of art.\textsuperscript{44}

The Mask of Anarchy (1819) was composed in the white heat of passion aroused by "the terrible and important news of Manchester", called Peterloo after Waterloo. Shelley was fully convinced of the fact that factory system which sucks the labourer pale, the oppressiveness of the Corn Laws and the ruthlessness of the Tory Government were ugly symptoms of "the terrible storm which is approaching. The tyrants here as in the French Revolution, have first shed blood."\textsuperscript{46} He, therefore, told the people of England, loud and bold, that "there will be no coming to close quarters until financial affairs decidedly bring the oppressors and the oppressed together."\textsuperscript{47}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{44} Ibid., pp. 8-9.
\item \textsuperscript{45} Shelley to Peacock: September 9, 1819, Vol.II, p.119.
\item \textsuperscript{46} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{47} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
Shelley was singularly persistent in one of his stands. He always ranged himself on people's side as he had seen the miserable plight of the poor under the social system of the time and the sub-human living condition of the labouring classes aroused his indignation against oppression of the industrialists with the connivance, if not active support, of the government. Shelley gave greater importance to the governed than to the government because the institution of government is primarily and wholly meant for the benefit of the governed. "A man has no right to be a king or lord or a bishop but so long as it is for the benefit of the people and so long as the people judge that it is for their benefit that he should impersonate that character." He squarely blamed the then existing social, political and religious institutions for contriving slavery for the working class and for providing unchartered freedom to the rich. Members of the working class irrespective of age and sex, are hardly able to meet the bare necessities of life; on the other hand, even 'asses, swines, dogs, of the rich are better fed than the children of the poor. Shelley takes a modern view when he defines freedom as 'for the labourer thou art bread; thou art clothes and fire; and food for the trampled multitude; to the rich thou art a check; thou

48 A Philosophical View of Reform, p.232.
49 'Tis to work and have such pay
As just keeps life from day to day
In your limbs, as in a cell
For the tyrants' use to dwell.
So that ye for them are made
Loom, and plough, and sword and spade;
With or without your own will bent
To their defence and nourishment.

(The Mask of Anarchy, XL-XLI, 160-167)
art justice -- never for gold; thou art wisdom, peace; liberty, Love'
and so on (The Mask of Anarchy, Stanzas LIV-LXI). Freedom is the
starting point for any progress since it brings about intellectual
awakening

Science, poetry, and Thought
Are thy lamps; they make the lot
Of the dwellers in a cot
So serene; they curse it not.

(Ibid., LXIII, 254-257)

Shelley mostly believes in non-violence and in peaceful resistance
but, in extreme cases, when the tyrants and oppressors refuse to mend
themselves under the moral pressure of peaceful resistance, he does not
hesitate to advocate the use of force and violence. In this poem
his revolutionary zeal reaches its fore when he gives a clarion call to
the have-nots to stand up as one man and to take the cudgel to bring the
oppressors to book.

Rise like lions after slumber
In unvanquishable number --
Shake your chains to earth like dew
Which in sleep had fallen on you
Ye are many -- they are few.

(Ibid., Stanza XCI)

We fully agree with Mrs. Shelley when she says that The Mask
of Anarchy was "written for the people"50 to show them "how to resist"
and with Karl Marx who opined that had Shelley lived longer he would

50 Note on The Mask of Anarchy by Mrs. Shelley, p. 345.
always have been one of the advance guards of Communism.

In an earlier shorter poem To Wordsworth, Shelley politely rebuked the elder poet; but it seems he was not satisfied with his earlier mild chiding and hence he composed *Peter Bell the Third* (1819) expressing his views more clearly. Shelley once appreciated William Wordsworth since he had hailed with rapture the 'dawn' of the French Revolution; but now he criticizes the same Wordsworth since he retraced his steps and turned a reactionary. Shelley goes a step further and opines that Wordsworth's decline of poetic power can be traced to his apostasy. Shelley admired Wordsworth's poetry, "he read it perpetually, and taught others to appreciate its beauties" [51] but Wordsworth's pamphlet supporting the candidature of a son of Wordsworth's patron, Earl of Lonsdale of Tory party against that brilliant Whig, Henry Brougham, in a parliamentary election, evoked Shelley's scathing criticism. He so much resented Wordsworth's conservative attitude that he wrote "What a beastly and pitiful wretch that Wordsworth. I can compare him with no one but Simonides, that flatterer of the Sicilian tyrants, and at the same time the most natural and tender of the lyric poets." [52]

If analysed in the light of this conviction it seems that *Peter Bell the Third* stands "as a warning -- not as a narration of the reality". Wordsworth's recantation is explicitly the theme of the poem. Peter's changed station can be linked to that of Wordsworth:

51 Note on *Peter Bell the Third* by Mrs. Shelley, p.362.
53 Note on *Peter Bell the Third* by Mrs. Shelley, p. 363.
But Peter, though now damned, was not
What Peter was before damnation.
Men often times prepare a let
Which ere it finds them, is not what
Suits with their genuine station.

(Peter Bell the Third, Part Fourth, 260-72)

and about the lack of Wordsworth’s moral courage Shelley’s attack is more scathing:

But from the first ’t was Peter’s drift
To be a kind of moral eunuch,
He touched the hem of Nature’s shift
Felt faint— and never dared uplift
The closest, all -- concealing tunic.

(Ibid., 313-317)

Not only Wordsworth, Shelley did not spare even Southey and Coleridge for their disavowal of the lofty ideals they had once cherished. Southey, points Shelley, became a renegade and that caused a decline of his poetic gift blunting his poetic sensibility. Coleridge, after he lost faith in progressive ideology, became an uninspired poet.

He was a mighty poet -- and
A subtle-souled psychologist;
All things he seemed to understand;
Of old or new -- of sea or land --
But his own mind -- which was a mist.

(Ibid., Part Fifth, 278-82)

Shelley’s poetry of the fourth phase shows richness and maturity as well as variety of thought; selfishness makes a man callously indifferent to the suffering of his fellow-human being thereby ushering in misery; love
without marriage is superior to marriage without love; evils can be diminished, if not completely eliminated, by the act of the will; national property depends on freedom and freedom can be achieved and maintained by sacrifice and suffering; and the course of violent revolution may be adopted only when peaceful means fail to remedy the wrong.