It is obvious from the records, that until the composition of The Cenci, neither Shelley himself, nor his friends, and his wife - Mary came to realize the potentiality of his dramatic genius. The composition of this tragedy served as an eye-opener to the poet himself and others. Shelley had always some doubt about his ability as a dramatist. He was, we are told by Mary Shelley, not confident of the requisite powers in him, that might enable him to be a dramatic author.

"He believed," writes Mary Shelley, "that one of the first requisites was the capacity of forming and following-up a story or plot. He fancied himself to be defective in this portion of imagination: ......... He asserted that he was too metaphysical and abstract, too fond of the theoretical and the ideal, to succeed as a tragedian."

When a friend in Rome in 1819 gave Shelley the detailed manuscript version of the terrible story of the Cenci family, "Shelley's imagination was strongly excited," but because of

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his lack of self-confidence, he urged his wife to write a tragedy out of the material. When Mary refused to undertake this task, only then Shelley set his hand upon it. His labour resulted not only in the production of a great tragedy of the Romantic period, but also in making an important discovery. Shelley, by chance, discovered his dramatic talent; others came to revise their views in so far as Shelley's dramatic talent was concerned.

"I speedily saw the great mistake we had made," writes Mary Shelley, "and triumphed in the discovery of the new talent brought to light from that mine of wealth (never, alas, through his untimely death, worked to its depths) - his richly gifted mind."

Mary could not discover her husband's "new talent" in Prometheus Unbound, as she did in The Cenci.

Before this work, Shelley had already written his most "favourite" lyrical drama - Prometheus Unbound. Naturally it follows, that the composition of it could not nerve Shelley up for attempting to write for the stage, and could not also convince him that he was equal to so arduous a task as dramatic composition. Shelley would not have felt so shaky and entrusted his wife, first with the task of writing The Cenci, if Prometheus could make him conscious of his own power and capacity as a practical playwright. It also goes to prove that the lesson he had learnt through the composition of Prometheus appeared to the

\[^{2}\text{Op. cit. p. 335.}\]

\[^{3}\text{Ibid.}\]
poet quite different from what was actually essential for writing for the stage. The Cenci was, therefore, the play—not Prometheus Unbound, that actually put Shelley's dramatic power to test. For very many reasons, therefore, we are persuaded to regard The Cenci as a significant milestone in Shelley's dramatic career. It gave Shelley real conviction, that he would be able to write Charles The First, a play which "will hold a higher rank than The Cenci as a work of art." The confidence as this was undoubtedly the result of his earlier success scored in The Cenci. Shelley's real dramatic interest and ambition thus fully crystallized with the completion of his only complete tragedy. It does not mean that Shelley's earlier attempts at drama do not deserve any consideration, or mention. They are important primarily for tracing his growing interest in theatrical art. In the early part of 1818, when Shelley was contemplating the composition of a tragedy on the subject of Tasso's madness, he first made his mind clear to his friend—Peacock. In a letter dated April 20, 1818 Shelley wrote from Milan:

"But, you will say, I have no dramatic talent; very true, in a certain sense; but I have taken the resolution to see what kind of a tragedy a person without dramatic talent could write."  

The letter shows a number of things. Firstly, Shelley is aware of his limitations, and shares the opinion of his friends

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and others that he has no dramatic talent "in a certain sense;"
secondly, he wants to test his capacity as a dramatic author,
and take up the task of dramatic composition somewhat in a
spirit of challenge; and lastly, the pre-eminently lyrical poet
like Shelley intends to turn towards a form of art which is other
than lyrical. Although the dramatic project indicated in the
letter ended in the twenty-seventh line, yet what is important
to note is the tendency. It clearly shows his mind turning from
the field of subjectivity to the objective form of art, from
abstract thinking and imaginings in poetry to the conception of
concrete characters and actions of human vicissitude in dramatic
terms. The letter, above all, shows the first sign of opening of
a hidden door of his mind, not known earlier to himself, or to
others. But Shelley did not reach the stage as yet which could
make him ambitious of dramatic success. His approach to the
composition of a tragedy on Tasso's life was made more from the
sense of trial, than from his confident realization of the
inward worth of himself. The attempt, (though unsuccessful)
deserves our attention in so far as it shows Shelley's dramatic
interest, as distinct from dramatic ambition.

We have some reasons to believe that Shelley's love for
the theatre was not innate. Dr. Sheila Uttam Singh maintains
that Shelley was always interested in drama and theatre right
from his early boyhood.\(^6\) Although we come to learn from her and
also from Shelley's biographers,\(^1\) like Newman Ivey White that

\(^6\)Singh, Sheila Uttam, *Shelley And The Dramatic Form*,
(Salzburg, 1972). p. 29.
Shelley attempted to write plays in collaboration with his sister-Elizabeth and his companion-Andrew Amos, and visited the theatre and the opera, still these instances do not lead us into an undisputed conclusion that Shelley, like Lord Byron was interested in the theatre. In this connection, it is also necessary to give some weight to the comments of Shelley's intimate circle. Thomas Love Peacock writes, that Shelley had some prejudice against the theatre, and Mary Shelley writes, that he "was not a playgoer, being of such fastidious taste that he was easily disgusted by the bad filling-up of the inferior parts." But Mary, of course, mentions in her Journal and elsewhere a few instances of her husband's playgoing. Shelley saw Edmund Kean and Miss O'Neil several times on the London stage.

"While preparing for our departure," writes Mary, "from England, however, he (Shelley) saw Miss O'Neil several times. She was then in the zenith of her glory;"

These and other instances do not contradict the statements of Peacock and Mary referred to earlier, nor do they run counter to the conclusion drawn by us. The comments of Shelley's friend

8 Shelley, Mary, Shelley's Works, p. 336.
9 Vide Mary Shelley's Journal, ed. F.L. Jones, (Norman, 1947) especially, pp. 26, 76-77, 92, for example.
10 Shelley, Mary, Shelley's Works, p. 336.
and wife, as we understand, hint roughly at the same thing that Shelley's love for the theatre did not spring from within; in respect of his playgoing one may say that the influence of his friends, like Peacock, Leigh Hunt, etc. may be given due weight. Dr. Singh has also admitted the fact when she observes that "when Shelley meets Peacock, does a real interest in the theatre and the opera develop." When Peacock in his Memoirs of Shelley writes, that

"Shelley had a prejudice against theatres which I took some pains to overcome," he also supports the view. The statement clearly shows that Peacock had some role to play in transforming Shelley's aversion for theatre into his liking for it. Edmund Blunden's confident remark approaches, to some extent, the probable truth in this regard. "From Peacock and Hunt and indeed from London itself," writes Blunden, "Shelley had learned to enjoy the theatre and the opera, and he took his opportunities during these early Italian days."

Shelley's actual dramatic career began not in England, but in Italy; his interest in and ambition for playwriting seem to have grown rapidly through his association with the members of the Pisan, or Italian Circle. Mary Shelley throws some light on her husband's line of thinking in dramatic terms during the

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11Singh, op. cit. p. 16.
12Peacock, op. cit. II. p. 330.
early Italian days in 1818. The climate of Italy energized both his body and mind, and Shelley began to meditate on subjects for lyrical dramas. "One was the story of Tasso; of this a slight fragment of a song of Tasso remains. The other was one founded on the Book of Job, which he never abandoned in idea,......... The third was the Prometheus Unbound."\(^1^4\) In his letters, to Peacock, dated April 20, 1818,\(^1^5\) and to Hogg, dated April 30, 1818,\(^1^6\) Shelley first declares his purpose of writing a drama on the life of the Italian poet - Tasso. Thereafter we begin to notice his dramatic progress and preparation within the limits set by his characteristic poetic genius. Aeschylus provided him with the rudiment of the Prometheus-story, which Shelley utilized in his own way for his own purpose; Rome provided him with the material for The Cenci; the history of England gave him the subject for Charles The First; the contemporary Greece and England inspired him to the writing of Hellas, and Swellfoot The Tyrant respectively. To amuse his friends Shelley started a drama on the story of an Indian Enchantress in 1822, and translated a Greek drama of Euripides, The Cyclopes and some parts from the German and the Spanish dramas. Besides, Shelley studied the ancient Greek dramatists, the dramatists of the Romantic Germany, the English dramatists of the Elizabethan and the post-Elizabethan periods. His interest in the dramas of Calderon led him even to the learning of Spanish language from Mrs Gisborne.\(^1^7\)

\(^{1^4}\)Shelley, Mary, Shelley's Works. pp. 270-71.
\(^{1^7}\)Shelley's Letters, ed. Ingpen. II. 324. p. 702.
In Italy, he also enjoyed both the theatre and the opera. All these activities clearly show the direction in which Shelley's mind had been moving, especially during the period of his Italian days; drama, it seems, was in his mind all the time. There is no doubt, that Shelley's dramatic interest by that time sufficiently developed, and his earlier "prejudice against theatres," if any, was no longer there in his mind.

As to his preparation for the dramatic writings, Shelley depended mainly on the reading and witnessing of the stage productions. There is practically no dependable record to show that Shelley was connected with the theatrical activities. David Lee Clark tells us, that "Shelley had while at Marlow in 1817 taken an active part in theatricals."\(^{18}\) He also says, that Shelley even acted in a Shakespearean drama.\(^{19}\) But despite this solitary instance (contradicted and doubted by a few others, like N.I. White), Shelley's histrionic activities and qualities are doubted. Other facts are also there to provide a basis for this doubt. When Lord Byron wanted to stage Othello in Pisa, he selected Trelawny for the part of Othello, Williams for Cassio, Mary Shelley for Desdemona, Mrs. Williams for Bianca, and himself for Iago.\(^{20}\) This shows, that Byron found these members of the Pisan Circle suitable for acting this or that part, except Shelley. Shelley's exclusion from the list may be taken as significant. Whatever may be the case, Shelley's


dramatic experience was, one may think, originally not beyond what his reading, and witnessing of stage productions could give. Besides, his intuitive knowledge helped him in whatever he did as a dramatist.

Shelley had no ambition of making any dramatic revolution, as Byron and Keats wanted to do in their own way. Unlike Byron, he did not also aim at dramatic innovation; he also did not think like Byron that Shakespeare was a bad model for imitation, or that the old English dramatists were full of gross faults. Shelley's reliance on the Elizabethan dramatic tradition was not appreciated by Byron; this again strikes the note of distinction between Byron and Shelley as dramatists.

In respect of the essential temper, Shelley is again basically different from Keats. Shelley's temper is essentially non-dramatic; it is essentially lyrical. Keats, on the other hand is quite different from Shelley in this respect. Generally speaking Shelley had no capacity to maintain dramatic objectivity. Shelleyan heroes are often the replica of Shelley's mind and thought, and we do not find it difficult to trace subjective elements in his works. In this respect, he comes nearer to Shaw, while Keats comes nearer to Shakespeare. Despite his wide reading and occasional play-going, despite his association and exchange of views with his friends having dramatic bent of mind and interest, Shelley remained essentially a man of subjective temper. This essential nature of his poetic personality remained, so to say, unchanged even when he first became a dramatist. But it

21 Letters and Journals. V. 405. p. 115.

22 Prometheus Unbound is a pure product of this essential poetic temper of Shelley.
must be said with certainty that Shelley struggled with his essential poetic temper when he meant to contribute to the stage. This is evident from two of his plays - *The Cenci*, and *Charles The First*. "I have endeavoured," writes Shelley in the Preface to *The Cenci*, "as nearly as possible to represent the characters as they probably were, and have sought to avoid the error of making them actuated by my own conceptions of right or wrong, false or true:" In a letter to Peacock the poet's attitude and intention are further clarified.

"... I having attended simply to the impartial development of such characters as it is probable the persons represented really were...."  

Shelley's attitude to *Charles The First* is equally conspicuous in his letter to Charles and James Ollier.

"The Historical Tragedy of 'Charles the First' will be ready by the Soring. ......... I ought to say that the Tragedy promises to be good, as Tragedies go; and that it is not coloured by the party spirit of the author."  

How far the poet has been able to achieve his goal is a different question, but the preface and letters referred to are unmistakable proofs that Shelley tried to come out in these plays from the prison of subjectivity - in other words, he aimed at dramatic detachment. The very tendency as this is indicative of Shelley's growing dramatic sense and dramatic development. And

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23Shelley's Works, p. 277.


nobody, perhaps, can deny that Shelley has been able to keep down his essential poetic temper for the dramatic requirements in so far as *The Cenci* and *Charles The First* fragment are concerned. The Shelley of *Prometheus*, *Hellas*, or *Swell-foot*, for example, is not the same as the author of these two pieces, and it is because of his growing dramatic mood, that *The Cenci* and *Charles The First* fragment do not fall in line with *Prometheus*, or *Hellas* or *Swell-foot*. It is, therefore, difficult for us to agree with the view that "Shelley, the poet, does not much differ from Shelley, the dramatist."\(^{26}\)

For obvious reasons Shelley's dramatic works should be arranged broadly into two groups - (a) plays mythological and ideal; and (b) plays historical, or semi-historical. To the first group undoubtedly belong *Prometheus Unbound* and *Hellas*, and to the second, *The Cenci* and *Charles The First*, *Swell-foot*, though not mythological, or ideal either, can be tagged to the first group for one more reason explained below. There can be another basis for grouping these plays - (i) plays written for the theatre of the mind, and (ii) plays written with the public Stage in view. The distinction between the two groups is so vivid and striking that it is wrong to group them together. The plays of the first group are the works of instinct and spontaneity, but those of the latter group are the works of skill and labour, and it goes without saying that Shelley's essential poetic temper was more at home with the first group

than with the second. Dr. Singh also seems to have meant the same thing when she said:

"The 'mental theatre' afforded Shelley the opportunity to portray conflict on the physical, moral and spiritual level, indulge his love of metaphysical ideas and employ symbols and metaphors for which only the devoted reader in his study would find sufficient time."27

Needless to say, that it is the first group of plays alone that represents the mental theatre of Shelley.

But there is some fundamental difference between his mental theatre and that of Lord Byron. Dr. Singh seems to have lost sight of the fundamental point of distinction and observes:

"The 'mental theatre' offered great scope for full play of their imagination."28

The remark as this takes no account of the basic difference that separates Shelley's mental theatre from Lord Byron's. Byron's "mental theatre" refers to his "regular English dramas"29 which are *Marino Faliero*, *The Two Foscari*, and *Sardanapalus*, and which were written with a definite purpose of reforming the English Stage; the rest of his plays are neither "regular," nor do they represent Byron's "mental theatre." The "regular" plays of Byron are stage-plays which

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27Singh, op. cit. p. 69.

28Ibid.

have been produced many times on the board of the public theatres of England, continental countries and America; they possess more of the dramatic qualities than the term - "mental theatre" usually indicates. But Shelley's mental theatre, represented by Prometheus and Hellas, is true to its name. Prometheus and Hellas are hardly presentable on a public stage, and can be dramatised by a reader in the theatre of his mind. Byron's Cain, Manfred, and Heaven and Earth can only approach Shelley's mental theatre of Prometheus and Hellas, or Swell-foot; others do not. Shelley himself was conscious of the essential character of his mental theatre; he could not appreciate the "regular" plays of Byron and thought him entirely on the "wrong road."

Shelley's poetic sensibility and essential nature of his genius easily discovered something in Cain, which we may call Promethean, in other words - Shelleyan. From this general discussion we now pass on to the study of Shelley's individual plays that actually provide us with the basis for whatever we have said about the characteristics of Shelley as a dramatist.

II

The play of the poet which is most Shelleyan is Prometheus Unbound. Shelley began it in September, 1818 and completed the first three acts in April, 1819; the fourth act, an after-thought, was completed towards the close of 1819 at


Florence. *Prometheus Unbound* was published in 1820.

Though Shelley took up from Aeschylus the conflict between Jupiter and Prometheus, he conducted the dramatic actions in his own way to a resolution satisfying to his mind and thought. Aeschylus's drama provided Shelley with nothing more than the material to start with, and to set at work his mind to express those thoughts and ideas which were almost a life-long passion with him. It provided him with a means to discuss abstract metaphysical issues concerning the Good and the Evil in the cosmic system in relation to the destiny of the whole human race. C. M. Bowra is quite right when he says:

"Aeschylus provides an introduction to what Shelley has to say, but that is entirely his own, and he presents it in his own way, not through any attempt to revive the archaic form of Attic tragedy but in a lyrical drama, with a variety of characters and scenes and songs, in the manner of the Romantic age." 32

Indeed, there is a gulf of difference between the Prometheus-myth of the Greek dramatist, and Shelley's use of it in *Prometheus Unbound*. Though the detailed comparison between the two works is outside the scope of this study, yet it may be said that the difference lies mainly in the plot and the conception. Excepting the first act, the rest of Shelley's drama bears no resemblance to the source play. Shelley's Prometheus defies all tortures inflicted on him by the various

agents of Jupiter; he endures it all with a mental and moral strength derived from his firm faith in the ultimate change to come at the right time. Shelley's hero is morally strong, and his robust optimism about the ultimate cyclic change emboldens him to endure the present pain for the sake of future pleasure. He symbolises a grand abstract idea, the destiny of the whole human race of which he is the ideal champion; he is not an individual character as Aeschylus's Prometheus is. Naturally, the victory, or the defeat of Prometheus matters a great deal to Shelley. Himself a champion of human liberty and perfection, Shelley cannot make his hero yield to the Evil Principle, symbolised by Jupiter, who is opposed to human liberty and perfection. Shelley, therefore, cannot but differ from the Greek tragedian in the treatment of the myth. "But, in truth," says Shelley, "I was averse from catastrophe so feeble as that of reconciling the Champion with the Oppressor of mankind."  

The plot, or the story of this lyrical drama is very slight and simple. The drama opens with Prometheus chained to the rock of the Indian Caucasus by Jupiter who sets at him various agents to inflict tortures of vilest nature. Prometheus has been suffering for long three thousand years; he once cursed Jupiter for putting him to endless sufferings. But his sufferings at last teach him a lesson and heighten his unbending spirit to a stately level of sublime fortitude and wisdom. He now feels for Jupiter for his ultimate fate lying in wait to accomplish his doom. He no longer hates his torturer.

33Shelley's Works. p. 205.
Disdain! Ah no! I pity thee. What ruin
Will hunt thee undefended through the wide Heaven!

I speak in grief,
No exultation, for I hate no more,
As then ere misery made me wise.

(I.i. 53-8.)

Prometheus gains from his sufferings a wisdom, a sublime mental and moral strength which makes him declare -

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

(I.i. 477-78.)

He suffers in the bleak and desolate mountain, but is unaware of the world-shaking change which is already afoot. Asia, his love, and Panthea, both the daughters of the Ocean meet together, and narrate to each other the dreams they have dreamt. They are then led by an invisible voice which guides them ultimately to the cave of Demogorgon. They come to learn from Demogorgon that a mighty Change is very near at hand, which will culminate in the utter annihilation of all that is evil in the universe. The Spirit of the Hour arrives in the meantime. The car of the Spirit passes with Asia and Panthea within it, and as they pass, they observe "Some good change/Is working in the elements," all around. A strange light from Asia (Love) glows, and it flows in all directions. The hour of Jupiter's fall draws nigh. Demogorgon alights from the car of the Spirit of the Hour and moves towards the throne of Jupiter - his father, and
overthrows him. Prometheus is released, and a new era of Love, Liberty, and Hope begins.

...... thrones were kingless, and men walked
One with the other even as spirits do,
None fawned, none trampled; hate, disdain, or fear,
Self-love or self-contempt, on human brows
No more inscribed, ..........

(III.iv. 131-35.)

The tyrant ruler having been overthrown, the great age of Justice, Love and Liberty begins with the regeneration of the universe.

The plot of Prometheus Unbound, considered from dramatic point of view, is barren of visible physical actions. The first act is the only one that shows some actions of spectacular kind and the contrast of characters, permissible within the limits of the form as Shelley has chosen. The hero is outwardly a statuesque figure. The actions are on the go in his mind; his reactions to the temptations of Mercury, to the tortures of the Furies, to the conversation with Earth, and also with Panthea - all constitute some actions in the mind of Prometheus. The torture-scene is balanced with a vague suggestion of some undefined hope communicated to the hero by the chorus of the Spirits. Shelley has shown some contrast through oppositions of characters in the first act. The Spirits and the Furies are the best illustration of the same. But what is important to note is that the actions of this act are not very interesting for a drama in the proper sense of
the term, and from this point of view this drama of Shelley is actionless. And additionally Prometheus Unbound also lacks dramatic dynamism in so far as the actions are concerned. The sense of dynamism is created by the dramatic poetry only. There is something static about the characters and the actions. The only action of the hero is his waiting for the ultimate change, not to be brought about by himself, but through the automatic process of evolution, in other words, through dialectical process.

............... I wait,
Enduring thus, the retributive hour
Which since we spake is even nearer now.

(I.i.405-407.)

This kind of action is rather non-dramatic. Prometheus is past all conflicts. He stands inert, enduring pain and suffering with a fortitude bordering on stoicism. Dr. Singh also admits this when she says: "The real dramatic movement here is one which takes place in the mind of the immovable Prometheus. Externally nothing has changed." But, Singh also thinks, that the first act of Prometheus Unbound may "make admirable theatre in the hands of an imaginative producer."

In the second act there are some actions shown through the agency of Asia and Panthea, but they are also dramatically not very interesting; they are poetically more consistent than

34Singh, op. cit. p. 97.
35Ibid.
dramatically satisfying. The protagonist - Prometheus is entirely absent from the second act, and whatever is to be done in it has been assigned by the dramatist to Asia who, all on a sudden, rises into prominence. Contradicting the majority of critical opinions, that the action of this drama is over at the line 53 of the first act, and that there is no other action in the rest of 2557 lines of Prometheus Unbound, Frederick A. Pottle very correctly emphasizes the importance of the role of Asia in the dramatic actions of this play.  36 The actual agent of the cardinal action leading to Prometheus' release is Asia; Prometheus' mental regeneration (I.i.53) is no more than a mere change of heart internal to himself. And, though it has poetic consistency with what follows in the succeeding acts, it cannot dramatically relate itself to the rest of the play with the inner logic of cause and effect. The imagination of a theatrical audience is not supposed to go so far as to understand its impact. But, while we admit the supremacy of Asia's role, we also think, that her journey with Panthea to the cave of Demogorgon and her subsequent actions in the second act divide our attention fixed earlier on Prometheus. Besides, there is something disconcerting about this act which points out some constructional short-coming.

While on a journey, Asia and her companion- Panthea do not know

their destination, nor do they know before why they are led to the cave of Demogorgon. Demogorgon they meet, and we find Asia asking him some metaphysical questions. Lastly, she asks Demogorgon as to the "destined hour" of Prometheus' release.

............... Prometheus shall arise
Henceforth the sun of this rejoicing world:
When shall the destined hour arrive?

(II.iv. 126-28.)

Only at this point, we find Asia coming to a question which has its relevance to the main action of this drama. What is dramatically disconcerting is that the law of actions in Prometheus Unbound is not the law of character; some invisible Law of the universe makes the scheme of the play; the characters are no better than puppets dancing to the tune of a supernatural power pulling the string and directing the dance from behind the screen. From the point of view of dramatic interest, this is quite unacceptable in a drama.

In the third act, Shelley has missed the opportunity of showing concrete, or physically spectacular actions in connection with the overthrowing of Jupiter by Demogorgon (III.i.). The fall of the Tyrant Ruler of the universe which is apparently the principal action of the drama, and without which Shelley cannot unbind his hero, is undramatically accomplished. Sir Maurice Bowra considers this scene of actual dethronement of Jupiter "the greatest failure" in the play, and writes -
"An event of such wide import and such dramatic possibilities might, we may well think, have been enriched with more than a short colloquy which leads to the immediate collapse and surrender of Jupiter."  

This is almost a general complaint against this drama. The magical fall of Prometheus' Adversary is followed by a scene (III.iii) in which Hercules unbinds the champion of mankind. The rest is, so to say, an anti-climax. The entire fourth act is dramatically redundant, for, as Bowra rightly points out, "the whole of Act IV is nothing but a series of magnificent songs accompanied by no action, and for all dramatic purposes the action closes with the end of Act III."  

The resolution of the plot of Prometheus Unbound is dramatically unconnected with the actions of the earlier acts. There is, in fact, no logical development of the actions leading to the annihilation of the tyrannical monarch of heaven. It cannot create "willing suspension of disbelief" even of the readers, not to speak of the audience. Olwen Ward Campbell also seems to have been baffled by the defects in construction of the drama. He says that Shelley "is too impatient to show in the course of his drama the gradual process by which evil is transformed. His Jupiter is suddenly wiped out."  

Ward rightly lays his finger on the weak points of construction, and shows the lack of "inner logic of the three unities." As a result,

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37Bowra, op. cit. p.122.

38Ibid.

"When Shelley unbinds his Prometheus, his drama falls all to bits, and his stage becomes a chaos."\textsuperscript{40} Excepting the first act, there is no sign of contrast and opposition either in characters, or in actions worth the name. There is no resistance in the character of the hero, or in that of his adversary - Jupiter. The conflict is conceived in spiritual terms. "Admittedly Shelley fails," says Jibon Banerjee, "to exploit the terrific conflict between Jupiter and Prometheus and the fall of Jupiter remains unexploited."\textsuperscript{41} But, Mr. Banerjee seems to have overlooked the point that the possibility of physical conflict between Prometheus and his adversary cannot be expected especially, when the drama opens with the hero bound. Of course, he is right to think (as others have thought) that "the fall of Jupiter remains unexploited."

Pottle seems to have found no dramatic defect in so far as the lack of action of this drama is concerned. "Willing, not muscular action," he maintains, "is the essential of drama. A physical non-resistance which we see to be gravely and consciously willed, though not the usual stuff of drama in our tradition, will function dramatically in our experience if we will allow it."\textsuperscript{42} This is how he defends the charge of the drama's lack of concrete physical actions. A drama in the truest sense of the term hardly admits of the argument put forth by Pottle. Because the audience's common psychology is that, they expect always to see some visible muscular actions on the stage; they


\textsuperscript{41} Banerjee, op. cit.

\textsuperscript{42} Pottle, op. cit. p. 137.
receive impressions through eyes first, and their minds become active only when their visual sense-organs pass on the impressions to the mind. And, as drama pre-supposes some audience, it hardly succeeds by denying what its audience normally expects. *Prometheus Unbound*, from this point of view, may be disappointing to an audience.

But there is another side of the picture to which we should not be blind. It is useless to search for conventional dramatic qualities in *Prometheus Unbound* which actually belongs to a class of drama quite different from an acting drama. Shelley, we find, has not written it for the stage, and has called it a lyrical drama. This drama is a representative type of Shelley's mental theatre, and Shelley, with this work, did not pretend to please an actual theatrical audience. It is, therefore, unjust to consider *Prometheus Unbound*, keeping in mind the standard set by *King Lear*, or *The Cenci*, or any other work we commonly call acting drama. Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* may be better understood, and the reasons for the apparent discrepancies and short-comings of its structure may be easily found, if it is judged with what H.D.F. Kitto says about Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound*.

"the solitary hero is everything; not what he does, but what he feels and is. Of action, between the prologue and the catastrophe, there is none. Prometheus' narratives, though they may give the illusion of action, were not designed for this. It is a drama of revelation, not action; of increasing tension in a situation which
Milton Wilson says, that Prometheus Unbound is structurally a lyrical drama, not so much for the abundance of lyrical substance in it, as for its structural method "appropriate to a lyrical drama in which the dramatic action, in so far as it concerns the moral identity of the central figure, is over at or near the beginning of the play." it, therefore, belongs, not to the class of Oedipus Tyrannus, or King Lear, but "to a different and more specialized genre" in so far as its dramatic structure is concerned.

Wilson's arguments and analysis in defence of Prometheus Unbound are sound in so far as the poet's aim in the structural pattern of the drama is concerned. But in characterization Shelley cannot be defended. He has miserably failed to create well-defined character in Prometheus Unbound. There is not a single character in it which is not shadowy, and this is not for the sake of the peculiar dramatic structure, but for Shelley's inability in creating character of vivid and sharp features. Prometheus is as indistinct in his features as the other characters of the drama – Asia, Panthea, Ione, Demogorgon, and Jupiter; they remain all through more as some ideas symbolised than as living personalities.

The real hero of Prometheus Unbound is actually the invisible Law of the universe, which works out the process of

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change in its own way. Prometheus, Jupiter, Demogorgon - all are under the government of this Law of Change. The dramatic actions give the impression of a sort of determinism; there is very little scope of the free will in the Promethean world. For some impersonal Force governs the course of events in it, and the characters are no better than tools in the hand of that Force. Prometheus cannot release himself through his own endeavour and initiative; he has no other alternative but to wait for the "retributive hour" (I.i.406.); Demogorgon cannot overthrow his tyrannical father until that retributive hour comes; Jupiter cannot retain his position when that hour actually draws nigh. And that hour comes not at the behest of either Prometheus, or Demogorgon, but at the bidding of the invisible and impersonal Force of Change to which all are subjected.

This again gives the impression, that Shelley might have had in his mind the process of dialectical change. For we are told that Jupiter is overthrown by his son - Demogorgon, who rises against his father and sets the new order. We can reconcile this fact, if we take Jupiter as the force of thesis, and Demogorgon, the force of antithesis. The conflict between the two is dialectically true and logical. With the dethronement of Jupiter the conflict ceases to exist, and the synthetical order begins. The force that brings about synthesis is supposed to grow in the womb of the thetical order, or in other words, it is born of and sustained by thesis itself, as Demogorgon is fathered by Jupiter. Synthesis being brought about, the conflicting forces of thesis and antithesis hide themselves till the cyclic order
of Change brings them in due time. Now, we fully understand the cryptic speech of Demogorgon, addressed to Jupiter:

Demogorgon. Eternity. Demand no direr name.
Descend, and follow me down the abyss.
I am thy child, as thou wert Saturn's child;
Mightier than thee: and we must dwell together
Henceforth in darkness.

(III.i. 52-6.)

The new order of synthesis having set in, their conflict is over, and they, therefore, should and must hide themselves in "darkness" now. It will not, therefore, be fantastic to speculate, that Shelley might have illustrated in this lyrical drama the workings of these cyclic changes. His Prometheus is not the hero, governing the process of change; he only represents the state of synthesis for which the conflict of Jupiter and Demogorgon is an eternal necessity. He cannot be his own deliverer, because, the state of synthesis is, in actuality, an effect - not the cause, and it is always dependent on a force external to it. The passivity of the character of Prometheus, from this point of view, is logical. He has no other thing to do, but to wait with patience for the hour of conflict between Jupiter and Demogorgon. Demogorgon, in this sense, is more prominent than Prometheus. Harold Bloom seems to have looked at this drama from a similar angle. He thinks, that "Prometheus is thesis and antithesis in the dialectic, with Jupiter as the Accuser, or Contrary, the Self-within, olaying as thesis here, and the Titan on the rock
as antithesis." We do not, of course, agree with Bloom in so far as his particular way of symbolising these characters is concerned, though we find no difficulty in agreeing with him in regard to his line of thinking. He is certainly right in his pointing out the importance of Demogorgon in the myth. "The agent of synthesis," he says, "is Demogorgon; he is the emblem of the whole myth, the dialectic itself." Bloom is correct only in a general way.

The theme of Prometheus Unbound has been interpreted by different critics, giving various metaphysical, or symbolical meanings, and analysing the actions of the characters in terms of their views. Earl R. Wasserman thinks, that the essential theme of the drama is "One Mind's evolution into perfection." He, like G.M. Matthews, also traces volcanic symbolism in the drama, and regards Demogorgon as the volcanic force overcoming "Jupiter in the manner of a volcanic eruption." G.M. Matthews maintains, that Shelley must have had in his mind the eruption of Vesuvius in 1794 when he wrote this drama, and goes to the extent of saying, that the "forcible separation of Asia and Prometheus, therefore, either caused, or resulted from, volcanic upheavals...." Keeping in view the

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50 Wasserman, op. cit. p. 156.
mental temper of the poet, it may be thought with justification that Shelley's conception of the main characters of *Prometheus Unbound* is more likely to be metaphysical than physical, and that the influence of the volcanic eruption should not be stressed too much, as the critics, like Wasserman and Matthews have tried to have us believe. Shelley's Demogorgon is far from being a mere symbol of the volcanic energy, and the poet's memory of the volcano may be traced not in the conception, but in imagery only. It is, however, interesting to find, that Aeschylus is also believed to have written *Prometheus Bound* "soon after the great eruption of Mount Etna in 479 B.C."\(^{51}\) We find in one of the speeches of Aeschylean Prometheus some obvious references to the volcanic eruption of Etna. Let us give an example:

The mountain roots of Etna spread their weight
To enclose him, while far, far, uoon the heights
Above, Hephaistos on his anvil smites
The rough red iron; and thence shall break one day
Rivers of fire with ravening jaws, to prey
On the fair fields of fruited Sicily.

(*Prometheus Bound*, 11.366-71.)

Now, there is scope for interesting (though idle) speculation, whether Shelley's volcanic imagery as traced out by the critics, is to be regarded as the result of his own mental association with what he saw after the eruption of Vesuvius, or whether his

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close study of the Aeschylean Prometheus Bound revived his own memory of the post-eruotional Vesuvius.

It is sometimes pointed out that Shelley's Prometheus has something of Milton's Satan in him. Satan of Paradise Lost is a rebel, and so is Prometheus. Both have iron-resolution—"never to submit or yield;" both defy the Omnibent. But beneath the apparent similarity, there lies the basic difference that distinguishes one from the another. And, it is the quality of their minds that constitutes this difference. Satan is a depraved being, obstinate in wrong-doing; he is remorseless. Whereas, Prometheus is remorseful for his having uttered a curse on Jupiter; and because of this, Prometheus' regeneration, as most of the critics hold, is complete at the line 53 of the very opening scene, which prepares, in turn, the way for the cosmic regeneration to which Demogorgon is only instrumental. Professor Carl Grabo's comment lays stress on the view.

"By casting out hate," writes Grabo, "Prometheus has identified himself with the ruling power of the universe which is Love, and Love commands Destiny, or Fate, which is Demogorgon."52

This "casting out" of hate is not at all possible on the part of Satan. Prometheus possesses that quality of mind by virtue of which one can forgive one's enemy and torturer. He has something of Christ in him; he has Shelleyan magnanimity.

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I wish no living thing to suffer pain.

(I.i. 305.)

Peter L. Thorslev also finds Prometheus superior to Milton's Satan in so far as his nobility is concerned. But as artistic creation, Shelley's hero is certainly inferior to Milton's Satan, and this is because, Milton's power of characterization is undoubtedly superior to that of Shelley. It is only in artistic excellence, that Prometheus' inferiority may be traced not in conception, which is equally grand and cosmic. Satan stands out as a towering personality in Paradise Lost, whereas, Prometheus remains a principle - not a personality, and what is more, Shelley has sometimes made other characters more prominent than Prometheus. Thus from the second act Prometheus almost recedes into the background, and Asia and Demogorgon begin to rise into prominence. In the act of Prometheus' deliberance, Demogorgon stands at the centre. From artistic point of view, Demogorgon's sudden rise into prominence is unwanted. D.G. James thinks, that "it is Demogorgon who undermines Prometheus Unbound as drama." The role of Asia as assigned by the poet to her makes K.N. Cameron think that Asia is an indispensable complement to Demogorgon in so far as the setting up of the new order is concerned. "Demogorgon," he writes, "can overthrow the old order without the aid of Asia, but he cannot build a new one unless she assists him." This means that the ultimate

53Thorslev, Peter L., Jr., The Byronic Hero, 1962. p.117.
importance lies not in the character of Prometheus, nor in the character of Demogorgon, but in Asia. For Shelley's ultimate aim in *Prometheus Unbound* is the setting up of the new order, the reign of Love, Liberty and Justice, for the sake of which the overthrowing of Jupiter is the first step and a dire necessity. Every way we turn, some new figure apparently minor in the general scheme of dramatic actions, towers over the others, breaking down the dramatic constitution all to pieces, and tearing off the essential organic relation of the parts with the whole.

"Had Shelley not written the first Act," says Dr. Singh, "we might have questioned his dramatic abilities." Dr. Singh, it seems, has ignored a very important truth, when she has said this in defence of Shelley's dramatic abilities. She has ignored the inter-relationship among the scenes and acts of a drama. A drama is an organic whole; and the abilities of a dramatist are proved, not by a scene, nor by an act, but by the drama as a whole. The dramatic qualities of the first act of *Prometheus Unbound* cannot cover up the undramatic, or extra-dramatic qualities and structure of the other three acts. To find Shelley's dramatic abilities, one need not turn to *Prometheus Unbound*; *The Cenci*, and *Charles the First* fragment are there to drive home the idea of Shelley the dramatist. It is better to admit, as Milton Wilson rightly thinks, that *Prometheus Unbound* belongs to a specialized genre of the lyrical drama; it was written by Shelley with no idea of making it stageworthy. Naturally, Shelley

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was not committed to be dramatic in a way we expect him to be. By choosing the structure appropriate to the lyrical drama he has made his way smooth for enjoying a kind of special independence which a professional playwright is not supposed to enjoy. So, Prometheus Unbound cannot be the basis for a judgment on Shelley's dramatic talent. We could have doubted Shelley's dramatic abilities, if he had not written The Cenci, and Charles the First fragment. Prometheus Unbound is a pure mental theatre - a closet drama, written "in the merest spirit of ideal poetry," and in a style best suited for a visionary poet, and may be called typically Shelleyan.

In a letter to Charles Ollier dated December 15, 1819, Shelley wrote: "My 'Prometheus' is the best thing I ever wrote." Shelley considers it best, not as a drama, but as a dramatic poem. He calls it "a poem in my best style." Let us try to see why Prometheus Unbound is regarded as the "best thing," and why it is a "favourite poem" to Shelley! It is favourite, because, the poet has been able to put most of himself into this work; it dramatizes Shelley's vision, hope, wish, ideas, emotions, thoughts and theory of revolution in the nearest possible approximation. It is a mirror of Shelley's own inner self, as no other poem, or play so perfectly and

entirely is. A word about Shelley's revolutionary theory as expressed in this drama may not be irrelevant in this context. "Shelley seems to have felt," writes Gerald McNiece, "that the poverty of moral imagination in France's leaders was a central cause of the fall of the Revolution, and he tried to work out a new concept of a revolutionary hero which would remedy this weakness." Prometheus especially, and the heroes of Shelley's other poems generally stand to exemplify within the limits of artistic form, this basic concept which Shelley holds so dear. Prometheus is the best of his other heroes in so far as he represents Shelley's mind and thought in entirety. He is the ideal hero, or the leader of revolution, reconciling in him both "Christ and Satan, the redeemer and the rebel." Shelley has created Prometheus as a representative leader of revolution whose moral imagination and unbending spirit of the mind lead him to a goal which the French leaders failed to reach. The idea of revolution should be based on some noble and spiritual values. In Prometheus Unbound, Love forms this basis, and in this sense, Asia plays a vital role, as Cameron thinks, in the thought-scheme of the poet.

Prometheus Unbound is near to Shelley's heart in one more sense. It offered a fair scope to Shelley for giving expression to his lyrical ecstasy and emotions through songs and choruses of the spirits. The inspired poet bursts into lyrics of superb beauty; his imagination is fired, and the poet

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outs into the verse, his entire poetic self. A lyricist, like Shelley is supposed to feel at home, when he finds a full scope for lyrical expression. Shelley, perhaps for these reasons, says that it is written in his "best style." And it may also be said that Shelley's "best style" consists in his abstract imagination, ethereal description, and lyricism.

In her Note on Prometheus Unbound, Mary Shelley gives us her husband's outlook on Evil and says, that according to Shelley, "evil is not inherent in the system of the creation, but an accident that might be excelled." If we are to believe Mrs. Shelley in this regard, then we shall have to say that in the last three stanzas (IV. 570-78) of Prometheus Unbound, Shelley has attained a new poetic vision and seen evil as inherent in life, and not as a political evil eradicable. Overthrowing of Jupiter does not mean extinction of evil for good.

To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite;
To forgive wrongs darker than death or night;
   To defy Power, which seems omnipotent;
To love, and bear; to hope till Hope creates
   From its own wreck the thing it contemplates;
   Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent;
This, like thy glory, Titan, is to be
Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free;
This is alone Life, Joy, Empire, and Victory.

(IV. 570-78)

63Shelley's Works, p. 271.
Human perfection can only arrest the emergence of evil, without being able to expel it from life. Though human life is related to the cosmic system in it, *Prometheus Unbound* has, after all, little human interest. It is a work of vision, idea, and instinct. The work of skill is *The Cenci*, his next attempt at drama to which we shall turn now.

Shelley the dramatist in the real sense of the term is discovered in *The Cenci*. In a letter to Leigh Hunt, written on August 15, 1819, Shelley wrote: "My 'Prometheus' is finished, and I am also on the eve of completing another work, totally different from anything you might conjecture that I should write; of a more popular kind; and, if anything of mine could deserve attention, of higher claims." The work referred to in the letter is *The Cenci*. Shelley was right to imagine how *The Cenci* would astonish his friends and others by its character quite different from what his genius could normally be expected to produce. *The Cenci*, in this regard, is really a great question mark. It was written immediately after the completion of the first three acts of *Prometheus Unbound* (which was the poet's original scheme) during the months from May to August, 1819, published in 1820 by C. & J. Ollier, London.

The following is a brief summary of its plot. Count Francesco Cenci, an old man of hoary gray hair, but a criminal in disposition, feels an implacable hatred towards his wife and children. His hatred at last takes the form of a violent

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64Shelley's Letters, ed. Ingpen. II. 326. p.705.
incestuous passion towards his daughter - Beatrice. Beatrice resists him by all possible means, but fails; at last she is polluted by him. The reaction of the act is maddening; Beatrice is compelled to think that something must be devised without further delay. She finds it incumbent on her to plot to murder her tyrannous father who is a common tyrant to the entire family. Lucretia - the second wife of Count Cenci and her stepmother, and her brother - Giacomo join hands with her. They all agree on this point.

Lucretia. He is a violent tyrant, surely, child:

We know that death alone can make us free;

His death or ours.

(III.i. 77-9.)

Orsino - a crafty prelate, friend and admirer of Beatrice offers to help her in effecting the murder through the employment of two hired assassins. But Cenci in the meantime tells Lucretia that he will take her and Beatrice to a lonely castle at Petrella in the Apulian Apennines "to-morrow before dawn." It is, therefore, planned, that while at Petrella, Cenci must die. Beatrice who is, by nature gentle and soft-hearted, stands firm; and it is the necessity of the circumstances that makes her stern and bold for the deliverance of the entire family from the violent tyranny of her father. The desired murder is done through the agency of two assassins - Olimpio and Marzio. But the deed is soon discovered. All those who are directly entangled in it - namely, Giacomo, Beatrice, Lucretia and Marzio are arrested and put to trial. Olimpio is killed while he offers resistance at the time of his
arrest. Orsino saves himself by escaping from Rome. The 
convicts first deny the charge against them, but the infliction 
of inhuman tortures compels some of them to confess the guilt. 
In spite of all possible efforts made to secure clemency of 
Pope (Clement VIII) by both the convicts and the distinguished 
men of Rome, the criminals are put to death. Marzio dies when 
he is tortured for confessing the crime. Thus, the unhappy and 
terrible story of "one of the noblest and richest families" of 
Rome during the Pontificate of Clement VIII comes to an end.

The event that forms the basis of this tragic drama of 
Shelley is an historical fact, and took place in the year 1599. 65
Naturally, for construction of the plot of The Cenci, Shelley's 
imaginative faculty was not called upon to work for him to the 
extent it had to in Prometheus Unbound, Hellas, and Swell-foot. 
What Shelley did was mostly in organizing the different events 
of the story for dramatic effect, and also for the "impartial 
development of such characters as it is probable the persons 
represented really were......." 66 Let us see how Shelley has 
done it.

The drama opens with Count Cenci and the Cardinal 
Camillo conversing with each other. The latter refers to 
Cenci's fresh crime of murder. Camillo's opening speech is 
designed to throw light on Cenci's past deeds of like nature on 
one hand, and the corruption of the Papal government on the

65Shelley's Works, pp. 275-78. Dr. Singh says, that the 
event took place in 1559. (Vide Singh, op. cit. p.117.)
66Shelley's Letters, ed. Ingpen. (To Peacock, July 1819). 
other. To hush up the present crime, Camillo has pleaded to
the Pope for Cenci, but His Holiness is this time stern. Camillo
reports to Cenci:

.................... he said that you
Bought perilous impunity with your gold;
That crimes like yours if once or twice compounded
Enriched the Church, .............
But that the glory and the interest
Of the high throne he fills, little consist
With making it a daily mart of guilt
As manifold and hideous as the deeds
Which you scarce hide from men's revolted eyes.

(I.i. 5-14.)

The opening scene serves as an excellent introduction to what
follows in the rest of the drama. Cenci's hatred towards his
wife and children, his lust for his daughter, his criminal
instinct - all are revealed in the very first scene.

Cenci. .................... my cursed sons;
Whom I had sent from Rome to Salamanca,
Hoping some accident might cut them off;
And meaning if I could to starve them there.
I pray thee, God, send some quick death upon them!

(I.i. 130-34.)

The banquet scene (I.iii.) is a complement to the first. His
hatred towards his sons is such, that he arranges a sumptuous
feast at the news that his sons are dead. Cenci requests his
guests to share his rejoicing.
Rejoice with me - my heart is wondrous glad.

(I.iii.50.)

But in the banquet things go all wrong. The guests stand confused and start departing; Beatrice requests them not to depart, but to stay and hear her.

Beatrice: ........................................

........................ Two yet remain,
His wife remains and I, whom if ye save not,
Ye may soon share such merriment again
As fathers make over their children's graves.

(I.iii.122-25.)

Beatrice's speech brings in a fresh element of contrast, and adds to dramatic effect of the scene. The atmosphere of the Banquet Hall completely changes; Cenci dismisses the guests to avoid the newly developed situation.

Cenci: My friends, I do lament this insane girl
Has spoilt the mirth of our festivity.
Good night, farewell;

(I.iii.160-62.)

The scene closes with an indication of Cenci's firm intent of making his incestuous onslaught on his daughter - Beatrice. He drinks and utters to himself -

Be thou the resolution of quick youth
Within my vein, and manhood's purpose stern,
And age's firm, cold, subtle villainy;
As if thou wert indeed my children's blood
Which I did thirst to drink! The charm works well;
It must be done; it shall be done, I swear!

(I.iii.173-78.)

The second act prepares the ground for Cenci's murder. Beatrice enters with a horrid mind; she fears she is pursued by her father, and is in a greatly disturbed mood.

Beatrice

............... Thou, great God,
Whose image upon earth a father is,
Dost Thou indeed abandon me? He comes;
The door is opening now; I see his face;
He frowns on others, but he smiles on me,
Even as he did after the feast last night.

(II.i.16-21.)

But it is not Cenci that enters; it is the servant of Orsino, giving her a paper. Beatrice's last hope is lost when she hears from him that Holy Father has rejected her petition for the redressal of her grievances against Cenci. The scene that comes next serves to collect further force to strengthen the cause of Cenci's murder. Giacomo and Orsino meet in the scene; the former discusses with the latter the future of their petition to His Holiness, the Pope. He knows why their petition fails.

Giacomo. My friend, that palace-walking devil Gold

Has whispered silence to his Holiness:
And we are left, as scorpions ringed with fire.

(II.ii.63-70.)
Giacomo has his own grievances too. He finds that there is none in Rome who can really protect him against the tyranny of his father. In this state of mind the thought of killing his father first enters his head. But Giacomo is not yet firm in his mind and sure of what he really wants to do. We find Orsino talking like a villain - eager to know the secret thoughts of his friend. Like an Iago, Orsino says at last -

Farewell! - Be your thoughts better or more bold.

(II.ii.104.)

Act III is the climax. Shelley's mastery in building the plot is quite evident here. Beatrice is violated, and her reaction to the action so vile and hideous has been brought out fully before the eyes of the audience. Act III, scene i is dramatically most effective. Cenci's tyranny having reached the climax, his death becomes a natural necessity - the only possible solution. Beatrice stands firm in her resolve, and Orsino promises help towards the accomplishment of the deed. Giacomo's mental conflict is resolved. A complete disintegration of the spiritual link between children and their father is noticed in the scene.

Giacomo. ....................... We

Are now no more, as once, parent and child,
But man to man; the oppressor to the oppressed;
The slanderer to the slandered; foe to foe;
He has cast Nature off, which was his shield,
And Nature casts him off, who is her shame;
And I sourn both.

(III.i.282-88.)
Act III, scene ii is designed as we understand, to show Giacomo's mental weakness further. For it is not easy to cut off the emotional link Nature has made between the parent and the child. The issue is so grave that it is bound to create mental conflicts in a son, like Giacomo. Besides, Giacomo's wrongs are not so heavy as his sister's

I almost wish

He be not dead, although my wrongs are great;

(III.ii.29-30.)

Shelley has skilfully balanced Giacomo's weakness with the steadiness of Orsino. Orsino manioulates the situation at last.

Act IV opens in the lonely castle of Petrella at night. Cenci's violent mood and passion rise to the climax. Lucretia's role is designed to offer checks and balances to the criminal intent of the maniac Cenci. The curse-scene (IV.i.) is skilfully constructed. There are dramatic movement and force in it, and the entire fourth act is theatrically effective and interesting. Act IV, scene iii is also a masterly one, having enough of similarity with the murder-scene of Macbeth. The fourth scene shows the discovery of murder, and the subsequent arrest of Beatrice, Lucretia and Marzio. The entire fourth act, in a word, is tense in action, dramatic suspense and surprise.

The last act shows the trial of the convicts, the infliction of torture on them to elicit truth, and the catastrophe. Only Giacomo's arrest seems to us something that may raise questions. Shelley has failed to show it in a convincing way. The last act proves Shelley's command over
the dramatic power in an unquestionable manner. The trial-scene (V.ii.) is the most masterly one and reminds us of the trial-scene of St. Joan; Beatrice stands out like Joan of Arc in her defence. Mary Shelley is perfectly right when she comments: "The fifth Act is a masterpiece. It is the finest thing he ever wrote, and may claim proud comparison not only with any contemporaray, but preceding, poet."67

Shelley's plot-construction in The Cenci claims our appreciation. It shows the dramatic power and conception of the poet at an astonishingly high degree. There is shown the logical development of actions through contrasts and oppositions and conflicts. The serious tone is maintained all through, though it is to be said here that this uniformity of tragic strain and seriousness does not go always to the credit of the dramatist committed to write for the stage. We are told by Stuart Curran, that the lack of relief has, among other things, made the play wearisome after a time, and this is proved through its performances on the stage.68 But despite this defect, the prolonged stage-history69 of the tragedy proves, that Shelley was able to make it a stageworthy play.

Shelley's plot stands on the opposition of characters and fine dramatic contrasts. Count Cenci and Beatrice are


68Curran, Stuart, oo. cit. p.191.

69Vide PMLA, LX, (1945), The Stage History of Shelley's The Cenci, K.N. Cameron and H. Frenz; and Stuart Curran 's book referred to earlier.
conceived in terms of this principle of opposition, and their conflict which may be reduced to the eternal conflict between Good and Evil, forms the principal action of this drama. This central conflict of The Cenci, perhaps, leads Ian Jack to declare that, "In The Cenci the conflict between Jupiter and Prometheus is transposed to the human level." It is not unlikely that, Shelley's imagination might have found a sort of Promethean conflict in the story of Beatrice Cenci. Beatrice is a revolutionary heroine without being truly Shelleyan. F.R. Leavis maintains, that in The Cenci, "Shelley, as usual, is the hero - here the heroine; his relation to Beatrice is of the same order as his relation to Alastor and Prometheus,..." Leavis has particularly failed to notice the basic characteristic difference that distinguishes Beatrice from other Shelleyan heroes typified by Prometheus. Typically Shelleyan heroes are mentally free from hatred. Prometheus casts off his hatred towards Jupiter; Beatrice cannot do so, and she is also the main architect of Cenci's murder. She resorts to violent means, and by doing so, Beatrice has automatically dismembered herself from the family of Shelley's revolutionary heroes of whom Prometheus is an ideal prototype.

The simplicity of plot-construction of the play indicates, that Shelley is more a follower of the Greek, than of

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the Elizabethan dramatic tradition. In Elizabethan tragedies, often we find one or more sub-plots connected with the main plot. The Cenci does not show this. There are Shakespearean echoes and Gothic elements in it, but they have nothing to do with the basic structure of the play; the structural pattern and the conception are neither Shakespearean, nor are they purely Gothic. David Lee Clark thinks that The Cenci is most nearly Shakespearean in so far as the dramatic conception and the method of execution are concerned. But Clark seems to have overlooked one important point in this connection. The conception of the Shakespearean tragic hero is generally Aristotelian; for he must have some tragic flaw in his character, for which he commits some tragic mistake that leads him to catastrophe. In the character of Beatrice who is the tragic heroine, there is no tragic flaw. The dictum-character is destiny which fully applies to the Shakespearean tragedy, does not apply to this tragedy of Shelley. Beatrice Cenci suffers not for her own fault, but for the fault of others. She is a victim of the circumstances in which the good and the innocent cannot survive.

Shelley's characterization in The Cenci deserves consideration. The character of Beatrice Cenci is an excellent creation. She is, by nature, an embodiment of virtue, innocence, softness, and the like. She is sympathetic. Beatrice maintains


73Curran, oo. cit. p.259.
her softness of temper and behaviour until her father's extreme wickedness is ready to engulf her. She is noble in the truest sense of the term; but she is not passively noble a heroine like Desdemona. Beatrice first tries to escape from the tyranny of her father; she tries to correct her father by all possible means. She requests Pope's intervention and also the intervention of Prince Colonna, Cardinal, Camillo and others (I.iii.).

O Prince Colonna, thou art our near kinsman,  
Cardinal, thou art the Pope's chamberlain,  
Camillo, thou art chief justiciary,  
Take us away!

(I.iii.126-29.)

When all other means fail, and Cenci's tyranny reaches its climax when her modesty is outraged, only then, Beatrice takes to the violent means to save herself and the family.

............... sorrow makes me seem  
Sterner than else my nature might have been;

(I.ii.34-5.)

Beatrice's essential nature is revealed through the speech of his brother - Giacomo.

............... Beatrice,  
Who in the gentleness of thy sweet youth  
Hast never trodden on a worm, or bruised  
A living flower, but thou hast pitied it  
With needless tears!

(III.i.365-69.)
The same gentle Beatrice shows the different stuff of her personality when the situation demands it. She displays her strength of mind, firmness of decision, power of judgment and courage when she finds that parricide is the only thing that can save them from the tyranny of her father. The transformation of gentleness into an unusual sternness is a natural outcome. From the third act, especially after her violation, Beatrice governs the actions of the play; she becomes Portia (The Merchant of Venice) and Lady Macbeth combined; Portia, in her power of judgment and intellect, Lady Macbeth, in her guiding the action of murder. Beatrice shows close similarity with Electra of Euripides. Both Beatrice and Electra guide the act of murder; both display firmness of decision, strength of masculinity and courage with which they govern the actions. But in motivation these two heroines differ from each other to some extent; Beatrice devises parricide with the spirit of self-defence, whereas Electra's attitude to her mother - Clytemnestra, and her consort, Aegisthus is similar to Hamlet's attitude to his mother and uncle. Electra incites her brother, Orestes to resort to matricide not so much for self-defence, as for avenging the death of their father - Agamemnon. Beatrice is thus different from her Greek counterpart in spirit and motivation. In the trial scene Beatrice boldly defends herself and others against the charge of parricide. Her role reminds us of Joan of Arc in trial scene. One objection to Shelley's portrayal of this character is often raised that Shelley has presented her as a liar when she denies the charge of murder. But we find, that there is no lack
of consistency in her character, as Joseph W. Donohue has found. Donohue writes - "There is, then, a basic inconsistency in Shelley's presentation of the character of Beatrice which makes it impossible to maintain sympathy for her in the concluding minutes of the play." Beatrice's denial is quite natural. Firstly, Beatrice does not think the murder of Cenci as a crime; because, it is not a crime "when a deed where mercy insults Heaven"... (IV.iii.30.) is committed. Electra also seeks to abjure the responsibility of her mother's murder.

El. Yet why hath Apollo by bodings ordained
That I with a mother's blood be stained? 75

(Electra,11.1303-04.)

Cenci has actually murdered himself. Beatrice's conscience is clear. Donohue has also meant somewhat the same thing when he maintains, that Beatrice feels justified in her outright lie "because she has already abjured the responsibility to be bound by conventional human justice and morality." 76 Secondly, Beatrice, like others, is also a human being with all normal human weaknesses. If Shelley means to show this through Beatrice's denial, he is not at all unjustified. An artist's, rather a dramatist's primary concern, is to hold mirror up to nature. Ethics cannot or should not govern the truths of life. In a corrupt system of the society or of the state, Beatrice's

74Donohue, op. cit. p.130.
76Donohue, op. cit. p.180.
truthfulness would have had no value. Beatrice's feelings and behaviour in the last scene have natural relation to the act of denial. In the last moments of her earthly life Beatrice is a different being - different from what she is in the third and the fourth acts especially, but very true to her sex. When the orders of the execution are communicated to her by Camillo (V.iv.), we hear Beatrice wildly exclaiming -

Beatrice (wildly).  
O
My God! Can it be possible I have
To die so suddenly? So young to go
Under the obscure, cold, rotting, wormy ground!

How fearful! to be nothing!

(V.iv.47-55.)

This speech brings out the most natural human reactions of Beatrice. The fear of death which is one of the most common human characteristics possibly makes her deny the charge of murder. There is nothing abnormal in it, and this should not be the cause for which Beatrice may lose audiences' sympathy. How pathetic and human are her last few words, when the executioner is ready to perform his task -

Here, Mother, tie
My girdle for me, and bind up this hair
In any simple knot; ...........

............... How often
Have we done this for one another; now
The character of Beatrice Cenci offers scope for emotional acting, and Shelley conceived this character and executed his plan with O'Neil in view, who, Shelley thought, would be the actress capable of bringing Beatrice out in full to the view of the audience. Of all the characters of The Cenci Beatrice is the most living one. She is the greatest triumph of Shelley's characterization.

The character of Count Cenci is set in contrast to the character of Beatrice. Their antagonism on both physical and spiritual plane constitutes the basis of actions of this tragedy. Cenci's earlier life is revealed to us by Shelley in retrospect through the speeches of the Count himself and also of others. It is clear that he is a born criminal who has passed all his life in debauchery and vice. Cenci is a heartless man of Satanic spirit - stern and ruthless in his crimes, immoral to the backbone in his attitude to life and the world. He is a cynic through and through.

Cenci is a man of sadistic pleasure, and this is at once clear when he says -
I love
The sight of agony, and the sense of joy,
When this shall be another's, and that mine.
And I have no remorse and little fear,
Which are, I think, the checks of other men.

(I.i.81-5.)

He has lived a life of sensual pleasure. "I fed on honey
sweets" (I.i.104), and he is now tired of such life. But his
perverse nature is not yet changed; it has only changed its
direction, and is now directed to his wife and children. The
father in him is now oververted; his sons are the objects of
hatred to him; his daughter is an object of lust. Cenci is,
in a word, morally lost completely. From Act I, scene iii
Cenci's sexual violence towards Beatrice begins to acquire
momentum and intensity. He appears in the drama like a maniac.
Shelley has handled this character with utmost delicacy in so
far as his incestuous activities are concerned. The violation
of Beatrice is not shown, but suggested through Beatrice's
reactions (III.i.) and Cenci's Satanic resolution: "It must be
done; it shall be done, I swear!" (I.iii.178.). Cenci proceeds
with a systematic plan. He takes his family into the lonely
castle of Petrella for the same purpose. Act IV opens with a
terrible soliloquy of the maniac Count. His speech serves to
strike terror in us.

Cenci. She comes not; yet I left her even now
Vanquished and faint. She knows the penalty
Of her delay:

(IV.i.1-3.)
Shelley is successful in showing the beast in him through these two and a half lines. Cenci in the curse scene (IV.i.) resembles Lear in his fury when the latter curses his daughters in violence of mood, in hatred and in stormy passion, though Cenci’s hatred for Beatrice is of a quite different kind. The character of Count Cenci has no aspect except his incestuous mania and madness, criminal perversity and violence. Though active in his own way, he is somewhat a static character; he is, in a sense, a character of unrelieved criminality.

The character of Lucretia is passive. She has no control over her husband. She is a gentle lady—motherly towards her step-children, helpless to give protection to the oppressed Beatrice. But her role in the drama is not dramatically inessential. She is designed to offer mild resistance to Cenci’s unchecked violence. Lucretia shows interesting contrast.

Orsino is conceived, it seems, in terms of Iago, and Shelley has displayed some skill in the portrayal of this character. Orsino is a young priest who loves Beatrice for her beauty and wealth. Orsino is a materialist, out and out. He holds back Beatrice’s petition to His Holiness the Pope, lest Pope should order for Beatrice’s deliverance from the tyranny of her father. His motive is clear when he says to himself:

He might bestow her on some poor relation
Of his sixth cousin, as he did her sister,
And I should be debarred from all access.

(I.ii.69-71.)
Orsino wants to win Beatrice only for her dowry and finds that so long Cenci lives, he has no hope of this. To gain his secret material end, Cenci's murder is a necessity to him.

\[ ..........., \text{And while Cenci lives} \]
\[ \text{His daughter's dowry were a secret grave} \]
\[ \text{If a orest wins her.} \]

(II.ii.126-28.)

Orsino's villainy is thus, not motiveless. He reads the mind of Beatrice and of Giacomo, and manipulates their thoughts to his own purpose, the first step to which is the murder of the Count. So far as Beatrice is concerned, the ground for him is ready; but he has to take some pains to win the mind of Giacomo. When Giacomo is in his vacillating mood, Orsino incites him to a firm and final resolution.

\[ \text{Once gone} \]
\[ \text{You cannot recall your sister's peace;} \]
\[ \text{Your own extinguished years of youth and hope;} \]

(III.ii.53-5.)

The murder of Cenci being done, Orsino successfully manages to escape, leaving his victims to their unfortunate fate.

Orsino. I thought to act a solemn comedy

\[ \text{Upon the painted scene of this new world,} \]
\[ \text{And to attain my own peculiar ends} \]
\[ \text{By some such plot of mingled good and ill} \]
\[ \text{As others weave;} \]

(V.i.77-81.)
But Orsino cannot gain by his villainy; his calculation fails and his actions frustrate his very hope that has driven him to embark on his villainous scheme of action. In a sense, Orsino also meets with his tragedy of ambition and remains, after all, as a villain all along.

From dramatic point of view, Orsino is an interesting study. He is a living character having mobility of body and mind. He is cunning like Iago, having Iago's capacity to turn his victim to his secret motive. We feel forced to watch him right from the second scene of the first act, and also interested in the manner in which he weaves his design through apparent sympathy for his victims. Orsino is one who is able to maintain suspense all through. He is Shelley's Iago. Other characters are not so important as to deserve any special notice. It may be mentioned here that Shelley's minor characters are not very impressive.

Most of the critics have traced echoes of Shakespeare in The Cenci, especially in certain scenes and also in certain characters. The critic, like David Lee Clark, has gone to the extent of charging Shelley with plagiarism. Clark finds close affinity between The Cenci and Macbeth; he finds Beatrice's similarity with Lady Macbeth and concludes that "it cannot be considered merely accidental." Sara Ruth Watson finds the play's affinity with Othello in respect of plot, characterization

77 Clark, op. cit. p.278.

78 Ibid. G. Wilson Knight also finds something of Lady Macbeth in Beatrice. (Vide The Golden Labyrinth, p.216).
and even structural pattern, but unlike Clark, she thinks, that some of the similarities are due to fortuitous circumstance. She finds closeness between Beatrice and Desdemona, and between Orsino and Iago. Ruth while emphasizing her point in respect of Beatrice has lost sight of one vital fact; Desdemona is essentially a passive character who is unable to offer resistance, while Beatrice is not so, and it is this essential characteristic difference between the two heroines which distinguishes them from each other. In this respect, we think, Clark is more correct in finding Beatrice's similarity with Lady Macbeth. As to Clark's charge of plagiarism against Shelley, truth seems to be that Shelley's imitation might not be intentional, or conscious. There is enough of similarity between Macbeth and The Cenci, it is true, and it is perhaps, due to the effect of Shelley's close studies in Shakespeare, or due to what the particular Italian story had in common with Macbeth. We are told by the poet himself that he has represented the plot and the characters as nearly as they were found in the source manuscript. If Shelley's statement is relied upon, it may appear that he had nothing much to do in so far as the invention of the plot and the conception of the characters of The Cenci are concerned. He might have imitated, to some extent, in the verbal part of his tragedy - in other words, the style of Shakespeare, as all the Romantics did more or less in their dramatic writings. It is this imitation of style and certain imagery and phrases which has actually created a ground for the critics' suspicion.

or misconception that Shelley has indulged in plagiarism. When Giacomo utters -

And yet once quenched I cannot thus relume
My father's life: (III.ii.51-2).

We at once recall the speech of Othello in the bed-chamber scene (V.ii.) on the eve of killing Desdemona, but Giacomo, speaking like Othello, is Giacomo - not a character from Othello's world. In the fourth act, Shelley's imitation of Shakespeare's verbal style and idioms of expression is all the more prominent, but Shakespeare's influence on Shelley remains mostly confined to the verbal part, rather than in the dramatic conception and conduct. Stuart Curran seems to have approached the probable truth when he concludes -

"He meant not to copy or imitate, but to recreate in the language of his own day the vigor and vitality of the Elizabethan stage."

The Cenci owes, to some extent, to the Gothic dramatic tradition as well. The murder scene lies in the lonely ancient castle of Petrella; its massive walls, dungeon, and the desolation of the place strike horror

You know
That savage rock, the castle of Petrella:
'Tis safely walled, and moated round about:
Its dungeon underground, and its thick towers
Never told tales; though they have heard and seen
What might make dumb things speak.

(II.i. 167-72.)

80Curran, op. cit. p.49.
The description refers to a Gothic atmosphere. Besides, the banquet, the distressed innocent heroine, the theme of incest—all go to show Shelley's Gothic reminiscences, and his debt to the School of Waloole and Mrs. Radcliffe. Other Romantic poets also worked under the spell of Gothic tradition to some extent, but Shelley's case is somewhat different in the sense that he was far from being a mere imitator of fashionable Gothicism. Shelley, we know, was an ardent reader of Gothic romance right from his early age; his acquaintance with the Gothic world was far more intense and direct, and as such, his mind was deeply saturated with Gothic diablerie in a way different from the minds of other Romantics were. It is, therefore, not at all surprising that his tragedy shows Gothic influence to some extent.

The Cenci is almost universally recognised as the best tragedy of Shelley's time. "For all its faults," writes Stuart Curran, "The Cenci is a greater play than any of Lord Byron's..."81 Joseph W. Donohue regards it as a "representative work" and as "the best and richest example of poetic drama in the Romantic age";82 and the same opinion is also held by George Rowell, when he maintains in an unequivocal language—

".......... among the Romantic poets' excursion into the drama the supremacy of The Cenci remains unchallenged."83

In Shelley's time it was not given its due place; its importance

82Donohue, op. cit. p.161.
83Rowell, George, op. cit. p.33.
as a play of the period was not even recognised. An unknown contemporary reviewer thinks that there is nothing dramatic about it. He finds the technical structure defective and the its subject-matter "blameable"; "The language is loose and disjointed; sometimes it is ambitious of simplicity, and it then becomes bald, inelegant, and prosaic." Byron also thought the subject of this tragedy essentially undramatic, though he recognised it as "a work of power and poetry." Keats's comment on The Cenci is also cold and very niggardly. Coleridge, as far as we know, is absolutely silent over it. Only Beddoes was able to discover in The Cenci the dramatic genius of Shelley, which no other could realize.

"To my mind," he writes, "the only error of The Cenci is, that its splendid author seemed to have the Greeks, instead of Shakespeare, as his model in the mind's eye; if he had followed the latter, I see no reason why he should not have been the second great dramatist." In a word, The Cenci, it seems, created a mixed reaction in its time, and on the whole, injustice was done to Shelley inspite of most of the half-hearted and scanty recognition that this play received from his close circle. But The Cenci has received posthumus recognition, both on the stage, as well as from the critics.


85 Letters and Diaries, II. (Letter to Shelley, April 26, 1821). p.601.

The prejudice of the Shelley's time against this tragedy, we think, was heightened and incited by its theme of incest that shocked the puritanic sentiment of the age. Its rejection by the Covent Garden and the Drury Lane is the proof. "The pollution of a daughter by a father," writes the unknown reviewer, "the murder of a father by his wife and daughter, are events too disgusting to be moulded into any form capable even of awakening our interest." But Shelley's intention was not to employ such a theme for its own sake; his purpose in The Cenci was to show the inadequacy of justice, the corruption of the Papal Government, and the utterly imperfect legal system of the then Rome, and above all, to hold up to view the helplessness of the innocent in such a society and the state which were actually responsible for the tragedy of Beatrice. In a sense, Shelley did in The Cenci what Galsworthy in the twentieth century has done in his tragedy - Justice. Both The Cenci, and Justice expose the ills of the society, the state, the legal system and the prison system, to which the individuals, like Beatrice, and Falder are sacrificed. The Cenci is a dramatic study of the psychology of perversion which turns it into a work of universal poetic import; it may also be taken as a work of Shelley's social conscience.

To achieve easy communicability between himself and his readers and supposed audience, Shelley has tried to choose a style of expression nearer to the spoken idioms of his time, and by doing so, he has undoubtedly taken a step towards the essential

87British Review, XVII (June, 1821), in Romantic Bards.
compromise between himself and his audience. A comparison between the verbal pattern and style of *The Cenci* and those of *Prometheus* can easily and at once indicate what was Shelley's aim in *The Cenci*. In the tragedy Shelley was not oblivious of, and indifferent to, the interest of the audience of the then London theatre, and accordingly he has made it stageworthy as far as he could. Here he has tried to avoid the vagueness of description, symbol and thought; there is little or no abstract imagery, and there is hardly any example of his characteristic flights of poetic imagination and lyrical effusiveness which are amply present in *Prometheus*, or *Hellas*. It proves, that Shelley could also release himself from the prison of subjectivity, lyricism and abstract metaphysical thoughts, if he wished. It was, as he himself declares, "studiously composed in a different style." 88

In between *The Cenci* and his last attempt at drama - *Charles The First*, intervened by chance, or fortuitous circumstances, two other dramatic works, *Oedious Tyrannus*, or *Swellfoot The Tyrant*, and *Hellas* for which Shelley seems to have been not prepared. *Swellfoot* preceded *Hellas*.

Mary Shelley's Journal and her note on this play indicate how Shelley went into the composition of *Swellfoot The Tyrant*. It was based on the political scandal of George IV and his Queen - Caroline of whom, the former was trying to disburden himself. Shelley's letter to Thomas Medwin dated July 20, 1820

indicates how Shelley disliked this royal affair. The thought of writing this mock satirical drama came to his mind, we are told, on August 24, 1820, while the poet was reading his poem Ode to Liberty to Mary, Claire, and Mrs. Mason at his house at Baths of San Giuliano, and heard the unexpected cries of the oigs beneath his windows, brought for sale at the fair. The idea of this drama came to his mind fresh, as that of a lyric poem. Shelley compared the cries of the oigs "to the 'chorus of frogs' in the satiric drama of Aristophanes," and "imagined a political-satirical drama on the circumstances of the day, to which the oigs would serve as chorus — and Swellfoot was begun."90

The plot of Swellfoot can briefly be out thus. The king Swellfoot of Thebes enters the temple of Famine to offer his worship to the deity. A number of boars, sows and oigs sitting on the steps and clinging around the altar start at once voicing protest and grievances against the king.

You ought to give us hog-wash and clean straw,
And sties well thatched; besides, it is the law!

(I.i. 65-6.)

The angry king orders fresh torture on the rebellious beasts to stop their grumbling. An oracle is heard: "Boethia, choose reform or civil war!" (I.i.113.), and it sounds a warning for the tyrant king. The king then informs his minister — Purqanax, and the Arch-priest of Famine — Mammon, that his ox-headed Queen — Iona

90Shelley, Mary, Note on Oedipus Tyrannus, in Shelley's Works, p. 410.
has returned to Thebes when he wished that she were in hell. It is, therefore, something that calls for precaution and proper action against her. Swellfoot orders his General to bring her head and body separate. In the meantime, Mammon hits upon a plan. He shows a "Green Bag" and assures the king to solve the problem with it; the content of the bag, if poured on anybody, can "turn innocence to guilt," and "gentlest looks to savage, foul and fierce deformity." Mammon says, that their victory is sure and certain, if the Queen Iona is enticed to come to the temple, and the content is poured on her.

But, while in the temple, the Queen, all on a sudden, seizes the Green Bag from the hand of the priest and pours all on the king and his men. At once they turn into ugly beasts; the Queen Iona comes out on a Bull-Demon - Minotaur to hunt them. The oracle thus comes to pass.

Swellfoot contains much of a drama, though Shelley has not written it for the stage. It is written in a satirical vein for the readers. The theme is again the overthrowing of the tyrant ruler. The swines stand under the protection of the Queen Iona whose rule, they think, will ensure their liberty, comfort and prosperity. They, therefore, raise a cry -

Iona for ever! - No Swellfoot!

(I.i. 292.)

They offer the Queen all co-operation and help. They believe that their Queen is thoroughly innocent, and without suspecting anything fishy about the proposal of the cunning Purganax that Iona may be converted into an angel by pouring on her head the
mystic water of the Green Bag (II.i) they consent to the proposal.

The play is full of vivid actions, and the last scene (II.ii.) is dramatically most important. Here we are shown the quite unexpected turn of the event - a dramatic irony. When this short Two-Act drama ends, we find the situation turned upside down; the plot of Swellfoot and the members of his court proves at last suicidal. The Swellfoot dynasty comes to an abrupt end, and Queen Iona comes out of the skilfully designed net of the Green Bag, victorious.

Of all the characters approaching human likeness, Purganax is perhaps the best. He is made of all the stuff of cunningness. By the gift of the gab, he carries out his plan of deceiving the swine-world into the conviction, that the Queen's ordeal as proposed, is not for her destruction, but for converting her into an angel. He is able to manipulate others' mind to the clandestine motive of his own. He wins over the swines, and his oratorical power is evident from his speeches with which Purganax wins his swinish hearers.

Swellfoot The Tyrant, though not fit for stage performance, is yet important for one special reason. It faces boldly the charge of those, like Matthew Arnold, who think that Shelley is a "beautiful ineffectual angel beating in void his luminous wings in vain"; in other words, it disproves the notion of those who, like a contemporary reviewer, think that Shelley is a poet of "wildest reveries" who "imagines that he can find the perfection of poetry in incoherent dreams or in the ravings
of bedlam." Swellfoot shows Shelley's interest in the affairs of this world, and his satirical spirit. A reader of this play can easily see the identity of king Swellfoot with George IV, of Iona with Queen Caroline and so on. Newman I. White in his article - *Shelley's Swellfoot The Tyrant in Relation to Contemporary Political Satires*, shows Shelley's thorough acquaintance with almost all the important political satires and cartoons on the royal scandal of the time.92

"From a more general point of view," writes White, "it shows that the unworldly lover of Emilia Viviani, the solitary and abstracted poet of *Trelawney's Recollections*, was sufficiently interested in the things of this world to acquire a surrising familiarity with the fugitive literature of a national scandal."93

In *Swellfoot The Tyrant*, Shelley is close to the idioms of the contemporary speech. He is almost free from vague and abstract imagination and imagery, abstruse symbols and lyricism. The style matches the subject. Swellfoot is nearer to *Hellas* in the sense, that the poet's interest in the contemporary world affairs remains behind them; both the plays are based on the political topics of the time - *Swellfoot* centres round an English theme, *Hellas* a Greek. Besides, both the play are structurally Greek; Shelley has taken chorus and semi-chorus from the Greek

92 *GLA*, XXXVI (1921), op. 332-46.
dramatic conventions; the reference to the oracle (I.i.) in Swellfoot also points to that convention.

Hellas was composed at Pisa in the autumn of 1821. The political background against which this lyrical drama was written has been well brought out by Mary Shelley. She tells us about her husband's reaction to, and interest in, the Greek war of liberation with the Turks. On the 1st of April, 1821 Prince Mavrocordato called on Shelley, "brining the proclamation of his cousin - Prince Yosilanti, and, radiant with exultation and delight, declared that henceforth Greece would be free."94 Shelley shared the enthusiasm of the Greeks struggling for liberation from the Turkish yoke. He espoused the Greek cause and mentally sided with Greece. "We are all Greeks. Our laws, our literature, our religion, our arts have their root in Greece."95 Shelley identified himself with the Greeks. Naturally, his intense sympathy for the Greek cause, and his sincere wish to see Greece liberated were insoled by the occasion, and sustained his poetic vision that remains behind the dramatic actions of Hellas.

Hellas is called by Shelley "A Lyrical Drama," and the poet is thoroughly justified. It is not for the theme which, as the poet says, cannot be treated otherwise than lyrically, not for the lyric note inherent in the constitution of the drama, but for something else. The entire drama is in spirit a single lyric poem. "It was written without much care," Shelley says,

94Shelley's Works. o.481.

95Shelley, Preface to Hellas. (Vide Shelley's Works. p. 447.)
"and in one of those few moments of enthusiasm which now seldom
visit me........" It is quite clear from the poet that *Hellas*
was composed in a way as a lyric poem is composed. It has all
the stuff of a proper lyric; it is spontaneous, emotional,
intense, personal, sincere, simple and also unified. *Hellas* is
essentially a subjective expression of the emotional reaction of
the poet's mind to a thing objective and external. *Prometheus
Unbound*, though a lyrical drama in form, is thus basically
different from *Hellas* in this sense. In one more sense, *Hellas*
differs from *Prometheus*: in the latter the theme is metaphysical
and cosmic, but the theme of the former is of local and
political interest; characters, situations and actions are here
conceived in political terms.

*Hellas* opens with Mahmud - the despotic Sultan of Turkey
in sleep on his royal couch. He wakes from sleep, strangely
moved by some strange nightmare. He asks Hassan to summon the
old jew - Ahasuerus who is an adept in interpreting dreams.
Mahmud is full of fears for the future of his rule. He learns
from four successive messengers the news of disastrous battle on
land and sea, and also of the revolts which have broken out in
the various parts of his dominion. He seeks to find hope from the
old jew. Ahasuerus holds up a vision of the fall of Mahmud. The
Phantom of Mohomet II also appears before the despotic Sultan
and hints at the shaping of an appalling change near at hand, when
Islam must fall, but we will reign together
Over its ruins in the world of death:--
(11. 987-8.)

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96Shelley's Letters, ed. Ingoen. (To John Gisborne,
Then come chorus and semi-chorus singing -  

And Greece, which was dead, is arisen!  
(1.1059.)  

and the drama ends with the ultimate victory of Greece and beginning of a new era suggested through the song of the chorus.

The world's great age begins anew,  
The golden years return,  
The earth doth like a snake renew  
Her winter weeds outworn:
(11.1060-63.)

The plot of Hellas is very thin. It will not be very untrue to say that Hellas has actually no dramatic plot worth the name. It is the ideas and emotions - not the episodes, that inspired Shelley to write this; in fact, this drama is nothing more than a joyous song of victory of the Greeks.

Shelley has not divided the drama into Acts and scenes, and calls it a drama for no other reason but for its being composed in dialogue. The dialogue is lengthy and undramatic; and the drama lacks action. Hellas should not be given undue importance as a drama, though some dramatic turns of situation are there in it. For example, when Mahmud is engaged in conversation with the Phantom and learns about his impending fall, the voice without, crying "Victory! Victory!" breaks suddenly for a moment his spell of fear; his "mighty trance" breaks. Its effect is dramatic. He considers it the last flicker of a dying lamp.
Weak lightning before darkness! poor faint smile
Of dying Islam!

(11. 915-16.)

The most important scene is one, when the four successive
messengers come one by one to give the Sultan the news of the
unexpected happenings of revolt, pestilence and disintegration
scattered in the different parts of the empire. The situation
is dramatically tense; Mahmud's mind is too heavy to hear any
more.

I'll hear no more! too long
We gaze on danger through the mist of fear,
And multiply upon our shattered hopes
The image of ruin. Come what will!

(11. 640-43.)

But the dramatic elements in the work are so slight that Hellas
does not deserve much consideration as a drama, nor should it
be the basis of passing any judgment on Shelley's dramatic
capacity and power.

Neville Rogers finds some similarity of thought between
Hellas and Prometheus Unbound. Mahmud's defeat in the end
represents the triumph of Shelley's ideals. He finds in it the
triumph of good over evil.

"Greek thought and the power of the Greek virtues,"
says Rogers, "have overthrown the despotism of 'blood
and gold'. Mahmud has been overthrown as Jupiter was
The conflict between the opposing forces interested Shelley more than anything else, and the conflict between the Greeks and the Turks was looked upon as the conflict between East and West, barbarism and civilization, darkness and light. Though apparently historical in theme, Hellas has actually very little history in it. The poet has not cared for what was actually happening in the war; his main object was, as Edmund Blunden thinks, "to contribute some encouragement, and rouse enthusiasm to the cause of Greek freedom." Byron hailed the spirit of liberty of the Greeks through his physical participation in the war; Shelley hailed it through poetry of which Hellas is the glowing example. Hellas is ultimately important not as drama, but as a medium through which Shelley, the lover and disciple of Greece extended his love, homage, and moral and spiritual support to the Greek freedom-fighters. "Hellas is Shelley's last revolutionary drama," says Gerald McNiece; it is actually a Greek poem, written in English with Aeschylus's Persae in mind.

In between Hellas and Charles The First fragment is interposed a slight dramatic fragment written at Pisa during the late winter, or early spring of 1822. This was undertaken, we are told by Mary Shelley, for the amusement of the individuals

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98 op. cit. p.291.
99 Blunden, op. cit. p.236.
100 McNiece, op. cit. p.246.
who composed their intimate society. No title of the fragment is given. Mrs. Shelley tells us how the poet conceived of the plot of this drama.

"An Enchantress, living in one of the islands of the Indian Archipelago, saves the life of a Pirate, a man of savage but noble nature. She becomes enamoured of him; and he, inconstant to his mortal love, for a while returns her passion; but at length, recalling the memory of her whom he left, and who laments his loss, he escapes from the Enchanted Island, and returns to his lady. His mode of life makes him again go to sea, and the Enchantress seizes the opportunity to bring him, by a spirit-brewed tempest, back to her Island."

This dramatic fragment opens at a stage, when we find the Enchantress in her recollection, both sweet and sad, of her past life associated with her pirate lover.

He came like a dream in the dawn of life,
He fled like a shadow before its noon;
He is gone, and my peace is turned to strife,

(11. 1-3.)

She makes the spell, and is answered by a Spirit. The next scene opens with an Indian youth and a lady. They are brought to this island by the Spirit in a mysterious manner. The youth loves the lady, but the lady returns his passion with a sisterly affection. This is the rudiment of the story we can collect from this dramatic fragment of only 244 lines.

101Shelley's Works. p.492.
102Ibid.
It is very difficult to predict what would have been the type of this drama, if it were completed. It is equally difficult to pass any comment on the dramatic qualities Shelley would have shown in its completed form. We can only say that this dramatic fragment reminds us of The Tempest in a Shelleyan manner. The supernatural elements are supposed to be in the dramatic scheme of the poet; characters are both human and supernatural; the atmosphere is charged with magic and enchantment. The fragment seems to be not dramatically vigorous.

Now we turn to Shelley's last attempt at drama - the fragment of Charles The First. It was designed in 1818, begun towards the close of 1819, resumed in January, and finally left in its fragmentary form by June, 1822.

The history of Charles I had continued to fascinate Shelley for a period long before he actually began to write the play. Before he came to realize his own dramatic power and ability, Shelley had suggested the history of Charles I to his wife - Mary for writing a tragedy. But Mary could not venture to start it. Later Shelley himself set his hand upon it.

Charles The First was actually a very ambitious attempt at a stage-drama. The elation born of the success achieved in The Cenci, and the confidence gained from the attempt seem to have made Shelley aim at something higher than The Cenci in this tragedy. We find him writing on it to his friend - Leigh Hunt from Pisa on January 25, 1822:

"I am at present writing the drama of 'Charles the First,' a play which, if completed according to my
The poet also says that this tragedy will not be coloured by
the party spirit of the author. In other words, Shelley
promised to maintain dramatic detachment as far as possible in
Charles The First. Keeping The Cenci in view, we do not think
that he would have failed to keep his promise. Charles The First
would have been an historical tragedy of the Shakespearean model.

The opening scene of this fragment introduces through the
conversations of the different citizens the theme that would
develop in succeeding acts and scenes. It at once reminds us of
the opening scene of Julius Caesar. Shelley, like Shakespeare has
brought out citizens on the street, and shown their different
reactions to an advancing masque of great show and solendour—

......................... which turns
Like morning from the shadow of the night,
The night to day, and London to a place
Of peace and joy? (Sc.i. 2-5.)

The citizens of Shakespeare are ignorant and simple: they come
out to see the procession with Caesar and others pass. But
Flavius and Marullus chide them for their aimless roving. In the
first scene of Charles The First, the citizens divide themselves
into two groups in so far as their reactions to the naudy masque
are concerned. Here, the first and the second citizens are

103Shelley's Letters, ed. Ingoen. II. 441. p. 934.
104p. cit. II. 438. o. 930.
oractically Shelleyan Flavius and Marullus.

Second Citizen. ............. This Charles the First

Rose like the equinoctial sun, ........
By vaoours, through whose threatening ominous veil
..................... he has gained
This height of noon - from which he must decline
Amid the darkness of conflicting storms,
To dank extinction and to latest night....

(Sc.i. 46-52.)

The theme of the drama is at once clear from these few lines, and the poet has been able to rouse the curiosity of his audience and readers about what comes next. The opening scene is dramatically a very important scene. The conflicting views and the contrasts and oppositions heighten the dramatic value and the theatrical effect of the scene. Shelley has individualized his character in the very beginning of the play. The second scene introduces most of the principal characters, and we are allowed to peep into the inner nature of each of them. Charles I is weak; his Queen - Henrietta is strong, obdurate and ambitious and reminds us, as Dr. Singh rightly says, of Lady Macbeth. Strafford is loyal to the king and hateful towards the people. Laud - the Arch-Bishop is stern and uncatholic in mind and thought; he is cruel, obstinate and overpowering. Shelley has, for the first time, introduced a fool - Archy in this play. Archy is an objective onlooker and commentator like all fools (especially, Shakespearean fools), but not a humorist. He is a serious fool resembling at least in intention the fool in
King Lear. He has wit, but no humour.

Archy. If your Majesty were tormented night and day by fever, gout, rheumatism, and stone, and asthma, etc., and you found these diseases had secretly entered into a conspiracy to abandon you, should you think it necessary to lay an embargo on the port by which they meant to dispeopole your unquiet kingdom of man? (Sc.ii.376-38.)

Archy's serious mood and speech are marked even by the Queen who says to her husband -

"My beloved Lord,
Have you not noted that the Fool of late
Has lost his careless mirth, and that his words
Sound like the echoes of our saddest fears?"

(Sc.ii.445-48.)

The third scene shows the trial of Prynne and Bastwick. Though very short, the scene is set in contrast and opposition of the characters. The fourth scene seemingly incomplete, is emotionally conceived. It shows the departure of some of the rebels from England. Hampden's emotional speech addressed to his motherland may be imagined to express what Shelley himself felt and thought at the time of his final departure from England on March 12, 1818.

Hamoden. England, farewell! thou, who hast been my cradle,
Shalt never be my dungeon or my grave!

(Sc.iv. 1-2.)
The fifth scene is incomplete.

The dramatic fragment of *Charles The First* holds great promise as a drama for stage production. There are actions, movement, clarity of thought and expression, objectivity and maturity of style. There is a sort of masculinity about it all; the dramatic constitution, as far as the fragment indicates, is strong, and based on maturer conception.

The critics and scholars have out forth different reasons for Shelley's abandoning the drama in this fragmentary form. Neville Rogers maintains, that Shelley "had in consequence turned away from his libertarian drama when he found that philosophical or problems intermingled with human sympathies had begun to outweigh the purely dramatic element." White also thinks, that Shelley abandoned this drama when he faced serious problems in handling the plot. But he also thinks, that Shelley might not have abandoned it for good. Whatever may be the case, Shelley's accidental death only a few days later closed the chapter finally, even if the poet had wished to carry on with it. It is a fact, that the poet was facing some difficulties in advancing with *Charles The First*. "I have done some of 'Charles I'," Shelley writes to John Gisborne from Pisa on April 10, 1822, "but although the poetry succeeded very well, I cannot seize on the conception of the subject as a whole, and seldom now touch the canvas." Whether the difficulties he

105 Rogers, oo. cit. p.275.
faced, would have been overcome later is a matter of conjecture. Keeping in mind the dramatic ability shown in The Cenci, we think, however, that Shelley would have made something worthwhile out of it, if he had lived longer.

III

This examination of the plays shows Shelley's successive stages of development as a dramatist. Two major influences are seen at work on him - the Greek and the Elizabethan. Shelley began as a disciple of the Greek, but when he came to Charles the First, he was more a follower of the Elizabethans, than of the Greek dramatist. Prometheus Unbound, Swellfoot The Tyrant, and Hellas were written primarily with the Greek dramatists in mind. The Cenci partially, and Charles the First wholly, are Elizabethan in character and style. Charles the First is purely English in the sense, that Shelley here turned neither to Greece, nor to Rome for the subject; he took up the material from his own native history. From the point of view of construction, The Cenci, as we have said, is Greek; but Charles I, as far as we understand from the fragment, is Elizabethan. In style and idiom, Shelley's debt to Shakespeare is clear, and this we have mentioned earlier. Shelley's debt to the Greek dramatists is evident in so far as the structural form (and sometimes, the source materials of some of his plays) of the plays (except Charles I) is concerned. Shelley has employed chorus and semi-chorus in Prometheus, Swellfoot, and Hellas, which are the essential dramatic
machinery of the Attic dramatic tradition; the characters are both human, and superman, or lower creatures, as swine, pigs, gadfly, etc.; a role of divinity is seen intermingled with human actions of the plot — and all this goes to assert the fact that Shelley has borrowed something of Greek dramatic form and substance. His employment of blank-verse shows the Elizabethan heritage. But it is to be admitted after all, that he did not work under the impulse of mere servile imitation, either of the Greeks, or of the Elizabethans from whom he borrowed. His aim was, it seems, not to copy, but to recreate something of his own with the material he collected from different sources. That is the reason for which we do not find it difficult to recognize the ultimate result of his borrowings as thoroughly Shelleyan.

Shelley admired the Spanish dramatist — Calderon, and translated three scenes of his play — *The Magico Prodigioso*; he also translated two scenes of Goethe's *Faust*. But Shelley's love for the Greek dramatists was greater; his reading of the Greek dramatists was both deep and wide, and this intense study in the Hellenic literature had formative influences on Shelley the poet and the dramatist. He translated into English *The Cyclops* of Euripides, and some verses from Homer; and these instances also go to show his love for the Greeks. He had admiration for Calderon or Goethe, but he had love for the ancient Greece.

The style in Shelley's dramatic works deserves a few words. In this regard, Stuart Curran observes with *The Cenci* in
"The diction is conversational, bare of modification, carefully tailored to character and subject. The blank verse, though dignified, is flexible and unobtrusive. In general these are the virtues of Shelley's dramatic style,.... The greatest virtue of Shelley's dramatic verse is his ability to suit his style to the particular emotional tone required by the context." 

Curran's comment, on the whole, is correct and may, more or less, be applicable to the plays of Shelley, except *Prometheus Unbound*. Where he has written for the stage, as in *The Cenci*, and *Charles The First*, he is nearer to the idiom and speech-pattern suitable for achieving communicability between the dramatist and his audience. He has carefully avoided vagueness and abstraction of imagery which we notice in *Prometheus Unbound*. And this quality of his dramatic works constitutes one of his merits as an author capable of contributing to the stage. *The Cenci* and *Charles I* prove, above all, that Shelley could at will, keep in abeyance his characteristic poetic style and qualities. T.S. Eliot has recognized the greatness of Shelley's *The Cenci*, but ultimately found no difference between this and other plays of the early nineteenth-century poets in so far as the "rhythm of speech" and versification are concerned. 

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Eliot has failed to note that Shelley and Byron tried to solve this problem of dramatic medium and achieved considerable success, especially in their stage-plays of which The Cenci is one. Eliot seems to have judged the nineteenth-century plays by the standard of twentieth-century poetic drama. F.R. Leavis who is usually not disposed to recognise Shelley's dramatic genius, has to admit, after all, a vital truth when he maintains that Shelley's "genius may be essentially lyrical, but he can, transcending limitations, write great drama." To admit this ability of Shelley is to recognise not only his dramatic talent, but also his capacity for conforming his style to the necessity of dramatic purpose. Had not the poet written The Cenci, and Charles The First fragment, he would have most likely suffered from the perpetual prejudice of his friends, acquaintances, and also of the posterity, that he had no dramatic talent at all. The dramatic works of Shelley fully justify his place among the dramatists of England; he claims a place not only as a poet of finest lyrical quality, but also as a dramatist, which no dispassionate historian of literature can deny.