

A STUDY OF TYRANNY
IN THE CLOSET DRAMAS OF THE ROMANTICS

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A Thesis
Presented to
The Department of English
and the Graduate Council
Kansas State Teachers College of Emporia

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
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August, 1967

Thesis
1967
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PREFACE

There are several reasons for studying the closet dramas of the major romantic poets. The poems of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Byron, and Shelley have consistently received high praise from critics for the majesty of their emotion and the elevation of their thought and language. Yet the dramas of these writers, and they all apparently approached the medium seriously and with determination, receive little or no recognition in the standard anthologies. Comparatively speaking, there has been little research on the plays themselves, the prevailing attitude being that they were mere exercises and should be relegated to that dusty shelf set aside by critics for "literary curiosities." Being a long-time admirer of the great lyric romantic poems, this author found it difficult to accept without question the judgment laid on the romantic dramas and was thereby prompted to investigate these plays, attempting to determine if they had been fairly judged and why they might have been written. A preliminary reading of all the selected plays revealed a persistent area of thematic concern--the evil of tyranny, certainly not an unexpected or unusual theme among the romantics, yet rather surprising in its intensity and pervasiveness throughout the dramas.

The purposes of this study are therefore (1) to delineate the role of tyranny as a major theme in the romantic dramas, (2) to discover what influences, if any, may have helped to mold these dramas

into their final form, (3) to evaluate the plays as dramas, and finally (4) to determine their place in the ranks of English drama.

Chapter I investigates both the romantics' concern with tyranny and the state of the drama during the Romantic Period. The two types of closet drama, those intended to be performed on the stage as well as those so lyrical as to be considered by many as primarily dramatic poetry, present a pattern for the investigation of the individual plays. Chapter II discusses Wordsworth's The Borderers, Coleridge's Osorio, and Keats's Otho the Great, these plays falling into the category of stage dramas. Only Byron and Shelley wrote both types of drama. Chapter III explores Byron's stage dramas but concentrates on his lyrical Manfred and Cain, since these plays are very much revealing of Byron's hatred of tyranny and also illustrative of the development of a heroic romantic rebel. Chapter IV discusses Shelley's The Cenci, considered the most effective of the stage dramas, and Prometheus Unbound, the great lyrical drama against cosmic tyranny. Chapter V summarizes the evaluations of these plays and attempts to explain not only why they might have been written but also what part the theme of tyranny might have played in their development and in their success or failure.

I am deeply indebted to Dr. Charles Walton, my advisor, for his invaluable guidance and patience, and to Dr. June Morgan, my second reader. Also, I wish to thank my family, whose thoughtful encouragement and interest were most greatly appreciated.

August, 1967
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CHAPTER I

THE ROMANTIC REVOLT AGAINST TYRANNY

In their preface to the Lyrical Ballads, first published in 1798, Wordsworth and Coleridge codified the literary principles which marked the full emergence of the Romantic Movement in England. These poets and their circle of friends, followed soon by a second generation of romantics including Keats, Byron, and Shelley, devoted themselves and their writings to the establishment of those ideals characteristic of the movement--a return to nature and simplicity, a glorification of the long ago and far away, a revolt against the classical tradition and its devotion to reason, and, most importantly, an ". . . emphasis on original genius, on genuine emotion, and on the reality and integrity of the human spirit."¹ It is not surprising that this last commitment should have manifested itself in an intense dedication to individualism and, consequently, a deep hatred for any form of tyranny. Hence, it is necessary, first, for one to explore the force and scope of this romantic hatred of tyranny and, secondly, to evaluate the theater of the time, in the hopes, thereby, of laying a foundation for a subsequent investigation of the place of this hatred of tyranny in the dramas of the romantic poets.

¹Henry M. Battenhouse, English Romantic Writers, p. 18.

Since the Romantic Movement has been characterized by a belief in the basic goodness of the individual rather than of institutions, it is appropriate that its rise in the latter part of the eighteenth century should have been accompanied by a corresponding rise of revolutions, not only political in nature, but religious, social, industrial, philosophical, and artistic as well.² Under the theory of the divine right of kings, the often heavy hand of monarchy had held western Europe in a tight grip that had only begun to weaken by the eighteenth century. The seeds of revolt against oppression were already beginning to flourish outside the European continent in Great Britain's thirteen North American colonies.³ There were some Europeans who appreciated the motivations which prompted the Revolutionary War of 1775, who dared to speak in favor of those principles for which they saw men ready to risk their lives. In 1774, Edmund Burke in his speech, "On Conciliation with the Colonies," attempted to defend the rights of the individual in the face of oppression; yet, England herself was not ready to adopt a more liberal policy, nor was she willing to adapt to an emerging spirit of revolt.⁴ Consequently, the American Revolution served as an example to the emerging Latin American nations struggling to break away from Spain and Portugal, and to the reformers on the European continent as well.

²T. S. Omond, The Romantic Triumph, pp. 1-2.

³G. M. Trevelyan, History of England, III, 68.

⁴Battenhouse, op. cit., p. 7.

Actually, Europe itself did not become involved internally with the rising revolt against oppression until the appearance of the writings of Rousseau, the major prophet of revolution and romanticism.⁵ His Social Contract demanded that the head of the state be held responsible to the people, and it was this philosophy that led to the beginnings of the French Revolution.⁶ Other writers on the theme of revolution were the American Tom Paine and William Godwin, the latter preaching philosophical anarchy.

The revolt of the people of France, subscribing to the noble sentiments of "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity," captured the hearts and spirits of those who cherished the romantic ideals. As Wordsworth explains in The Prelude, "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive / But to be young was very Heaven" (XI.108-109). The first generation of the romanticists--Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, and Hazlitt--were in their teens in 1789 at the beginning of the French Revolution and believed it to be the hope of all mankind. As the Revolution progressed, however, it became undermined by a growing violence of the mob, culminating in the Reign of Terror under Robespierre in 1793-1794.

The rise of Napoleon Bonaparte from 1793 to 1804, when he became Emperor, and the later Napoleonic Wars mark a second historical period during the Romantic Movement. For a time the young English poets had still continued to praise the French efforts, even in the face of their

⁵George Brandes, Main Currents in Nineteenth Century Literature, I, 195.

⁶Battenhouse, op. cit., p. 8.

country's war with France and her constant threats to invade their England. Nevertheless, it was obvious that ". . . the peoples of Europe had become deaf to the voice of freedom and had swung from mob tyranny to princely despotism."⁷ One by one, the romantic poets forced themselves to admit that their dream had faded. In 1798, Coleridge wrote his "France, An Ode" as a rejection of the perversions of the French Revolution, and to some extent Wordsworth withdrew into a conservative shell, pouring his disillusionment and soul searching into The Prelude and "Poems Dedicated to National Independence and Liberty."⁸

An expected result of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars was the wave of reaction and suppression that swept England. She was deeply concerned for her own safety and under Tory leadership strove to form coalitions with other monarchies for protection. After Napoleon's defeat, England, Russia, Prussia, and Austria formed the Quadruple Alliance, whose purpose was to preserve monarchies and suppress the spirit of revolution.⁹

By now the younger generation of romantic poets, Keats, Byron, and Shelley, had become involved in the fight against tyranny, and to them the cause of liberalism and reform seemed almost hopeless. The Tory government had placed severe restrictions on freedom of speech,

⁷Jacques Barzun, Classic, Romantic and Modern, p. 32.

⁸Battenhouse, op. cit., p. 68.

⁹Trevelyan, op. cit., p. 167.

of assembly, and of the press, and intellectual radicals were pursued with vehemence.¹⁰ Until 1822, under Castlereagh, the English government continued its persecution of reformers by enacting harsh laws against sedition and by stooping to employing large numbers of spies to discover agitators.

During these years following Napoleon's defeat, the two great voices against tyranny were those of Byron and Shelley. After the breaking up of his marriage and the subsequent flood of public disapproval of his moral character, Byron left England. For a time he wandered throughout Europe, finally settling in Italy. He died in an attempt to aid the Greeks in their fight against tyranny. His writings strongly reflect his commitment to individual liberty. His Don Juan was mockingly dedicated to the two "Bobs," Castlereagh (Robert Stewart) and the poet laureate, Robert Southey, both of whom Byron regarded as puppets of the state. The Vision of Judgment, another brilliant satire, was directed against the pathetic George III.

Byron's hatred of tyranny was extremely emotional, widely directed, and sometimes almost a volcanic eruption against the whole social order. Shelley's hatred was also deep and thorough; yet, particularly after his earliest poems, his vehemence is channeled into visions of a world liberated and dedicated to intellectual freedom and love. He, too, left England, first to encourage the Irish people to rise up against oppression; but, finding his efforts to be in vain,

¹⁰A. B. Fox, "Political and Biographical Background of Coleridge's Osorio," JEGP, LXI (April, 1962), 259.

he returned to his homeland. Although married, he fell in love with William Godwin's teenage daughter, Mary, and subsequently eloped with her to the continent. A significant number of Shelley's poems are protests against tyranny, the most notable of which are The Masque of Anarchy, Queen Mab, "Song to the Men of England," and "England in 1819:"

These younger romantic poets flourished in an age generally unresponsive to their urgent pleas of immediate and widespread reform. On the other hand, their efforts and those of others sympathetic to their cause were not in vain. After 1822, the dictatorial grasp of the government weakened somewhat and finally relaxed with the passage of the Reform Bill of 1832. These men's attitudes toward rebellion have continued to influence intellectuals and artists, even in modern times.¹¹ Certainly, their poetry and the emotions which inspired it strike a sympathetic chord in the hearts of all who struggle to preserve and extend freedom.

These poets, however, did not limit completely their literary expressions to the medium of poetry nor to the writing of didactic or critical prose. Each also experimented with the writing of drama, a somewhat unexpected yet highly interesting outlet for their lyrical talents. Although the Romantic Movement in England was characterized by innovation and experimentation with form and subject (primarily as a revolt against the restraints of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries), there was a surprising lack of these qualities in this one

¹¹Bertrand Russell, "Byron," Byron, p. 152.

area of literature. The theater of early nineteenth-century England was bogged down in a mire of Shakespearean revivals, melodramas, and farces. It is possible to trace this lack of progress to the censorship restrictions of the time as well as to an Elizabethan style that dominated most theatrical conventions.¹²

As Granville-Barker observes, "Great dramatic movements seem . . . to be exceptionally short-lived. All that was vital in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama had burned out in fifty years."¹³ The blaze of Shakespeare's genius might well be unsurpassed on the English stage, for seldom has the world seen such vigour and vitality mastered by dramatic restraint. Yet English drama degenerated in stature from 1610 to the time of the closing of the theaters by the Puritans, possibly because the theater had moved indoors and because its patrons were looking for something new in a medium still lodged in the traditions of the Shakespearean past.¹⁴ In drama, the Restoration period offered few bright hopes, except in the work of Wycherly and Dryden; and it was as though even in the best of plays, a dramatist seemed to be following a pattern, a formula, rather than utilizing his natural powers to the fullest extent that his medium allowed. Under a dominant French influence from the mid-seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth century, comedy fell into a prescribed formula, and tragedy, when re-

¹²Kenneth Neill Cameron (ed.), Percy Bysshe Shelley: Selected Poetry and Prose, p. xxvii.

¹³Harley Granville-Barker, On Dramatic Method, p. 117.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 117-118.

vivals were attempted, was ". . . left the prey of the poetaster, the pedant and the hack. . . ." ¹⁵ Thus, the poet, sensing himself ill-prepared in his few tremulous ventures, quietly retreated.

It is obvious, therefore, that the dramatic heritage of romantic drama was rather frozen in its form. Classic and traditional influences supported a five-act formula and blank verse conventions. The romantic theater, however, established several conventions of its own. Realizing that the area of the apron stage was being utilized less and less by actors and that it probably could easily be converted into orchestra seats for more profit, theatrical managers dispensed with the apron as well as the proscenium doors at the rear of the stage. ¹⁶ Furthermore, stage curtains were being employed more readily as their many advantages became apparent. The major innovation upon the romantic stage was the establishment of an actor-manager system. ¹⁷ Hence, the names, faces, personalities and eccentricities of Kemble, Macready, Samuel Phelps, Charles Kean or Sir Henry Irving became most familiar to any regular playgoer. ¹⁸

Only two theaters, Drury Lane and Covent Garden, in addition to the Haymarket in summer seasons, were allowed to operate legally under the licensing act of 1737. in the performing of legitimate drama. ¹⁹

¹⁵Ibid., p. 118.

¹⁶Allardyce Nicoll, The Development of the Theatre, p. 187.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 190.

¹⁸Loc. cit.

¹⁹Bernice Slote, Keats and the Dramatic Principle, p. 46.

Descriptions of these theaters show that they were probably similar to modern houses. Both Covent Garden (seating 2800 in the pit, gallery, and boxes) and Drury Lane, with a capacity of 3060 persons, were built in the shape of a horseshoe and were elaborately decorated.²⁰ These theaters also maintained elegant saloons and refreshment rooms, and in 1817 the management installed gas lights, making the houses take on the appearance of daylight and causing such discomforts as sore throats and headaches.²¹

The types of plays usually seen on the stage during the Romantic Period fell into three categories. Shakespeare was rediscovered by the age as a truly creative artist and genius, and his dramas were popular.²² Edmund Kean, the greatest actor of the romantic theater, was more famous for his Shakespearean roles of Shylock, Othello, and Richard III, than for any of his other parts.²³ Another popular type of performance was the pantomime, or harlequinade. A third type, known as the "Eastern," was often characterized by the wilder aspects of Gothic melodrama.²⁴ Expected to be found in the Eastern, or oriental action play, would be a Far Eastern setting, a lover-hero, battles, intrigue, rescued ladies, mysterious strangers, enchantments, betrayal-revenge, and death.²⁵ Entertainment for any evening was

²⁰Ibid., p. 48.

²¹Ibid., p. 49.

²²Hardin Craig (ed.), The Complete Works of Shakespeare, p. 40.

²³Sheldon Cheney, The Theatre, p. 419.

²⁴Slote, op. cit., p. 54.

²⁵Ibid., p. 59.

usually designed to last for five hours, usually involving one five-act play in combination with a two-act farce, pantomime, or oriental work, or possibly a short pantomime as a third item.²⁶

Several of these characteristics of the romantic theater actually produced weaknesses in the drama. Besides a flood of contemporary plays that were superficial and unimaginative, the theater was hampered by certain conditions not conducive to professionalism. Spectators, if wealthy or famous enough, were allowed to wander backstage, often getting in the way of the production.²⁷ The star system, a development of the Romantic Period, created petty jealousies over certain popular roles.²⁸ The large size of the theaters encouraged spectacle and exaggeration so that subtilities of voice and movement were nearly impossible to achieve.²⁹ The installation of gas lights, making the stage and pit almost equally well illumined, might explain the fact that audiences were extremely volatile and vocal in their immediate reactions to any occurrence.³⁰ For example, Angus compares the behavior of the audience to that of a modern baseball audience:

". . . their cheers, loud remarks, and showers of missiles were part

²⁶Ibid., p. 54.

²⁷William Angus, "Actors and Audiences in Eighteenth Century London," Studies in Speech and Drama, in Honor of Alexander M. Drummond, p. 126.

²⁸Loc. cit.

²⁹Slote, op. cit., pp. 53-54; Cheney, op. cit., p. 420.

³⁰Slote, op. cit., p. 51.

of the show. Quite often they functioned as referee in disputes. . . ."³¹ Certainly, audience behavior was not improved upon by habitually late arrivals.³²

It is a rather melancholy fact that the birth of democracy neither ushered in a new age of the drama nor even maintained the fresh impetus from the preceding period of Goethe and Schiller in Germany.³³ The question naturally arises as to why Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Byron, and Shelley, as well as other poets of the time, even experimented with the medium. For whatever reason the plays of these poets were composed, history has placed upon these dramas the label of "closet drama," denoting any play written for private pleasure and not for the stage, and usually connoting a play unsuitable for the stage. Therefore, the term is "a rather undignified appellation."³⁴ The closet dramas under present investigation fall into two categories: dramas that follow classic tradition and demonstrate Shakespeare's influence; and those which partake of no set pattern or form, but which are more lyrical in nature, thus allowing the development of an ideal romantic rebel, a hero who would epitomize those ideas of freedom and individualism so dear to the hearts of the romantics.

Ellis-Fermor provides one with a set of standards for the success of a stage play. A play is a failure as a stage play, regard-

³¹Angus, op. cit., p. 137.

³²Slote, op. cit., p. 51.

³³Cheney, op. cit., p. 380.

³⁴Desmond King-Hele, Shelley: The Man and the Poet, p. 127.

less of how much sublime poetry, thought, and design it contains, if it lacks reasonable craftsmanship in any of three main areas: (1) action, or plot; (2) characters, who must convince the audience of their reality and believability; and (3) speech, or dialogue.³⁵ Besides these formal characteristics, a great drama will also contain passion, thought, and poetic imagination, and will be so universal that ". . . when what is temporal and perishable has lost its meaning, an imperishable and eternal significance shines through. . . ."³⁶

Playwriting posed an inherent danger to the romantic poet, who usually was most effective in lyrical self-expression. Drama demands objectivity; it is essentially an impersonal art concerned with proper management of plot, character, setting, and theme. A dramatist may, to some extent, allow expression to his emotion and thought, particularly through the medium of character. Yet, any great attempt to express his own experiences, his own views of life must be made implicitly, through a subtle blending of the major elements of the drama. Thus, the very nature of the dramatist's art might seem alien to romantic poets, whose individualism and drive toward self-expression are recognized as being highly motivating in their writing. To what extent the poet-dramatists could adapt themselves to the necessary impersonality inherent in the drama might largely determine whether "closet drama" is an appropriate and deserved term. Critics of the

³⁵Una Mary Ellis-Fermor, Shakespeare the Dramatist, p. 2.

³⁶Ibid., pp. 2-3.

drama have held generally the appellation to be a suitable one, for ". . . the theatre adds the least glorious chapter to the story of a freeing impulse that flowered gorgeously in lyric poetry and at least profusely in fiction."³⁷ Yet it is difficult to accept the judgment levied against these plays without closer inspection. Therefore, this study and evaluation of the selected plays will not only reveal concern about tyranny but will show that while the romantics were not successful within the bounds of prescribed classical dramatic tradition, their lyrical dramas, nevertheless, provided them with the freedom of expression necessary for the conception and development of their most impressive contribution--the character of the romantic rebel.

³⁷Cheney, op. cit., p. 415.

CHAPTER II

TYRANNY IN THE STAGE DRAMAS OF WORDSWORTH, COLERIDGE, AND KEATS

Three romantic poets, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Keats, wrote only the first type of closet drama previously described--the drama that followed classical tradition and demonstrated Shakespeare's influence. These poets' opposition to tyranny is evident in varying degrees in each of their plays, sometimes as the prime motivating force. An analysis of these plays reveals specific causes for these poets' hatred of oppression and offers several reasons for the critical failure of these works, then and now, as good drama.

Wordsworth early indicated his intention to compose a dramatic work that would express certain lessons which he had learned as a young man:

Share with me, Friend! the wish
That some dramatic tale, endued with shapes
Livelier, and flinging out less guarded words
Than suit the work we fashion, might set forth
What then I learned, or think I learned, of truth,
And the errors into which I fell, betrayed
By present objects, and by reasonings false
From their beginnings. . . .

(The Prelude, XI.282-289)

Under the exhilarating influence of the beginnings of the French Revolution, young Wordsworth became passionately devoted to the ideas that man was essentially noble and, therefore, should be set free, and that all tyranny must be eradicated. However, by 1794, he had

" . . . yielded up all moral questions in despair" (The Prelude, XL.305). He was confused, disillusioned, and embittered by the myriad contortions and perversions into which the French Revolution had led itself. Between this time of his despair, marked by the year, 1795, and the publication of his Lyrical Ballads in 1798, Wordsworth wrote The Borderers, his one dramatic contribution that was to play an important part in his search for the peace and truth which are fully developed in the Lyrical Ballads.

There has been some controversy in the past over the actual date of the composition of The Borderers. The problem is an important one, for proper dating might effectively aid one in determining whether the play was written as an affirmation or as a refutation of William Godwin, author of Political Justice and spokesman of the necessitarian spirit of the age. Godwin's Political Justice, published in 1793, advocated several principles that, at first, appealed to the young Wordsworth. In this work, Godwin rejected all institutions as tyrannical and prohibitive of man's inherent freedom. He held that truth could be arrived at only through the exercise of reason and through an adherence to a doctrine of necessity. Furthermore, he was dedicated to humanitarianism and to the outlawing of militarism and war. Wordsworth must have read the book as soon as it was published, and it is obvious that he was influenced by it.³⁸

³⁸Arthus Beatty (ed.), Wordsworth: Representative Poems, pp. xliiii-xlv. All subsequent references to Wordsworth's play will be to this text.

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Scholars first supposed that the play was written in 1795, the main evidence being a letter in which, in 1796, Wordsworth stated, "I have been employed lately in writing a tragedy,--the first draught of which is nearly finished." However, although this letter was dated by Wordsworth himself as 1796, the postmark bears a date of February 27, 1797.³⁹ Thus, the date of composition must have been sometime in 1796-1797, a period which de Selincourt, who originally proposed 1795, now accepts.⁴⁰ Garrod feels that ". . . the intense Godwinian period begins in July, 1795, and ends in Lyrical Ballads."⁴¹ Yet most critics today, including Smith, MacGillivray, and Willey, hold that Wordsworth by 1795 had entered his anti-Godwinian period.⁴² Willey, thinks that The Borderers ". . . may be taken to represent [Wordsworth's] convalescence, . . . [embodying] his verdict upon Godwinian ethics."⁴³ Hancock agrees with the idea that The Borderers marks a period of Wordsworth's "convalescence" from Godwin's doctrine of banishing all institutions so that the individual intellect could be the sole guide of conduct: "In The Borderers [Wordsworth] puts Godwin's individualism to the crucial test; it brings disaster and

³⁹Ibid., p. 89.

⁴⁰Loc. cit.

⁴¹Heathcote William Garrod, Wordsworth's Lectures and Essays, p. 74.

⁴²J. H. Smith, "Genesis of 'The Borderers,'" PMLA, XLIX (1934), 929-930; J. R. MacGillivray, "Date of the Composition of The Borderers," MLN XLIX (February, 1934), 110; and Basil Willey, The Eighteenth Century Background, p. 267.

⁴³Ibid., pp. 267-268.

is proved absurd."⁴⁴ On a larger scale, however, Wordsworth is rejecting much more: the Jacobins, Robespierre, Rousseau, and finally the perversions of a revolution which ended with ". . . the degrading spectacle of Napoleon crowning himself while a Pope stood by approving."⁴⁵ By carrying individualism to the extent of the lawlessness that resulted during the Reign of Terror, Wordsworth, in composing The Borderers, is greatly concerned with tyranny, not with the expected tyranny of some monarchy, but the tyranny that can result from anarchy. Anarchism, as a positive theory, assumes that each individual will act voluntarily for the benefit of all; when men are not so motivated, anarchy becomes simply another form of tyranny-- a tyranny of the most powerful of selfish men.

An examination of the play and an assessment of the predominant influences upon Wordsworth during its composition will show that, while the play itself has numerous faults as a dramatic work and has never been considered one of his major contributions, it, nevertheless, is an important link in the understanding of the development of the mature Wordsworth and his thoughts on tyranny. Wordsworth took his setting for The Borderers chiefly from William Gilpin's Observations, Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty, Made in the Year 1772 On Several Parts of England; Particularly the Mountains and Lakes of Cumberland, and Westmoreland.⁴⁶ This book told of a region full of Gothic terror, ap-

⁴⁴A. E. Hancock, The French Revolution and the English Poets, p. 142.

⁴⁵Beatty, op. cit., p. xxxvii. ⁴⁶Smith, op. cit., p. 924.

appropriate for ". . . the perpetration of some dreadful deed . . .," and peopled with bandits and robbers.⁴⁷ In selecting the borderlands between England and Scotland as they were at the time of Henry III, Wordsworth depicted ". . . a state of society which would correspond in lawlessness to that of France in the early 1790's."⁴⁸ The setting of The Borderers is, also, reminiscent of several Shakespearean tragedies, which similarly occur in a place of lawlessness and disorder.

There are similarities between Wordsworth's plot and one by Goethe in 1773, and one by Schiller in 1792. Each of these plays has a hero who is ". . . dominated by the motive of benevolence and distrustful of society as an agent not for the betterment but for the oppression of man."⁴⁹ The Borderers has roots in history, however, for subsequent to the Battle of Eversham on August 4, 1265, in the vicinity of Braugham Castle, there lived a Roger de Clifford, who originally led for the Barons a band of Welshmen similar to the band of borderers in the play. He defected to the King, then turned outlaw, later to become a hero by saving the life of one of his opponents, receiving for his trouble Isabella de Vipont as a bride.⁵⁰

The tragic plot centers around a noble man who, outside established society, finds himself concerned with a problem that only he

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 925.

⁴⁸C. J. Smith, "Effect of Shakespeare's Influence on Wordsworth's The Borderers," SP, L (October, 1953), 629.

⁴⁹Beatty, op. cit., p. 92.

⁵⁰H. F. Watson, "Historic Detail in The Borderers," MLN, LII (December, 1937), 577.

can solve. Marmaduke is confronted with a crime so hideous that ". . . Earthy law / Measures not crimes like his" (The Borderers, 582-583). The crime is actually the imaginary construction of another character, Oswald, who manages to convince Marmaduke to take upon his own shoulders the responsibility of bringing about justice. Marmaduke, thus, causes the murder of an innocent old man and, upon discovering the truth, must bear his burden of guilt. Ironically, he hears Oswald utter the perverted philosophy that has brought about the tragedy:

To-day you have thrown off a tyranny
 That lives but in the torpid acquiescence
 Of our emasculated souls, the tyranny
 Of the world's masters, with the musty rules
 By which they uphold their craft from age to age;
 You have obeyed the only law that sense
 Submits to recognize; the immediate law
 From the clear light of circumstances, flashed
 Upon an independent intellect.

(The Borderers, 1488-1496)

Smith demonstrates that this plot is the basic theme behind each of Shakespeare's four great plays--Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth and King Lear, with a particular closeness to Othello and Hamlet.⁵¹ Although it has been stated that Shakespeare was a possible influence on the plot and setting of The Borderers, it is in the area of character that Wordsworth draws most heavily on Shakespeare. Wordsworth is more concerned with character than with plot, as evidenced in his prefatory essay (published in 1926 by Professor de Selincourt). Here, he attempts to present the psychology of Oswald in such a manner as ". . . to show the dangerous use which may be made of reason when a man has

⁵¹C. J. Smith, op. cit., p. 629.

committed a great crime."⁵² Failing to heed their emotions and their consciences, ". . . good men were sometimes betrayed into crimes in the names of Reason and Liberty."⁵³ In his depiction of these characters, Wordsworth may have been unconscious of his great reliance upon Shakespeare. Being thoroughly familiar with his predecessor, he ". . . unconsciously thought in Shakespearean terms. . . . His characters were composites of imaginative figures similarly derived. . . ." ⁵⁴

Several characters in The Borderers bear a striking resemblance to certain well-known characters in Shakespeare's tragedies. The most obvious resemblance is that which exists between Oswald and Iago. Both men have as their goal the determination to corrupt a noble man, and both are driven by pride, restlessness and by what Coleridge termed "Motiveless malignity."⁵⁵ Oswald's methods of tempting Marmaduke are similar to Iago's, both using misinterpretation, feigned reluctance and insinuation: ". . . he administers his poison in little doses, pausing to encourage his victim to delude himself as much as possible."⁵⁶ Although Oswald must be more intellectual in his temptation, for he must poison not only emotion but reason, he is obviously an echo of Iago. Marmaduke, however, does not resemble the emotional Othello so much as he resembles the noble and idealistic

⁵²Quoted in Beatty, op. cit., p. 91.

⁵³C. J. Smith, op. cit., p. 628. ⁵⁴Ibid., p. 633.

⁵⁵Willey, op. cit., p. 269.

⁵⁶C. J. Smith, op. cit., p. 633.

Hamlet: like Hamlet he feels the need for immediate justice, yet does not act, ". . . like Hamlet he is full of world-weariness, disgust at lust and greed of others. . . ." ⁵⁷ Both must take the responsibility of passing judgment on crimes that are beyond the law. Parallels between Idonea and Ophelia are also evident. Both attempt to follow their fathers' admonitions not to see their lovers, both receive cruel treatment at the hands of these lovers, and both heap upon themselves the burden of guilt over their fathers' deaths and their lovers' tragedies. ⁵⁸ The love which their sweethearts offer is a love based on childhood remembrances, a love which contains much pity and affection, but little ardent desire.

Not only are the characters of The Borderers composites of Shakespearean characters, but they are accorded a diction that is also strongly reminiscent of Shakespeare's. Wordsworth wrote the play in a style ". . . which is markedly Shakespearean in vocabulary, cadence and phraseology." ⁵⁹ His blank verse tragedy is filled with soliloquies, involved similes, and dualistic imagery. In some passages, the exalted language can find a direct parallel in some Shakespearean tragedy.

Wordsworth was concerned with the formation of his characters; however, character was important, only to the extent that it would provide a vehicle for the main theme he wanted to express: i.e.,

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 631.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 635.

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 637.

"the tragic fallibility of the reason, even of the conscience, allows passion for a time to triumph and virtue, upon occasion, to turn into vice."⁶⁰ Referring to the wickedness observed in the progress of the French Revolution, in his note to the drama in 1842, Wordsworth himself stated that he had many times been ". . . an eyewitness of this process, and it was while that knowledge was fresh upon my memory, that the Tragedy of The Borderers was composed."⁶¹ Critics have suggested three possible sources of thought for the theme of remorse that runs throughout The Borderers: (1) the anti-Godwinian influence, (2) Wordsworth's desertion of Annette Vallon, and (3) the influence of the French Revolution. Because at least the last one of these is concerned with the tyranny of the mob, of anarchy, one should probably attempt, at first, to determine which of the above-mentioned three played the most prevailing part in guiding Wordsworth's handling of the drama.

It has already been established that The Borderers was not written during the time most critics feel that Wordsworth was influenced by Godwin's Political Justice. Godwin's despising of the emotions, the anarchy, the supremacy of the intellect, the moral evil of social institutions--all were characteristics alien to the later Wordsworth. Then, one wonders how Wordsworth's advice given to a student ("Read Godwin on Necessity"), or the apparent Godwinian tone of some of

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 630

⁶¹Quoted in Beatty, op. cit., p. 90.

Wordsworth's writing may be explained.⁶² The answer lies, of course, in the fact that Wordsworth, familiar with Godwin's ideas, chose only those which fitted his own philosophy: i.e., "the passion for justice and equality, the humanitarianism, the hatred of privilege, of caste, of war, and of the penal code. . .," and the widespread employment of fixed standards of justice.⁶³ If Wordsworth were able to abstract those ideas with which he was in agreement and, furthermore, to incorporate them into his own philosophy, it hardly seems plausible that Godwin or Political Justice could have evoked such a violent response as Wordsworth exhibits in The Borderers. Wordsworth must have been occupied with something more powerful, more personal in 1796.

Wordsworth's love affair with and subsequent desertion of Annette Vallon have often been suggested as the determining motivation behind The Borderers. Certainly, the theme of desertion occurs throughout this tragedy. For example, Oswald and the crew desert their captain, Herbert deserts Idonea for a time during her childhood, and Herbert, as a blind man, is particularly fearful of desertion. Indeed, Herbert's death is the result of his abandonment on the plains. A sense of guilt is also evident throughout the play. Pursued by a damning sense of guilt, Oswald ". . . exerts his intellect and asserts his moral freedom by poisoning the mind of Marmaduke . . ., leading him virtually to repeat his own crime."⁶⁴ Herbert, Idonea, and the

⁶²C. W. Roberts, "Wordsworth the Philanthropist, and Godwin's Political Justice," SP, XXI (January, 1934), 87.

⁶³Willey, op. cit., p. 261.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 269.

wife of the cottager feel guilt, but it is Marmaduke who, overwhelmed by it, decides to lead the life of a hermit. However, this sense of desertion and guilt automatically need not be attributed to Annette Vallon. There is no mention of her in The Prelude. Idonea is not really an outstanding figure in the play, and it is Herbert who is most punished by Marmaduke. Nor is a young child mentioned who might correspond to Wordsworth's young daughter. Finally, an investigation of the relationship between Wordsworth and Annette and their separation reveals no evidence of any great emotional upheaval, but indicates a mutual disenchantment and desire for freedom. Surely, the sense of desertion and guilt in The Borderers is motivated by a stronger force in Wordsworth's mind.

In 1833, Wordsworth wrote that, although ". . . he was known to the world only as a poet, he had given twelve hours' thought to the conditions and prospects of society, for one of poetry."⁶⁵ He even wrote to Sir George Beaumont: "Every great Poet is a Teacher: I wish either to be considered as a Teacher, or as nothing."⁶⁶ At the beginning of the French Revolution, caught up in the spirit of the times, he placed his hope for the future of mankind in the idealistic promises of liberty, equality and fraternity. Moving to France, he listened with hope and joy to Beaupuy and others.⁶⁷ When England de-

⁶⁵Quoted in Ibid., p. 254.

⁶⁶M. H. Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp, p. 329.

⁶⁷Beatty, op. cit., p. xxxv.

clared war on France, he was heartbroken and forced to reject his own country's actions. However, the Revolution turned into the Terror, and he ". . . was soon borne on the rocks by the gales of French perfidy and English bigotry."⁶⁸ He ". . . had given much to the Revolution and was stricken deeply at what he came to regard as its failure."⁶⁹ It was at this time that all moral questions were given up in despair, and it was in the years that followed, before his collaboration on the composition of the Lyrical Ballads with Coleridge, that he attempted to solve the question of what had gone astray. Willey clearly shows the complexities of this issue:

Perfected humanity could perhaps dispense with the poor, irrational "virtues" of gratitude, filial and parental affection, patriotism, or piety. But supposing we dispensed with them, and yet failed of perfection, might we not discover too late that these virtues are what alone prevent us, not from advancing to perfection, but from sinking into brutality.⁷⁰

This view is a rejection, not just of Godwin, but of the eighteenth-century separation of reason and emotions, a rejection of rationalism or Jacobinism, of which the French Revolution was the political manifestation.

It was with thoughts such as these that Wordsworth began to work on The Borderers. His struggle becomes evident, if one interprets the characters and their actions in the light of these thoughts. For ex-

⁶⁸R. D. Havens, The Mind of a Poet, II, 547.

⁶⁹D. H. Hayden, "Toward an Understanding of Wordsworth's The Borderers," MLN, LXVI (January, 1951), 21.

⁷⁰Willey, op. cit., p. 239.

ample, Oswald would represent the French Revolution, a force which began in good but ended in evil, contaminating others as well as itself. This force has attached itself to France (Marmaduke), and, by turning France away from emotion (Herbert, the epitome of love and affection), has turned it away from salvation. Wordsworth is a witness, as Idonea is a witness. Both experience a feeling of sadness and loss. It is evident, therefore, that the dichotomy of reason and emotion, culminating in the chaos of the French Terror, was the guiding influence in Wordsworth's mind during the composition of The Borderers.

Since The Borderers was written during a time of transition, of confused ideas, it is not surprising to discover that the play has little great literary merit. Wordsworth himself wrote that he had no thought for the stage while composing the tragedy and did not even introduce it for public appraisal until 1842.⁷¹ There are two major reasons, however, for the failure of the play to achieve greatness. First, it is overly preoccupied with the philosophical issue that was bothering Wordsworth at the time, that is, with his concern for tyranny as evidenced in the French Revolution. It was this subjective concern that determined, in a large part, the progression of the play, and this lapse in an objective art took away motivation from the characters themselves, making them mere puppets for Wordsworth's observations. Secondly, the play also suffers in its imitation of Shakespeare's

⁷¹Beatty, op. cit., p. 90.

models, for no imitation can ever hope to capture the universal elements of a great work. These two judgments relegate The Borderers to the category of romantic closet drama.

Aristotle designated plot, the structure of the incidents of a story, as the most important of the six elements of classical tragedy.⁷² Because of Wordsworth's preoccupation with the problems of the French Revolution and his admitted intention to write a tragedy illustrating the theory that good can sometimes become evil, he failed to emphasize this most important element of tragedy and, instead, attempted to write a tragedy of thought.⁷³ This determination, in turn, produced his inability to project clear images. "Confusion in the conception of Oswald, . . . and lack of clear distinction between him and Marmaduke," Campbell comments, ". . . is due not so much to philosophical principle as to an artistic limitation which Wordsworth never transcended."⁷⁴ Wordsworth found it difficult to make his characters believable. A dramatic figure, allowed to behave in an unexpected way, whose actions are never explained later, contributes to audience confusion. Hayden points out such ambivalence as (1) an outlaw who supposedly helps the weak, yet kills a helpless old man; and (2) a dog which is supposedly tame but suddenly becomes vicious.⁷⁵

⁷²Aristotle, "Poetics," trans. Benjamin Jowett, Great Books of the Western World, 1450_a.

⁷³C. J. Smith, op. cit., p. 638.

⁷⁴O. J. Campbell and P. Mueschke, "The Borderers as a Document in the History of Wordsworth's Aesthetic Development," MP, XXIII (May, 1926, 472).

⁷⁵Hayden, op. cit., p. 4.

Wordsworth also falls short in his imitation of Shakespeare's tragedies. His Iago-Oswald must not only turn the emotions of Marmaduke but the mind, as well. de Selincourt suggests, "It was always his fate, in his more ambitious writings, to attempt something more difficult than his great models, and thereby to court artistic failure."⁷⁶ Only in the element of diction does Wordsworth approach success, for The Borderers contains many excellent passages of beautiful blank verse. Yet, in imitation of his master, Wordsworth cannot transmit into words the powerful emotion so prevalent in the dialogue of Shakespeare. He treats emotion obliquely, having Idonea swoon, rather than express her grief verbally. He also finds it difficult to make his strange, unfamiliar region seem natural. Only when he wrote about familiar regions did he achieve plausibility.⁷⁷ Thus, too little dramatic skill makes The Borderers a poor stage play.

There is one aspect of the play, however, that makes The Borderers important, for its value lies in the emotional crisis which Wordsworth was experiencing during the period of composition. One scholar suggests that "by writing The Borderers Wordsworth was able to clear his mind of cant."⁷⁸ The play provided the necessary catharsis which resulted in the peace and harmony of the proposal and the poems of the Lyrical Ballads.

⁷⁶Quoted in C. J. Smith, op. cit., p. 632.

⁷⁷J. H. Smith, op. cit., p. 929.

⁷⁸F. W. Bateson, Wordsworth: A Reinterpretation, p. 123.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, another romantic poet who wrote traditional drama, could be considered the most versatile of the romanticists, for he was not only a poet but a critic, philosopher, scholar, theologian, preacher, lecturer, and humanitarian, as well. His eclectic interests and ambitious plans oftentimes became lost in a maze of indolence, ill health, and opium; yet so powerful was his impact upon the literary world that he might be called one of the great germinal minds of the time. Evaluations of such a powerful personality by those who were touched by him would necessarily vary. For example, Thomas Carlyle called him a "king of men," while Shelley saw him only as a "hooded eagle among blinking owls."⁷⁹ Upon Coleridge's death, Southey commented, "He had long been dead to me." However, Charles Lamb, his deepest mourner, wrote, "Never saw I his likeness, nor probably the world can see again."⁸⁰ Hazlitt not only thought him the greatest man he had ever known but the only one from whom he had ever learned anything.⁸¹ Wordsworth, whose relationships with Coleridge had at times been very close and mutually beneficial, also called him "the most wonderful man that he had ever known."⁸²

Since he was in the first generation of romantic poets, Coleridge, like Wordsworth, was caught up, for a time, in the wave of political

⁷⁹Quoted in Battenhouse, op. cit., p. 123.

⁸⁰Quoted in E. K. Chambers, Samuel Taylor Coleridge: A Biographical Study, p. 330.

⁸¹Elisabeth Schneider (ed.), Coleridge: Selected Poetry and Prose, p. xv.

⁸²Chambers, op. cit., p. 330.

and social rebellion that was sweeping his world. His deep love of liberty and intense desire to defend freedom, often reminiscent of the idealism of Byron and Shelley, were ". . . carried into practically every region of thought which his ever-seeking mind explored."⁸³ The story of his infatuation and later disillusionment with the French Revolution closely parallels in time and intensity that of Wordsworth's experience. Although Coleridge could accept few of Godwin's teachings, he was a staunch supporter of the French Revolution and its principles.⁸⁴ The inevitable confusion and disappointment over the mob tyranny and apparent loss of purpose that became evident during the Reign of Terror and under Robespierre, however, affected Coleridge in much the same way as it did Wordsworth. Both men vented their sorrow and loss in poetry--Wordsworth in The Prelude and Coleridge in "France, An Ode." Both men used the writing of a drama as a kind of cathasis--by 1797 Wordsworth had composed his only play, The Borderers, and Coleridge, in 1794, had composed his first dramatic work, the first act of The Fall of Robespierre (Acts II and III composed by Southey).⁸⁵ This first act, a rather hastily written study of the evils of demagoguery, centers around Bareere, a man who recognizes

⁸³C. R. Sanders, "Coleridge as a Champion of Liberty," SP, XXXII (October, 1935), 618.

⁸⁴J. D. Campbell, Samuel Taylor Coleridge: A Narrative of the Events of His Life, p. 188.

⁸⁵Ernest Hartley Coleridge (ed.), The Complete Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, II, 495. All subsequent references to Coleridge's plays will be to this text.

the ambition of Robespierre but who waits for a criminally long time before betraying the tyrant.⁸⁶

By 1797 Coleridge and Wordsworth, along with the latter's sister, Dorothy, had entered into a close and harmonious relationship that would produce, by 1798, that small but momentous volume, the Lyrical Ballads. In 1797, the two men were living at Nether Stowey and Alfoxden, three miles from each other, in the Quantock hills. It was in the same year that Coleridge, again, attempted a drama, influenced possibly by his admiration of The Borderers, but most certainly prompted by the urgings of R. B. Sheridan, who had repeatedly promised him that if he were to try his hand at a tragedy, he (Sheridan) would do all that he could, both through suggestions for improvement and by his influence, to have the play staged.⁸⁷ The prospect of having a play on the stage was financially appealing to the young poet; and Osorio, the resulting play, was submitted to Sheridan in that very year. However, by the end of the year, the play had been rejected by Drury Lane, and Sheridan not only had failed properly to respond to Coleridge about the matter, but also had failed to return the manuscript to him.⁸⁸ Since Coleridge himself had misplaced his own copy of the play, his ambitions for the drama were, for a time, set aside.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, he tried his hand at writing drama again, in 1800, with

⁸⁶C. R. Woodring, Politics in the Poetry of Coleridge, p. 195.

⁸⁷Coleridge, op. cit., p. 812. ⁸⁸Chambers, op. cit., pp. 85-86.

⁸⁹Coleridge, op. cit., p. 813.

his fragment of The Triumph of Loyalty and his translations of two of Schiller's tragedies, The Piccolomini, or The First Part of Wallenstein, and The Death of Wallenstein. Finally, his play, Zapolya, was intended as a Christmas entertainment. Therefore the complete Osorio, with its subsequent revision of 1812, retitled Remorse and actually staged in 1813, is the most appropriate of Coleridge's plays for examination.

Despite the fact that Remorse was performed twenty times upon its introduction to the stage, it must yet be classified as a closet drama--but, more specifically, that type of closet drama that reflected classical tradition, to some extent, and also a Shakespearean influence. This five-act, blank verse tragedy is a blend of various types of drama popular in that day, resulting in a mélange that might be termed an oriental Gothic melodrama. As an authority and lecturer on Shakespeare, Coleridge might be expected to demonstrate, either consciously or unconsciously, some Shakespearean influences in the tone and style of his drama. It is a great loss that no copies, but only scattered notes, of his Shakespeare lectures have been preserved, for his interpretations have profoundly shaped traditional Shakespearean interpretations today. Hamlet, for many, is Coleridge's Hamlet, and his analysis of the first scene of Hamlet has become the standard critical view.⁹⁰ At one time, he complained bitterly about the production methods of Shakespearean drama and actually urged that,

⁹⁰Schneider, op. cit., p. xii.

for the time, the plays be relegated to the closet.⁹¹ His proposal was prompted by his frustration over the tasteless manner in which the plays were being staged and does not reflect on his part any harsh judgment of Shakespeare. The neoclassic taste which had long since given way in poetry still held firm control in script, and little attempt was made to produce the plays as Shakespeare might have intended for them to have been performed.⁹²

Coleridge began his writing of Osorio early in February, 1797, letting himself be guided by what he felt were the requirements of Drury Lane and its stars, Kemble and Mrs. Siddons.⁹³ By late March, he felt bogged down by the chaotic structure which he had outlined and, thus, described his plan as ". . . romantic and wild and somewhat terrible."⁹⁴ His reaction is perhaps understandable, however, for during this time he had been engaged by the Critical Review in commenting on various Gothic works in which, he says, the horrible ". . . dungeons, and old castles, and solitary Houses by the Sea Side, and Caverns, and Woods, and extraordinary characters, and all the tribe of Horror and Mystery . . ." continuously pressed upon his mind.⁹⁵ In June, he thought he would finish his play within a few

⁹¹J. R. de J. Jackson, "Coleridge on Dramatic Illusion and Spectacle in the Performance of Shakespeare's Plays," MP, VXII (August, 1964), 20.

⁹²Schneider, op. cit., p. xi. ⁹³Woodring, op. cit., p. 200.

⁹⁴Quoted in John Livingston Lowes, The Road to Xanadu, p. 223.

⁹⁵Loc. cit.

days; and on October 16, he sent it to Sheridan with the comment, "It is done: and I would rather mend hedges and follow the plough, than write another."⁹⁶ His depression was probably prompted by his fear of the play's being rejected, and certainly the feeling continued to oppress him when the play was actually rejected in December and Sheridan had failed to return the manuscript. Coleridge was further irritated by Sheridan for two additional sleights. First, Sheridan obviously allowed the manuscript to be taken out of his hands, because in 1802, Coleridge saw the song from Act III printed and set to music without any identification of its author.⁹⁷ Furthermore, in the presence of a group of friends, Sheridan parodied the first two lines of Act IV: "Drip! drip! drip!--in such a place as this / It has nothing else to do but drip! drip! drip!" These lines he changed to "Drip! drip! drip! there's nothing here but dripping!" and based his objection to sponsoring the play on a pretense that Coleridge had refused to alter a single line.⁹⁸

Osorio takes place in Granada during the reign of Philip II. The Moors had been defeated in 1571, and the action of the play takes place, as Coleridge explains, ". . . during the heat of the persecution which ranged against them. . . ." ⁹⁹ Robert Watson's The History of the Reign of Philip the Second appears to have been a major

⁹⁶Quoted in Chambers, op. cit., p. 85.

⁹⁷Coleridge, op. cit., p. 813. ⁹⁸Chambers, op. cit., p. 86.

⁹⁹Coleridge, op. cit., p. 519.

source for the background, the theme of remorse, and most of the character names, with the notable omission of Alhadra.¹⁰⁰ Three years prior to the action of the play, Osorio, the younger son of the Marquis Velez, had plotted with Ferdinand, a Moor, to kill his older brother, Albert. The Marquis and Albert's betrothed, Maria, believed that Albert was slain by pirates. In reality, Ferdinand had refrained from killing Albert, who was forced into service as a soldier. Thus, as the play opens, Albert secretly returns, expecting to find after three years Osorio married to Maria and seeking only recognition of their disloyalty from the two. However, upon discovering that the marriage has not taken place and that Maria has been faithful, Albert withholds his identity until the last act. By then, however, it is too late for Osorio. Feeling betrayed by Ferdinand, Osorio slays the Moor and, in return, is murdered by Ferdinand's wife, Alhadra.

As an oriental Gothic melodrama, Osorio contains the usual devices expected of this type. For example, the threatening spectre of the Inquisition elicits the proper amount of gloom and fear. There are dark caverns with deep and treacherous pits; a dank dungeon; a long incantation to the dead; a pure, victimized heroine; several duels; and, finally, a foul crime of fratricide. There are, also, overly long speeches, weaknesses in character delineations, and a lack of continuity, sometimes caused by the inclusion of irrelevant material. Of this last item, the most famous example is the Foster-Mother's

¹⁰⁰Woodring, op. cit., p. 200.

tale, also included in the Lyrical Ballads. The decision of Drury Lane's officials to reject the play was a wise one.

The accidental discovery in 1812 of another manuscript copy of Osorio, however, led Coleridge to reconsider his play.¹⁰¹ Through the hope of financial gain and through the encouragement of a literary figure (this time, Byron), Coleridge decided to rewrite his play with a new title, Remorse, and it was later accepted by the Drury Lane Committee in 1813.¹⁰² This version contained numerous changes. In addition to a new title, with which Coleridge intended to amplify the major theme, there are new names for all of the characters but Alhadra, less peroration, and numerous sizeable revisions of speeches. Coleridge added an opening scene to enlighten the audience more quickly about the importance of certain past events, and omitted the Foster-Mother's tale, which, although it was touching poetry, was, nevertheless, entirely irrelevant to the plot. The characters themselves he changed very little, with the exception of Alvar (Albert in Osorio), whom he made more noble in appearance, and the Inquisitor, whose part he shortened, yet whose nature he made fiercer.¹⁰³ In Remorse, Woodring also observes a clearer delineation ". . . of the dramatic and political significance of Osorio's association with the oppressive Inquisitors and Albert's association with the oppressed Moors. . . ."104 Lamb contributed a previously written prologue, and Coleridge composed

¹⁰¹Chambers, op. cit., p. 200.

¹⁰²Campbell, op. cit., p. 188.

¹⁰³Woodring, op. cit., p. 206.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., p. 207.

an epilogue--both of which seem irrelevant and especially artificial. The play was finally produced on January 23, 1813, and was well enough received to warrant a run of twenty performances.¹⁰⁵ In his preface to the printed version of the work, Coleridge later extravagantly praised the actors and producers, but admitted to others that he was coloring the truth, because ". . . the scenes were bad and the acting execrable."¹⁰⁶

In Osorio, besides an obvious theme of remorse, there is another which, it is argued, is even more powerful in its impact, despite its implicit handling. The theme of the "victory of the persecuted meek over the tyrannically powerful" is expressed primarily through characterizations, although certainly the setting itself provides examples of the evils of oppression.¹⁰⁷ Coleridge depicts tyranny in Osorio on three levels as (1) a religious attack against the evils of the Inquisition; (2) a political attack against some of the practices of the English government; and (3) a general attack upon all individuals who force their wills upon others weaker than they. The often unjust treatment and suffering of the Moors in Spain and the secret, deadly methods used by the Inquisitors obviously touched Coleridge's humanitarian soul. Francesco (Monviedro in Remorse), the Inquisitor, particularly hated by Maria and Alhadra, ". . . represents the union of established church with military force."¹⁰⁸ He was instrumental

¹⁰⁵Chambers, op. cit., p. 255. ¹⁰⁶Ibid., p. 256.

¹⁰⁷Woodring, op. cit., pp. 204, 200.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., p. 204.

in effecting an earlier imprisonment of Alhadra along with her small baby only because of the color of her skin; and within the play itself, his oppression takes the form of a plot to imprison Ferdinand, Alhadra's husband. The method of his tyrannical control is evident when he remarks to his spy:

I have the key of all their lives.
 If a man fears me, he is forced to love me.
 And if I can, and do not ruin him,
 He is fast bound to serve and honour me!
 (III.253-256)

It is from the oppressive behavior of Francesco that Alhadra learns that "Christians do not forgive." Upon learning of his cruel and tyrannical deeds, Maria finally turns to the Inquisitor with these angry words:

Thou man, who call'st thyself the minister
 Of Him whose law was love unutterable!
 Why is thy soul so parch'd with cruelty,
 That still thou thirstest for thy brother's blood?
 (IV.311-314)

The famous Foster-Mother's tale in Osorio provides the most pitiful example of inquisitional horrors in the play. It tells of an orphaned male child reared years before by Maria's foster mother. This young boy was "unteachable" as far as orthodox religion was concerned. He was completely a child of nature until a friar taught him to read. The youth read, as Don Quixote read, "till his brain turn'd," and he began to have unlawful thoughts. One day during a conversation with the youth, the old Lord Velez was so frightened by an earthquake that he confessed heretical talk from the youth. The boy was thrown into a dungeon and would surely have died had not a sympathetic peasant helped him to escape. Fox believes that Coleridge meant for Osorio

to be a protest against political events in England in 1794 and after, and that the tyrannies of the Inquisition in the play may be interpreted in a political sense.¹⁰⁹ He thinks the Foster-Mother's tale reflects Coleridge's hatred of all despotic power, and the character of Albert embodies Coleridge's enmity of political oppression.¹¹⁰ Specifically, Coleridge centered his attack upon the Pitt ministry, which had suspended the Habeas Corpus Act in 1794 and had passed the Seditious Meeting Act and the Treasonable Practices Act of 1795, both of which permitted the arrest of Horne Tooke, John Thelwall, and their associates for superficial charges brought upon them by a network of spies ". . . employed by the ministry to find or manufacture evidence of treason."¹¹¹ In Act III it is not surprising that Coleridge, himself an object of spying in 1797, should have Francesco plant a spy in the sorcery scene to collect evidence against Albert.¹¹² Still another protest against political tyranny is represented when Albert is thrown into the dungeon. There, in his soliloquy, he ponders the plight of any individual condemned to such a foul and dank place. The loathsomeness of the dungeon, he believes, can only corrupt the souls of those therein; nature itself is the only healing force that can mend the mind's wounds. Albert's perception of the irony of such a dungeon clearly voices Coleridge's concern for prison reform.

¹⁰⁹Fox, op. cit., p. 259.

¹¹⁰Ibid., p. 262

¹¹¹Loc. cit.

¹¹²Loc. cit.

Besides Coleridge's specific attacks against the tyranny of the Inquisition and the Pitt Ministry, one perceives the author's more general concern for the oppression of one man by another. Specific instances of this theme include Osorio's blackmailing of Ferdinand, Velez's threatening Maria to marry Osorio or be sent to a convent, and the treatment of Francesco by the Moorish mob. It is in the character of the oppressed but fierce Alhadra, however, that Coleridge's hatred of tyranny is centralized. One scholar suggests that "genuine passion against tyrannical injustice, not trumped up to satisfy Sheridan, helped make Alhadra the strongest figure in the play."¹¹³ It is Alhadra who is allowed the last speech in Osorio, in which she warns all tyrants:

Knew I an hundred men
 Despairing, but not palsied by despair,
 This arm should shake the kingdoms of this world;
 The deep foundations of iniquity
 Should sink away, earth groaning beneath them;
 The strong holds of the cruel men should fall;
 Their temples and their mountainous towers should fall;
 Till desolation seem'd a beautiful thing,
 And all that were and had the spirit of life
 Sang a new song to him who had gone forth
 Conquering and still to conquer!
 (V.311-321)

It is interesting also to speculate upon the possible influence of The Borderers upon Osorio, since one recalls that Coleridge's play was written during the time of his close association with Wordsworth and soon after the completion of The Borderers. It would be presumptuous, if not unfair to Coleridge, to draw numerous parallels

¹¹³Woodring, op. cit., p. 204.

between these plays in plot, character, and theme; however, there is one interesting parallel of character that should be mentioned. Both plays concern men who are guilty of the crime of murder. Both Oswald and Osorio, because of their pride, cannot emotionally face their guilt; therefore, they rationalize what they have done. Subsequent perverse thinking even leads Osorio to question momentarily whether the killing of one man might not provide good by supplying thousands of insects and tiny creatures with a host. Both Oswald and Osorio become tyrants in attempting to impose their wills upon others. Yet, it is rash to conclude that Osorio is a mere copy of Oswald. Actually, Osorio seems more real, more believable. He almost deserves the sympathy that one inadvertently accords Macbeth, who kills and when troubled by guilt, allows his fears to create within a self-protective pride and a need to kill again to conceal his first offense.

Coleridge always held Remorse to be a great favorite of his, not only for its financial success but also because of its theme, which allowed him, he said, to expound upon "certain pet abstract notions."¹¹⁴ Yet, the play could not be very successful upon the stage, particularly because of a major weakness--Coleridge's tendency to indulge ". . . before the public in those metaphysical and philosophical speculations which are becoming only in solitude and with select minds."¹¹⁵ As with Wordsworth, Coleridge found it difficult to put into an ob-

¹¹⁴Quoted in Chambers, op. cit., p. 257.

¹¹⁵Quoted in Ibid., p. 256.

jective art his personal philosophy concerning tyranny. Chambers concludes, "Such subtle psychologizing does not easily get over the footlights, and to the Drury Lane audience Remorse can have seemed little more than an unusually poetic melodrama."¹¹⁶

The last of the five great romantic poets who composed only traditional drama was John Keats, of the group the youngest and most fragile, both physically and aesthetically. Keats is usually thought of as a poet almost completely submerged in beautiful and strange worlds of abstractions, in sensuous dreams, and mystical experiences. Nevertheless, the young poet was much more than a dreamer. He became a surgeon; he spent time in the usual popular occupations of the day, such as bear-baiting, prize fighting, and playgoing; he faced disillusionment, sickness, and death; and he fell deeply in love. All of this full life was gathered into twenty-five short years. Like his fellow poets, he was a pronounced liberal with an instinctive hatred of tyranny and injustice.¹¹⁷ Although he probably was happier in his poetic absorptions, he once wrote, "I would jump down Aetna for any public good."¹¹⁸

After investigating the plays of Wordsworth and Coleridge, one might expect Keats to be better suited to the writing of drama, since

¹¹⁶Ibid., p. 257.

¹¹⁷Clarence DeWitt Thorpe (ed.), John Keats: Complete Poems and Selected Letters, p. xxiv. All subsequent references to Keats's play will be to this work.

¹¹⁸Quoted in Loc. cit.

he ". . . came closest to the theory and practice of later proponents of art for the sake of art," and he later objected to Wordsworth's works on the grounds that "we hate poetry that has a palpable design upon us."¹¹⁹ It has already been pointed out that a lack of adherence to the necessary objective principles in dramatic art contributed to the failure of the traditional dramas of Wordsworth and Coleridge as stage plays. Keats's recognition of the inherent dramatic pitfall of objectivity into which the other romantic poet-dramatists fell would suggest that he might in drama have avoided such a fate. It should be pointed out, however, before undertaking a study of Keats's Otho the Great, that critics differ greatly as to Keats's potentiality for becoming a great dramatist. Amy Lowell, usually a sympathetic biographer of Keats, found little evidence to suggest that he could manage the dramatic.¹²⁰ Garrod felt that there was little in Otho the Great or the fragment of King Stephen that would permit one to attribute to Keats those talents necessary to the dramatist.¹²¹ On the other hand, de Selincourt believed that of his contemporaries Keats possessed the greatest objective powers.¹²² Although he held that Keats would not have been finally successful in drama, Elliott felt that Keats had more of a real dramatic attitude than any of his fellow

¹¹⁹Abrams, op. cit., p. 328.

¹²⁰Amy Lowell, John Keats, I, 380.

¹²¹H. W. Garrod (ed.), The Poetical Works of John Keats, pp. 58-59.

¹²²Ernest de Selincourt (ed.), The Poems of John Keats, p. lix.

poets.¹²³ These comments are even strengthened by the more favorable opinions of other critics. For example, Hewlett saw Keats as a great "potential dramatist."¹²⁴ Bradley believed that Keats's ". . . hope of ultimate success in dramatic poetry was well founded."¹²⁵ Finally, Bridges detected qualities in Otho the Great that would ". . . forbid one to conclude that Keats would not have succeeded in drama."¹²⁶ If one accepts the favorable comments of the majority of these critics, he must conclude that Keats did possess a potential talent as a dramatist.

To a greater extent than did Wordsworth and even Coleridge, Keats possessed a wide knowledge of the stage of his time, perhaps a necessary component to successful playwriting. Of his most intimate group of friends, at least four were equally knowledgeable of the theater: Leigh Hunt, John Hamilton Reynolds, Charles Armitage Brown, and William Hazlitt.¹²⁷ Keats himself wrote dramatic contributions to the Champion and regularly attended current plays.¹²⁸ Slote also points out that Keats was well acquainted with the plays of Shakespeare and

¹²³G. R. Elliott, "The Real Tragedy of Keats," PMLA, XXXVI (September, 1921), 319-320.

¹²⁴Dorothy Hewlett, "Otho the Great," Keats-Shelley Memorial Bulletin, No. IV, 1.

¹²⁵A. C. Bradley, "The Letters of Keats," Oxford Lectures on Poetry, p. 223.

¹²⁶Robert Bridges, "Introduction," Poems of John Keats, I, lxxxii.

¹²⁷Slote, op. cit., p. 43.

¹²⁸Ibid., p. 6.

other dramatists, and notes also the poet's own recognition of an essential dramatic trait in his own poetic personality, his knowledge of the current actors and plays, and also his use of the more formal, conscious dramatic techniques (in addition to his own natural dramatic sense) evident in his later poems.¹²⁹ Because of the date of Otho the Great, Coleridge's Remorse was the only so-called contemporary literary drama with which Keats was probably familiar, yet considering the contents of a previously unpublished sonnet which Keats had written only two months before Otho the Great was begun, one doubts that Coleridge was any great influence. The sonnet contains a list of things which Keats considered vile, among which is the "voice of Mr. Coleridge." Obviously, Keats had not been favorably impressed with Coleridge at a meeting between the two: I heard his voice as he came toward me--I heard it as he moved away--I had heard it all the interval--if it may be called so. . . ."¹³⁰

The writing of drama, particularly drama of a Shakespearean nature, had been Keats's goal for a number of years. He wrote to Bailey, "One of my Ambitions is to make as great a revolution in modern dramatic writing as Kean has done in acting."¹³¹ By this time, he had committed himself to a philosophy of empirical humanism, through which he came to believe that a world of evil and pain is a necessary

¹²⁹Loc. cit.

¹³⁰Quoted in Finney, The Evolution of Keats's Poetry, II, 652.

¹³¹M. B. Forman (ed.), The Letters of John Keats, p. 368.

part in the experience of any "negatively capable poet, such as Shakespeare"; the experience would allow him to merge ". . .sympathetically into the minds of other men, [and] express . . . [his] emotions, ideas, and actions in objective form!"¹³² Keats had intended to delay his dramatic attempts until he had gained some experience and a knowledge of human motivation. It was financial need, however, that immediately prompted his composition of Otho the Great. Because of his dire financial situation, he was considering becoming a surgeon on an Indiaman.¹³³ Therefore, when Charles Armitage Brown, himself a successful playwright, suggested that the two pool their talents in the writing of a stage drama, Keats found the proposition appealing. Financially, it would allow him to continue his poetic life, and it would hopefully permit him to show the harsh critics of Endymion his real talents.

His method of composition for Otho the Great was rather peculiar, as Brown explains:

. . . I engaged to furnish him with the title, characters, and dramatic conduct of a tragedy, and he was to enwrap it in poetry. The progress of this work was curious, for while I sat opposite to him, he caught my description of each scene entire, with the characters to be brought forward, the events, and everything connected with it. Thus he went on, scene after scene, never knowing nor inquiring into the scene which was to follow, until four acts were completed. It was then he required to know at once all the events that were to occupy the fifth act; I explained them to him, but, after patient hearing and some thought, he insisted that many incidents in it were too humorous, or, as he termed them, too melodramatic. He wrote the fifth act in accordance with his own views, and so contented

¹³²Finney, op. cit., p. 657.

¹³³Ibid., p. 658.

was I with his poetry that at the time, and for a long time after, I thought he was in the right.¹³⁴

Keats took only one month to write the play. He began from Brown's outline of Act I in July, admitting later in July that Brown and he were ". . . pretty well harnessed now to [their] dog cart," so that by mid-August the play was complete.¹³⁵ To Keats, Brown's attention to detail and to what he thought of as dramatic effects seemed, at times, a bit ambitious and artificial, as, for example, the introduction of an elephant into the play, which Keats mentions in a letter to Dilke on July 31. Keats jests that, since there was no historical mention of an Otho menagerie, the whole idea was a joke, but that Brown was so enthusiastic about the idea that he almost convinced Keats himself.¹³⁶

Otho the Great centers around the unfortunate marriage of Ludolph, the son of Otho, Emperor of Germany, to Auranthe, the sister of Conrad, Duke of Franconia. Information concerning at least six antecedent events is woven into the opening scenes. Because Otho had previously refused to allow his son to marry Auranthe, suggesting his cousin Erminia instead, Ludolph had recently led an unsuccessful rebellion against the crown. In the meantime, Auranthe was secretly having an affair with Albert, a noble knight. An invading Hungarian army has been recently overthrown, providing a background for Erminia's moral

¹³⁴Quoted in de Selincourt, op. cit., p. 552.

¹³⁵Quoted in Robert Gittings, John Keats: The Living Year, p. 159.

¹³⁶H. B. Forman (ed), The Complete Works of John Keats, III, 35.

disgrace, Otho's pardon of the rebel Conrad, and the king's recognition of Ludolph, disguised as an Arab who had fought bravely against the Hungarians. Within the play itself, Otho pardons Ludolph for his rebellion and permits him to marry Auranthe. When it is found that Erminia has actually been the victim of Auranthe's shifting of guilt in her affair with Albert, Ludolph goes mad, Albert kills Conrad, Auranthe commits suicide, and Ludolph dies of grief. The plot falls into the usual five acts, the climax coming in the middle of the third act. There is a sub-plot, the love of Gersa and Erminia, that is never allowed to approach in intensity the major plot of love between Ludolph and Auranthe. As might be expected of Keats, there are numerous Shakespearean overtones--Finney alone has found over forty passages that closely parallel in phraseology and/or imagery passages in seventeen of Shakespeare's plays.¹³⁷ Besides similarities in the blank verse of the two writers, Finney also finds several parallels in character. Ludolph, like Claudio in Much Ado About Nothing, is a war hero, both react in the same way on learning of the unfaithfulness of their loved ones, both have speeches which are strikingly similar to each other's.¹³⁸ There are also several passages reminiscent of Macbeth, particularly a reference to the chaos and horror of the night of a murder.

Among all the romantic poets, however, it is least surprising that Keats should reflect a Shakespearean influence. The two writers

¹³⁷Finney, op. cit., p. 666.

¹³⁸Ibid., pp. 662-663.

had ". . . a very close, and subtle relationship. There were alike in certain qualities of mind and of art, a fact of which Keats himself was aware. . . ." ¹³⁹ There is even further reason for Otho the Great to reflect Keats's imitation of Shakespeare, for Keats wrote the play expressly as a vehicle for Edmund Kean, the greatest romantic actor and Keats's theatrical hero. ¹⁴⁰ Keats actually ". . . resembled [Kean] in appearance and temperament . . ." and felt a close attachment to him. ¹⁴¹ When it was disclosed that Kean was planning a tour to America during the Autumn of 1819, Keats was extremely upset, for financial problems and a waning health made the waiting for Kean's return and the performance of the play in 1820 virtually impossible. Keats did begin a second drama, King Stephen, patterned on Kean's most famous role of Richard III. What little was written of the play provided for a vibrant hero and a tremendous physical action--a perfect match for Kean's vivid talents. Although this play showed more promise as a dramatic work than all of Otho the Great, Keats was forced to abandon it for the hopefully more profitable publication of Lamia.

One does not find in Otho the Great a lesson about tyranny (as in The Borderers) or an underlying desire to express certain thoughts about contemporary oppression (as in Osorio). Keats made no apparent attempt, here, to bring forth any message on tyranny or on any other moral issue. Yet, it is erroneous to imply that the play offers

¹³⁹Caroline F. E. Spurgeon, Keats's Shakespeare, pp. 53-54.

¹⁴⁰Gittings, op. cit., p. 166. ¹⁴¹loc. cit.

no suitable material for comments on tyranny and oppression. On the contrary, there is an abundance of tyranny in the play, and it is precisely this emphasis upon tyranny that creates the major weakness of the play--specifically, in character development.

Otho is obviously the tyrant in the play; he is pictured as having "iron lips" and "swart spleen"; he often threatens death and all kinds of vile punishments to anyone in his way. His actions belie his threats and reveal him as an almost kind old man who simply wants peace and quiet. He treats his enemy, Gersa, with infinite kindness; he concedes to Ludolph's every whim; he is overly generous to all who have wronged him; and, finally, when Ludolph becomes ill with grief, Otho does not thrash about like a caged lion, but behaves like a helpless hen concerned for her chick. Instead of raging, he only whimpers, "Why will ye keep me from my darling child?"

The major weakness in the play lies in the fact that the role of the tyrant is unconsciously misplaced. It is the hero, Ludolph, who is actually the tyrant whose tyranny takes the guise of a spoiled child, a point of view which is certainly unattractive in a hero, even in a melodramatic hero. It was Ludolph who had organized the rebels against his father because he had been denied Auranthe. His pride and arrogance lead him to treat his father, his cousin, Erminia, and Conrad rather shamefully. On everyone around him, he so forces his declaration of love for Auranthe that even his father protests, "This is a little painful; just too much." When Ludolph finally discovers Auranthe's shameful behavior, he feels he personally must punish

the three offenders. His taunting and raging over the dying Albert attract all sympathy to Albert. Ludolph's wild behavior finally forces Auranthe to commit suicide and leads, soon afterwards, to his own death. The weakness of misplaced tyranny is further increased when it becomes evident that Ludolph is actually impotent as a real tyrant. His behavior, like that of a hot-tempered, spoiled child, is all rage and fury with little action. All of his worthy deeds are accomplished before the play begins. Within the play itself, he merely treats others arrogantly, threatens several fights, taunts a dying man, and finally brings about his own death. This superficial behavior creates a lack of depth in any character, and since Ludolph is the major figure, it leads to the play's lack of fulfillment. There are other weaknesses that should be noted. There is no tragic struggle of the human soul; the struggle, prompted by Auranthe's indiscretion, is only melodramatic and, therefore, gives no real motivation to the progression of the plot. The characters of Conrad and Auranthe are so villainous as to be humorous. Finally, there is a failure to integrate the plot with the characters. Obviously, the play should be placed in the category of an Elizabethan-Gothic melodrama; and, considering the circumstances under which it was written, it is not surprising that the play falls short of good tragedy.

The work does, however, contain numerous passages of great beauty, all possessing the magic quality of language so characteristic of Keats. Keats himself thought the play would be a stage success. It was not until 1950, however, under the patronage of Keats's admirers,

that the play was ever staged. The two performances were reasonably attended, and unsurprisingly, the reviews were favorable.¹⁴²

The question previously raised, "Did Keats possess dramatic ability?" may now be answered. Unquestionably, he possessed potential as a dramatist. Otho the Great was no worse than the average tragedy of the time and, in some respects, particularly in language, it showed promise of things to come. He did possess ". . . the impersonality and objectivity that a dramatist should have: the power to project himself, to get out of himself by imagination."¹⁴³ Certainly, his King Stephen demonstrated a growth in dramatic skill. Yet, time was the determining factor in Keats's dramatic development. Because of his approaching final illness, he should have been, at twenty-three, writing plays of the calibre of Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth, and Lear.¹⁴⁴ He lacked only in degree the command of language and dramatic skill necessary for such a task; given twenty more years, he might have succeeded as a truly great dramatist.

A study of the three plays discussed in this chapter has revealed two relevant and pervasive characteristics possessed by each of the three. All exhibit a concern for tyranny. In The Borderers and Osorio, this concern becomes powerful enough to weaken the impact of the play, for the authors found it difficult not to impose their

¹⁴²Hewlett, op. cit., p. 1.

¹⁴³R. H. Fogle (ed.), John Keats: Selected Poetry and Letters, p. vii.

¹⁴⁴J. Middleton Murry, Keats and Shakespeare, p. 203.

own opinions and motivations upon their characters, rather than allowing such motivation to come from within the characters themselves. In the case of Otho the Great, the play is weakened by the mishandling of the role of the tyrant. The second major area of similarity concerns the form of these plays that relegates them to the realm of closet dramas. Some insight is to be gained from Reynolds's description of the "formula" playwriting of his day:

Let there be some heart-breaking scene of domestic misery presented to our view--be it a fond husband deserted by a faithless wife, a generous son disinherited by his father, or a sick mother turned out of doors to perish by hunger, and thus discovered by her own son.¹⁴⁵

As soon as such a "heart-breaking" device has been chosen, the dramatist has assured himself of the sympathies of his intended audience. His next task is no more difficult. He need only ". . . let the hero as the natural consequence of such a situation be driven to some act of desperation. . . ." ¹⁴⁶ This act, completely unjustifiable under normal conditions, must appear so necessary and natural under the pressures of the circumstances that the hero makes "offense a skill." Thus:

The audience, dear souls! are won over to sympathy, and "quite forget his vices in his woe;"--instead of the merited rope, he comes off with their applause, leaving them with a pitying tear for his misfortunes, and an approving smile for the spirit which makes him break through the petty prejudices of society.¹⁴⁷

Obviously, The Borderers, Osorio, and Otho the Great contain the

¹⁴⁵Quoted in Finney, op. cit., p. 661.

¹⁴⁶Loc. cit.

¹⁴⁷Loc. cit.

superficialities inherent in Reynolds's formula. Consequently all fail to achieve any stature of greatness that would have allowed them to overstep these superficialities. All of their heroes commit grievous crimes, yet these heroes somehow manage to persuade the audience that the crimes were necessary and therefore justifiable. These plays seem abundantly supplied with enough sentimentality to warrant the emotional acceptance of their heroes's inherent innocence. Thus, these stage plays do not achieve literary greatness because of their authors' intense concern for tyranny and their reliance upon the era's superficial formula of dramatic composition.

CHAPTER III

BYRON'S LYRICAL DRAMAS OF MANFRED AND CAIN:

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ROMANTIC REBEL

From the second generation of English romantic poets came one who, more than all the others, epitomized to his contemporaries and even his readers today the essence of the romantic revolt against tyranny. Although a man of many complexities, even paradoxes in his personality and temperament, Lord Byron was, indeed, a "son of the Revolution," and being a proud individualist, he spent his life in a tempest, contemptuous of anchors.¹⁴⁸ His voice was heard in Parliament on behalf of the poor and oppressed, his pen was employed in such vehement attacks on the established government as The Vision of Judgment (1822), and even his life was finally given in the cause of Greek liberation.

Byron's goal was freedom on all levels of society: he felt that no nation should be allowed to oppress another; no citizen should be tyrannized by any form of government, particularly any monarchy, and, most specifically, its ". . . tools--the Castlereaghs, Wellingtons, and Southneys"; and finally, no individual should fall under the power of any authority outside his own mind--that is, complete anarchy.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸Crane Brinton, The Political Ideas of the English Romanticists, p. 162.

¹⁴⁹Edward E. Bostetter (ed.), Byron: Selected Poetry and Letters, pp. vi-vii.

His proud ego manifested itself, however, in obviously contradictory characteristics: his pride in his aristocratic heritage, his rude treatment of many well meaning people, his hatred of democracy, and his possible temptation to accept the Greek crown if it had been offered him.¹⁵⁰ Yet, it is the combination of his proud ego with his sincere and humane desires for freedom that created the magnetic and dynamic personality that made him both the darling and the wandering outlaw of the Europe of his day.

Byron once said that he wrote ". . . as a tiger leaps; and if he missed his aim, there was no retrieving the failure."¹⁵¹ It is true that his work seldom reflects the delicacy and profundity of phraseology that one finds in Keats or Shelley. Even Byron himself often admitted his distaste for revision. Certainly, in the writing of his dramas, which far outnumber those of the other romantics, Byron is open to the charge of haste and, sometimes, carelessness. Within the seven years, from 1816 to 1822, he wrote eight dramas in addition to a large amount of other verse.

Byron's plays fall into both of the two previously determined categories in romantic drama. His Manfred, Cain and Heaven and Earth are lyrical and philosophical in nature, they follow no established form, and they allow the most perfect expression of Byron's romantic

¹⁵⁰Ibid., p. vii.

¹⁵¹Paul E. More (ed.), The Complete Poetical Works of Lord Byron, p. xix. All subsequent references to Byron's plays will be to this text.

temperament. Manfred and Cain are two of his dramas in which Byron makes his strongest and most individualistic appeal against tyranny. This appeal allows for the emergence of an ideal romantic rebel, not merely another "formulated" hero characterized by melancholy, defiant pride, ennui, misanthropy, and remorse, but one whose scope and dignity place him in the realm of the superman.

With the exception of Werner and The Deformed Transformed, both of which are supernatural in nature, Byron's other plays fall into the category of stage drama, the type also composed by Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Keats. Since he was a member of the Drury Lane Committee, Byron had ample opportunity to become familiar with the typical melodramatic play of his time. His poor opinion of such plays is reflected in his stated reason for trying his own hand at the medium: to show his contemporary playwrights how one should blend the materials of history with the classical laws of drama.¹⁵² Interestingly, Byron, like Wordsworth, insisted that his plays were not written for the stage. His loud and frequent expressions of this point he explains in his Preface to Marino Faliero, as follows:

And I cannot conceive any man of irritable feeling putting himself at the mercies of an audience. The sneering reader, and the loud critic, and the tart review, are scattered and distant calamities; but the trampling of an intelligent or of an ignorant audience on a production which, be it good or bad, has been a mental labour to the writer, is a palpable and immediate grievance, heightened by a man's doubt of their competency to judge, and his certainty of his own imprudence in electing them his judges.¹⁵³

Actually, Manfred, Marino Faliero, Sardanapalus, and Werner all were

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 477.

¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 499.

performed at Drury Lane Theatre at one time or another, yet none has survived the test of time to become a stage success.¹⁵⁴

A brief investigation of these five stage dramas reveals why Byron failed, as did Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Keats, in his writing of the dramatic medium. Besides the previously alluded to handicap of hurried and sometimes lax composition, his plays partake of the melodramatic: "Everything is made to sound important, almost as if each play contained *Station Standing Orders for Good Men Hard Pressed*."¹⁵⁵ Thematically, all of these plays center around the subject of essentially noble men who, over concern for power, fall to a tragic end. In the first, *Marino Faliero*, Doge of Venice, feeling insulted because the omnipotent synod has failed to punish a man who has smeared the reputation of the Doge's wife, leads a fruitless insurrection and is beheaded. Next, in *Sardanapalus*, a sybaritic yet likeable king of Assyria finds out too late about the unrest in his kingdom and is forced to suicide. In the third play, *The Two Foscari*, the Doge's son is tried for having plotted treason and subsequently dies for his tortures. His father, finally forced to resign, is given a poisoned cup and, as it takes effect, refuses to lean on anyone, saying bravely, "A Sovereign should die standing." In the fourth play, *Werner*, Byron tells of another noble man who tries legally to gain an inheritance that belongs to him. The obtaining of the inheri-

¹⁵⁴Cheney, *op. cit.*, p. 419.

¹⁵⁵Paul West, *Byron and the Spoiler's Art*, p. 107.

tance becomes his tragedy, however, when he discovers that it was gained only by his son's becoming a murderer. The last of these plays, The Deformed Transformed, is Byron's rather wild story with Satanic overtones about Arnold the hunchback, who magically takes on the shape of Achilles and joins in an attack upon Rome. West points out that all of these plays project ". . . a sense of futility--men of stature being fiercely hemmed in by a force which wrecks dignity and stunts responsibility."¹⁵⁶

Byron's stage plays lack a careful handling of the plot movement, character delineation, and versification. A certain pervasive shallowness is apparent in them, and most do not appear substantially developed for a full five-act drama. Furthermore, most are inferior to the stage dramas of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Keats and, like the dramas of those authors, fail primarily because Byron has given more attention to states of mind than to a vivid combining of plot, character, and dialogue into a dramatic whole.

Although Manfred, written in 1817, has been staged, it is evident, from Byron's insistence on its being called "a dramatic poem," that it differs substantially in form from the stage plays heretofore discussed. Actually, Manfred is merely a series of tableaux. The presence of plot, character, and dialogue should prohibit, however, its being relegated entirely to the area of poetry. Instead, it falls more accurately into the type of drama that is lyrical in nature, its

¹⁵⁶
Loc. cit.

form and progression being determined, not by any set pattern, but by inherent needs within. Moreover, Manfred has only three acts, its versification is carefully suited to the nature of the particular character speaking, and its setting exhibits a strong influence of the Alps, which was, one recalls, Byron's retreat soon after he left England ostensibly to escape the harsh judgments levied upon him by his wife's sympathizers.

This play is autobiographical to the extent that Manfred's struggle with his guilt probably reflects the author's misgivings concerning his own past relationship with his sister, Lady Augusta. Most critics agree with Calvert that Manfred is a ". . . piece of self-portraiture of the poet's emotional nature."¹⁵⁷ In addition to being guilt-ridden, Manfred is a proud, defiant soul possessing a great amount of imaginative vision. He has knowledge of the mysteries of the universe and exercises a command over the spirits of earth and air. From earliest childhood he has preferred solitude, with the exception of Astarte, the only creature he has ever loved, and the only one who was like him: "She had the same lone thoughts and wanderings / The quest of hidden knowledge, and a mind / To comprehend the universe" (II.ii.109-111).

Through some unknown means, Manfred has caused the death of Astarte, for her blood has been spilled, although not by his hands, and she is no longer among the living but dwells with the spirits. His subsequent agony of remorse drives him to search desperately for

¹⁵⁷William J. Calvert, Byron: Romantic Paradox, p. 143.

some means of oblivion ". . . rather than annihilation, the power to deny feeling rather than to cease to feel and move."¹⁵⁸ He calls up tyrant spirits, but they can offer him nothing but kingdoms and peoples to command. He attempts suicide but is saved by a chamois hunter. He realizes that death in itself is not the answer to forgetfulness, since his essence is of the spirits, although his body be clay, and death means nothing to spirits. He goes to the hall of Arimanes, Prince of Earth and Air, asking that Astarte be called up to see if she will give him some sign of forgiveness. However, her spirit only tells him that his earthly ills will end on the morrow, and she fades away. In his tower on the next evening, Manfred prepares for his death, leaving his servants guarding the door from the outside. An Abbot, who had earlier on that same evening tried to reason with Manfred, returns for another attempt, only to find that the spirit of Manfred's genius is attempting to claim the mortal. Manfred struggles against this spirit and its helpers, finally succeeding in banishing them with the words:

The mind which is immortal makes itself
 Requitual for its good or evil thoughts,
 Is its own origin of ill and end,
 And its own place and time. . . .

(III.iv.389-392)

Thus, freeing himself from these spirits, Manfred expires, after having told the Abbot, "'Tis not so difficult to die." (III.iv.411)

Although the Destinies and Arimanes in the play are Byron's most obvious symbols of oppression, tyranny in Manfred basically takes the

¹⁵⁸W. H. Marshall, The Structure of Byron's Major Poems, p. 99.

form of a sense of guilt which oppresses the hero to a degree which lesser mortals could not have withstood. Manfred is bound and tortured by his own soul, and the words of the Incantation in the first act explain the form which his oppression takes:

Nor to slumber, nor to die
 Shall be in thy destiny;
 Though thy death shall still seem near
 To thy wish, but as a fear;
 Lo! the spell now works around thee,
 And the clankless chain hath bound thee;
 O'er thy heart and brain together
 Hath the word been pass'd--now wither!
 (I.i.254-261)

Interestingly enough, the force of this guilt is represented differently in Byron's two extant drafts of Act III. In the first, written before he left Switzerland and while he was still consumed with the problems which he had left behind in England, he depicts the Abbot as a more villainous character.¹⁵⁹ His original visit to Manfred seems to have been prompted not only by a desire to win Manfred's soul but also by a crafty scheme to gain money for a new monastery. Thus, aware of the Abbot's ulterior motive, Manfred directs a demon to remove the Abbot to a peak of the Shreckhorn and to watch with him through the night, adding: "Let him gaze and know / He ne'er again will be so near to Heaven!" (III.i.37-38). In the final scene, the servants, waiting outside Manfred's tower, rush in when a flame shoots forth and a loud noise occurs. Finally, they bring out the near life-

¹⁵⁹Barbara Sylvester, "Prophetic Tendencies in Lord Byron: A Reconsideration of the Mystery Plays" (unpublished Master's thesis, Kent State University, Kent, Ohio, 1960), p. 16.

less Manfred, whose dying words are the same as those previously cited. For Byron to have left the play in the form of this first draft would have weakened its entire structure, for, as Calvert has observed, "The poem could mean nothing except as the cry of a hurt soul."¹⁶⁰ Byron's attention given to the villainous Abbot would have merely distracted the reader from seeing the real struggle within the poem--Manfred's ". . . desire for detachment, the longing of the individual to throw off the bonds of social law and make . . . a life apart from the world's life. . . ." ¹⁶¹

Byron composed the final draft of Manfred in Rome several months later. In it, there is certain calm in Manfred not to be found in the former version of III, indicating that Byron had come to face the issues that had been disturbing him earlier in Switzerland and was, thus, more objective in his treatment of the plot. Sylvester has suggested that the mystic experience in the Colosseum described by Manfred in III might actually have been experienced by Byron, giving him the calm perception necessary to overcome his sense of guilt and remorse, and allowing him to expand the character of Manfred and mark the beginnings of an ideal romantic rebel.¹⁶²

Manfred possesses many of the characteristics that would have made him a typical popular hero of Byron's own day, for example, a Childe Harold or a Conrad. He is aristocratic, proud, solitary, wan-

¹⁶⁰Calvert, op. cit., p. 142.

¹⁶¹More, op. cit., p. xx.

¹⁶²Sylvester, op. cit., p. 17.

dering, wise in mysterious matters, and, in addition, made glamorous by the guilt of an "unmentionable sin." Yet, he steps out of this popular category when to the spirits who have finally come for him he utters that the mind "Is its own origin of ill and end, / And its own place and time. . . ." This is the declaration of the romantic ego; it is rejection of all social and religious taboos, thus making the ego the ultimate repository of judgment, ". . . free to create its own scheme and values."¹⁶³ Throughout the drama, Manfred has prepared himself for this ultimate defiance of outward authority. He has refused to bow down to Arimanes; he would not swear allegiance to the Witch of the Alps; and he could not receive comfort from the Abbot. From the beginning, he himself had determined the source of his own guilt--not his pride nor his investigations into the prohibited realms of magic and darkness, but his destroying of his beloved Astarte.

The defiance of all external authority and the reliance upon one's own reason as the ultimate judge become the nerve and sinew of the romantic rebel. Yet, the true romantic rebel only begins with Manfred, for Manfred himself is not fully qualified to be placed among such ideal romantic rebels as Byron's Cain or Shelley's Prometheus. In determining the characteristics of the true romantic rebel, one must necessarily recall Aristotle's description (in Chapter XIII of the Poetics) of a tragic hero as one who is bigger than life; that is, ". . . he must be above the common level, with greater powers,

¹⁶³Peter L. Thorslev, Jr., The Byronic Hero, p. 168.

greater dignity, and a greater soul."¹⁶⁴ This hero ". . . seeks honors only from equals; he is generous only from a sense of strength; . . . he knows his own worth and he is sure of himself. . . ."¹⁶⁵ The true romantic rebel is also a sensitive individual, an ardent pursuer of knowledge, at any expense. An examination of Manfred by these standards reveals that he is an imperfect type of romantic rebel in only two respects: (1) his strong sense of guilt, which, until the last, determines everything he does and is more characteristic of the melodramatic heroes of the earlier Byron; and, more importantly, (2) his lack of sensitivity, a certain humaneness necessary to the fully developed romantic rebel.

It is in his next philosophical drama, Cain, that Byron makes his strongest protest against tyranny, and it is in his main character, Cain, that he develops the true romantic rebel. Although Byron refers to this drama as a mystery, after the traditional English mystery plays, and indicates in his Preface that he intends to preserve insofar as possible the facts and the language of his Biblical source, it is evident from the beginning that the thought behind Byron's version of the first murder was in no way compatible with that of the original source. One sees, first, Adam's family at a sacrifice. Besides Adam and Eve, there are Cain, his wife Adah, Abel and his wife Zillah. All but Cain offer homage to God; and the family, alarmed by the impiety of Cain's silence, urge him to be "cheerful and resigned" (I.i.51).

¹⁶⁴Loc. cit.

¹⁶⁵Loc. cit.

Cain remains behind as the family leaves to go about its chores. Lucifer, the fallen angel, appears to Cain and tells him that he understands Cain's thoughts: "They are the thoughts of all / Worthy of thought;--'tis your immortal part / Which speaks within you!" (I.i.102-105). Offering Cain the knowledge which the mortal so desperately seeks, Lucifer tells him to swear allegiance, but upon learning that Cain will not only refuse to bow to him but has already refused to bow to God, Lucifer seems satisfied, and takes Cain on a cosmological journey through the abyss of space and even to the hall of the dead. Cain is not really given the comprehensive knowledge he seeks, but he learns at least that dreaded death is not the end of all things but rather a necessary prelude to other things--knowledge that the "Omnipotent tyrant," as Lucifer calls Jehovah, has failed to reveal to man.

Cain, intoxicated by his journey, returns to earth and is persuaded by Adah to join Abel in sacrifice. Abel bows meekly, prays, and then sacrifices the first-borns of his flock. Cain stands before his altar, delivers a speech reminiscent of an eighteenth-century rationalist, and offers up the fruits and flowers he has tilled. When a whirlwind destroys his altar and the flames of acceptance burn brightly on Abel's, Cain becomes furious and attempts to wreck the bloody sacrifice which, he feels, disgraces creation. Abel stands in the way, however, and Cain's dealing him a blow with an altar brand brings death into the world. The other members of the family discover Cain beside Abel's body and gradually realize Cain's guilt. Eve

curses him with all the vehemence of God's curse upon her, and all of the family, with the exception of Adah, turn from him. After the Angel of the Lord has set a mark on Cain's forehead, Cain, Adah, and their children depart into the wilderness in a mood that is very similar, as Thorslev has suggested, to Marmaduke's in The Borderers:

A wanderer must I go. . .
 No human ear shall ever hear me speak;
 No human dwelling ever give me food,
 Or sleep, or rest: but over waste and wild,
 In search of nothing that this earth can give,
 But expiation, will I wander on--
 A man by pain and thought compelled to live,
 Yet loathing life--till anger is appeased
 In Heaven, and Mercy gives me leave to die.
 (The Borderers, V.2314-2323)

The violence and power of Byron's depiction of religious tyranny in Cain surely must have stemmed from some great complexity within the author himself. He had been strictly reared in Calvinistic teachings, and although he revolted against such doctrine as a young man, it is evident that he was still haunted by it.¹⁶⁶ Byron had a logical intelligence that was quick to perceive "rationalizations, contradictions, and evasions in religious and philosophical dogmas," an ability, perhaps, that would not permit him to reconcile the Calvinistic teachings of predestination, original sin, and cursed mankind with the concept of a just and loving God.¹⁶⁷ Byron's sense of fatalism and injustice drove him to depict an "indissoluble tyrant" who

¹⁶⁶E. W. Marjarum, Byron as Skeptic and Believer, p. 21.

¹⁶⁷Edward E. Bostetter, The Romantic Ventriloquists, p. 255.

". . . deliberately set a trap for men, punished them remorselessly for falling, and demanded abject acquiescence and adoration forever after."¹⁶⁸ Throughout his life, Byron had been resolutely opposed to absolutism, and finally when he faced divine authoritarianism, his rebellion takes on titanic proportions.¹⁶⁹

There is one interesting addition to the idea of religious tyranny that should widen the scope of Byron's concern for oppression in Cain. Arguing that Cain is also Byron's protest against the Holy Alliance, Hancock points out that Cain's questioning--of the status quo, of the existing laws and conditions, of whether something is good merely because it comes from God whom one calls good--surely was meant to have social and political implications, as well.¹⁷⁰

Bostetter goes even more deeply into the philosophical implications of the story of the Fall-- that ". . . the human race must forever suffer for the willing disobedience of its progenitors, except for whatever alleviation God in his mercy is willing to provide. . . ."¹⁷¹ He sees the acceptance of such a myth as bringing about the "acquiescence of the individual in his particular lot" and as insuring the preservation of the established social organization.¹⁷² It is not surprising that the obsequious submissiveness and unquestioned acceptance of his parents is alien to Cain: "My father is / Tamed down;

¹⁶⁸Ibid., p. 258.

¹⁶⁹Marjarum, op. cit., p. 45.

¹⁷⁰Hancock, op. cit., pp. 115-116.

¹⁷¹Bostetter, op. cit., p. 286.

¹⁷²Loc. cit.

my mother has forgot the mind / Which made her thirst for knowledge at the risk / Of an eternal curse" (I.i.176-179). Even Abel's behavior is almost a parody of ". . . the self-righteous, well-intentioned people who by their blind submission encourage the perpetuation of social tyranny and evil."¹⁷³ Finally, it is painfully ironic that Cain, so enraged with the oppression of his brother's God that he loses emotional control, should adopt tyrannical measures of violence toward his own brother.

When one attempts to evaluate Cain as a drama, he should do so within the framework of the standards established in Byron's other dramas. Certainly, the play should never be given a staging, primarily because of the difficulties that would be encountered in attempting to make II plausible. This second act, concerned with the journey by Lucifer and Cain, while admittedly an interesting episode for its own sake, actually interrupts the anthropomorphic myth and makes Act III anticlimactic. Byron's poetry in Cain does not reach the heights he achieves in Manfred, although Cain is perhaps superior in its consistency and intellectual development.¹⁷⁴ Finally, Byron's major contribution in the play lies within the character of Cain himself as an ideal romantic rebel.

Lucifer's advice to Cain on effective resistance to tyranny is reminiscent of Manfred's words used to drive away the spirits that seek his soul. Lucifer tells Cain: "Nothing can / Quench the mind,

¹⁷³Ibid., p. 288.

¹⁷⁴Thorslev, op. cit., p. 176.

if the mind will be itself / And centre of surrounding things"
(I.i.209-211). Although Byron identifies Lucifer with knowledge, he cannot make him be a romantic rebel, for Lucifer cannot love and is a tyrant himself, ever ready to add more souls to his dominion. It is Cain, on the other hand, who is the true romantic rebel, who "in conception . . . rises above the Gothic into the realm of tragedy . . . [with] none of Manfred's Gothic misanthropy."¹⁷⁵ He possesses the necessary thirst for knowledge, the largeness of power, dignity, and soul to become an ideal romantic rebel. He has another attribute that places him above Manfred: Cain is heroic in sensitivity; his struggles are designed to alleviate not only his own pain but also the pain of his loved ones and, for that matter, of the entire world. While Manfred remains as an isolationist, Cain envisions an entire world free of the tyrannical forces that now engulf it. His fury against the "Omnipotent tyrant," finally resulting in his brother's death, becomes his tragic flaw; and for this flaw he is given the most devastating punishment possible for him--he is denied death, the only means to a fuller understanding of his universe. Yet despite his tragic bent, Cain's scope and vision elevate him to the realm of the true romantic rebel.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 180.

CHAPTER IV

SHELLEY'S THE CENCI AND PROMETHEUS UNBOUND:

THE ROMANTIC REBEL DEIFIED

Percy Bysshe Shelley gave, perhaps, the most creative voice to the revolutionary forces that permeated the Romantic Movement. This rather wild and extremely intense poet (just after a bout of hazing with several schoolmates) dedicated himself at the early age of twelve to wage a war of justice, liberty, and gentleness among mankind.¹⁷⁶ Surprisingly enough, this vow never wavered in intensity; if anything, his dedication increased, bewilderingly so, it seemed to his father.¹⁷⁷

Shelley's biographies teem with incident upon incident concerning his adherence to ideals, rather than to what might be termed common sense. He was early dismissed from Oxford for authoring a pamphlet entitled "On the Necessity of Atheism." He roamed the streets of Dublin, trying to urge the Irish workers to revolt. His early writings are almost entirely devoted to appeals for various reforms. Gordon once made a list of evils that Shelley opposed, among whose fourteen major categories one finds the family, universities, all monarchies, all priests, marriage, soldiers, etc.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶George Gordon, Shelley and the Oppressors of Mankind, p. 4.

¹⁷⁷Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁷⁸Ibid., p. 3.

Yet, Shelley's fame does not rest so much upon the spectacle of his life, for any man can rebel in such a way as to make himself known. Rather, it is in the spectacular beauty and imagery of his poetry--of Hellas, Alastor, the Hymn to Intellectual Beauty, Adonais, To a Skylark and Prometheus Unbound--that Shelley finds his immortality.

Shelley seemed to possess what many critics consider to be a genuine dramatic talent. In The Cenci, his one drama written for the stage, he exhibited not only inspiration but also the one characteristic usually missing in the other plays of the time--that of discipline. He had been urging Mary, his wife, for some time to write a drama, feeling that he himself ". . . was too metaphysical and abstract, too fond of the theoretical and the ideal, to succeed as a tragedian."¹⁷⁹ Yet, he was powerfully inspired in Italy by his reading of a manuscript which recounted the tragic story of the Cenci family. Realizing that his former works had not received the readership which he had desired (whether because of their difficult abstractions or the "temper of the times," he was not sure), he became determined to write a tragedy based upon the Cenci story as he had become acquainted with it.

His opinion of his contemporary theater was somewhat unfavorable. Although it is thought that he had acted for a time, it is clear that

¹⁷⁹Mrs. Shelley, "Note on The Cenci," The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley, ed., Thomas Hutchinson, p. 335. All subsequent references to Shelley's plays will be to this text.

he considered the theater to be too cluttered with meaningless and crude comedy.¹⁸⁰ Even though he had never studied the techniques of dramatic writing, he did possess a complete set of Shakespeare's plays which he had studied extensively.¹⁸¹ He was also familiar with "other dramatists, both Classical and Elizabethan: Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes, Beaumont and Fletcher, Jonson, Marlow and Calderon. . . ."¹⁸² Thus armed, he set about, after his completion of Prometheus Unbound in 1819, to compose in a disciplined, objective manner, regarding both plot and language, the tragic story of the wicked Count Cenci and his gentle daughter, Beatrice. He admits that the writing took only a few months, yet he felt at its completion that there should be no impediment to its success on the stage, with the possible exception of the incest theme, which was profoundly more shocking to his age than to the present generation. It was this theme, however, that prevented the production of the play at Covent Garden, and it was not until 1886 that it was finally acted in a private performance sponsored by the Shelley Society.¹⁸³ Since then, the play has been produced eleven times.¹⁸⁴ Wordsworth thought it was "the greatest tragedy of the age," and many of Shelley's friends

¹⁸⁰David L. Clark, "Shelley and Shakespeare," PMLA, LIV (May, 1939), 269.

¹⁸¹Ibid., p. 270.

¹⁸²Loc. cit.

¹⁸³Kenneth Neill Cameron and Horst Frenz, "The Stage History of Shelley's The Cenci," PMLA, L (October, 1945), 1081.

¹⁸⁴Ibid., pp. 1080-1081.

agreed; yet, the reviewers condemned it, presumably because it was by Shelley and about incest.¹⁸⁵

Shelley's earlier poems all reveal his characteristic concern for tyranny. For example, Queen Mab, in its youthful enthusiasm, attacks any and all tyrants, centering primarily upon priests and kings. One finds the same emphasis in The Revolt of Islam. In The Masque of Anarchy, Shelley deploras the Manchester Massacre. It is not surprising, therefore, to find that although the theme of tyranny was already present in the Cenci story, it becomes in Shelley's play the dominant theme, ". . . a savage castigation of oppression in all its forms, social and domestic."¹⁸⁶ More precisely, Beatrice becomes the victim of parental and ecclesiastic oppression.¹⁸⁷ This oppression, termed patria potestas, is illustrated first by the absolute power the father of a household has over his wife, children, and servants, and later by the absolute power of the Church, which interprets Beatrice's action as a threat to Church power.¹⁸⁸ Shelley voices his hatred of tyranny in the following lines of the play:

. . . Power is as a snake which grasps
And loosens not: a snake whose look transmutes
All things to guilt which is its nutriment.
(IV.iv.178-180)

¹⁸⁵King-Hele, op. cit., p. 134.

¹⁸⁶Cameron, op. cit., pp. xxiv-xxv.

¹⁸⁷Newman I. White (ed.), The Best of Shelley, p. 484.

¹⁸⁸Ernest Bernbaum, Guide Through the Romantic Movement, p. 254.

In the final act, Beatrice answers her accusers:

. . . And what a tyrant thou art,
And what slaves these; and what a world we make,
The oppressor and the oppressed. . . .

(V.iii.73-75)

Shelley's portrayal of the tyrant, Cenci, is fascinating. As one might expect, "The Count is actuated by lust, avarice, a desire for vengeance . . . and, above all, by desire to dominate."¹⁸⁹ It is probably this last desire which leads to incest. The Count, well versed in the power of mental torture, saw that the mortification of incest was the only pain powerful enough to bring the Beatrice of the banquet scene completely to submission. Unlike the "mere cardboard figure" set up as the tyrant in Shelley's previous poems, Count Cenci ". . . is a man to be feared. His almost incredible cruelties could so easily have made us laugh, not shudder."¹⁹⁰ So monstrous is he that his corruption brings on that of all of the others around him, each according to his own weakness. Beatrice lies, her mother quavers, Orsino covets, and Giacomo deserts the responsibilities of his family. Yet, as fascinating and forceful as this particular tyrant is, it is Shelley's magnification of the tyrant theme that leads to weaknesses within the play itself.

The Cenci has been placed at the head of all nineteenth-century closet dramas.¹⁹¹ There are numerous virtues in the play. For ex-

¹⁸⁹Peter Butter, Shelley's Idols of the Cave, p. 82.

¹⁹⁰King-Hele, op. cit., p. 131.

¹⁹¹White, op. cit., p. 485.

ample, the conventional blank verse, while not inspired, usually flows smoothly enough and, in certain passages, becomes quite dramatic. Beatrice's speech to Bernardo and Lucretia, just before her song of comfort to her mother and brother, is very effective in conveying a convincing, conversational tone by an articulate, yet distressed young woman. The entire Act V was thought by Mrs. Shelley to be Shelley's greatest achievement.¹⁹²

Although a constantly pounding tone of doom is never relieved in the play, as Shakespeare might have done, one understands a certain viewer's observation upon leaving a performance of the play, "Now I know what Aristotle meant by Catharsis."¹⁹³ Also, another viewer commented on the great effort needed ". . . to grasp Shelley's magnificent imagery."¹⁹⁴ Shelley himself seemed rather successful in his desire to blend imagery with passion using only those images which seemed natural in meaning and in scope. He allows only a few images to develop to any length beyond a line or two, and even these are simple and natural, i.e., the lamp-father image in Act III, so that they call little attention to themselves. Besides plausible dialogue, powerful emotion, and appropriate imagery, Shelley also manages to sustain tension throughout much of the play, although at least one of his devices for sustaining this tension shows his immaturity in

¹⁹²Mrs. Shelley, op. cit., p. 337.

¹⁹³Cameron and Frenz, op. cit., p. 1104.

¹⁹⁴Ibid., p. 1085.

handling the dramatic form. For instance, on two separate occasions, heavy footsteps are heard outside the door, leaving everyone fearful of the entrance of the dreaded Count. In each case, the door is opened by a minor character, making at least the second set of heavy footsteps appear as an obvious device for tension building and, therefore, a device resented by the audience.

Another minor point has been made concerning Beatrice's "dumb remarks" about hers and her mother's hair as they are being led away to the execution.¹⁹⁵ From the modern reader's point of view, these remarks are not "dumb," but only somewhat inarticulate and pointless:

Here, Mother, tie
 My girdle for me, and bind up this hair
 In any simple knot; ay, that does well.
 And yours I see is coming down. How often
 Have we done this for one another; now
 We shall not do it any more. My Lord
 We are quite ready. Well, 'tis very well.
 (V.iv.159-165)

Not all go to their death with the preparedness and dignity of a Socrates, particularly accompanied by a weak, hysterical mother. Certainly, if the fastening onto of such trivia keeps the mind, especially a young mind, from faltering over the immensity of death, should any critic relentlessly find fault? It is this use of understatement that shows Shelley's restraint, for he must have been sorely tempted, considering his other poems, to soar above death, at least in memorable language.

¹⁹⁵Olwen W. Campbell, Shelley and the UnRomantics, p. 239.

Cameron and Frenz summarize reasons for the present general non-acceptance of the play as a stage drama. They list the incest theme, the concept of Shelley as an "ineffectual angel," and the adverse remarks of the 1886 critics, who were morally prejudiced, as the major faults found by the play's harshest critics.¹⁹⁶ These reasons, however, seem artificial and outmoded. Actually, the failure of The Cenci as a stage drama lies in three other characteristics of the work: (1) the play's obvious borrowings from Shakespeare, for ". . . drama cannot succeed unless its idiom is contemporary, and . . . imitating Shakespeare is the shortest road to ruin";¹⁹⁷ (2) the play's structural weaknesses; and finally, (3) Shelley's sudden shift of emphasis from Beatrice to the oppressive Papal judges, brought about by Shelley's constant concern for tyranny. In The Cenci, he obviously relied, to some degree, on the works of the famous dramatists of the past and their knowledge in the handling of classical drama. He gave careful attention to the plausibility of Beatrice's tragic flaw. As in the ancient Greek play, the dramatic tone of The Cenci is never relieved, and in respect to plot, character, thought, and spectacle, the play basically fulfills Aristotle's criteria for tragedy. Camillo even fulfills many of the functions of the Greek chorus.¹⁹⁸ There are also traces of a Gothic influence, as illustra-

¹⁹⁶Cameron and Frenz, op. cit., p. 1105.

¹⁹⁷King-Hele, op. cit., p. 341.

¹⁹⁸Ibid., p. 132.

ted in the incest theme, in the wild and secluded palace to which the Cenci family retreats, and even in the use of the name, Beatrice, one which is also found in The Monk.

Yet, Shelley's greatest borrowing was obviously from Shakespeare. This Shakespearean influence, found profusely in the stage dramas of other romantics, is present in all of Shelley's plays: Charles the First, Fragments of an Unfinished Drama, Hellas, Prometheus Unbound, and naturally, The Cenci.¹⁹⁹ By 1819 he was well versed in Shakespearean drama, and in The Cenci alone King-Hele finds over twenty possible verbal echoes: "When his own mind was blank, Shelley seems to have filled the vacuum by unconsciously recasting some half-remembered Shakespearean scene. This was unwise of him, for everyone . . ." is familiar with works of the master tragedian.²⁰⁰

Clark charts parallels in the plot with Macbeth:

1. Both plays contain a strong-willed woman, who is the main-spring of the dramatic action;
2. Both plays contain the murder of an old man;
3. This murder is plotted by the strong-willed woman;
4. The first murder in Macbeth is committed by the principals' in The Cenci, it is attempted by them;
5. The second murder in Macbeth is by assassins; in The Cenci the second attempt is by assassins.²⁰¹

Wilson finds parallels in character with Othello:

1. Orsino and Iago are both ruthless figures;
2. Their accomplices, Giacomo and Roderigo are tools, who become caught in the net of intrigue;
3. Beatrice and Desdemona are both noble and virtuous, and

¹⁹⁹Clark, op. cit., p. 269.

²⁰⁰King-Hele, op. cit., p. 128.

²⁰¹Clark, op. cit., p. 278.

both overcome their destinies enough to preserve their purity of character.²⁰²

Thus, while The Cenci has the necessary components of tragedy in its progression of inevitability, its tension and its characters of tragic stature, ". . . its borrowed technique robs it of subsidiary dramatic qualities and hampers its success as an acting play."²⁰³

One interesting adjunct to a discussion of Shakespeare's influence lies in Shelley's use of animal imagery. Shelley is well known for his imagery, but seldom does he include animals among his favorite images. Yet, in The Cenci there are over eighteen references to the animal kingdom. This unusually large number (for Shelley) seems to be a direct influence of Shakespeare's use of vivid animal imagery. Besides the expected heraldic images, such as the deer and the tiger, one finds serpents, toads, panthers, scorpions, hounds, bloodhounds, dogs, and a preponderance of worms.

A second major weakness of The Cenci is its structure. King-Hele offers the following list of structural flaws:

1. Everything happens behind the scenes; there is little to no action on stage;
2. The scene changes are too frequent;
3. The speeches are overly long;
4. There are more soliloquies than in Hamlet;
5. There is too much talk between two persons only and not enough in the cut and thrust of real conversation.²⁰⁴

Bates concludes that The Cenci cannot possibly be an acting drama:

²⁰²Sara Ruth Watson, "Shelley and Shakespeare: An Addendum," PMLA, LV (1940), 612.

²⁰³King-Hele, op. cit., p. 128.

²⁰⁴Ibid., p. 127.

A play, one of whose acts fails to advance the plot in the least, ten of whose scenes are purely conversation and without action, and four-fifths of whose speeches are of impossible length, is surely not to be called an acting drama.²⁰⁵

In addition to certain structural weaknesses in plot and Shelley's obvious borrowings from Shakespeare, The Cenci possesses one last major flaw, represented in the blatant intrusion of the Papal judges in the last scenes. Theoretically, a scene before the Papal court may have been necessary, because Beatrice should be allowed to face her accusers in order to achieve the highest dramatic effect upon the audience. Such a scene would emphasize her noble character and point up the tragedy of her downfall. The audience could, then, be sympathetic toward her, even though she is a murderess, because of the mitigating circumstances surrounding her tragedy. The audience would also tend to disparage her judges, simply because they show no mercy. However, not content with the naturally sympathetic tendencies of his audience, Shelley chose to dwell on the oppressive behavior of the Papal judges, stressing their greed and insidious reasoning, their intense need for self-protection rather than justice. In this interrupting of the inherently dramatic tragedy of the scene, Shelley creates yet another tyrant for his audience to hate. Yet it is this sudden division of emotional focus between Beatrice and the Papal judges that has led one critic to comment, "There is more rhetoric than action; little sense of climax, and far too much indulgence in

²⁰⁵E. S. Bates, A Study of Shelley's Drama *The Cenci*, p. 60.

anticlimax."²⁰⁶ Rather than allowing the drama to follow its own course of action, Shelley yielded to his ever present concern for oppression by creating the Papal tyrants, then permitting them to go unpunished. The play leaves one with cluttered emotions. One is grieved over Beatrice's fate, yet perplexed by the almost unbelievable evil suddenly manifest in plot toward the end of the play.

Shelley was disappointed in his drama. He is quoted as saying, "I don't think much of it. It gave me less trouble than anything I have written of the same length."²⁰⁷ Perhaps, one never does value quite as much those things which flow easily; yet this fact in itself should be no judge of greatness. A close inspection of The Cenci must lead to the conclusion that it was certainly superior to the dramas of its time and that its author possessed distinct dramatic talents. However, the play itself cannot be truly called a stage play; and as a work of literature, it fails to become great tragedy.

In 1819, Shelley wrote The Cenci and completed his lyrical drama, Prometheus Unbound. The latter work he had begun in 1818 near Venice, and had completed the first three acts in Rome in the spring of 1819.²⁰⁸ He added the fourth act in November of that same year.²⁰⁹ For some time, he had been considering various sources suitable for lyrical drama. Among these were Tasso, Job, and

²⁰⁶Cameron and Frenz, op. cit., p. 1090.

²⁰⁷Campbell, op. cit., p. 197.

²⁰⁸King-Hele, op. cit., p. 169. ²⁰⁹Loc. cit.

Prometheus, but he finally selected Aeschylus's hero.²¹⁰ Later, in a letter from Rome, he described his now completed drama as being rather unusual in character and structure, of whose execution he was rather proud.²¹¹ Most critics believe it Shelley's masterpiece, Read describing it as ". . . the greatest expression ever given to humanity's desire for intellectual light and spiritual liberty."²¹²

The second play in Aeschylus's trilogy had, as its hero, a titan, Prometheus, who, against the wishes of Jupiter, the ruler of heaven, had given fire to man. For this crime, Prometheus was chained to a rock, hurled into the abyss, and left to unimaginable tortures and horrors until Jupiter should decide to revoke his sentence, an act that would occur only if and when Prometheus divulged a secret concerning a threat to Jupiter's reign. This story is basically the plot of Prometheus Bound, and probably the vegetarian author of Queen Mab felt little concern for the matter.

By 1818, however, Shelley had become very much interested in the Prometheus legend and desired to write Prometheus Unbound. The third play of Aeschylus's trilogy had been lost, but its plot was known to have been based upon a theme of the reconciliation between Jupiter and Prometheus. This turn of events was alien to Shelley's nature, however, for he could not rationalize any peaceful settlement between the champion of mankind and mankind's oppressor.²¹³ The only character

²¹⁰Hutchinson, op. cit., p. 271. ²¹¹Ibid., p. 274.

²¹²Herbert Read, The True Voice of Feeling, p. 271.

²¹³Hutchinson, op. cit., p. 205.

type that approached Shelley's conception of Prometheus was that of Milton's Satan, yet Prometheus was of a greater stature, because he was the ". . . highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature, impelled by the purest and the truest motives to the best and noblest ends," and, furthermore, was free of the ambition, envy, and revenge inherent to Milton's Satan.²¹⁴

One necessarily limits his analysis of Prometheus Unbound essentially to three considerations: (1) the establishing of the presence of tyranny as a motivating force, (2) an examination of the structure of this lyrical drama, and (3) an analysis of Shelley's Prometheus as a type of deified romantic rebel.

The myth of Shelley's Prometheus Unbound is fairly simple. Jupiter has chained the hero, because he had helped men to improve themselves. (Shelley has Prometheus give to man not only fire, but hope, love, music, art, mathematics, control over disease, and fine speech, i.e., thought.) Prometheus, however, is not to be freed until he yields up his secret--that Jupiter will be dethroned by his own child. Ironically, Jupiter had earlier gained control of heaven with the help of Prometheus by dethroning Saturn, his own father. At the beginning of the play, Prometheus, wiser now after thirty centuries of captivity, recalls his curse upon Jupiter and repents the violence, then, of his curse. This expression of pity, although felt earlier by Prometheus when he had given mankind gifts in the defiance of

²¹⁴Loc. cit.

Jupiter's wrath, he has never, until this moment directed toward his enemy. Mercury, next, brings Furies to torture Prometheus. Upon their failure to humble him, the spirits attempt to soothe the titan with lyrics of hope and love. Prometheus, then, thinks of Asia, his long-lost bride, and she responds by paying a visit to Demogorgon, the destined child of Jupiter, in his lair far beneath the physical world. As a result, Demogorgon ascends to heaven for the purpose of deposing Jupiter, and Jupiter himself is hurled into the abyss. Prometheus, then, is unchained by Hercules and reunited with Asia.

Since it is based upon myth, Prometheus Unbound lends itself to an almost endless allegorization. Many readers have delighted in evolving multi-leveled structures of meaning, and one scholar has suggested an interesting political interpretation that reflects Shelley's hatred of political tyranny. For example, Jupiter's fall may be interpreted as Shelley's sign of the triumph of reform; Prometheus becomes a representative of enlightened political reformers; Mercury becomes a spineless drudge in the pay of the ruler (Jupiter); and the Furies become sycophants growing fat upon the spoils, persecuting reformers.²¹⁵ Unfortunately, Asia and Demogorgon do not readily fit into this interpretation. Summarily, however, it is generally accepted that at least on one level Prometheus represents man, or the mind of man; Asia epitomizes love or nature; Jupiter represents tyranny which man must overcome; and Demogorgon represents the law of

²¹⁵King-Hele, op. cit., p. 198.

Necessity, unable to function except when motivated by the mind.²¹⁶

In 1817, Shelley began to compose his narrative poem, The Revolt of Islam, in which a noble young hero, Laon, accompanied by his beloved Cyntha, attempts to reform the wickedness in the world, a wickedness usually symbolized in priests and kings. The couple's struggle is long and involved, ending in death at the stake. The weaknesses of this cluttered and meandering plot must surely have been evident to Shelley, seldom a pretentious critic of his own works. His theme of the oppression of mankind, however, seems to have been his major reason for the poem, and it is this theme, albeit comprehended on a different level, that he repeats a year later in Prometheus Unbound. In his drama, however, Shelley chose not to depict man's slow progress toward perfection, as he had done in The Revolt of Islam, but rather to show man at one symbolic hour--"The hour of the world's redemption through man's act of self-reform."²¹⁷

Act I is a harsh depiction of cruel oppression brought about by Jupiter. Prometheus, described, here, as a "proud sufferer" and "awful sufferer," has been chained for thirty centuries because of his defiance of the tyrant, during which time he has suffered immense physical and mental torture. So has man suffered, Prometheus's object of pity, and Earth even tells of her tortured surface:

Lightning and Inundation vexed the plains;
Blue thistles bloomed in cities; foodless toads

²¹⁶Cameron, op. cit., pp. xxxi-xxxii.

²¹⁷Carlos Baker, Shelley's Major Poetry: The Fabric of a Vision, p. 92.

Within voluptuous chambers panting crawled:
 When Plague had fallen on man, and beast, and worm,
 And Famine; and blank blight on herb and tree;
 And in the corn, and vines, and meadow-grass,
 Teemed ineradicable poisonous weeds
 Draining their growth, for my wan breast was dry
 With grief; and the thin air, my breathe was stained
 With the contagion of a mother's hate
 Breathed on her child's destroyer. . . .
 (I.169-179)

Furthermore, Earth dares not repeat Prometheus's curse for him,
 ". . . lest Heaven's fell King / Should hear, and link me to some
 wheel of pain / More torturing than the one whereon I roll" (I.139-
 142). Part of Prometheus's torture by the Furies includes a vision
 revealing the failure of the French Revolution:

The nations thronged around, and cried aloud,
 As with one voice, Truth, liberty, and love!
 Suddenly fierce confusion fell from heaven
 Among them: there was strife, deceit, and fear:
 Tyrants rushed in, and did divide the spoil.
 This was the shadow of the truth I saw.
 (I.650-655)

In Act II, when Asia asks of Demogorgon to explain who it is that
 had brought evil into the world, Demogorgon answers, "He reigns,"
 obviously in reference to Jupiter; yet, understanding Shelley, one
 thinks the remark possibly also refers to any individual who rules
 another.

Admitting in his Preface to possessing "a passion for reforming
 the world," Shelley assures his readers that, nonetheless, didactic
 poetry was not his intention in Prometheus Unbound.²¹⁸ To the extent
 that his concern about and presentation of oppression do not weaken

²¹⁸Hutchinson, op. cit., p. 207.

the structure of Prometheus Unbound, he sustains his intention. Certainly, his narrative clatter of The Revolt of Islam is replaced by "a clean symmetry," almost as if he had found the dramatic medium to be his most powerful means of expression.²¹⁹ The play would surely never be successfully staged, primarily because a physical depiction of these events would necessarily limit the scope of this drama. Furthermore, the characters are truly supernatural beings, creatures of the mind alone.²²⁰ The settings range from craggy mountain tops, to Indian vales, to the deeps beyond the physical world, to heaven itself. Yet, the richness and range of Shelley's settings blend perfectly with the progression of his plot.

In one respect, the structure of the play has been harshly criticized. A majority of critics seem to think that there is only one action in the entire work--that which occurs when Prometheus first shows pity for his enemy; and they maintain that, after this action, the remaining 2557 lines merely unravel the consequences of this concern.²²¹ This view is a harsh evaluation and, according to Pottle, Weaver and King-Hele, untrue.²²² Actually, one discovers that Acts I and II are parallel in time sequence, making Asia's recognition

²¹⁹Baker, op. cit., p. 93.

²²⁰Bennett Weaver, Prometheus Unbound, p. 15.

²²¹Frederick A. Pottle, "The Role of Asia in the Dramatic Action of Shelley's Prometheus Unbound," Shelley: A Collection of Critical Essays, p. 133.

²²²Loc. cit.; Weaver, op. cit., p. 14; and King-Hele, op. cit., pp. 203-206.

of impending activity and subsequent journey to Demogorgon almost as significant as Prometheus's display of pity. Possibly, the effortless manner in which Prometheus overthrows Jupiter disappoints some critics, who evidently think the tyrant ruler of heaven capable of a grander and more episodic fight. However, dramatic unity and Shelley's original concept of the symbolic hour require a face-to-face, rapid dethronement. There is also no philosophical necessity for the dethronement to be violent or difficult, for Shelley believed that mankind had only to will that evil would depart, and it would vanish.²²³

There is one aspect of Shelley's dramaturgy that seems touched with magic--his ability to apply a variety of metre to the occasion. For example, King-Hele finds thirty-six distinct verse forms, ranging from the noble blank verse of the beginning to the pounding tetrameters of the Furies (reminiscent of Shakespeare), to the hauntingly beautiful lyrics.²²⁴ The lyrics also serve as a Greek chorus, rejoicing or mourning as the occasion requires, or acting as commentaries or transitions.²²⁵ In any evaluation of the structure of this play, one should finally recall that the action is, in reality, within the mind, as the mind contemplates laws and principles, so that its structure must be fluid, moving away from circumstance toward

²²³Hutchinson, op. cit., p. 271.

²²⁴King-Hele, op. cit., p. 204.

²²⁵Baker, op. cit., p. 117.

song. Certainly Act IV, one long choric hymn to the new age, while unnecessary to the dramatic development of the play, is perfectly compatible to the lyric form Shelley was innovating.

One has previously traced the beginning and development of the ideal romantic rebel, a hero who held that the mind was "its own origin of ill and end" and whose nobility and grandeur of character were enhanced by sensitivity and an intense desire for knowledge. When Shelley stated that man's ". . . own mind is his law; his own mind is all things to him . . .," it is evident that he was in full sympathy with one of the prime tenets held by the romantic rebel.²²⁶ To what extent Shelley was able to develop such a hero may be shown in Prometheus Unbound.

At the beginning of Act I, Prometheus possesses the essential characteristics of the romantic rebel. His hatred of oppression, the strength of his will and the magnitude of his character make him fully the equal of Byron's Cain. But Shelley is not yet fully satisfied with his hero; there is something obviously lacking. Prometheus, at the beginning of Act I, does not possess the largeness of spirit that would allow him to pity his enemy; the titan's hate is still too strong. Yet, Shelley realized that hate in itself is crippling, and he would not permit his hero to indulge in such emotional luxury at this time in the drama. Prometheus's words, "I pity thee," indicate

²²⁶Quoted in Roger Ingpen and Walter E. Peck (eds.), The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley, VII, 65.

the beginning of Shelley's desired change.

There occurs, next, an obvious parallel between Shelley's titan and Christ. Prometheus's curse, repeated by Jupiter's phantasm, is enlightening in this following respect:

Let thy malignant spirit move
 In darkness over those I love:
 On me and mine I imprecate
 The utmost torture of thy hate.
 (I.276-279)

Obviously, Shelley's import, here, is the opposite of Christ's pleadings to take on mankind's sufferings; however, Prometheus soon retracts the curse. The torture by the Furies is also a strong indication that Shelley wished associations to be made between Prometheus and Christ. The torture is presented as a series of tableaux mentally excruciating to Prometheus, the protector and savior of mankind. One of the Furies reveals ". . . a woful sight: a youth / With patient looks nailed to a crucifix" (I.584-585). Fiendishly clever, the Furies mock Prometheus, saying that the knowledge which Prometheus gave to man became a thirst that turned into a raging fever; so, too, the wisdom of the figure on the Crucifix became evil: "His words outlived him, like swift poison / Withering up truth, peace, and pity" (I.548-549). Prometheus stares upon the Christ until he takes on the characteristics of Christ: "Drops of bloody agony flow / From his white and quivering brow" (I.564-565). Although the sight is unbearable, Prometheus observes the anguish in the eyes of the other sufferer, the flowing blood from the thorn wounds, the "sick throes" of the body, the "pale fingers" playing with the gore in the

pierced palms. The Furies in taunting words exult over the perversions made by the followers of the Christ, with this final thrust: "they know not what they do" (I.631). It is obvious that Shelley saw certain parallels between Prometheus and Christ: both faced and overcame temptation, both possessed pity, both were serene in their self-mastery, both became the saviors of mankind in their separate myths. In fact, it is in the following of Christ's dictum, "Love your enemies," that Shelley's Prometheus was allowed to conquer evil and bring about reform.²²⁷

There are several differences between Prometheus and Christ, however, to be pointed out. Prometheus possesses hubris, or pride, and Christ, of course, does not. Prometheus also possesses a pagan love of Nature (Asia), has a thirst for knowledge, and, most importantly, personifies the creative spirit of man that will allow man to develop to his fullest capacity.²²⁸ Grabo even further identifies Prometheus with God: When Prometheus destroys Jupiter, he ". . . discovers that he himself is God. God is not outside man's universe but exists in man himself."²²⁹ Thus, the romantic rebel is deified, and the last lines of the play offer a fitting hymn to his struggle:

To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite;
To forgive wrongs darker than death or night;

²²⁷R. M. Smith, Types of Philosophic Drama, p. 347.

²²⁸Paul Grabo, Prometheus Unbound: An Interpretation, p. 189.

²²⁹Ibid., p. 196.

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.570-578)

In his dramas, Shelley has presented the world with powerful and unforgettable portraits of tyranny. On the level of mankind, this tyranny is epitomized in the character of Count Cenci, whose oppressive acts against family, church, and mankind are monstrous in scope. On the level of the cosmos, Jupiter becomes the oppressor not only of mankind, but of the universe, as well. Yet Shelley's natural tendencies toward hope and the perfectibility of man, while subdued in The Cenci, are allowed to develop fully in Prometheus Unbound. A great reform of the universe, while not imminent, is still a part of Shelley's plan, and his lyrical drama gives full vent to his warnings to all oppressors that tyranny breeds its own destructive forces. In Shelley's plays, Count Cenci is murdered by his own child, driven to desperation, and Jupiter is dethroned by his son, Demogorgon. Thus, Shelley expresses his most cherished hope--that mankind will eventually throw off evil and live in the millenium which he describes in his fourth act of Prometheus Unbound.

CHAPTER V

THE DRAMAS OF THE ENGLISH ROMANTICS: THEIR VALUE AND PLACE IN LITERATURE

The English Romantic Period, dating from 1798 to 1832, was a time of change and innovation. Upheavals in political, social, religious, economic, and philosophical thought were directly echoed in the literature, where new forms and experimentation, dedicated to the causes of imagination and nature, expressed rebellion against eighteenth-century rationalism and glorified the individual.

The major literary figures of the period, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Byron, and Shelley, found their truest expression of these trends in a magnificent, soulful poetry, only Coleridge making an impressive mark in the field of prose. Nevertheless, these five poets experimented in the writing of drama, a medium whose requirements of objective handling and technical knowledge would, at first, have appeared to be alien to their individual natures. All five authors attempted to write stage dramas, basically following the accepted patterns of the drama of their day. Byron and Shelley also attempted a new dramatic form, one far more lyrical and free of the restraints of any pattern or prescribed form. These two poets were able to achieve a height of creativity in their lyrical dramas that far surpassed the formulated stage dramas of the larger group.

The reasons for these five poets' attempts at dramaturgy are various. At least three admitted that they chose drama for financial gain, surely a reasonable consideration at any time when a poet must depend either upon the marketing of his poems and/or the generosity of friends for his sustenance. All of these poets were also students of Shakespeare, and the opportunity to imitate the master, as well as to demonstrate their wide study of other great tragedians, must have been appealing. Most of these men had some familiarity with the theater of their day, and, although they deplored the tastes and behavior of the contemporary audience (Shelley held comedy to be an anathema, worthy of only his lowest contempt), the appeals of financial gain and obvious advantages in the medium were dominant.

Unfamiliarity with the intricacies of staging and character delineation through dialogue and action is evident in their works, reflecting a degree of amateurism. However, the major problem with these stage plays lies in the poets' inability to restrain their rhetorical or didactic manner of expression against tyranny and oppression. Although only Wordsworth expressly states his desire to "teach a lesson," still it is evident that the revolt against tyranny was strong enough in the emotional natures of these men to dominate the themes of their plays.

Their plays, as a whole, are not inferior works; certainly, in several instances, particularly in The Cenci, they surpass the dramas of their time. Yet, the drama during the Romantic Period was at a low ebb, some critics considering it the lowest ebb in the history of

the English stage. Two reasons contributed to this condition: the people, caught up in the sentimentality of the novels and poor poetry of the time, demanded melodrama, and, also, these five poets could not artistically manage in their composing of the dramas their inherent tendency toward self-expression. Consequently, their plays, not really suitable for the stage, were relegated to the closet. There, they may prove to be enlightening to today's scholars of the Romantic Period. There, too, their oftentimes beautiful poetry may find an appropriate and appreciative audience. No critic could deem worthless any work that contained such masterful imagery as Ludolph's ravings before his death:

These draperies are fine, and, being a mortal,
 I should desire no better; yet, in truth,
 There must be some superior costliness,
 Some wider-domed high magnificence!
 I would have, as a mortal I may not,
 Hangings of heaven's clouds, purple and gold,
 Slung from the spheres; gauzes of silver mist,
 Loop'd up with cords of twisted wreathed light,
 And tassell'd round with weeping meteors!

(Otho the Great, V.v.31-39)

Two of these five poets, furthermore, attempted to produce a new dramatic form, completely unstageable because of its lack of regard for traditional and technical demands of the stage. Characteristic of these dramas is a freedom from any artificial form, and an intense, lyrical expression. The lyrical drama furnished Byron with a vehicle, free enough from tradition, to allow him to develop ideas and themes inherent to his very nature. He poured out his ego into his plays, and their freedom of expression gave impetus to the development of a new type of hero, a superman, a romantic rebel who epitomized all of

those ideals held dear by the romantic poets themselves. The character of Manfred is the initial stage in Byron's development of the ideal romantic rebel. He possesses the necessary qualities of magnitude in character, dignity, and soul, the eager searching for knowledge, the pride, the hatred of tyranny, and, most especially, the belief that man is his own judge, his mind the sole source of good and evil. Manfred lacks sensitivity, however, or an ability to care and feel for others. It is the possession of this last quality, in addition to others, that also marks Byron's Cain as a fully developed romantic rebel. Shelley, not to be outdone, goes one step further in deifying the romantic rebel, and in Prometheus Unbound his concept of the romantic rebel reaches its greatest heights. Prometheus not only suffers immeasurably yet unyieldingly under a ruler tyrant but, through love, manages to overcome oppression, to save mankind, and to create a golden age on earth.

Thus, the major contribution of the lyric dramas of Byron and Shelley lies in the creation of an ideal romantic rebel, a hero who captures the very essence of the romantics' dream of a new order brought about by the conquering and reforming of tyranny. These lyric dramas allow the freedom necessary to create, particularly in Prometheus Unbound, some of the language's most inspired poetry, and also provide a vehicle free enough for the expression of the ideal romantic rebel.

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