Chapter - VI

THE THIRD PHASE (1815-1817)

The literary output of Shelley during this short phase registers a qualitative change as compared to the works of the immediately preceding years. One cardinal point responsible for this change may be that Shelley made a prolonged continental tour during this period. This extensive travel gave him a first-hand knowledge of and clearer insight into the evils of war in France; he saw "the country that was the seat of war" and the "innumerable forms of destruction". 1 Side by side with this outward development Shelley had some inward and purely personal development which was of no less importance. When he was emotionally drifting away like a ship sans a rudder, his relation with his first wife having reached a point of no return, his refreshing acquaintance with the delightfully lifeful Mary Godwin offered him a cozy berth for his emotional self to rest and rejuvenate. Commenting on this peculiar development of incidence in the life of Shelley, S.U. Khan says, "Shelley's matrimonial mishap is one of the many reasons of his unpopularity. It was believed and the belief still persists that his 'desertion' of Harriet cannot be

1 K.N. Cameron; The Young Shelley; London; 1951, p. 273.
attributed to anything else except to his moral perversity. But the facts of this particular case are much different. That Harriet flung herself upon Shelley when his affections were still engaged with his cousin, Harriet Grove, can hardly be doubted. Emotionally it was a low ebb tide when Shelley eloped with Harriet. We have no reason to doubt Harriet's sincerity but her elder sister Elisa cannot be extricated from a suspicion that she carefully planned the marriage of Harriet and Shelley with an eye on the immense fortune which Shelley was to inherit. The same Elisa or 'The Miserable Wretch' as Shelley called her, may also be said to have caused much of unhappiness in the life of the young couple.

"Shelley's letters of summer of 1813 reveal the growing estrangement between him and Harriet who learnt by this time, partly from Peacock and partly from Hegg, to laugh at the 'dreams' of her husband. She also ceased to take interest in study and she lacked sympathy for her husband's beliefs. 'She could not feel poetry and understand philosophy', Shelley complained. Moreover, the hope of immense fortune which Shelley was to inherit had receded back. It is interesting to read Shelley's poem To Harriet, written in 1814, where he pleads with Harriet to give up malice, revenge and pride and pity him if she cannot love him. In the natural sequence of such cold indifference, it was necessary for Shelley to seek love or intellectual companionship in Mary Godwin.  

Notwithstanding this domestic crisis, Shelley continued

2 S.U. Khan; The Unpopular Shelley': Milton and the Devil's Party and other Essays, Aligarh; 1969, pp. 103-104.
to give serious thought to social and political problems of the day as the poetry of the period will bear a testimony to that.

Evil propensity makes a man physically weak and morally impotent. Even courageous and spirited souls soon recoil and take compromising and cowardly attitude. William Wordsworth was no exception. This spirited soul, who burst into poetic rapture with the advent of the French Revolution calling loud and bold that it was "bliss to be alive at that time and to be young heaven", did also recoil immediately when the excess of the atrocities became too much for him to stand. Not only did Wordsworth withdraw his support for the cause of the revolution, he made a sudden volta face and turned to be a conservative attacking everything that revolution stood for. Initially Shelley had great respect for Wordsworth and considered him to be the spiritual and practical force behind the Romantic Movement. But as Wordsworth turned renegade (if we may use the word), Shelley immediately got thoroughly disillusioned about this older poet and started directing scathing attacks towards him. In To Wordsworth (1815) Shelley literally rebukes Wordsworth for recantation with a profound sense of shock he regrets that the poet who was once a pioneer of equality, liberty and fraternity, would abandon the ideals he had long nurtured. Since Wordsworth's approval of conservatism disappointed him, he bitterly condemned the 'poet of Nature'.
Thou wert as a lone star, whose light did shine
On some frail bark in winter's midnight roar;
Thou hast like a rock-built refuge stood
Above the blind and battling multitude.
In honoured poverty thy voice did weave
Songs consecrated to truth and liberty;
-- Deserting these, thou leavest me to grieve,
Thus having been, that thou shouldst cease to be.

(7-14)

All Europe was dazzled with the charisma of Napoleon and he
was worshipped as a superman and even as a demigod. But to a young man
of 24, as Shelley was then, Napoleon could not hide his real self and
in a poem *Feelings of a Republic on the fall of Bonaparte* Shelley exposes
the real self of Napoleon with deep and penetrating insight. Without
mincing words, Shelley starts by saying 'I hated thee, fallen Tyrant'.
Shelley not only hated but he also groaned:

'To think that a most unambitious slave
Like thou, shouldst dance and revel
On the grave of Liberty

(2-4)

It was the singular blunder of Napoleon that instead of building a
throne of lasting excellence

... Thou didst prefer
A frail and bloody pomp which Time has swept
In fragments towards oblivion.

(5-7)

It seems that Shelley has overcome his puerile notions of good and evil,
virtue and vice; he sounds immensely matured when he declares:
... I know
Too late, since thou and France are in the dust,
That virtue owns a more eternal foe
Than Force or Fraud; old custom, legal crimes,
And bloody Faith the foulest birth of Time.

(10-14)

These lines shake the very foundation of the works of those critics who made all our efforts to portray Shelley as eternally immature having a childish concept of the causes of evil.

With the composition of Alastor (published in 1815) a very significant phase of Shelley's career begins. For the first time he became introvert in the true sense of the term. His entire process of thinking undergoes a sea-change as it is conditioned by his attitude of regarding man's existence on two planes — the sociological and the imaginative; the outer and the inner; the one based on relational approach with the society and the other having a direct bearing upon spiritual principles. Shelley is of the firm opinion that the refinement of the imaginative being is circumscribed because it attempts "to exist without human sympathy." It invariably breeds 'self-centred seclusion' and excludes the possibilities of being broad-minded since it makes one myopic rendering one incapable of looking beyond the beloved and towards humanity. Consequently this limitation inherent in the pursuit of an imaginative being leads to moral failing bringing in its wake disastrous end-results. The youth in Alastor "drinks deep of the

3 P.B. Shelley: Preface to Alastor
fountains of knowledge and is still insatiate. The sameness and beauty of the external world sinks profoundly into the frame of his conceptions, and affords to their modifications a variety not to be exhausted.4 But he is roundly self-centred and hence callously indifferent to his kinship with his fellow human beings on the social plane. He is oblivious of the fact that "the intellectual faculties, the imagination, the functions of the sense have their respective requisitions on the sympathy of corresponding power in other human beings."5 This youth possesses all the sublime qualities for the attainment of 'peace within and calm around'. He is of 'uncorrupted feelings' and 'adventurous genius' and is 'led forth by an imagination inflamed and purified through familiarity with all that is excellent and majestic, to the contemplation of the universe."6 But he failed simply because he had everything sans human element -- the qan vana] which shapes things, moulds deformity, fills lacunae and, last but not least, imparts grace to the dull sordid drama of human existence. A human being cannot always float in air; he has to come to the ground and that very moment the tragedy begins. Because as long as "... it is possible for his desires to point towards objects; thus infinite and unmeasured; he is joyous, and tranquil, and self-possessed. But the period arrives when these objects cease to suffice. His mind is at length suddenly awakened and thirsts for intercourse with an intelligence, similar to itself."7 The poem embodies Shelley's firm belief that

4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
"those who love not their fellow beings live unfruitful lives, and prepare for their old age miserable grave."8

From the very beginning the youth of Alaster was a visionary and he had his initial training in cosmic discipline.

By solemn vision, and bright silver dream,
His infancy was nurtured. Every sight
And sound from the vast earth and ambient air,
Sent to his heart his choicest impulses.
The fountains of divine philosophy
Fled not his thirsting lips, and all of great,
Or good, or lovely, which this sacred past
In truth or fable consecrates, he felt
And knew.

(67-75)

But he did not rest there, neither he did remain content. He went on moving forward to 'follow knowledge like a sinking star'.

... When early youth had passed, he left
His cold fireside and alienated home
To seek strange truths in undiscovered lands.

(75-77)

But being totally engrossed with self-love he failed to recognize, not to speak of to reciprocate, the innocent and sincere love of the Arab maiden.

Meanwhile an Arab maiden brought his food,
Her daily portion, from her father's tent,
And spread her matting for his couch, and stole
From duties and repose to tend his steps:
Enamoured, yet not daring for deep awe
To speak her love;—and watched his nightly sleep
Sleepless herself...

(29-35)

8 Ibid.
Here we are faced with a dilemma as to whether self-centredness is a positive evil and whether a man can live peacefully if he tries to follow only the dictates of his conscience or to satisfy his sublime ego. Shelley’s answer is crystal clear; a man lives not only for himself but for the society also. Since man accepts some social obligations, it is reasonably expected that he would not act in a manner detrimental to the majority interest. But what about him who has turned introvert? If the society is indifferent to him, has he not a moral right to be indifferent to the society? To appreciate Shelley’s position, Mrs. Shelley’s Note on Alastor might help us. Commenting upon the difference between Queen Mab and Alastor, Mrs. Shelley says, “Alastor is written in a very different tone from Queen Mab. In the latter Shelley poured out all the cherished speculations of his youth -- all the irrepressible emotions of sympathy, censure, and hope, to which the present suffering, and what he considers the proper destiny of his fellow creatures, gave birth. Alastor, on the contrary, contains an individual interest only. A very few years, with their attendant events, had checked the ardour of Shelley’s hopes, though he still thought them well-grounded, and that to advance their fulfilment was the noblest task man could achieve.”

So far as Shelley’s conception of evil is concerned, Alastor is a turning point since from this poem onward ‘love’ occupies the central position in Shelley’s scheme of things. Love here is not something

9 Mary Shelley, Note on Alastor.
static or ineffective; here it is dynamic and is a motivating force in man's life. The indifference of the youth to human love, his thirst for imaginative love and his consequent agony and death testify Shelley's conviction that love is a psychological as well as sociological phenomenon.

_Hymn to Intellectual Beauty_ (1816) was composed "under the influence of feelings which agitated me even to tears". In this poem Shelley seems to "define private theology with the spirit of Intellectual Beauty as a substitute for God." Shelley believes that though life exists amid 'doubt, chance and mutability', even then 'Life is real, Life is earnest' and the spirit of Beauty 'gives grace and truth to life's unquiet dream. Being thoroughly disillusioned falling 'upon the thorns of life' Shelley asks in a mood of self-pity:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Spirit of Beauty, that dost consecrate} \\
\text{With thine own hues all thou dost shine upon} \\
\text{Of human thought for form, -- where art thou gone?} \\
\text{Why dost thou pass away and leave our state} \\
\text{This dim vast vale of tears, vacant and desolate.}
\end{align*}
\]

(13-17)

Since Beauty creates truth and grace in the heart of man, it can purge society of falsehood, disgrace and other shades of evil. This civilising power of Beauty has immense potentiality and can go a long way to nourish noble thought.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Thou messenger of sympathies} \\
\text{That wax and wane in lover's eye --} \\
\text{Thou -- that to human thought are nourishment.}
\end{align*}
\]

(II. 42-44)

11 Desmond King-Hall: _Shelley - His thought and work_: Macmillan, 1964, p. 60.
Though there seems little hope for the emancipation of this outcast, Man, an optimist like Shelley can hardly reconcile to such a pessimistic inference. So even in 'awful loveliness' Shelley sees a hope that will 'free this world from its dark slavery'. There seems to be an apparent contradiction in Shelley's stand when he says that the spirit of Beauty urges him to fear himself but to 'Love all human kind'. Is it possible for any one to love everyone barring himself? But if we look at the problem from another angle, the contradiction is resolved to a great extent. Man is primarily a social being and as such his lot is, with or without his conscious effort, cast with his fellow human beings. So no permanent good may come to him in total isolation.

The Revolt of Islam (1817) is Shelley's "experiment on the temper of the public mind, as to how far a thirst for a happier condition of moral and political society survives among the enlightened and refined, the tempests which have shaken the age in which we live." In this longest of his poems, the poet has endeavoured to enkindle within the bosoms of his readers "a virtuous enthusiasm for those doctrine of liberty and justice, that faith and hope in something good, which neither violence nor misrepresentation nor prejudice can ever totally extinguish among mankind." The poem is a story of 'human passion' on a super-human setting and amply displays Shelley's moral and political creed; it represents "a succession of pictures illustrating the growth

12 Shelley: Preface to The Revolt of Islam.
13 Ibid.
and progress of individual mind aspiring after excellence and devoted to the love of mankind.\textsuperscript{14} This poem is another significant attempt by Shelley to understand the origin of evil, to discuss its manifestations and to suggest remedial measures.

The 'Dedication' is an unmistakable pointer to the fact that there is an undercurrent of hard realities which Shelley had lived and the mission of the poet to ceaselessly try to reform the world without violence and bloodshed. The evil all around, manifested in the oppression of the weak by the strong, distressed him so much that he took an oath:

\begin{quote}
I will be wise
And just and free, and mild, if in me lies
Such power, for I grow weary to behold
The selfish and the strong still tyrannise
Without reproach or check.
\end{quote}

(Dedication: IV; 31-35)

Shelley believed that ignorance was a positive evil and a root cause of many secondary vices. With a view to eradicating or at least minimizing his own ignorance, Shelley set upon himself the task of learning as much as possible. So with all sincerity he declares:

\begin{quote}
And from that hour did I with earnest thought
Heap knowledge from forbidden mines of lore,
Yet nothing that my tyrants knew or thought
I cared to learn, but from that secret store
Wrought linked armour for my soul, before
It might walk forth to war among mankind;
\end{quote}

(Dedication: V: 37-42)

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
The oppressors, the tyrants, the exploiters did impart some knowledge to the men in general and the younger generation in particular. But it was not that type of education which was in harmony with the proper function of education which in the word of Swami Vivekananda is the manifestation of the perfection already in a man. Naturally the oppressors did not want that through education people should know their evil design. So they not only prevented people from having real knowledge, they deliberately tried to distort the brains of young enthusiasts with distorted analyses of the realities of life. That accounts for the deliberate neglect by Shelley of his curricular studies. Shelley’s floating of corked bottles containing his leaflets into the sea during his Irish voyage should be seen in this context, notwithstanding the ridicule of his critics. If we just judge this action of Shelley without trying to understand the motive behind, it might provoke our laughter as the action would seem childish and even idiotic. But if we consider the motive behind, we may not be so unkind to Shelley. Many of the single actions of even civilized men of today appear nonsensical if we view it in isolation. Huge sums of money are being spent for remitting radio signals into the outer space with the hope that some other extra-terrestrial intelligent civilization, billions of miles away, might receive and communicate with men on Earth after hundreds of years to end the cosmic loneliness of man. We do not condemn this apparently futile, wild, and expensive adventure.

At the time of composition of *The Revolt of Islam* Shelley was deeply under the influence of Zoroaster as regards the origin of evil.
To solve that recurring and imposing dilemma as to how there could be so much of evil in the creation of that Being who is not only omnipotent but also all-loving, a readymade answer to this baffling problem seemed to lie in the system of Zoroaster. This philosophy is of the opinion that in the process of creation there are two Gods equally powerful and eternally pitted against each other. The God of good is represented by 'Ahriman' and the God of evil is represented by 'Ormuzd'. The God of good tries to eradicate evil by trying to combat the god of evil and vice-versa. It should be the endeavour, and by implication the bounden obligation, of all sane-thinking human beings to try to further the cause of the God of Good and to frustrate the evil design of the God of Evil.

The symbolical fight between the serpent and the eagle represents the eternal struggle between the good principle and the evil one:

For in the air do I behold indeed
An eagle and a serpent wreathed in flight.

(Canto I, VIII, 192-193)

The fight seems to be a fatal one and both the contenders are trying to fight to finish:

Around, around, in ceaseless circles wheeling
With clang of wing and scream, the eagle sailed
Incessantly -- sometimes on high concealing
Its lessening orbs, sometimes as if it failed;
Drooped through the air; and still it shrieked and wailed
And casting back its eager head, with beak
And talon unremittingly assailed
The wreathed serpent, who did ever seek
Upon his enemy's heart a mortal wound to wreck.

(Canto I, X, 208-216)
In the fight the serpent was mortally wounded and fell from the mountain top into the river below. But it did not die. It fell into a boat and was taken and tended by a woman. Boat is the symbol of 'hope' and the woman of 'love'. The good is temporarily defeated but it is not destroyed; it is being reared by Hope and Love for the final fight and ultimate victory over evil. Today the world has become a degenerate one and evil reigns supreme. But this fallen state cannot continue forever. However dark and bleak the today may be, the tomorrow is bound to be happy and prosperous — the only thing man has to do in the meantime is to wage a battle of no retreat with the evil principles and to come out victorious ultimately. Once the evil is permanently defeated and destroyed, nothing can prevent man from enjoying his state of pristine peace and glory.

Shelley's vast and varied reading coined with his personal experience made him shockingly aware of another glaring social evil: the exploitation and neglect of women by men down the ages. He is thoroughly convinced of the fact that exploitation by man is a suicidal act on his part because in the process of weakening their female counterpart they have been weakening themselves because woman is complementary to man and consequently exploitation of woman by man is like deliberate and unnecessary amputation of his own person. Shelley condemns religion in general and Christianity in particular for inculcating this anti-feminism.

Shelley here uses inverse simile because unlike the prevailing religious symbol of serpent as 'evil', he makes the serpent a symbol of good as it is a symbol of change.
in man and for inciting useless and vain male-chauvinism. The very conception of the Bible that Adam, the man was created first and that Eve, the woman was made out of the rib of Adam, relegates Eve, by implication every woman, to a lower and inferior position as compared to man. And the serious aspersion that Eve was primarily responsible for the Fall of Man since it was she who was induced by the serpent and who, in her turn, induced Adam to disobey God by eating of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, 16 goes a long way to castigate woman. It is not a far-fetched imagination that people for many generations associated Eve with the word 'Evil'. "The woman in Europe and all over the world was looked upon as a mere nonentity. She formed the theme of many a discourse of the learned scholars and philosophers who wrangled among themselves over questions such as these: Has woman got a soul or not? If yes, then what precisely is the nature of her soul, is it human or animal? Supposing she does possess a human soul then what social and human position should she occupy in relation to man? Is she born as a slave to man or does she hold a position slightly superior to that of a slave?"

This situation remained unchanged even through those relatively short spans of history when woman appears to have occupied a central position in the social set-up of the time, e.g., in Greece and the Roman

16 In fact man should feel grateful to 'Mother Eve' for her unique and bold decision of eating of the fruit of the 'Tree of Knowledge' instead of that of the 'Tree of Life' thereby saving man from the disaster of having eternal life.
Explaining the degradation of woman from the sociological point of view in a historical perspective, Frederic Engels opined that initially there was primitive communism in human groups. There was not much exploitation since the concentration of individual property had not developed still then. Men used to collect food and other essentials collectively and to consume those as per needs. But with the adoption of 'agriculture' and domestication of animals far-reaching changes took place in society. Men became conscious of their own rights and possessions and 'wealth turned into property'. Women were treated as property and chattels of men and this stage is described by Engles as the historical fall of woman.

But Shelley believed in the end of exploitation of woman by man and he was deeply thinking for finding out ways for the emancipation of woman. As Mary appeared to be a prospective promise of beauty, freedom, wisdom and radicalism, he thought these virtues were necessary for the emancipation of women. Shelley was aware of the fact that in nineteenth century England the social, political and economic status of women was so inferior to that of men that they were treated as personal property of men. Not to speak of social or political equalities, even domestic equality was denied to them. Initially some middle class and lower class women enjoyed some economic independence by working in fields, factories and mines, but the capitalist agrarian policy and the new factory system

brought "much unemployment and misery for single woman and the breaking up many small rural households whose budget had always been balanced by the earnings of the wife and children." To a great extent Shelley owed his feminism to Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin and Desmond King-Hele has rightly said that to guide him, he had a bible at hand in the Rights of Women which he had first read in 1812.

Shelley held that the position of women in a country was the touchstone of civilization. He had all praise for ancient Greek civilization but he vehemently criticized it when he found that women lived in a state of subjection even at the hey day of Greek civilization. The men in Greece received the highest cultivation and refinement; while the other (women) so far as intellect is concerned, were educated as slaves and were raged but few degrees in all that related to moral and intellectual excellences above the condition of savages." But he praised the Roman civilization where women "held a higher consideration in society and were esteemed almost as the equal partners with their husbands in the regulation of domestic economy and the education of their children."

In England people gave respect to the women belonging to the rich classes whereas they had no respect for women belonging to low income groups. Shelley firmly opines that the misery and death of a princess is in no way of greater importance than that of the thousands of her sex.

18 G.N. Travelyan: English Social History: Elbs; 1962, p. 486.
20 Ibid.
In his Address to the People on the Death of Princess Charlotte he wrote, "The accident of her birth neither made her life more virtuous nor her death more worthy of grief." In this article Shelley turns the attention of the mourning people to those innumerable young and innocent women who "have perished in penury and shame, and their orphan baby has survived; a prey to the scorn and neglect of strangers." Shelley pointed to the callous indifference of the people to the death of poor women: "none weep for them — none mourn for them — none when their coffins are carried in the grave (if indeed the parish furnishes a coffin for all) turn aside and moralize upon the sadness they have left behind."

It was Shelley's firm conviction that man cannot be free "if woman is a slave" and man cannot defeat the oppressors if woman is "condemned to bear scorn." Without the help of woman man cannot accomplish the task of liberating mankind and that is why when Laon, the hero of The Revolt of Islam, finds his task difficult, the heroine Cythna comes forward and assures him of her fullest cooperation and gives an account of her real strength.

21 P.B.Shelley: An Address to the People on the Death of Princess Charlotte; p. 166.
22 Ibid., p. 163.
23 Ibid., p. 164.
24 P.B.Shelley: The Revolt of Islam; II. XLIII, 1045.
25 Ibid; II, XLIII, 1048.
26 Shelley's feminism very much influenced the rebel poet of Bengal Kazi Nazrul Islam, who paid a glowing tribute to the role of women in making life meaningful and the dead earth a habitable globe. In his poem entitled Woman he says that man has brought the heat of day and the scorching sunshine but the woman has brought the coolness of the night, the gentle breeze and the soothing shower.
Leon, I am not weak,
And, though my cheek might become pale the whiles
With thee, if thou desirest, will I seek
Through their array of branded slaves to wreak
Ruin upon the tyrants.

(The Revolt of Islam, II, XXXIX, 1010-14)

Though Shelley had not seen the apogee of the French Revolution, he was deeply influenced by it and The Revolt of Islam shows Shelley's passion for French Revolution; his leading political and social ideas notwithstanding. At the first sight the title appears misleading since we do not find any minute delineation of Mahometan manners. The "tale is illustrative of such a Revolution as might be supposed to take place in a European nation, acted upon by the opinions of what has been called (erroneously as I think) the modern philosophy and contending with ancient notions and the supposed advantage derived from them to those who support them. It is the Revolution of this kind, that is the beau-ideal as it were of the French Revolution, but produced by the influence of individual genius and out of general knowledge."27

To Shelley evil appeared to be a global phenomenon. Argolis, like Paris on the eve of the French Revolution, suffers under the evil effects of age-old tyranny of the monarch. A parallel can easily be drawn between the social and political injustices; the oppression of the King, the spiritual tyranny of the Clergy, the exploitations of the

nobles and the blood-curdling atmosphere of the intellectual subservience
of Argolis and that of the Pre-Revolution Paris. Shelley was very
much against monarchy, clergy and nobility and he could see clearly
their nefarious designs prompted out of evil motives. The state of
affairs in England at that time shocked Shelley beyond measure. The
death of Princess Charlotte, the heir-apparent of King George III
shocked Shelley like many liberals of the time. But what shocked him
more was the hanging and quartering of three poor labourers on frame-up
charges of high-treason by the government. Sharing the feeling of
nationwide mourning on the death of the princess, Shelley immediately
wrote An Address to the People on the Death of Princess Charlotte to
give vent to some of his deeper thoughts regarding the evil state of
affairs all around. But the death of the princess was only the occasion
for Shelley's address: "its real purpose was to arouse the nation to a
sympathetic understanding of the intolerable plight of the poor, and to
call attention to the fact that Englishmen had lost their time-honoured
freedom to write and speak and to petition freely about their grievances."

Shelley then drew a deadly parallel between the mourning for a
beautiful princess and the deep grief of a whole nation for the execution
of three poor labourers on false charges by the government. Shelley
forcefully made his point that in the shameful execution of these three
labourers Freedom itself was murdered. "Let us follow the corpse of the

28 Davis Lee Clark: Preface to Shelley's Address to the People on the
Death of Princess Charlotte, pp. 162-163.
British Liberty slowly and reverentially to its tomb; and if some glorious phantom should appear and make its throne of broken swords and sceptres and royal crown trampled is the dust, let us say that the spirit of Liberty has arisen from its grave and left all that was gross and mortal there, and kneel down and worship it as our Queen."  

Shelley had expected too much of the French Revolution since it stood to champion the cause of those ideals which Shelley so fervently espoused. This poem shows how Shelley saw a better society lurking in the Revolution. In his considered opinion the bastions of monarchy, clergy and aristocracy could be trampled down through nothing short of revolution.

When first the living blood through all veins Kindled a thought in sense; great French sprang forth And seized, as if to break, the ponderous chains Which bind in woe the nations of the earth.

(The Revolt of Islam, I, XXXIX, 469–72)

When the hope of a better society in France was frustrated by the bloodshed that resulted from the excess of the Revolution, many an erstwhile champions, including Wordsworth and Southey, coiled back and stood against the Revolution. But Shelley was singularly matured in the assessment of the causes of failure of the French Revolution. He was one of the few who did not confuse disease with the cause. Without abandoning his faith in revolution, he embraced the doctrine of non-violence, passive

resistance and bloodless revolution. The failure of the French Revolution shocked Shelley but it could not make him disillusioned because, unlike many supporters of the Revolution, he had no illusion about the Revolution. He did not pin too much hope on the Revolution because he had a fairly thorough knowledge of the state of affairs in pre-Revolution France.

Shelley was of the opinion that it was too much to hope that the people who were degenerate a few years ago would emerge perfect immediately with the taking place of the Revolution. In forceful language Shelley declared, "Could they listen to the plea of reason who had groaned under the calamities of a social state, according to the provisions of which one man riots in luxury while another famishes for want of bread? Can he who the day before was a trampled slave, suddenly become liberal-minded, forbearing and independent? This is the consequence of the habits of a state of society to be produced by resolute perseverance and indefatigable hope and long-suffering and long-believing, courage and the sympathetic efforts of generations of men of intellect and virtue." 30

The Revolt of Islam shows a marked development over Queen Mab in thought-content; the idea of class conflict develops into a universal phenomenon of conflict between the good and the evil forces; the idea of liberty comes close to non-violence and bloodless revolution; the reforming tone is changed into mild revolutionary radicalism; and the passion for intellectual beauty turns into clear-cut feminism.

30 P.B. Shelley: Preface to the Revolt of Islam.
In *Rosalind and Helen* (1817) Shelley's conception of the eradication of evil takes a new direction as the concept of love finds a new dimension. Here love is "the essence of our being, and all woe and pain arose from the war against it by selfishness, or insensibility, or mistake." (Note to *Rosalind and Helen* by Mrs. Shelley). So long the world has mostly been ruled by hate; Shelley tries to banish this positive evil—hatred, from human consciousness. But then immediately the question comes as to who will fill the void and who will rule the world in the absence of hate. Shelley's answer is 'Love'. So after dealing with the evil forces, Shelley moves forward with the implication of love and marriage. In a conventional loveless marriage, woman is treated as no better than chattel; however, devoted she might be to her husband. Shelley partly out of his interest in the uplift of women and partly owing to the influence of William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, advocated equality in matters of love and marriage. Lionel sincerely loves Helen but he does not have any faith in the institution of marriage. Rather he is critical of it thinking it to be a means of exploitation:

many a rite.
By men do bind out once provided;
Could not be shared by him or me
Or they would kill him in their glee.

(Rosalind and Helen: 646-49)

Helen also disapproved of marriage but her disapproval came through a long process of suffering because she had lived for sometime under the influence of orthodox system of marriage. She suffered torture and then realized
the hollowness and inhuman nature of marriage rites and she boldly gave
vent to her personal choice declaring:

We will have rites our faith to bind
But our Church shall be the starry night,
Our altar the grassy earth outspread,
And our priest the muttering wind.

(851-854)

True to their heart's desire, Helen and Lionel were united but
the cementing bond of their union was the sacred fire of love and not the
orthodox rituals of marriage. Physically they were two different entities
but emotionally they became one 'soul of inter-woven flame'. This brought
a qualitative change in them and they gained new life and found themselves
into a 'second birth/in worlds diviner far than earth'.

Lionel is a projection of Shelley's own personality and is a
radical and revolutionary. His natural sympathies are with the have-nots
and his firm conviction is in the redemption of man. Adverse circumstances
of life can never tame his spirit and in the midst of odds he clings to
his ideal with unshakable faith and determination.

his words could bind
Like music the lulled crowd and stem
That torrent of unquiet dream
Which mortals, truth and reason deem
But is revenge and fear and pride.

(636-640)

31 He passed amid the strife of men;
And stood at the throne of armed power
Pleading for a world of weal;
Secure as one on a rock-built tower
O'er the wrecks which the surge trials to and fro,
'Mid the passions wild of human kind
He stood, like a spirit calming them.

(629-635)
As to why Shelley portrayed Lionel after his own image and what he wanted to convey through this portrayal, Carl Grabe remarks: "Shelley, by the force of circumstances and defects and virtues of his own nature, led a tragic life, a life which gave him insight into the darkness of the human heart. Coldness, selfishness and cruelty he found more prevalent than love. To one whose heart went out in loving sympathy to all things, the realization of its weakness, of its loneliness against odds too great for it, was bewildering, shattering. Shelley for a time indulged in self-pity and got some consolation in creating characters which are himself enlarged, more successful in the role of his choice, that of poet-reformer, and suffering a greater and more spectacular martyrdom. He achieves ultimately of greater impersonality, perceiving in his own sufferings but an instance of the law exemplified on the heroic plane by Christ and Prometheus that those who give the most and love the world unselfishly suffer the most from the world's neglect and cruelty." 32

32 Carl Grabe: op.cit., p.236.