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Audrey G. Insch

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AUDREY G. INSCH.

English Blank Verse Tragedy from 1790 to 1825,

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A Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor  
of Philosophy of the University of Durham,  
1958.

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## Preface.

I would like to express my thanks to all who have helped me in the preparation of this thesis: the Governors of the John Reid Trust Scheme of Aberdeen who, by awarding me a three year research grant, enabled me to undertake the work; the University of Durham Library, both Durham and Newcastle divisions, whose librarians gave me every assistance; Dr. W. Douglas Simpson, Librarian of Aberdeen University, for the use of the University Library; the British Museum staff in the Reading and Manuscript rooms and in the Newspaper Library at Colindale for their friendly co-operation, and the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh, particularly Miss Marion Linton, an Assistant Keeper.

In common with all students of Dramatic Literature, I am deeply indebted to Professor Allardyce Nicoll, without whose works such studies as my own would be a formidable if not an impossible task.

Above all I wish to record my gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Clifford Leech of Durham University, without whose friendly guidance and wise counsel this thesis could never have been completed.

Throughout I have used the following abbreviations in the foot-notes:-



- Doran = Their Majesties' Servants: Annals of the English Stage from Thomas Betterton to Edmund Keen; edited and revised by R.W.Lowe, 3 vols. 1888.
- Fitzgerald = P. Fitzgerald, A New History of the English Stage, 2 vols. 1882.
- Genest = J. Genest, Some Account of the English Stage from the Restoration in 1660 to 1830, 10 vols. 1832.
- Hazlitt = The Complete Works of William Hazlitt Centenary Edition, ed. P.P. Howe, 21 vols. 1934.
- Hunt = Leigh Hunt's Dramatic Criticism, 1808-1831, ed. L.H. and C.W. Houtchens, 1950.
- Nicoll = Allardyce Nicoll, History of English Drama, 1660-1900, i, 1955; ii, 1952; iii, 1952; iv, 1955.
- P.M.L.A. = Publications of the Modern Language Association of America.

For theatre abbreviations I have used the familiar ones of Professor Allardyce Nicoll :

C.G. = Covent Garden, Theatre Royal.

D.L. = Drury Lane, Theatre Royal.

H.<sup>1</sup> = Haymarket, King's Theatre.

H.<sup>2</sup> = Haymarket, Theatre Royal.

"Blank verse is now, with one consent, allied  
To Tragedy, and rarely quits her side."

Byron, Hints from Horace, ll.117-118.

CHAPTER I.

Theatrical conditions, 1790-1825

In dealing with blank verse tragedy, from 1790 to 1825, we may not take it for granted that every play was written specifically for the stage; of the 249 plays in this period 165 have never been publicly performed. Byron, for example, was most anxious that his plays should not be performed,<sup>1</sup> as witness the legal action he took when Drury Lane, in defiance of his wishes, performed Marino Faliero, Doge of Venice, 25/iv/1821;<sup>2</sup> of lesser dramatists, W. Preston, in the Preface to The Siege of Ismail,<sup>3</sup> deprecates any theatrical performance of his plays. Nevertheless, the theatres of the time inevitably influenced the dramatists, either directly, by hopes of performance, such as stimulated Coleridge to write Osorio, with Mrs. Siddons and Kemble in mind;<sup>4</sup> or, indirectly, through their despair of the contemporary theatre which led them far from the stage into the rarified atmosphere of poetic dramas as was the case with H.H. Milman, for example,

1. Letters and Journals of Lord Byron, ed. R.E. Prothero, 1922, v.167, 218, 221, 223, 224, 229, 256-7, 285, 290, 295; The Works of Lord Byron: Poetry, ed. E.H. Coleridge, 1922, iv, 337; v, 9. (Hereafter referred to as Byron).
2. Letters and Journals of Lord Byron, v, 226, 288, 291.
3. 1794 (Anonymously).
4. Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. E.L. Griggs, 1956, i, 318.

whose first play, Fazio, performed at Covent Garden, 5/ii/1818, experienced throughout a most favourable reception,<sup>5</sup> but who finished his dramatic writing with a series of dramatic poems, which he acknowledges as not intended, and unsuitable for, the stage.<sup>6</sup> Another aspect of this is found in the antiquarian reconstructions cast in a pseudo-dramatic mould, fortified with long academic footnotes, such as H. Boyd provided for The Royal Message,<sup>7</sup> along with a postscript confirming the impression made by the play, stating that he was more interested in the theological than in the dramatic aspects of his play. Other would-be writers of tragedy were led astray by the conditions of the theatre, leaving "two bare boards and a passion" for such extravagances as Dr. J. Wolcot's glorious musical spectacle in The Fall of Portugal, where a scene "Discovers a View of the TAGUS" complete with the Portuguese fleet, several forts and spectators singing an ode,<sup>8</sup> or Mrs. M. Deverall's "Scotch Reel" which is sung as an interlude in

5. The Times, 6/ii/1818.

6. The Martyr of Antioch, 1822, introduction; The Fall of Jerusalem, 1820, introduction.

7. in Poems, chiefly Dramatic and Lyric, Dublin, 1793.

8. The Fall of Portugal, 1808, V,ii.

her tragedy, to the "Accompaniment of lively Music, a Tabor and Pipe";<sup>9</sup> and towards the melodramatic tragedies of Frances Burney,<sup>10</sup> W. Hayley,<sup>11</sup> M. Mitford,<sup>12</sup> Sir Martin Shee,<sup>13</sup> W. Sotheby,<sup>14</sup> J. Templeton,<sup>15</sup> and C.E. Walker,<sup>16</sup> who, by over-playing sensational elements, have made any tragic harmony impossible. The conditions which influenced the writers, one way or another, were (i) the system of Patent Houses, (ii) Theatrical Architecture, (iii) Character of the Stage, (iv) Actors and Managers, (v) Audiences.

(i) Patent Houses, and others.

Only three theatres in the City of London were licensed by the Lord Chamberlain for the performance of regular drama: Drury Lane and Covent Garden Theatres, the two patent houses from the Stage Licensing Act of 1737,<sup>17</sup> and The Little Theatre

9. Mary Queen of Scots; an Historical Tragedy, or, Dramatic Poem, 1792, III, iv.
10. "Fitzormond; or Cherished Resentment" in Tragic Dramas, chiefly for Representations in Private Families.... 1818
11. Eldora, 1811.
12. Julian, 1823.
13. Alasco, 1824.
14. Ellen, or, The Confession, 1816.
15. "The Shipwrecked Lovers" in Poems, Dublin, 1801.
16. Wallace, 1820.
17. 10 Geo. II, c. 28.

in the Haymarket which, under Foote's management in 1766, had obtained a summer licence for regular drama whilst the two patent houses were closed.<sup>18</sup> In addition there were numerous minor theatres, licensed for various kinds of entertainment, such as opera, ballet, pantomime, burlesque, equestrian performances and spectacles; only a few retained their identity from 1790 to 1825: "The King's Theatre" in the Haymarket, "The Royalty" - remodelled in 1816 and renamed the East London Theatre - and Sadler's Wells; of the many others Allardyce Nicoll lists 17 buildings - the titles frequently being changed - which had performances at some time within the period.<sup>19</sup> Outside the liberties of Westminster the theatres could perform what they pleased, legitimate or illegitimate drama, subject to the Lord Chamberlain's censorship.<sup>20</sup> Within reach of London, there were the Surrey Theatre, Blackfrairs Road, and The Richmond Theatre; The Surrey - formerly The Royal Circus<sup>21</sup> - staged the first performance of H.H. Milman's Fazio, 22/xii/1816<sup>22</sup> and M.A. Shee's

18. Nicoll, iii, 229.

19. Nicoll, iii, 229-230, 375; iv, 222-233.

20. Fitzgerald, ii, 437.

21. Nicoll, iv, 230, 232-3.

22. Ibid, iv, 356.

Alasco, 5/iv/1824, which was acted without a Lord Chamberlain's licence;<sup>23</sup> Richmond<sup>24</sup> regularly housed London performers during the summer months, and it was here that Professor Richardson's The Indians had its only recorded performance, round about 1790.<sup>25</sup>

In this situation, the two patent theatres were the only hope for a standard of good dramatic writing in the period, but on account of other factors to be considered, their size, the star system, financial troubles, their rivalry and their wooing of the populace, any new serious play had little chance of success. Had the smaller theatres been permitted to stage legitimate drama, it would have introduced an acceptable element of competition, as distinct from rivalry between two unchallenged theatres, and might have forced more people to realise that vast theatres, such as Drury Lane and Covent Garden, were really better suited to lavish, illegitimate spectacles, and that the minor theatres were better for legitimate drama, certainly the patent houses would have gained financially: Harris of Covent Garden declared in a

23. Ibid, iv, 400.

24. Ibid, iii, 237-8.

25. Ibid, iii, 302.

Chancery Suit that Covent Garden had not made a shilling on regular drama from 1809 to 1821, but had subsisted on pantomimes, spectacles and melodrama,<sup>26</sup> these appearing along with regular drama as part of the triple bill.

(ii) Theatrical Architecture.

The old Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, was abandoned in 1791, when Sheridan, the manager of the company decided to build a new one.<sup>27</sup> The old theatre was badly in need of repair, but the main motive was the financial gain to be expected from a new theatre with a capacity double that of the old.<sup>28</sup> This theatre, built by Holland,<sup>29</sup> was opened on 12th March, 1794, with a performance of Sacred Music, the first regular performance being on 21st April, 1794, when Kemble and Mrs. Siddons played in Macbeth.<sup>30</sup> It could hold 3,611 persons, or, in terms of box office receipts, £826. 6.0. when completely filled.<sup>31</sup> Its dimensions were, from east to west, 320 feet long; from north to south, 155 feet broad; roof width, 118 feet;<sup>32</sup> the

26. Theatrical Observer No. 3372, 5/x/1832.

27. Nicoll, iii, 229.

28. Fitzgerald, ii, 331.

29. Nicoll, iii, 229.

30. Genest, vii, 149.

31. Fitzgerald, ii, 380.

32. Ibid, ii, 340.



proscenium opening was 43 feet wide, 38 feet high, with a stage depth of no less than 92 feet.<sup>33</sup>

This theatre was burned down on 24th February, 1809.<sup>34</sup> Wyatt designed a new one, opened on 10th October, 1812, with Elliston and Miss Kelly in Hamlet.<sup>35</sup> It was only slightly smaller, seating well over 3,200 persons, with a proscenium opening of 33 feet.<sup>36</sup> In 1819 Elliston took over the management and, under Beazley's direction, reconstructed the interior; apart from this, and other, minor, alterations, the Theatre Royal remains unchanged to the present day.<sup>37</sup>

The proprietors of Covent Garden, the other patent theatre, greatly enlarged the house in 1792,<sup>38</sup> under Holland's direction,<sup>39</sup> to hold 3,013 persons.<sup>40</sup> This theatre was burned down on 20th September, 1808, and a new building, designed by Smirke, was opened on 18th September, 1809,<sup>41</sup> with Kemble

33. Allardyce Nicoll, The Development of the Theatre, 1927, p.185.

34. Nicoll, iv, 224.

35. Genest, viii, 351-2.

36. Allardyce Nicoll, The Development of the Theatre, 1927 p.185.

37. Nicoll, iv, 224.

38. Ibid, iii, 229.

39. Boaden, Memoirs of the Life of John Philip Kemble, Esq... 1825, ii, 68.

40. Gilliland, The Dramatic Mirror, 1808, i, 135-8, quoted by Nicoll, iv, 223.

41. Nicoll, iv, 223.

and Mrs. Siddons, in Macbeth,<sup>42</sup> evidently a recognised piece for opening a new theatre. The auditorium was 51 feet by 52 with four tiers, each containing twenty-six boxes; the proscenium was 42 feet wide and 36 feet high; the stage 68 feet by 82.<sup>43</sup> The overall size was about 220 feet long and 170 broad.<sup>44</sup> It held 3,000 persons and the receipts from a full house were equal to nearly £700.<sup>45</sup> To meet the expenses involved, £300,000,<sup>46</sup> new prices were charged, resulting in the notorious Old Price riots.<sup>47</sup> A committee, formed to examine the Covent Garden finances, demonstrated the precarious financial position of such a vast theatre,<sup>48</sup> but no attention was paid to the devastation such conditions wrought upon legitimate drama, both in acting and in contemporary composition. Had these two huge theatres provided pantomime and popular spectacles, they would, at best, have done no harm, but, licensed as they were to provide legitimate drama, they struggled to do so against disadvantages of their own making, which, combined with other tendencies of the period, reduced legitimate drama to a sad state.

42. Genest, viii, 178.

43. Allardyce Nicoll, The Development of the Theatre, 1927, p. 185.

44. Boaden, op.cit, ii, 488.

45. Fitzgerald, ii, 373.

46. Ibid, ii, 372.

47. Doran, iii, 337-345; Boaden, op.cit, ii, 492-516; Hazlitt, v, 357; xvii, 164; xviii, 397; xx, 150, 284; Hunt pp. 26-34.

48. Genest, viii, 171-173.

(iii) The Character of the Stage.

The solidity of a theatre makes any sudden innovation in the character of the stage unlikely, rather do we find gradual modifications. The history of the stage, from 1790 to 1825, covers the complete rebuilding of the two patent theatres,<sup>49</sup> but the character of the stage developed slowly, and, apart from sheer physical dimensions, independently of the rebuilding. The apron stage, for example, in its attenuated form,<sup>50</sup> still persisted, but it was used less and less, as the curtain was used more; managers discovered that the curtain could be used to give dramatic impact to a play, and also to conceal the increasing activity entailed in changing the ever more complicated sets. Stage directions begin to include "Curtain falls": J. Baillie finishes Ethwald<sup>51</sup> and Orra<sup>52</sup> with "the Curtain drops"; even Byron, disclaiming stage presentation, uses the curtain to conclude "The Two Foscari"<sup>53</sup> Marino Faliero<sup>54</sup> and Sardanapalus;<sup>55</sup> and J.S. Knowles directs "curtain falls" at the end of Act IV

49. Supra, (ii).

50. Nicoll, iii, 31.

51. A Series of Plays, 1802, ii, 237.

52. A series of Plays, 1812, iii, 100.

53. Byron, v, 196.

54. Ibid, iv, 461.

55. Ibid, v, 112.

of Caius Gracchus<sup>56</sup> as well as the end of Virginus,<sup>57</sup> 1820, which also boasts of a tableau, a new effect, traced by The Theatrical Repertory<sup>58</sup> to German influence. References to such usage in blank verse tragedy, are not as frequent as those in melodrama and spectacle, as might be expected from the smaller number of tragedies, but from legitimate and illegitimate productions it is plain that the curtain was becoming an accepted part of a performance.<sup>59</sup>

The old flat sets were gradually, and not uniformly, discarded in the pursuit of realism; as the Angustan conventionalism with its use of side-wings no longer attracted the audience, the box-set was introduced.<sup>60</sup> With the disappearance of side-wings and back-shutters, the movement began which has resulted in the modern "eavesdropping" box set whereby the audience so often make up, as it were, the fourth wall of a room. The built-up set was also introduced adding emphasis to the three dimensional effect, as, for example, in W. Capon's set for J. Baillie's De Monfort,

56. Dramatic Works, 1856, i, 49.

57. Ibid, i, 110.

58. No. IV, 10/x/1801; quoted by Nicoll, iv, 46-47.

59. Nicoll, iv, 46-47. It was not until 1850 that the end of an act meant "Curtain" and the beginning of the next act the rising of the curtain. (Allardyce Nicoll, The Development of the Theatre, 1927, p.190)

60. Nicoll, iii, 30-31; Allardyce Nicoll, The Development of The Theatre, 1927, p.174.

Drury Lane, 29/iv/1800: "In width this extraordinary elevation (a scenic church) was about 56 feet, 52 in depth, and 37 feet in height. It was positively a building."<sup>61</sup> Such innovations combined with the decreasing use of the apron stage, made the disappearance of proscenium doors inevitable;<sup>62</sup> the Drury Lane management tried to have them removed at the 1812 rebuilding, but failed owing to actors' prejudices; they finally succeeded in 1822.<sup>63</sup>

Along with these sets went a much more ambitious attempt to reproduce the period and atmosphere of a play, in the painted settings, than had previously been tried. William Capon<sup>64</sup> (1757-1827) painted a number of special scenes for Drury Lane's opening, on 21st April, 1794, designed to become stock company pieces; they were as historically accurate as possible, and all tending towards a Gothic style. Allardyce Nicoll in The Development of the Theatre<sup>65</sup> reproduces one of Capon's designs for Kemble's Shakespearian revivals at Covent Garden in 1809, an ancient scene, where we can see the Gothic

61. Boaden, Memoirs of the Life of John Philip Kemble, Esq., 1825, ii, 257.

62. Nicoll, iii, 30-31.

63. Ibid., iv, 31.

64. Allardyce Nicoll, The Development of the Theatre, 1927, p.174. Nicoll, iii, 26, 367.

65. Op. Cit., 1927, p.175.

influence and also a particularity of detail, which became more intensive as the nineteenth century progressed. De Loutherbrough<sup>66</sup> (circa 1735-1812) developed the more explicitly romantic tendency of the period in lavish settings of typical romantically conceived landscapes with rocks, high cliffs, mountains and water-falls - very different from the Angustan Garden or Temple, so conventionally portrayed.

Among all the changes in the character of the stage, lighting was the only sudden change. Garrick, in 1765, had introduced a new principle when he removed the circular candle chandeliers and substituted direct side lighting on the stage from perpendicular candle battens behind the proscenium and wings.<sup>67</sup> The discovery of gas lighting was, at first, regarded with suspicion, on account of the odour it produced, and the unaccustomed quality of its light; it was however, introduced to Drury Lane, both stage and auditorium, in 1817.<sup>68</sup>

The new style of lighting was too unfamiliar for

66. Allardyce Nicoll, The Development of the Theatre, 1927, pp.175-6; Nicoll, iii, 27, 367; Boaden, ii, 101-103.

67. Nicoll, iii, 38-39.

68. Ibid, iv, 35.

managers to use it freely in lighting experiments, for special effects, within this period,<sup>69</sup> so it had no influence upon the drama. Some of the other changes did have an effect upon dramatists. The new lavish settings suggested spectacle, which was encouraged by the patent theatres, as the managers fully realised how much an audience, familiar with the illegitimate theatre, gloried in lavish stage effects. Accordingly, the finer aspects of dramatic performance, particularly of blank verse tragedy, were blunted and well nigh lost in these huge patent theatres<sup>70</sup> more suited to spectacular pantomime than to the tragic intensity of, for example, the recognition scene in King Lear. This meant that intending writers of tragedy either purposefully eschewed the stage, or else pandered to the public, majority tastes: Byron has been cited as one who scorned stage production; most of the scorners, however, unlike Byron, were writers who had little or no talent, either poetic or dramatic; whilst the lowering of stage standards effected by those who indulged the public taste, for example, M.G. Lewis, meant that when, say, Shelley sought

69. Nicoll, iv, 35; Hunt pp.153-156.

70. infra (iv).

performance, he was refused,<sup>71</sup> so that his dramatic talent, which was considerable for a romantic poet, was turned towards the "lyric and classical drama" of Prometheus Unbound, which defies normal stage production. The average dramatists of the period, who were staged, for example, Knowles, Sheil, Sotheby, Maturin, achieved performance, not by working out a new dramatic idiom for their own time, but by relying largely upon Shakespeare, or the more melodramatic, Gothic elements of their popular contemporaries.

(iv) Actors, acting.

The leading actors of this period fall into three groups; the Kembles, who had succeeded the Garrick school; Kean and his disciples, who followed the Kembles; and the Macready group; although there is, of course, no clear cleavage between them, each group does have its peculiar characteristics.<sup>72</sup> The Kembles turned from Garrick's romantic style to a neo-classic poise and dignity, only broken by the needs of the growing romantic melodrama of the period, for example,

71. The Cenci was refused, cf. "A note on The Cenci" by Mary Shelley.

72. Throughout indebtedness to Alan S. Dower "Nature to Advantage Dressed: Eighteenth Century Acting", P.M.L.A. lviii (1943) 1002-1037; and "Players and Painted Stage. Nineteenth Century Acting" P.M.L.A. lxi (1946), 522-576.



for Rolla~~n~~ in Pizano by Sheridan, one of the many translations of Kotzebue's Die Spanier in Peru oder Rollas Tod.<sup>73</sup> With these actors acting became almost secondary to declamation. The Kembles - John Philip Kemble, Charles Kemble, Mrs. Siddons - addressed the audience with their speech and with their gesture, paying less attention to fellow actors on the stage with them.<sup>74</sup> This meant that the unity expected from a good company was often lacking, and, may, in part at least, be responsible, not only for the plays written obviously for one actor or another, with a plum of a part giving a chance for outstanding histrionics, but also for the tendency of blank verse tragedy to produce, not interesting speeches, but long<sup>ones,</sup> almost recitations which could be aimed at the audience, and, no doubt, most effectively, but which may not unite with the rest of the play dramatically; thus the acting style had encouraged an undramatic weakness all too common in the contemporary writers. There is a record of a comment made upon W. Sotheby's Julian and Agnes, Drury Lane, 25/iv/1801: a footnote to a review of this performance in The Dramatic Censor, No. XXXVII, May, 1801, runs -

"A gentleman being asked by the Manager of  
Covent Garden Theatre, who attended the first

73. Nicoll, iii, 64.

74. P.M.L.A. lviii, 1018.

representation of Julian and Agnes, in the Upper Boxes, what he thought of the New Tragedy? - replied not unaptly: "that it was an ill-made pudding, with only one plumb and two currants in it:- the plumb for Mr. Kemble - one currant for Mrs. Siddons - another for Miss Briggs - and the dough for the rest of the performers."

This school was also termed the "tea-pot school" because of the strange, artificial attitude so often adopted -

"one hand on the hip, the other extended and moving in curved lines, with a gradual descent to the side. When the speaker was tired of this he simply changed his attitude by throwing the weight of the body on the opposite leg, and going through the same routine gesture. "

75.

which resembled nothing more than a tea-pot. This adds to the impression of stylisation, constraint to the point of attitudinising. This kind of acting was not suited to an age becoming increasingly Romantic: inevitably it was succeeded by a new, fiery school epitomised by Kean.

Kean was a small, dark man, who went to violence in his passionate performances, scorning the Kemble classic restraint.<sup>76</sup> Macready mingled Kemble and Kean in his performances; from Kemble and the neo-classics he adopted a scholarly approach to a part, and a beauty of declamation; from Kean, an almost violent intensity<sup>77</sup> but not a perpetual one, as he added his own peculiar element what has been termed the domes-

75. J.E. Murdoch, The Stage, Philadelphia, 1880, p.49; quoted P.M.L.A. lxi, 528.

76. P.M.L.A., lxi, 533-4; Hazlitt, xviii, 216; v, 223-4.

77. P.M.L.A. lxi, 542.

tic style of acting. Hazlitt<sup>78</sup> says of his Othello:

"He whined and whimpered once or twice, and tried to affect the audience by affecting a pitiful sensibility, not consistent with the dignity and masculine imagination of the character."

79

The classical dignity of the Kembles, the romantic fire of Kean, have, in Macready, been affected by the sensibility of the age. Hazlitt considered him a "better orator than actor."<sup>80</sup> This style of acting was well suited to the great flood of domestic melodrama unleashed upon the stage in the nineteenth century.<sup>81</sup>

All the actors were affected by the size of the patent theatres: Mrs. Siddons became grander and more imposing;<sup>82</sup> having more room, but her style coarsened;<sup>83</sup> Kemble chanted, at times, to the gallery;<sup>84</sup> Kean almost caricatured himself in his fiery eagerness to impress;<sup>85</sup> Macready's domestic manner was no doubt intensified by a desire to sway and to control, by direct demands on public sentiment, his huge audiences. The actors certainly played in smaller provincial theatres, especially during the summer months, but their main job was to

78. Hazlitt, xviii, 279,355.

79. Hazlitt, v, 339.

80. Ibid, v.340.

81. Nicoll, iv, 100-120.

82. Boaden, Memoirs of Mrs. Siddons, 1827, ii, 287-289.

83. Fitzgerald, ii, 341-2, quoting from Boaden, Lives of the Kembles, i,310.

84. P.M.L.A. lviii, 1019.

85. Ibid, lxi, 533-4.

mesmerise a crowd of up to 3,000 people in these vast London circuses: inevitably their styles changed, the finer points were rubbed off, the delicate interplay of light and shade was bound to veer towards a starker black and white effect. Mrs. Siddons's most famous effect was an ear-piercing shriek and violent physical movement, when, as Mrs. Beverley in The Gambler, she hurled herself upon her husband's body,<sup>86</sup> an action which, in a small theatre today, would probably be, not so tragically moving, as bordering upon the melodramatically humorous.

The adulation of the star actor led to a regard for roles, as apart from plays; this is natural enough in Shakespeare productions, when an audience wants to see, let us say, Kemble's interpretation of Macbeth; but it does not do for contemporary drama, which becomes a kind of sportsfield for the actor to demonstrate his histrionic paces and is performed ~~only~~ only to exhibit an actor: this happened with, for example, Fazio by H.H. Milman, whose contemporary success may largely be explained by the power of the part of Fazio and not by the effect of the whole play.<sup>87</sup> A criticism of

86. P.M.L.A. lviii, 1019 - quoting from Macready's Reminiscences, i, 55-56.

87. Nicoll, iv, 167.

Bertram, Drury Lane, 16/v/1818, states: "This tragedy was presented, for the purpose of displaying the talents of Miss Macauley in Imogene."<sup>88</sup>

By this time actresses had long been naturally accepted upon the stage. The genius of Mrs. Siddons, the star of the Kemble school, has surely left a mark upon the tragedy of her time. Coleridge records that he had her in mind when writing Osorio;<sup>89</sup> in other plays her influence may be found: F. d'Arblay, Edwy and Elgiva; S. Lee, Almeyda, Queen of Granada; H.J. Pye, Adelaide; J. Baillie, De Monfort; Sotheby, Julian and Agnes, among some of the acted plays; of those not performed, her influence is often detected in the heroine,<sup>90</sup> with a statuesque magnificence in one who is capable of great depths of feeling - or as capable as the writer can make her. Miss O'Neill was the other outstanding actress of this period: she supplanted Miss Walstein at Crow Street, Dublin, then came to London and succeeded Mrs. Siddons.<sup>91</sup> In the rough divisions previously made, she belonged to the Kemble School but, playing with Kean, she was influenced by him, much to Hazlitt's

88. The Theatrical Inquisitor, xii, (May 1818), 370.

89. Supra, p.1.

90. Hazlitt, xviii, 278.

91. Doran, iii, 287-289.

disapproval,<sup>92</sup> into more violence than was natural to her whose peculiar excellence was that of "faultless nature";<sup>93</sup> and who established her reputation upon her "powers of sensibility."<sup>94</sup> She too inspired dramatists: she played Sheil's Adelaide in Adelaide, or The Emigrants,<sup>95</sup> and, high honour, she seems to have been in Shelley's mind for The Cenci.<sup>96</sup>

Naturally these leading stars, who so obviously drew the crowds,<sup>97</sup> demanded high salaries, which had to be paid whether they played or not. Accordingly the management could not afford to pay the dramatists very well,<sup>98</sup> another inducement ~~not~~ to write for the stage. Miss Mitford received only £200 for Julian (C.G. 1813); Knowles, £400 for Virginus (C.G. 1820);<sup>99</sup> and until the Copyright Bill of 1833 plays could be performed without any royalties going to the writer. The actors, however, received large salaries, as, for example, Mrs. Jordan, in the Drury Lane season 1801-02, averaged £31.10/- a week, and Kemble, as actor-manager £56.14/-.<sup>100</sup> The actor-

92. Hazlitt, v, 261-2; xviii 279.

93. Ibid, v, 257.

94. Ibid, v, 310.

95. Ibid, v, 310.

96. Shelley's Letters, ed. R. Ingpen, 1914, ii, 595-6, a note by R. Ingpen.

97. Hazlitt, xviii, 218.

98. Boaden, Memoirs of the Life of John Philip Kemble, Esq., 1825, ii, 354.

99. Nicoll, iv, 53.

100. Boaden, Memoirs of the Life of John Philip Kemble, Esq., 1825, ii, 354-5.

manager combination was another theatrical drawback, making the star system even more disastrous: as long as the manager could not be sure of a star role suitable for him as an actor, any play submitted was likely to be refused. Charles Bucke, in his Preface to The Italians, 1819, "containing the correspondence of the Author with the Committee of Drury Lane Theatre," attacks Kean, the actor-manager, who, according to Bucke, demanded that "tragedy must be martyred into a MONODRAME." W. Archer, in his W.C. Macready (1890) records that when Macready played Othello, Iago had to be nowhere, and when Iago, then Othello was the pipe he played upon.<sup>101</sup>

As in other aspects of this age, extremism has affected the theatre, so that the harmony, the stability gained by writers, actors, managers, each pulling his own weight has gone; the theatre and the writer suffered.

(v) Audiences.

The audiences affected both actors and writers. The houses were divided into the pit, usually keen playgoers, and critics; the boxes, a fashionable audience,<sup>102</sup> more concerned perhaps, with themselves and their own activities than with the performance, or merely concerned "to mock the silly fool, the

101. Op. Cit. pp.210-11 - quoted by Nicoll, iv, 48-49.

102. Hazlitt, xx, 284.

author";<sup>103</sup> and the gallery, full of a jumbled assortment of people ready to cheer or jeer at any moment and for any reason.<sup>104</sup> The audience was affected by the trends of the age: sensibility, shown in the novels as well as the drama, was strong at the end of the eighteenth century, but was gradually changing into a pre-Victorian prudery,<sup>105</sup> which in regarding a work of art looked for any offensiveness to protest over if found whereas with sensibility people tended rather to look within themselves to make sure they were exhibiting a proper "feeling". Whether it was ~~the~~ sensibility or prudery, the effects were similar, an unnatural response to the drama, as the audience, particularly the more fashionable element, was prevented from reacting spontaneously by reason of this pre-occupation. The gallery which might be expected to react spontaneously, had had its taste formed by the illegitimate drama, so it rejoiced, on the whole, in large spectacle, obvious effects, having little sympathy with the finer points of acting or dramatic writing; understandably, as in the new houses the gallery could hardly see the stage and acoustics

103. Allardyce Nicoll, The Development of the Theatre, 1925, p.170.

104. Nicoll, iii, 5-22; iv, 7-22; Hazlitt, xviii, 352-3; Boaden, Memoirs of the Life of John Philip Kemble, Esq. 1825, ii, 446-7; Doran, iii, 182-184.

105. Nicoll, iv, 14-15.



in the large theatres were bad.<sup>106</sup> The old Drury had provided a good gallery, usually filled with intelligent playgoers, the boxes held less in quantity, but of a better quality.<sup>107</sup> The triple bill encouraged a careless audience, as many of them attended not for the tragedy but for the farce or spectacle accompanying it.<sup>108</sup> Accordingly there are plays exhibiting sensibility or prudery, to please the boxes - for example, W. Richardson's The Indians, with its "just" sentiments, H. Brand's Huniades, S. Lee's Almeyda, Queen of Granada, which was "honoured" by tears,<sup>109</sup> and the plays of R.L. Sheil, B. Wilmot, H. Twiss, C. Bucke, C.E. Walker and C.R. Maturin, whose Bertram produced a review which sums up this tendency:

"Its beauties are rather those of language and sentiment than of action or situation.....It is a sentimental drama, it is a romantic drama, but it is not a tragedy in the best sense of the word .....the modern romantic tragedy is a mixture of fanciful exaggeration and indolent sensibility [which] courts distresses, affects horror, indulges in all the luxury of woe, and nurses its languid thoughts, and dainty sympathies, to fill up the void of action,"

110

106. Boaden, op. cit., ii, 69.

107. Ibid., ii, 41-2.

108. Nicoll, iv, 10.

109. S. Lee, Almeyda, Queen of Granada, Advertisement.

110. The Examiner, 19/v/1816.

There were, too, large effects and melodrama, to please the gallery, as in the plays of W. Hayley, J. Haynes, A. Shee, J. Bird, T.S. Whalley, whose stage directions in The Castle of Montval (1799) include "More groans", "groans repeated" and an accumulation of Gothic mysteries; and in the pit exasperated critics bewail the state of English drama.<sup>111</sup>

The size of the houses led to another evil: as the theatres could seldom be filled with keen playgoers, prostitutes established their business among the audience, helped by the large private boxes and anti-chambers.<sup>112</sup> This open and acknowledged scandal continued until well on in the century:<sup>113</sup> The Theatrical Journal, 27/vii/1844, styled the theatres "great public brothels." This affected the tone of the audience and discouraged many would-be playgoers, the solid, steady core which an audience requires. Authors, frightened by the audience, wrote for private theatricals,<sup>114</sup> which, going from one extreme to another, became effete in contrast with the coarseness often found in public theatres, producing,

111. Hazlitt, v, 308.

112. Nicoll, iv, 10-11; W. Scott "Essay on Drama" (1819), reprinted Prose Works, Edinburgh, 1834, vi, 392.

113. Hazlitt, xx, 206-208.

114. Nicoll, iii, 19-22.

for example, F. <sup>my</sup>Burley's Tragic Dramas, chiefly intended for Representations in Private Families, 1818. But life and vigour, though expressed coarsely is essential for a living theatre, the alternative is a barren plot of genteel effeminacy. Drama must be firmly planted in strong earth, otherwise it cannot grow to any height; private theatricals produced hot-house plants which were bound to wilt in any other atmosphere.

One emotion, patriotism, linked all kinds of playgoers. Britain, fighting the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars, was filled with enthusiastic patriotism,<sup>115</sup> so that many plays were written to exploit this emotion, but having no regard for dramatic or poetic values: for example, J. Bartholomew, The Fall of the French Monarchy, 1794; J. Chamock, Loyalty; or Invasion Defeated, 1810; J. Penn, The Battle of Eddington; or, British Liberty, 1792; G. Watson, England Preserved, 1795; as well as a number printed anonymously, as The Patriot Prince, Calcutta, 1809.

Enthusiasm was displayed over actors; a bad play could succeed on the stage if a good, or popular, actor took the lead.<sup>116</sup> The emphasis on the actor discouraged any critical

115. Genest, vii, 209-10.

116. Cf. supra (iv)

sense of drama among the majority of the audience, as the plays were regarded more as vehicles for an actor's passion than as dramatic entities,<sup>117</sup> whilst the writers were inevitably influenced by the knowledge that success or failure could depend upon an actor accepting and playing a part in their plays,<sup>118</sup> a feeling naturally aggravated when dealing with actor-managers.<sup>119</sup> Scott recorded "No part written for either of these astonishing performers (Garrick and Mrs. Siddons) has survived the transient popularity which their talents could give to almost anything."<sup>120</sup> This tendency is always present in the theatre; in this period, however, it was taken to an extreme; along with it went such wild enthusiasms as the Master Betty craze,<sup>121</sup> only to be explained in terms of a besotted audience, intoxicated by star-acting and bereft of dramatic judgement; so that a manager felt he could fill his theatre by novelties better suited to a circus; to the credit

117. S. Lee. Almeyda, Queen of Granada, 1796, Advertisement; Genest, vii, 49; 463; The Dramatic Censor, No. XVIII, (3/v/1800).

118. U.C. Nag, "The English Theatre of the Romantic Revival", The Nineteenth Century, CIV (September 1928) 386-387.

119. "A letter to Charles Kemble, Esq., and R.W. Elliston, Esq., on the Present State of the Stage." Blackwood's Magazine, xvii (June 1825) 727-731.

120. "Essay on Drama" 1819, reprinted Prose Works, Edinburgh, 1834, vi, 380.

121. Doran, iii, 239-247; Boaden, Memoirs of the Life of John Philip Kemble, Esq., 1825, ii, 394-409.

of the audience, however, was the rejection of Kemble's prodigy, Miss Mudie<sup>122</sup> - here, at least, they showed some discrimination.

The audiences reflect the theatrical malaise of the period: are they attending a circus, or a theatre descended from The Globe? They do not know; critics fulminate; but managers must fill their theatres, financial facts obliterate all others, so that until the monopoly is broken conditions are hardly likely to improve. One gain stands out: these huge audiences, once their attention had been caught, their enthusiasm aroused, provided such an encouragement to the players that the theatre of this period, though providing no great dramatists, produced great actors, even if, as a result of the size of the theatres, their acting had to be coarser than accords with the best of acting. Unfortunately, their art dies with them, but it did irradiate the period.

Mr. U.C. Nagchaudhuri puts forward the thesis that the condition of poetic drama from 1800 to 1830 was more due to external conditions, such as I have just discussed, than to weaknesses inherent in the writers:

122. Genest, vii, 715; Nicoll, iv, 21-22, who quotes from The Percy Anecdotes (1822).

"My main thesis, derived from a close study of the dramatic output of the period, is that the failure of the poetic drama of the Romantic Revival was due more to the attendant circumstances which were extremely adverse and less to the playwrights who had constantly to fight against odds that have no parallel in the whole history of British Drama. "

123.

Whilst this is partly true, I believe more emphasis could probably be placed upon the undramatic character which poets of the Romantic Revival exhibited; subjectivity, introspection and a distaste for putting themselves at the mercy of an audience. As is the case in any period, the literary output was conditioned by many interacting factors.

123. Poetic Drama of the Nineteenth Century: (from 1800-1830), Unpublished Thesis, 1927, University of London.

CHAPTER II.

Dramatic Theories of the period 1790-1825.

(i) Joanna Baillie.

Joanna Baillie stands apart in this period as the only dramatist who publicly developed her own original dramatic theory. In an "Introductory Discourse" to her first volume of plays<sup>1</sup> she outlines her intention in writing plays and gives the reasons for her intention. Joanna Baillie starts her reasoning from Man's natural interest in his fellow men which usually manifests itself in sympathy and curiosity. This is particularly obvious when the circumstances surrounding a man are unusual and lead to a display of his passions, whether the motive force be provided by outward events or inner conflicts.

"It is to this sympathetick curiosity of our nature exercised upon mankind in great and trying occasions, and under the influence of the stronger passions, when the grand, the generous and the terrible attract our attention far more than the base and depraved, that the high and powerfully tragick, of every composition, is addressed."

2

1. A Series of Plays: in which it is attempted to delineate the stronger passions of the mind. Each passion being the subject of a tragedy and a comedy, 1798, i, 1-72.
2. Ibid, p.11.

This "sympathetick curiosity" has a moral sanction -

"Unless when accompanied with passions, of the dark and malevolent kind, we cannot well exercise this disposition without becoming more just, more merciful, more compassionate." 3

Studying human nature displayed in the theatre enlarges our sympathy and understanding and makes us better men and women.<sup>4</sup>

This instruction fits in with the belief that you cannot have a lasting delight in any work of art without instruction. The highest pleasure we derive from poetry is based upon this sympathetic interest which not only agrees with a basic truth of human nature, but which also provides instruction. Because of this pleasure theatrical performances have always been popular, as they very readily appeal to our natural sympathy. Tragedy is always the more important dramatic genre because it brings great men before our eyes, not elevated beyond our knowledge, but displayed as human beings like ourselves swayed by the passions we also experience. From this Joanna Baillie concludes that were tragedies written specifically around one passion, the play would appeal to an audience more than the usual type of tragedy, where passions indeed arise but are not traced from their birth to their death and we are therefore always left

3. ibid, p.12.

4. ibid, p.14, p.15.



with an imperfect impression of them.<sup>5</sup> Joanna Baillie has therefore decided to write

"a series of tragedies, of simpler construction, less embellished with poetical decorations, less constrained by that lofty seriousness which has so generally been considered as necessary for the support of tragick dignity, and in which the chief object should be to delineate the progress of the higher passions in the human breast, each play exhibiting a particular passion... I have been the more readily induced to act upon this idea because I am confident, that tragedy, written upon this plan, is fitted to produce stronger moral effect than upon any other. "

6

The characters concerned in such plays "must be powerful and interesting"<sup>7</sup> and, although our sympathies are with them, the passions which the characters exhibit "must still be held to view in their most baleful and unseductive light."<sup>8</sup> The conflict in the plays must not be between a character and outward events, but between the main passion and "other passions and propensities of the heart."<sup>9</sup> So that the main passion, represented in the leading character, may stand out more clearly, subsidiary characters "should generally be represented in a calm unagitated state"<sup>10</sup> - though Joanna Baillie is aware of the

5. ibid, pp.38-39.

6. ibid, pp.41-42.

7. ibid, p.59.

8. ibid, p. 59.

9. ibid, p. 59.

10. ibid, p.59.

danger that such characters may "appear altogether insipid and insignificant,"<sup>11</sup> if the dramatist is not careful. The plot must, as one would expect, be simple so that the course of the passion may be more easily followed. To make up for this simplicity of plot Joanna Baillie calls upon "the shew and decorations of the theatre" believing that

"it is much better to relieve our tired-out attention with a battle, a banquet, or a procession, than an accumulation of incidents." 12

Joanna Baillie frankly acknowledges the wish to see her plays performed. Unlike many of her contemporaries, Joanna Baillie, whilst admitting the deficiencies of the theatre of this period, also realised that plays should be written for performance.<sup>13</sup>

The idea of plays written upon the passions did not originate with Joanna Baillie. In 1781, at the Haymarket Theatre there was performed for Digges' benefit on the 7th of August, The School of Shakespeare, or Humours and Passions, which was composed of five acts on Vanity, Parental Tenderness, Cruelty, Filial Piety and Ambition, each act respectively using

11. ibid, p.59.

12. ibid, p.60, note. Cf. Count Basil, I, 1, which concludes with a parade of soldiers, succeeded by a procession of ladies.

13. That Joanna Baillie had a good grasp of contemporary theatrical conditions may be seen from this "Introductory Discourse," from the preface to A Series of Plays, 1812, iii, and a note appended to the preface where she shows familiarity with the problems and effects of stage lighting.

Henry IV, 2 Henry IV, The Merchant of Venice, Hamlet, the closet scene, and Henry VIII.<sup>14</sup> The same idea was later followed by Drury Lane (31.v.1808) with different plays.<sup>15</sup> The Elizabethans present characters which almost personify such passions as revenge or ambition, as Vendice in Cyril Tourneur's The Revenger's Tragedy, 1607, and Tamburlaine in Marlowe's Tamburlaine the Great, 1590, but Joanna Baillie was the first English dramatist to put forward a theory of tragedy based upon the exploitation of one particular passion.<sup>16</sup> The tragedies themselves are examined in detail in a later chapter,<sup>17</sup> but in examining Joanna Baillie's theory some reference will naturally be made to the plays.

The first danger of Joanna Baillie's theory is that the passion should assume such great importance for the author that the characters too easily become personifications of elements found within a rounded human being, instead of giving us the

14. Genest, vi, 202. I am indebted to Margaret Carhart, The Life and Work of Joanna Baillie, 1923, p.191, for drawing attention to this.

15. Genest viii, 73. This performance is also noted by U.C. Naghaudhuri, Poetic Drama of the Nineteenth Century (from 1800-1830) Unpublished Thesis 1927, University of London, pp.69-70.

16. It is interesting to note that Sanscrit Drama recognises eight principal "rasas" or impressions which may form the subject matter of a play - love, heroism, pathos or tender grief, anger, laughter, fear or terror, disgust, wonder or admiration. Cf. Allardyce Nicoll, The Theory of Drama, 1931, p.57, and J.M. Tagore, The Eight Principal Rasas of the Hindus, 1879.

17. cf, pp.184-240, Chapter V,

impression of complete human beings. This emphasis upon a passion can also lead to a highly charged dramatic atmosphere, which, on account of her theory, Joanna Baillie could do little to relieve, because dramatic tension is not relieved by a grand spectacle nearly so effectively as by some subsidiary interest in the plot taking our attention off the main theme on to a secondary one. If dramatic tension is built up and maintained for too long, then it inevitably tires the audience. This weakness was aggravated by Joanna Baillie's strong belief in the moral sanctions underlying her work, which made her unwilling to distract the audience from the main passion.

These flaws have been, unconsciously, explained by Joanna Baillie herself when she says that her plan is

"To conceive the great moral object and outline of the story; to people it with various characters under the influence of various passions; and to strike out circumstances and situations calculated to call them into action...."

18

She is, in other words, conceiving a play, firstly, by determining upon a passion and a moral to be drawn from it, then thinking of characters to exemplify the passion and moral, before finally making a plot to fit them all into. It is very likely that a play so planned will lack the rounded characters which enliven any play in comparison with the

deadening effect of flat characters.

Joanna Baillie's attitude towards the medium of tragedy was not favourable to the best blank verse. The Dream<sup>19</sup> is a tragedy written in prose which Joanna Baillie explains thus:

"I have written it in prose that the expressions of the agitated person might be plain though strong, and kept as closely as possible to the simplicity of nature. Such a subject [the passion of The Dream is the fear of death] would, I believe, have been weakened, not enriched by poetical embellishment. Whether I am right or wrong in this opinion, I assure my Reader it has not been indolence that has tempted me to depart from common rules." 20

The assumptions behind this are, apparently, that verse could not demonstrate emotions plainly and that verse can be, and is, regarded as an "embellishment." This attitude is all too common in this period: writers choosing blank verse either because it is the accepted convention, or because they want to produce a drama which is ornamented by verse.

Allardyce Nicoll sums up Joanna Baillie's theory thus:

"....it serves to mark at once a potentiality for dramatic advance and an unquestionably vitiated tendency. That which marred much of the early nineteenth century poetic drama was the tendency towards the abstract. A Romantic poet only too often started from a theory, attempting to discover

19. A Series of Plays, iii, pp.101-171.

20. A Series of Plays, iii, Preface xi. We may note that blank verse attached to tragedy is a "common rule."

and devise a plot which should illustrate his mental abstract, in this providing a sufficient contrast to the methods of the Elizabethan dramatists, whose prime interest was in the human personality and in the story, thought of in the first place as a stirring and amusing theme. On the other hand, great drama always exhibits a central atmosphere or dominant passion, which gives an informing purpose to the human events narrated...and it is this dominant passion which was so lamentably lacking in the dramas produced in England between the time of Otway and that of the Romantic poets. In thus stressing the necessity for the central emotion, therefore, Joanna Baillie was doing something which was of the utmost importance." 21

Apart from Joanna Baillie no writer or critic developed a new dramatic theory. The eighteenth century trend away from classic rules towards a greater freedom for the genius of the writer<sup>22</sup> was naturally strengthened by the Romantic Revival. This led to an ad hoc system of criticism where a critic examined a play without any classical rules to help him in his judgement. Thus Coleridge, for example, criticises plays, as they are produced or printed, not with reference to any classical critical apparatus, but to his own beliefs and theories concerning not only the theatre but the whole artistic output of mankind. Such criticism would have been invaluable

21. Nicoll, iv, 156-157.

22. Cf. R. Welck, A History of Modern Criticism: 1750-1950, 1, 1955, pp.109-132.

in this period if there had been any writers of real dramatic genius to profit by such inspired criticism. To exemplify this we could mention C.R. Maturin whose play Bertram (D.L. 9/v/1816), was so thoroughly examined by Coleridge<sup>23</sup> and yet who continued to write the same poor tragedies in Manuel (D.L. 8/iii/1817) 1817, and Fredolfo (C.G.12/v/1819) 1819.

Hazlitt adopted a slightly different approach. He seldom analyses a play as a formal composition, but comments much more either upon the characters of a play as almost separate entities, or upon Kemble, Mrs. Siddons or any notable actor interpreting a part. Such criticism is lively and interesting for the reader - even today - and for those who saw the performance but, like Coleridge, Hazlitt provides little or no guidance to the kind of writer who was trying to produce blank verse tragedies in this period. Charles Lamb shows another aspect of Romantic criticism by evoking the atmosphere of the play being discussed rather than providing any constructive criticism of it. Such criticism gave no lead to the writers of tragedy in this period, who were rather influenced by a number of differing factors.

23. Biographia Literaria 1817, ch, xxiii; cf. Chapter IV.pp. 124-129.

(ii) Influences upon writers of tragedy, 1790-1825.

The influence of the Elizabethans was naturally strong because not only had they written the largest body of good English tragedy, but Shakespeare had done so without being overtroubled by classical rules of composition - a position with which this period sympathised. Moreover, the poetic language of the older dramatists was acclaimed and copied. As we will see, the influence of Elizabethan diction runs throughout this period. Shelley, in discussing his use of imagery in Prometheus Unbound and The Cenci, acknowledges the example of Shakespeare:

"The imagery which I have employed will be found, in many instances, to have been drawn from the operations of the human mind, or from those external sections by which they are expressed...Dante and Shakespeare are full of instances of the same kind,"

24

"In a dramatic composition the imagery and the passion should interpenetrate one another, the former being preserved simply for the full development and illustration of the latter."

25

In a note-book Shelley remarks in connection with this passage, "The finest works of Shakespeare are a continual illustration of this doctrine."<sup>26</sup>

24. Prometheus Unbound, Preface.

25. The Cenci, Preface.

26. Note-Book, ii, 95.



Beddoes acknowledged that song-writing

"is almost the only kind of poetry of which  
I have attained a decided and clear critical  
theory."

27.

He may not have achieved a critical theory of drama, but running through all his poetry and drama, and mentioned in many of his letters, we find the influence of Shakespeare and the Elizabethans. Beddoes, who was the most Elizabethan of all the writers of this period was also the one who saw most clearly the damage which was done to the theatre by too great a dependence upon the dramatic wealth of the Elizabethans:

"Such ghosts as Marlowe, Webster &c are better dramatists, better poets, I dare say than any contemporary of ours - but they are ghosts - the worm is in their pages - and we want to see something that our great-grandsires did not know. With the greatest reverence for all the antiquities of the drama, I still think we had better beget than revive."

28.

As we will see from an examination of the minor writers of this period, many of them accepted Shakespeare as the only model upon whom they could base their own work. This is an underlying assumption which seldom emerges openly in a Preface; it does, however, with Richard Chenevix, whose "Remarks, by

27. The Works of Thomas Lovell Beddoes, ed. H.W. Donner, 1935, p.649: a letter to T.F. Kelsall, 19; vii, 1830.

28. ibid, p.595: A letter to T.F. Kelsall, 11.i.1825

the Author of the Play" (Leonora, 1802) include:

"As Shakespeare is the epitome of every quality which nature could bestow on man, to fit him for a dramatic writer, he must occur, with the very idea of a theatre, to every Englishman."

But Chenevix continues to assert that he has written Leonora according to the rules of Aristotle, and that he himself has full faith in the unities.

It is interesting to note here what Voltaire thought of the effect of Shakespeare's influence early in the XVIII century:

"le mérite de cet Auteur (Shakespeare) a perdu le théâtre anglais.....les auteurs modernes l'ont presque tous copié; mais ce qui réussissait chez Shakespeare est sifflé chez eux, et vous croyez bien que la vénération qu'on a pour cet ancien augmente à mesure que l'on méprise les modernes. On ne fait pas réflexion qu'il ne faudrait pas l'imiter, et le mauvais succès de ces copistes fait seulement qu'on le croit inimitable."

29

Like Chenevix John Galt acknowledges the supremacy of Shakespeare, but also wants to find some rules to guide him in writing. In the Preface to The Tragedies of Maddalen, Agamemnon, Lady Macbeth, Antonia and Clytemnestra, 1812, Galt observes :

"With respect to the style, I consider the characteristics of the British dramatic verse

29. Lettres Philosophiques, 1734, quoted by F.E. Halliday, Shakespeare and His Critics, 1949, pp.292-293 (revised edition, 1958, p.70)

as having been fixed by Shakespear; and his successors, in my opinion, would shew as bad a taste in attempting to introduce a new manner, as in imitating the obsolete quaintness peculiar to the writers of his age...But in the structure of the drama, I have ventured to preserve the unities of the Greek theatre along with the natural circumstances and dialogue of the English."

The greatest influence exerted by the classics in this period is an external one found in the concern shown by many writers to adhere to the unities, rather than to strive for an inner, restrained tragic reality. The influence of the unities is found from Byron to Dr. Whitelaw Ainslie who in his Preface to Clemenza; or The Tuscan Orphan (Bath, 1/6/1822) 1823 stresses that

"the time does not occupy quite twenty-four hours; with respect to the place, the furthest range does not exceed two miles."

A more direct influence is naturally found in plays such as P. Bayley's Orestes in Argos, 1825, which have a specifically classical inspiration.

Of the major writers who wrote plays, Byron set most store by the classical unities,<sup>30</sup> and by

"writing naturally and regularly, and producing regular tragedies, like the Greeks; but not in imitation - merely the outline of their conduct, adapted to our own times and circumstances, and of course, no chorus."

31

30. cf. Marino Faliero, Doge of Venice, Preface; Sardanapalus, Preface.

31. Letter to John Murray, 4/vii/1821 in The Works of Lord Byron. Letters and Journals, ed. by R.E. Prothero, 1922 v.217-218.

In the same letter Byron explains:

"If you want to have a notion of what I am trying (in writing tragedies), take up a translation of any of the Greek tragedies. If I said the original, it would be an impudent presumption of mine; but the translations are so inferior to the originals that I think I may risk it. Then judge of the 'simplicity of plot, etc.' and do not judge me by your mad old dramatists....."

In another letter to Murray, 14/vii/1824, Byron emphasises this:-

"My object has been to dramatize, like the Greeks, (a modest phrase!), striking passages of history... You will find all this very unlike Shakespeare; and so much the better in one sense, for I look upon him to be the worst of models, though the most extraordinary of writers. It has been my object to be as simple and severe as Alfieri, and I have broken down the poetry as nearly as I could to common language."

32

The influence of the Italian Alfieri and that of the French tragic writers both tended to emphasise classical regularity, one of the marks of the Augustan age, which was giving way to the new spirit of romance at the end of the eighteenth century. This new spirit influenced the English stage by appearing in German adaptations and translations. Unfortunately it was not Goethe or Schiller who influenced English dramatists so much as Kotzebue. This German influence did not last very long: A.F. Tytler's translation of Schiller's

Die Räuber (1781) in 1792, could be taken as a starting point, and by 1819 the craze had died down.<sup>33</sup> But whilst it lasted writers were influenced by the sentimentalism of Kotzebue whose plays were performed in translation.

→ Another unfortunate German influence was experienced by those writers who tended to write closet dramas; Schiller and Goethe were translated into English, but the translations were seldom good theatre, so their readers

"finding that Schiller and Goethe could not be performed in England....were inclined to forget that there were theatres in Germany." 34

This led many writers into writing plays which were as unsuitable for the theatre as were many of the German translations.

Wordsworth referred to the plays of the lesser German dramatists as "sickly and stupid German Tragedies."<sup>35</sup> Scott observed of the same German plays that

"the tumid is too often substituted for the sublime; and faculties and dispositions the most opposed to each other are sometimes described as existing in the same person." 36

33. cf. Nicoll, iv, 85.

34. Nicoll, iii, 73.

35. Lyrical Ballads, second edition, Preface.

36. Essay on the Drama, 1819. This essay first appeared in the Encyclopaedia Britannica, 4th edition.

Scott also remarked that the better German plays had not come to England:

"for, by some unfortunate chance, the wretched pieces of Kotzebue have found a readier acceptance, or more willing translators, than the sublimity of Goethe, the romantic strength of Schiller, or the deep tragic pathos of Lessing. They have tended however (wretched as the model is,) to introduce on our stage a degree of sentiment, and awaken among the audiences a strain of sensibility to which before we were strangers."

37

Hazlitt, in examining German tragedy, noticed:

"The German tragedy (and our own, which is only a branch of it) aims at effect and produces it often in the highest degree; and it does this by going all the lengths not only of instinctive feeling, but of speculative opinion, and startling the hero by turning over the established maxims of society, and setting at nought all the received rules of composition... It is an insult and defiance to Aristotle's definition of tragedy. The action is not grave, but extravagant; the fable is not probable, but improbable; the favourite characters are not only low, but vicious; the sentiments are such as do not become the person into whose mouth they are put, nor that of any other person; the language is a mixture of metaphysical jargon and flaring prose; the moral is immorality."

38.

Frederic Howard, Earl of Carlisle, remarks in the "Preface to his play, The Step-Mother, 1800:

"Without presuming to arraign the popular taste on the subject of theatrical performances, or to hint any opinion of my own on the German Drama, (with which I profess to be but little acquainted)

37. ibid.

38. Lectures on the Dramatic Literature of the Age of Elizabeth, Lecture VIII, Hazlitt, vi, 360.

I flatter myself no candid British critic will be offended by the acknowledgement, that, in the construction of the fable or in the conduct of the following scenes, recourse has not been had to recorded history, or to the invention of contemporary writers'. Their works, in this instance, have not been translated, their style of colouring has not been copied, and their plots have been safe from violation."

Whilst the Epilogue of the same play contains these lines:

"Should you tonight our Poet but endure,  
You'll fix his frenzy, and beyond all cure  
Lord! how he'll vapour, and how domineer!  
How little in his eyes shall we appear!  
God knows but he'll attempt in desperate rage,  
To amend the taste, and fashion of the age,  
And grown quite wild, blaspheme the German stage!  
This, you'll confess, is folly in the extreme;  
O do not then approve his dangerous dream;  
But damning him, decree it be his fate,  
Twelve plays a year, from Kotzebue to translate."

G.A. Rhodes in a Preliminary Essay to his play Dion, 1806, is also critical of the German influence upon contemporary English drama :

"The principal defect in modern tragedy is that it generally oversteps the modesty of nature; the causes of this I conceive to be an attachment to the German school, and an imitation of the spurious passion, the false brilliancy, the creeping numbers, and dull and sophistic declamation of the earlier English tragedians, extolled much beyond their due merit by the pseudocritics of the present day."

Associated with the German influence was the interest in the mysterious and terrible as found in Gothic art. This, just as much as the German experiments, was an attempt by dramatists to provide new themes and materials for the stage.

Walpole's The Mysterious Mother, 1768, was the forerunner of a succession of plays dealing with the terrors of mystery and surprise usually unfolded in gloomy, macabre surroundings, either of crumbling castle or convent or of dark, unfathomable woods, or any other background calculated to thrill an audience. This, on the whole, had a bad influence upon dramatists who tended to substitute stage business for action, and to lose sight of any genuine tragic emotion in great waves of sensibility.

"The possibilities of Gothicism as a conventional framework within which tragic fears might be explored were scarcely even perceived. The gothic milieu neither acquired the symbolical quality with which Yeats endowed the Irish legends, nor did it develop into a convenient framework which freed the dramatists from the limitations of verisimilitude and enabled them to extend the meaning of the materials to the full stature of tragedy, in some such manner as Shakespeare treated the ancient stories of Hamlet and Lear, or the Greeks the old myths. Its principal influence was to foster the theatrical."

39

Consequently many writers, surrounded by Gothic works, can do no other than produce Gothic heroes and villains performing among the stock Gothic properties: gloom, terror, mystery, unmentionable complications - usually associated with some weird family relationship - and, most destructive of all for

39. Moody E. Prior, The Language of Tragedy, New York, 1947, p.217



the best tragedy, gross exaggeration of sentiment.

Coleridge in his "Critique on Bertram"<sup>40</sup> has thoroughly examined a Gothic tragedy and thoroughly exposed it. After going through the play act by act and showing how ridiculous are so many of the effects, Coleridge concludes thus upon the character of Bertram :

"This felo de se and thief-captain, this loathsome and leprous confluence of robbery, adultery, murder and cowardly assassination, this monster whose best deed is, the having saved his betters from the degradation of hanging him, by turning Jack Ketch to himself, first recommends the charitable Monks and holy Prior to pray for his soul, and then has the folly and impudence to exclaim:

'I died no felon's death,  
A warrior's weapon freed a warrior's soul!' "

Coleridge's own play Remorse<sup>41</sup> (D.L.23.i.1813) 1813, is not entirely free from Gothic attributes with a mysterious and unpleasant event in the form of attempted fratricide before the action begins, but considering the period in which it was written it is happily free from Gothic faults. Wordsworth's The Borderers<sup>42</sup>, 1842, has a Gothic pattern with the

40. Biographia Literaria 1817, Chapter xxiii.  
Bertram by C.R. Maturin, 1816, performed D.L.9.v.1816  
cf. pp. 124 - 129.

41. cf. pp. 264 - 295.

42. cf. pp. 242 - 262.

deliberate development of mystery and withholding of the solution, in the settings of bleak moor and ruined castle, but Wordsworth, as has been pointed out by Mr. Bertrand Evans,<sup>43</sup> tried to work out an idea within an established Gothic framework, whereas most Gothic writers aim at exploiting the framework to obtain the maximum of mystery, gloom and terror.

Wordsworth may have failed to write a good, acting tragedy, but at least his attempt shows that Gothicism as such, did not have to cripple the tragic vision. This is proved conclusively in Shelley's The Cenci<sup>44</sup>, 1819, where there are some scenes, as, for example, III,i, giving the description of a ravine, and those scenes showing Beatrice's reactions to her father's sin, which could be interpreted as revealing signs of Gothic influence, but the play as a whole is lifted quite beyond all such limited and limiting influences by Shelley's own genius.

Lesser writers also bear witness to the Gothic influence, not only tacitly in their plays, which, as we will see, are, in many instances, strongly influenced by the Gothic tradition, but openly, either with praise or condemnation, in

43. Gothic Drama from Walpole to Shelley, University of California Publications in English, vol. XVIII, 1947, p. 222.

44. cf. pp. 316-348.

prefaces. T.J. Serle in his Preface to Raffaelle Cimaro, 1819, remarks :

"The following Play has certainly no extrinsic attraction to recommend it. Its Title Page can boast neither of 'horrors' nor 'mysteries.' No 'Spectres' glare with delightful portent in capital letters on the cover; nor does a 'Robber's Cave' or a 'Haunted Tower' invite the reader to pry into its recesses, or magnanimously slumber amidst its apparitions."

This points to the great popularity which Gothic drama enjoyed with play readers.

J. Haggitt takes an opposite view, which may in part be explained by his writing twenty-five years earlier. In his Preface to his "The Count de Villeroi, or, The Fate of Patriotism", 1794, he notices:

"One tragedy only occurred [H. Walpole's, The Mysterious Mother, 1768] of considerable merit, which was not the work of a professed poet; and the excellence of that, indeed, is so great that it ought rather, perhaps, to have made him [J. Haggitt] throw down his pen in despair, than animated him to proceed. Those who are acquainted with the 'Mysterious Mother,' will not look further for that work which is here intended..... we shall not easily find a piece in which elegance of language, unity of design, strict preservation of character, with all the higher excellencies of tragedy - the power of exciting pity, terror, distress, and horror for guilt, are more eminently united. "

Along with the German, and to a lesser degree with the Gothic influence, there is a strain of moral teaching. Joanna

Baillie, we have seen,<sup>45</sup> pointed to the moral sanction for her work. Of the lesser writers, W. Preston in particular always aimed at inculcating a moral, no matter what else might suffer thereby: writing of his play Offa and Ethelbert; or The Saxon Princes, Dublin, 1791, in "Letter to a Friend on the Subject of the Saxon Princes" he remarks :

"I know it wants the bustle and intrigue, so necessary to the modern drama; I know, that many of the speeches may be thought declamatory, diffuse, and languid; but I flatter myself, it contains a purity of sentiment, and a strain of morality, which, with a candid reader, will hide a multitude of sins."

Preston's Preface to The Siege of Ismail, 1794, is long and almost completely devoted to explaining the moral and allowing it to explain his complete lack of dramatic talent:

"I do not consider it [The Siege of Ismail] as a regular tragedy, but, merely, as a moral poem in dialogue...the length and declamatory cast of many of the speeches must be attributed to an anxious desire of impressing my moral."

Similarly J. Dillon in a "Prefatory Letter to John Symmons," says of his tragedy, Retribution; or, The Chieftain's Daughter, (C.G.1.i.1818) 1818:

"Whatever Reception the Work may eventually meet with from the Public, it is, at least, an honest effort to inculcate an useful and important moral Lesson; in any case it is therefore of some value. "

45. cf. p. 30.

This unnatural emphasis upon one aspect of all creative work led writers like Dillon and Preston to write tragedies of no merit and yet to remain complacent in the face of their inability because they had at least tried to give moral instruction which, as has so often been explained, is unavailable if the work does not please first.

A different attitude is to be found, as one would expect, in the Preface to Shelley's The Cenci, 1820,

"The highest moral purpose aimed at in the highest species of the drama, is the teaching the human heart, through its sympathies and antipathies, the knowledge of itself; in proportion to the possession of which knowledge, every human being is wise, just, sincere, tolerant and kind. If dogmas can do more, it is well: but a drama is no fit place for the enforcement of them."

But even Shelley does not go beyond the idea of self-knowledge, whereas the morality of great art consists in an affirmation that is with difficulty arrived at, and perhaps precariously maintained. The morality which the writers of this period usually thought of was the simple examination of commonplace un-experienced precepts.

(iii) Attitude of writers to the stage.

The dramatic theory of this period was modified by a relatively new attitude to play writing. Before the eighteenth century a play such as Samson Agonistes, or the plays of the non-theatrical Senecan dramatists of the late XVI and early XVII centuries, <sup>45a.</sup> written to be read rather than performed, was a rarity, but the late eighteenth century saw a great increase in the number of plays written not so much for the stage as for the closet. The reasons for this increase in closet drama are varied; some depend upon the theatrical conditions of this period,<sup>46</sup> for the huge theatres, the love of spectacle and melodrama, the star system, all discouraged poets from trying to gain performance for their plays. Byron is an example of one poet who shrank from public performance - "I will not be exposed to the insolences of an audience"<sup>47</sup> Thus, increasingly there arises a belief that to write a play not intended for the stage was a normal activity, which was the worst possible belief to circulate during a period of Romantic

46. cf. Chapter I.

47. Works of Lord Byron, Letters and Journals, ed. by R.E. Prothero, 1922, v.221: A letter to John Murray, 11.vii.1821

45a. Such writers as Daniel, Fulke Greville, the Countess of Pembroke.

poetry when the lyrical aspect of poetry predominated, making dramatic objectivity even more difficult. Wordsworth understood some measure of the trouble when he wrote:

"A dramatic Author, if he write for the stage, must adapt himself to the taste of the audience, or they will not endure him; accordingly the mighty genius of Shakespeare was listened to.... that Shakespeare stooped to accommodate himself to the People, is sufficiently apparent; and one of the most striking proofs of his almost omnipotent gemius is, that he could turn to such glorious purpose those materials which the prepossessions of the age compelled him to make use of."

48

What Wordsworth fails to say is that, were there any good dramatists in the late eighteenth, early nineteenth centuries, they too would "turn to glorious purpose" all the aspects of the age which might have displeased them, instead of grumbling about them in long winded prefaces to plays designed for the closet. Many of the writers regarded the closet as a second-best to stage performance, but this did not seem to spur them on to greater efforts to reach the stage. A. Murphy in the Preface to Arminius, 1798, remarks:

"The following Poem was written in the course of last summer. Why it was not offered to the Stage, it is unnecessary to mention."

48. "Essay, Supplementary to the Preface" [i.e. Preface to The Lyrical Ballads]

G.A. Rhodes shows the same resignation in his "Preliminary Essay" to Dion, 1806:

"This poem was intended more for the closet than the stage, and may be deemed possibly more a work of philosophic fancy than impassioned interest....."

James Bird, in the "Advertisement" to his play, Cosmo, Duke of Tuscany, 1822, frankly admits the superior position of the stage:

"It has become the fashion for dramatic poets to affirm; that their pieces were not written for the stage. The Author of 'Cosmo' cannot make such an affirmation: on the contrary, he acknowledges that his Tragedy was composed expressly with a view to its performance. That a play may be more interesting in the closet than on the stage, he is willing to allow; yet if its respective scenes present not to "the mind's eye", a certain portion of pictorial effect, combined with the charm - the pathos - of literature, it may exhibit a series of dialogues in verse, but can have little, if any, pretension to the distinguishing appellation of a drama."

Unfortunately, however, Bird lacks any familiarity with the theatre. His dramatic treatment seems to consist of nothing more than rapid speech, broken up dialogue, and, at the beginning, quick action, whilst undramatic descriptions intrude too often, cf. II, iii :

"The soft and balmy breath of evening comes,  
Wafting a joyous freshness on its wings;  
The moon is sleeping on her azure couch -  
And heaven's blue canopy hangs cloudless o'er her,  
While two refulgent stars are watching near  
As though to guard the chamber of her rest!"



In the end one realises there has been no real action, only one character after another expressing his feelings about action, but not developing them, nor acting upon them. It deteriorates into melodrama with its usual stage business, movement and shifting about of Gothic properties, instead of the desired internal tragic action. It ends with a convent on fire and this stage direction -

"(Julia is seen above, enveloped in flame. A shriek of women is heard without. In a few moments Giovanni is discovered, making his way through the flames. He catches Julia in his arms, and bears her fainting on the stage).

The Curtain Falls.       "

"A Female Refugee" who is the author of The Carthusian Friar, or The Age of Chivalry, 1793, confesses:

"Inexperience in stage business in every part of the world, joined to the absolute transgression of the unities of the perfect Drama, have deterred her from hazarding it in representation..... 49  
Her aims, her desires, are confined to the narrower circle of the studious, and, above all, the compassionate! It is in the silent recesses of the closet, that she dares to court the eye of sensibility!"

But surely one so inexperienced in stage business should have either gained stage experience or turned her thoughts in

49. The "Female Refugee" means that she has flouted the Unities in her play and therefore feels it would not be accepted on the stage.

other directions.

H.H. Milman is unusual in that his first tragedy, Fazio, 1815, was performed with applause,<sup>50</sup> yet he continued writing, not acting tragedies, but "Dramatic Poems" such as The Fall of Jerusalem, 1820, which prompted Genest to remark:

"A dramatic poem...is a species of writing which ought not to be encouraged - it is like a mule - neither horse nor ass but something between both - a person ought to write a regular Drama, or a regular poem without any reference to the Drama - he who will not conform to dramatic laws is not entitled to dramatic privileges." 51

Genest is being too forceful here, perhaps, but certainly few writers can write effective dramatic poems. In this period Shelley and Byron both show it can be done: Shelley with Prometheus Unbound and Hellas, Byron with Manfred, but they were exceptional.

50. Survey, 22.xii.1816 - as The Italian Wife; C.G.5.ii.1818.

51. Genest, X,239.

### CHAPTER III

#### Minor Tragedy, 1790-1814.

In this period, 1790-1814,<sup>84</sup> writers published 127 plays and 26 appeared anonymously - 153 in all. (Of these plays, 45 were acted, 21 of them in London; few of them ran for more than a night or two and they were seldom revived. For every blank verse tragedy published there must have been approximately twenty other dramatic works published.)<sup>1</sup> The majority, as we would expect in any period, are mediocre, if not simply bad theatre. It is instructive, however, to trace the features these plays have in common, which are peculiar to this age, and help us to understand why they failed.

##### (i) Sensibility and Sentimentality.

By 1790 sensibility, with the hero as "the man of feeling,"<sup>2</sup> had developed in the English drama as well as in the novel. It became a cult of emotion for its own sake, for the vicarious pleasure of reader or audience, and the sheer abandon of sickly excess.

"...the literary school of sentimentalism degenerated towards the end of the eighteenth century. Quantitatively it flourished as

1. cf. Allardyce Nicoll's "Hand-list of Plays," Nicoll, iii, iv. Whenever a play mentioned has been performed performance is recorded in brackets after the title, using abbreviations for theatres: D.L. for Drury Lane; C.G. for Covent Garden.
2. Mackenzie's "The Man of Feeling" was published in 1771.

much as before, but the authors of genius had been succeeded by imitators well versed in the tricks of the trend but without the necessary talent to produce great literature.

"One of the reasons for this degeneration was the fact that sentimentalism, or sensibility had become the fashion. Sensibility originating in that hybrid mixture of thought and feeling, was characterised by extreme innate sensitiveness, which responded to external stimuli with utmost quickness. In consequence, certain outward manifestations developed, such as weeping, ("a sympathetic pitying tear"), kneeling, swooning, as SPONTANEOUS signs of a feeling heart and delicate disposition.

"It is understandable that not everybody was gifted with such a faculty of responsiveness as was expected from a man of sensibility. Now when sensibility became the fashion, that is, when sensibility came to be regarded as "good manners," a very natural expedient was adopted. The external signs were imitated irrespective of whether the corresponding innate promptings were there or not.

"The result was the accusation of insincerity and dissimulation, which, eventually, became associated with the movement as a whole. The stage of degeneration had set in."

3

M.G. Lewis, for example, in Adelgitha; or, The Fruits of a Single Error (D.L.30/4/1807), 1806, <sup>uses</sup> ~~was~~ a slight tale of Crusaders and their wives, to support his lurid fancy<sup>and</sup>'s positive enjoyment of undisciplined emotion. The Times, 1.v.1807, reviewing

3. E. Erämeestsä, A Study of the Word "Sentimental" and of other Linguistic Characteristics of Eighteenth Century Sentimentalism in England, Helsinki, 1951, p.57.

the performance at Drury Lane on 30.iv.1807, says,

"But Mr. Lewis is a poet only in his imagination of horrors; he is no master of poetic language - none of poetic figures....Mr. Lewis abounds too in the barbarism of making his characters describe a passion instead of making them imitate it.... The purity of morals, and the rigidity of virtue, which are enforced by this tragedy, called forth the best approbation of a numerous audience. Indeed so successful a performance has not been witnessed this season."

This demonstrates the weaknesses of many of the dramatists of this period, and by inference, of the critics: the dramatist's inability to conceive poetically - "no master of the poetic language" - combined with the critic's idea that drama can be enhanced, be made "poetic" by the addition of "poetic figures," as if they were to be added to a play by the writer from without, instead of arising naturally, through the poetic conception from within:

"artistic success in the use of verse in tragedy... is contingent on an essential formal relationship between a diction poetically conceived and ordered and the dramatic character of the work...the diction of poetic tragedy becomes dramatic only when, after satisfying all other necessary demands, it contributes to the form as a necessary and probable action."

4

It also shows the dramatist's lack of dramatic feeling - "making his characters describe a passion, instead of making them

4. Moody E. Prior, The Language of Tragedy, New York, 1947, p.15.

imitate it" - so that characters verbosely enlarge upon their feelings, instead of acting in such a way that the audience understands their emotions through their various courses of action, and the necessary, dramatic speech associated therewith. This results in lines such as Wallace declaims in D. Bain's The Patriot; or Wallace (unacted), Edinburgh 1806, I,iii

" in that glistening eye  
And in this heaving breast my witness lives."

and Henry, in Henry and Almeria (unacted), 1802, by A. Birrell, II, i,

"But yet it wings my heart to part!...To part?  
Impossible!.....No, never, never!  
Whilst this has judgement, striking his head with his  
hand/or this heart hath heat."

which are no doubt undramatic reflections from the many hand-books published at this time giving the aspiring actor ready information upon the appropriate facial expression and physical posture for every possible emotion.

Critics were bound to fail in their task as long as sentimentalism and sensibility were mistaken for sincere emotion, as happened so often in this period, so that, for example, Wallace in Bain's The Patriot, becomes an eighteenth century man of feeling. His love for virtue and honour forces him to fight; consequently he lacks all dramatic conflict, as no way is open to the man of honour other than the

path of honour itself. The play drags on for five undramatic, insincere acts, relating the story of Wallace's fight for Scottish independence. Thus it is not really surprising to find the critic so misleading about Adelgitha - "the purity of morals, and the rigidity of virtue which are enforced by this tragedy" - a play abounding in a moral repulsiveness. The final degradation is "the best approbation of a numerous audience."

The tendency to descriptive speech, which is associated with a diffuse sentiment, is a common weakness of the age, e.g. in J. Mylne "The British Kings"<sup>5</sup> I, v, Cadwallan proclaims:

"I cannot, like a superstitious girl  
To her confessor, sigh a piteous tale  
Of human frailty, and implore forgiveness,  
Made of more stubborn stuff, my haughty heart,  
That ill can bear e'en friendship's kind rebuke,  
Will swell with ill-timed passions and convert  
My friend into a foe."

Both Mylne's plays, The British Kings and Darthula,<sup>5</sup> use involved, untheatrical verbosity making them dull poems and abysmal plays. In Dallas's Lucretia<sup>6</sup> talk abounds concerning Magdeline's marriage to Orlando, who, unknown to either, is her father, but the play does not move, it is - a contradiction in terms - a static play, which can never produce an honest

5. In Poems, 1790 (unacted).

6. In Miscellaneous Writings, 1797 (unacted).

tragic conflict. The same undramatic exposition is found in Mrs. Deverell's Mary, Queen of Scots (unacted), 1792, e.g.II,iv, Queen Mary -

"There, in conjunct opinion  
Of Elizabeth's illegitimacy,  
Henry of France, enjoin'd his son and me  
T'assume the title of England's King and Queen,  
And bear th' arms as my heredit'ry right." -

- Where too many lines like this bog down a play already handicapped by a lack of tragic conflict. Such conflict as does exist is a simple one between Mary, who wants to flee to England, and her attendants who do not - instead of the much more interesting one which must have existed within Mary herself and would have given the play the dramatic vigour it so obviously lacks. James Grahame, in his Mary Stewart, Queen of Scots, (unacted), 1801, Edinburgh, has the same difficulty of developing a conflict, but overcomes it by making his play centre rather upon Adelaide, an attendant much loved by Mary, and Douglas, Adelaide's lover. Douglas is captured and executed by the English after an abortive attempt at rescuing Mary from her captivity. His life could, however, have been saved had Mary signed a document proclaiming herself a murderess and a harlot. Here Mary's conflict lies between her affections, as a private person, and her responsibilities as a queen. This gives shape to the play, which is written largely from Shakespearean inspiration. The lesser characters, the mechanics,



use prose, an unfortunate pseudo-Scots, and attempt humorous relief. Grahame also displays an unusual and welcome realism when, at the end of I,ii, Adelaide, who has just made a very brief aside, is addressed by Leven - "Haste, muttering minion, to thy chamber." This forms a contrast to the more usual lack of attention paid to asides of much greater length in this period, which was much more ready to abuse, than to use, the convention. Shakespearean echoes sound through Grahame's language as in I,iii, in a description of Mary's arrival in Scotland in a barge:

"Graceful she stood,  
With one hand clasped around the rose wreathed post,  
Which o'er her head upheld a silken sky  
Tinged faintly with a broken - vaulted rainbow.  
At intervals was heard a quire of flutes,  
Breathing such lays! - - -  
The listening waves seemed music lulled, heaving  
With noiseless swell, that gently raised  
And yet half yielded 'neath the gilded prow."

- Which is so obviously derived from Antony and Cleopatra II,ii.
- Another unusual feature is his trick of using rapid dialogue often giving characters no more than a line at a time. But the play fails because Grahame has grasped no more than a few outward dramatic properties, e.g., use of humorous prose scenes to relieve tension, breaking up of long speeches, and has followed too much the outer form of Shakespeare, his rhythms,

cadences, use of language, so that the play lacks unity to harmonise these outward tricks, and Grahame himself lacks an ear for individual dramatic verse. Consequently the play is melodramatic with characters who do not develop within the action. This weakness is even more apparent in Grahame's Wallace (unacted), 1799, Edinburgh, where he treats the story of Wallace and Margaret of Hexeldham. It may be that he is gaining experience in this play, or perhaps he could not sympathise with his characters as much as he does in Mary Stewart, Queen of Scots: howsoever, Wallace is stiff and unnatural with long, undramatic speeches, which could belong to any of the characters, so lacking in individuality are they.

A lack of dramatic pungency is self-confessed by W. Preston. His play Offa and Ethelbert, or, The Saxon Princes (unacted), 1791, Dublin, which abounds in long tedious speeches of description embodying a moral tone of high seriousness is printed along with "Letter to a Friend on the Subject of the Saxon Princes", where Preston says of his play:

"I know that many of the speeches may be thought declamatory, diffuse, and languid; but I flatter myself, it contains a purity of sentiment, and a strain of morality which, with a candid reader, will hide a multitude of sins....."

Again, in the Preface to his The Siege of Ismail (unacted) 1794,

he admits:

"I am sensible that many of the speeches in this poem are too long and declamatory, and, as a play, it is censurable for being embarrassed with personages, that are unnecessary to the fable; and scenes that do not form the catastrophe."

and excuses all his undramatic ways by saying it is to inculcate a moral - "morality should be its [the drama's] predominant feature."

Sentiment and morality should never be called in to "hide a multitude of sins": if Preston wanted to give only a moral lesson, he should have used a different art form, and not prostituted the drama, especially as he seems to realise how theatrically inadequate his plays are. Yet he does show an occasional gleam of promise, such as Ethelbert's image in I,i,

"With cruel art she dallies with my love  
And wrings with hope delay'd my sicken'd soul,  
Winds up desire to madness, and wears out  
The strings of life,"

where the first conventional lines finish in a tightly knit image achieved by a true realisation of the imaginative strength which should be derived from poetic drama at its best.

This moral tendency was often denounced - though not always, as we saw from the critic's misunderstanding of Adelgitha - if and when such plays were performed, as, e.g.

H.J. Pye's Adelaide, 1800, (D.L.25/i/1800), when The Dramatic Censor commented, "Twas a fast sermon in decasyllabic verse, transferred from the pulpit to the stage." <sup>7</sup> Doran remarks:

"but who knows anything more of 'Adelaide' than that it was insipid, possessed not even a 'tuneful nonsense', and was only distinguished for having made Mrs. Siddons and John Kemble appear almost as insipid as the play." 8

and Genest: "Kemble and Mrs. Siddons are said never to have appeared to less advantage."<sup>9</sup> Yet, as we have seen, Lewis's Adelgitha, or The Fruits of a Single Error, which has the underlying repulsiveness one would expect from the author of The Monk, was welcomed for "the purity of morals, and the rigidity of virtue which are enforced by this tragedy." The critics then, as now, were not in agreement, but it is interesting that even in this age of star performers Mrs. Siddons and John Kemble could not make Adelaide acceptable.

(ii) Gothic elements.

Sentiment, sensibility, a high moral tone and Gothicism are all involved in each other. "Sentiment" is used for fine feelings, often with a high moral and humanitarian sanction;

7. Op cit. No. V, 1/ii/1800

8. Doran, iii, 2.

9. Genest, vii, 463.

"sensibility" for an almost morbid perception and reception of fine feelings, leading to an obvious response to them. Gothicism is not so readily definable; outwardly it is characterised by the properties first found in the Gothic novel: wild, scenic backgrounds, storms, ruined castles, gloomy groves, mysterious monasteries, all combining to produce a surprise climax of terror and horror. Coleridge, in a review of Mrs. Radcliffe's The Mysteries of Udolpho,<sup>10</sup> noticed:

"The same powers of description are displayed (as in the Romance of the Forest), the same predilection is discovered for the wonderful and the gloomy - the same mysterious terrors are continually exciting in the mind the idea of a supernatural appearance.....Curiosity is kept upon the stretch from page to page, and from volume to volume, and the secret, which the reader thinks himself at every instant on the point of penetrating, flits like a phantom before him, and eludes his eagerness until the very last moment of protracted expectation.....the interest is completely dissolved when once the adventure is finished, and the reader, when he is got to the end of the work, looks about in vain for the spell which has bound him so strongly to it."

This criticism could easily be applied to most of the Gothic dramas.

By 1790, this external Gothic horror was being augmented

10. Critical Review, August, 1794.

by an internal agony of suffering:

"Horrors continued to be popular, but less in the way of robbers, ghosts, and tyrants, external miseries, crass romances, and empty tirades, than in inward commotions of the soul."

11

Coleridge had professional experience -

"but indeed I am almost weary of the Terrible, having been an hireling in the Critical Review for the last six or eight months - I have been lately reviewing the Monk, the Italian, Hubert de Serrace and Ec and Ec - in all of which dungeons, and old castles, and solitary Houses by the Sea Side, and Caverns ~~and~~ Woods, & extraordinary characters, & all the tribe of Horror and Mystery, have crowded on me - even to surfeiting."

12

A reflection of this is found in Coleridge's remarks on Shakespeare's characteristics. Among other things he praises Shakespeare for

"Expectation in preference to surprise... As the feeling with which we startle at a shooting star, compared with that of watching the sunrise at a pre-established moment, such and so low is surprise compared with expectation.... Keeping at all times on the high road of life, Shakespeare has no innocent adulteries, no interesting incests, no virtuous vice (all very Gothic attributes); he never renders that amiable which religion and reason alike teach us to detest, or clothes impurity in the garb of virtue, like Beaumont and Fletcher, the Kotzebues of his day."

13.

11. A. Brandl, Coleridge and the English Romantic School, 1887, p. 166.
12. Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. E.L. Griggs, 1956, i, 318.
13. Shakespearian Criticism, 1930, ed. T.M. Raysor, p. 225-6.

The characters of these plays are usually surrounded by a mystery of some dreadful, unmentionable nature. Often some event which occurred many years before the play opens, is the mysterious impulse which gives the play what form it has by beginning the action. This event is always referred to in obscure, difficult terms, with much agony, until its final revelation, usually in the last act, when, like a deus ex machina, it explains all the difficulties and mysteries which have accumulated throughout the play.

Take, for example, W. Sotheby's Julian and Agnes, or The Monks of the Great St. Bernard (D.L.25/1v/1801), 1801, and the altered stage version, Ellen, or, The Confession, 1816, which tell of Julian, Count of Tortona, re-named "Alfonso" in Ellen, who, already married to Agnes, bigamously marries Ellen, a young woman whom he has promised to look after when she was submitted to his care by her brother, who was evidently dying of wounds on the battle-field. (He does, in fact, live - a typical Gothic surprise). Julian happily maintains two households without any apparent conscience troublings, until Ellen's brother re-appears and denounces him. Whereupon Julian is promptly overwhelmed by a desolate sense of sin.

He flees to the mountains to live with the monks of the Great St. Bernard. Meanwhile the desolate Countess Agnes, confronted with the mystery of her husband's sudden disappearance - Ellen's brother denounced Julian only to himself - determines to enter a convent, as Julian had left word asking her to regard him as dead. Ellen, the second wife, knowing from her brother of Julian's first marriage, has joined Agnes, who is ignorant of Ellen's history and who urges Ellen to join her. They travel into the Gothic, mountainous country where the monks of the Great St. Bernard live, and are attacked by assassins, who are beaten off by Julian. Before this happens we have seen Julian in the monastery troubling all the monks by his great sense of guilt - and no wonder, for the care with which a Gothic hero cultivates his guilt and remorse, his sin and his damnation, would upset all but the most Calvinistic of Christians. In Ellen, III, ii, the Provost of the Monastery talks to Alfonso:

"Provost. Know, too, our holy church  
Has pray'rs and penances of power to cleanse  
The soul from all infections.

[illegible]



The play closes with Julian being forgiven by his wives before he dies. Ellen also dies. Nearly all these facts, however, of the relationships and of the past, are concealed until the end; only mysterious references hint at Julian's sin and crime and at Ellen's identity, so that the play is more akin to a detective novel than a tragedy. The situation is not tragic, but melodramatic and wildly romantic: Ellen, in Ellen; or The Confession, I,iii, warns the Countess:

"oh! beware!  
Thou hast rais'd me from the couch of death,  
And all unconscious to thy bosom clasp'd  
The adder that must pierce thee - search not out  
My secret soul, nor rouse its slumbrous fires." -

an extract from a speech all in that vein which puzzles both the Countess and the audience, coming to a climax with

" . . . . .The awful voice  
Again has warn'd me forth: but, where are thou  
Who call'st on Ellen?"

This supernatural voice is another Gothic property, guilt, as it were, spiritualised into a voice of conscience. In II, i and ii, we are introduced to Alfonso - Julian - in the Convent of the Great St. Bernard, adding to the sense of mystery as he is apparently quite unconnected with Act I and is himself obviously bedevilled with guilt. Alfonso meets the Provost of the Convent, II, i :

"Alfonso. I must hail him.  
Your benediction, father!

Provost. Peace be with thee!

Alfonso (striking his breast, rushes by him)  
Peace! never - never."

In III, i, the bigamous marriage is revealed, giving a melodramatic scene between Ellen and Agnes; then in III, ii, "The Inside of a Gothic Cathedral", Ellen melodramatises before Alfonso's tomb - he had left instructions to the Countess Agnes for his tomb to be raised when he disappeared. In Act IV Alfonso confesses to the Provost, and Act V ties up the ends, but it does not resolve the tragedy, for there is no tragedy to resolve; instead there is a succession of acts providing opportunities for melodramatic histrionics. A tragic spirit may not perhaps properly be expected from the minor tragedy of any period, yet we do expect a tragic form, but here, and too often in his period, the plot is not tragic but is more accurately termed "melodramatic." Sotheby suffers from the weakness of his age - that no genuine idea of tragedy prevailed among the dramatists.

This play also demonstrates a stage in the evolution of the Byronic hero, as traced by Bertrand Evans in Gothic Drama from Walpole to Shelley.<sup>14</sup> There Mr. Evans sees a movement

14. University of California Publications in English,  
XVIII, 1947.

in Gothic drama leading from villain-hero, through hero-villain, to Byronic hero. The emphasis upon mystery, gloom and terror, required the villain to be the most powerful figure so that the atmosphere could best be exploited. Star actors were encouraged to take the villain's part as the most important in the play. Their natural desire to appeal to the audience was pandered to by sympathetic touches in the villains, who gradually evolved into heroes. In tragedy this modification was probably hastened by the writer's desire to have a strong tragic hero. In Sotheby we find the hero-villain in Julian-Alfonso, has almost become the Byronic hero such as Manfred for example. Julian is the only villain in the play, but neither of the wronged heroines feels any animosity towards him, because he is also the hero.<sup>15</sup>

The same weakness, of mystery replacing the tragic impulse, is found in the anonymous The Carthusian Friar; or, The Age of Chivalry (unacted), 1793, by "A Female Refugee. Eugenia, Duchess of Rochford, has lived in grief ever since, eighteen years before, the Duke, after a secret discussion with her, rode off never to return. Rochford, her son, now eighteen

15. Though this same tendency is found in, e.g. Frank in Ford's The Witch of Edmonton, 1658.

years old, suddenly wanting to solve this mystery, accosts his mother, I, ii:

"Rochford.      You start! - mysterious hour!    why tremble  
                                                                                         thus?  
Why heaves that bosom like the swelling sea  
When tempest-shook? - Explain this horror! -  
Speak!

Eugenia. I cannot - Fly me! "

Rochford, determined to seek an explanation, goes to the court at Paris, where he is mocked as having an idiot father. He returns to his mother, providing the author with a scene she obviously revels in when young Rochford and his mother meet in St. Michael's Chapel before the tomb of the late Duke of Rochford, the father and husband. (In this period, we must note, a tomb does not necessarily include a corpse.) The Duchess enters, III,iii :

"Once more, thou dismal treasury of sorrow!  
Once more, remote from every human eye  
(As the pale miser steals to count his gold)  
I come to number o'er my store of griefs!"

Young Rochford, with many catches in his breath, asks if he really is the son of the late Duke. Amid great sentiment and lamentation the scene ends, without a definite answer - a technique now employed by bad detective stories. In Act IV the Duchess reveals how Mansoli, a great friend of her husband's, had attempted to seduce her. She spurned him. In revenge Mansoli made Rochford believe she had a paramour.

Rochford stabbed his wife, then pregnant, and vanished. But he had miscalculated the fatal blow and the Duchess lived. She weeps and exclaims, as she has evidently been doing for eighteen years. Young Rochford weeps also before rushing off to avenge his mother. An added complication is found in Juliet, a young girl of mysterious antecedents, who loves Rochford. In II, i, she exclaims,

"O do not search the reason of my griefs,  
Unless thou canst as surely give their remedy!  
Unless thou canst invoke some pow'r divine  
To banish shame, which holds my tongue enchain'd  
When I wou'd speak of them."

Juliet, disguised as a page, and owing much to Shakespearean maids in similar circumstances, accompanies Rochford in his search for Mansoli. She reveals her identity in time to plead with Rochford not to fight Mansoli, whom he has finally found in Turin. Rochford, however, fights a duel - naturally winning - and Mansoli, before he dies, confesses his crime towards Eugenia. He also admits to having ruined a woman before he met Eugenia - the result of which ruining turns out to be Juliet. Then Rochford is arrested, under Turin laws, for his duelling. A friar who comes to comfort him in prison turns out to be his own father, the "late" Duke of Rochford, who had sought typical Gothic refuge in a monastery from his

wife's infidelity. A great sentimental scene follows. Then the news arrives that Eugenia has died. Young Rochford goes to the scaffold, whilst old Rochford returns to his cell, where, it is strongly hinted, he will only survive a few days, so great is the burden of his remorse.

There is no genuine tragedy in this play, unless tragedy is to be equated with mystery and unhappiness, whilst the idea of a tragic hero meeting his death through breaking the law of a city does not add to the "tragedy." The bad writing is inseparable from the bad plot: the conception is non-poetic and non-tragic, whilst the whole play is almost a parody of the worst aspects of Gothic melodrama: a mysterious mother, whose son suddenly starts posing unanswerable questions; a husband and father who is missing, assumed dead, but who turns up in a monastery, old and feeble, very willing to experience grief and remorse and to welcome death; a young girl of mysterious parentage, always revealed finally as noble; all the mysteries surrounding these people being demonstrated and worked out in midnight groves, Gothic chapels or cathedrals, monasteries with tolling bells, ruins, or any of the other stock Gothic properties, to the accompaniment of melodramatic outbursts, inexplicable starts and sighs and many tears from both sexes.

Another Gothic mystery drama is provided by S. Richardson's Gertrude (unacted), 1810. Here Gertrude, the leading lady, advised by her nurse Ursula, has exchanged babies so that her son may become Count Linckenstein. Now, the requisite number of years having passed, the children are old enough for marriage and Gertrude is seething with remorse. Her daughter Clara, and Henricus, her apparent son, suspect that something is amiss, not only from Gertrude's mysterious innuendos, but from their mutual love, which goes beyond brotherly affection. Clara, meanwhile, is betrothed to the Count who is her real brother. This is a typical Gothic situation; involved relationships trembling upon the brink of unmentionable sins, which so often take the form of some kind of breach of the table of affinity. Gertrude determines, after much turmoil, to resolve the situation, as far as she herself is concerned, by taking poison. She is prevented by another stock Gothic property - a friar. Just as Clara and her unacknowledged brother are standing before the altar on the very brink of matrimony a short note written by Gertrude, confessing everything and hurriedly delivered by Fr. Anselm, prevents a catastrophe. Everything is explained and Gertrude goes to a nunnery: obviously her Gothic choice was between that and death. This melodramatic, emotional frenzy is entitled, Gertrude, A Tragic Drama, but wherein

the tragedy consists is difficult to understand. Fr. Anselm closes the play thus, referring to Gertrude:

" - She stands a mournful evidence to prove  
That not the best intentions can suffice  
No, nor the clearest sense, or proudest talents,  
To guard us thro' life's perils and temptations,  
Unless the soul is arm'd by FORTITUDE,  
- Her virtues struck upon the Rock of FEAR."

Sentiments singularly inappropriate when applied to Gertrude, who exhibits neither "best intentions," "clearest sense" nor "proudest talents," whilst her so-called virtues struck, not upon "the Rock of FEAR", but upon the rock of maternal selfishness. Once again we find an unhealthy piety based upon pseudo-Christianity of a most unpleasant kind.

Mrs. Richardson's other play, Ethelred, A Legendary Tragic Drama (unacted), 1810 is no better. Ethelred II has married a commoner, Ethelgive, against the advice of his nobles. Now the nobles recognise her worth and want to crown her as queen. But Ethelred has fallen in love with Emma, Princess of Normandy, and is now going to renounce Ethelgive as if it were a noble sacrifice for his country. Ethelgive swoons and remains unconscious so long that it is assumed she is dead. Ethelred now regrets his passion for Emma, especially after reading a noble, self-sacrificing letter from Ethelgive anent their children. Ethelgive revives. Ethelred is killed by



Ethelgive's brother, who then poisons Ethelgive for still feeling warmly towards Ethelred. Ethelred is a most naïve hero-villain, swinging from one emotion to another just as it pleases Mrs. Richardson. In II, ii, Ethelred is made to throw away his chance of conflict,

" . . . . One of us must suffer,  
And why not she? The reasoning is fair:  
I'll think no more of her, and beauteous Emma  
Shall with her heavenly presence quite dispel  
Each dark and fear-form'd vision...."

At the end of II, iii, Ethelred, leaving Ethelgive, drops a picture of Emma: the mind boggles at an Anglo-Saxon portrait of a Princess clattering unnoticed to the ground. Finally, however, the moral is drawn, Ethelred should have remained faithful to Ethelgive.

Another moral ending is provided by C. Masterton in The Seducer (unacted), 1811, which ends:

"From this seduction what misery has come!  
O, that men ever carried in their minds  
The curb for passion, that a moment's pleasure  
Often incurs eternity of pain."

Another Gothic play with a strange relationship element is R.C. Dallas's Lucretia.<sup>16</sup> Orlando is preparing to marry Magdeline, who, unknown to either, is in fact his daughter.

16. Miscellaneous Writings, 1797 (unacted).

The mystery is not revealed until Lucretia, Magdeline's mother, but not Orlando's wife, returns from a pilgrimage of penance, accompanied by her legitimate son, though neither mother nor son knows of the relationship. This involved play is neither dramatic nor poetic, in conception, or in execution and, as referred to above, it is no more than static talk. It is interesting to note a typical Gothic element: Lucretia has been on a pilgrimage of penance for the sin of Magdeline's conception, which was committed more than eighteen years before and has been regretted ever since. Yet penance continues. There is the same, unpleasant wallowing in sin, a repulsive delight in the continued remembrance of mistakes and a refusal to accept forgiveness - presumably the sin has been committed against God, if we may judge from some of the soliloquies, and therefore capable of being forgiven by God.

Much the same kind of thing occurs in W. Hayley's Endora (C.G.29/i/1790), 1811: Raymond is falsely accused of murdering his prince, who was in fact murdered by an enemy of Raymond's so that Raymond could be blamed, Endora, Raymond's wife, having refused to gratify this man's desires. Raymond is imprisoned and his father urges him to suicide. For many

wailing scenes the father believes he has succeeded, but Endora stops Raymond, the real murder<sup>er</sup> is revealed and peace restored. This plot is in no sense tragic: there is no tragic conflict or tragic hero, and any tragic situations which might have been developed are neglected. The characters lament to one another in bad verse and all ends happily with the bad man punished and the good man justified. The use of language may be illustrated from I, i, when an officer reports :

"                               Yes, my lord,  
Your lovely daughter, in a grateful transport,  
Charg'd me to thank you for the joyous summons,  
Which she is hastening to obey."

His other plays, The Viceroy (unacted), Chichester, 1811, and The Heroine of Cambria, (unacted), Chichester, 1811, both have the same weaknesses of undramatic exclamations imposed upon themes treated melodramatically. J. Templeton, The Shipwrecked Lovers (unacted), Dublin, 1801, also indulges in melodrama and bad verse. His hero, Seymour, ends the play:

"When fates are wearied with their fiercest rage,  
And wish our griefs and sorrows to assuage,  
When the full conflict of our cares are o'er,  
When the black phial pours its ills no more:  
To temper bliss with woe, the powers above,  
Waft to our bosoms heav'n-descended love,  
Bid yielding beauty hear the bursting sigh,  
And wipe the flowing torrents from the eye,  
Command the thoughts of dangers past to cease,  
And warm the soul to rapture, love and peace."

This tendency to melodrama affects most of the minor tragedy, 1790-1814, in varying degrees. Whenever a tragic vision is lacking the dramatists have feigned the tragic emotion by assaults upon the sentimental emotions. This emotional emphasis was encouraged by the tendencies of the period in other art forms. The major writers were enabled to pass beyond crude emotional effects because they tended to be more intellectually involved in the problems of their age.

These Gothic properties, mystery, gloom, perpetual penance, guilt and violence of emotion, are accompanied by sentiment and an unplesing morality, combining to give an overall unhealthy impression, inevitable when emotions probably false to begin with, are exploited for their own sake. At first Gothic properties constituted a genuine attempt to introduce fresh themes and materials as eighteenth century themes were growing too familiar and could not be expected to appeal to the new spirit of the age which was moving at the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>17</sup> But the dramatists could not see how a powerful drama might have evolved had they used the Gothic machinery as a framework within which to develop their themes. Instead, they were content to exploit the framework itself, and by concentrating upon the Gothic properties neglected the tragedy which they both could and should have

17. Moody E. Prior, The Language of Tragedy, New York, 1947, Chapter IV, "Nineteenth Century Tragedy," pp.213-290.

presented. Dramatic action tended to be replaced by stage business. J. Haggitt, The Count de Villeroy, or The Fate of Patriotism (unacted), 1794, states in his Preface:

"we shall not easily find a piece [Haggitt is referring to Walpole's The Mysterious Mother, 1768] in which elegance of language, unity of design, strict preservation of character, with all the higher excellencies of tragedy - the power of exciting pity, terror, distress, and horror for guilt, are more eminently united."

In his play Haggitt not only confuses stage business with dramatic action, but crude assaults upon the sensibilities with emotion, the more easily as a patriotic element enters the play. In IV, i, Julia, the heroine, has a soliloquy of 100 lines upon her emotions, which is both untheatrical and typical of these plays. J. Mason, in The Renown,<sup>18</sup> writes a tragedy which amounts to no more than the moving around of Gothic properties; mystery is furnished by the Marchioness de Eboli who agonises over her daughter Julia's intention to marry Lord Dormer. The Marchioness very obviously and vociferously has a secret grief, explained when Desmond, Lord Dormer's friend, appears and reveals himself as the Marchioness's natural son. She wants to keep this quiet, but Desmond finds his father and the Marchioness dies. There is no tragedy, only a stupid mystery, unexplained terror, grief and remorse. Mason

18. In Literary Miscellanies, 1809, II (unacted).

appears to write blank verse tragedy as a hobby suitable for a gentleman. His other play, Ninus<sup>19</sup> concerning a usurping monarch in Babylon, is not so Gothic, but is as useless. Baker says of Mason, "of this person we know no more than that he wrote The Natural Son, T.8 vo, 1805."<sup>20</sup> This play, The Natural Son, I have been unable to trace and tentatively conclude that it is an alternative or earlier title of The Renown, as Mason states in his "Observations on our Princip-  
Dramatic  
al/Authors,"<sup>21</sup> that "two (of these plays) have been already published." His hobby attitude may explain his bad writing, but it probably indicates that he followed the best kind of contemporary tragedy as he saw it, instead of writing with any artistic consciousness reacting to the age in which he lived or to his own vision of the world. The marshalling of the outward, obvious Gothic manifestations could never replace genuine dramatic action. W. Preston, in his "Letter to a Friend, on the Subject of the Saxon Princes,"<sup>22</sup> says

"I know it [Offa and Ethelbert] wants the bustle and intrigue, so necessary to the modern drama.... I know that the introduction of madness has fallen into some discredit, and perhaps justly. A mad scene has been a kind of bow of Ulysses, in which

19. In Literary Miscellanies, 1809, II (unacted).
20. D.E. Baker, I. Reed, S. Jones, Biographia Dramatica; or A Companion to the Playhouse, 1812, i, 495.
21. ~~This~~ Literary Miscellanies, 1809, II.
22. Offa and Ethelbert, Dublin, 1791.

every tragic writer, great and small, who wished to produce a rant, has tried his strength; yet what is more natural than privation of reason under violent agitations of mind? And, what is better calculated to produce, in stage representation, the dramatic effects of terror and pity?"

This emphasis upon "bustle and intrigue" and "terror and pity" is wrong; bustle and intrigue there may well be in a tragedy, but it should be incidental to the development of the tragic theme, and not referred to, as Preston does here, as some kind of an extra prescribed specifically for "the modern drama." Pity enters into tragedy, as one element, and not the most important one, in the response of the audience, but it should quickly be developed and deepened into a right compassion which embraces, not one particular character or play, but the whole unfathomed perplexity of the universe: the pity referred to by Preston is the late eighteenth century pity for a particular character and his predicament. Similarly the Gothic terror is exploited for its own sake and is not allowed to harmonise with a proper pity so that any catharsis may be achieved.

Along with this went purposeful assaults upon the sensibilities instead of upon the compassion of the audience. In III, i, of The Minstrel, or The Heir of Arundel (unacted), 1805, by J. West, Rudolph, Earl of Arundel, a tyrant and a

murderer, remembers how he murdered a young boy who stood in his way:

"What to me is beauty?  
I murder'd beauty. Rosy was his cheek:  
His eye a morning sun-beam; and his arms,  
As he extended them in vain for mercy -  
Oh! horror! horror! fatal pomp! curst greatness!  
Would I could quit this state, and once again  
Enjoy one peaceful hour! "

Such inartistic efforts to bludgeon a reader, or an audience, into a tragic response, relying upon simple melodrama to do it, are usually boosted by stage directions. (And one can imagine that actors lavished all their melodramatic powers upon such parts). The Castle of Montval, (D.L.23,iv,1799), 1799, by T.S. Whalley, was written so that Mrs. Siddons could play the Countess. It abounds with Gothic mystery, spectres, haunted rooms, and deep groans. In IV, iv, directions include "More groans; she [the Countess] starts aghast....."; "Groans repeated; " "She looks with wild horror round the alcove."

In the preface, "To the Public" of the Anonymous, The Carthusian Friar, or, The Age of Chivalry (unacted), 1793 the Author writes:

"Her aim (i.e. the author's), her desires, are confined to the narrower circle of the studious, and, above all, the compassionate! - It is in the silent recesses of the closet, that she dares to court the eye of sensibility!"

which displays her misunderstanding of "tragedy", as she has so termed her play.



(iii) German influence.

This sensibility went along with the influence of German drama and of German ideas, which was particularly strong at the end of the eighteenth century, when the French influence began to wane as all things French appeared unpatriotic.<sup>23</sup> Kotzebue's sentimental dramas encouraged English sentimental tragedies and spectacular melodramas. Performed adaptations and translations of Kotzebue, as straight plays, spectacles or melodramas, listed by Professor Allardyce Nicoll<sup>24</sup> between 1790 and 1825, only amount to 16 and they were not frequently performed. But the unproduced, and often unproduceable translations had a stronger effect upon English dramatists, who were writing as much for the closet as for the stage. Between 1790 and 1825, Professor Nicoll lists 70 such plays, of all kinds, ranging from literal translations to free adaptations. This total of 86 plays, dependent upon only one foreign dramatist, demonstrates his influence, one which tended toward heavy emotion, melodrama and sentiment.<sup>25</sup> Better German dramatists did not have so much influence. Eight translations

23. Nicoll, iii, 59-61.

24. Nicoll, iii, 232-348, 377-406; iv, 249-558, 567-643.

25. Nicoll, iii, 4, 66.

or adaptations of plays by Goethe were published between 1790 and 1825. Faust appeared first in an anonymous abridged version in 1821, and Lord Francis Gower's translation in 1823. In the same period Schiller appeared in 21 direct translations or adaptations of one kind or another, of which 5 were performed between 1790 and 1825, 1 in 1848, and the remaining 15 were unperformed. Consequently the influence of Goethe and Schiller in the period was not as powerful as that of the lesser Kotzebue who could not provide the intensity of tragic spirit found in, e.g. Die Räuber.

Naturally this German influence was commented upon during the period. Wordsworth notes that -

"the works of Shakespeare and Milton are driven into neglect by frantic novels, sickly and stupid German Tragedies."

26

Coleridge, in his "Critique on Bertram"<sup>27</sup> refers to "pernicious barbarisms and Kotzebuisms in morals and tastes." He then continues to examine German drama and traces its roots to English works, such as Young's Night Thoughts, Hervey's Meditations and Richardson's Clarissa Harlowe - in fact, to the earliest works of the sentimental school of English writers.

26. Lyrical Ballads, Preface.

27. Biographia Literaria, xxiii.

Coleridge concludes :

"The so-called German drama, therefore, is English in its origin, English in its materials, and English by re-adoption."

This recognition of the sources of German drama does not, of course, alter Coleridge's low opinion of its extreme manifestations.

The minor writers themselves recognised the German influence. F. Howard, Earl of Carlisle, in the preface to The Step-Mother (unacted), 1800, remarks,

"Without presuming to arraign the popular taste on the subject of theatrical performances, or to hint any opinion of my own on the German Drama (with which I profess to be but little acquainted) I flatter myself, no candid British critic will be offended by the acknowledgement, that, in the construction of the fable, or in the conduct of the following scenes, recourse has not been had to recorded history, or to the invention of contemporary writers. Their works, in this instance, have not been translated, their style of colouring has not been copied, and their plots have been safe from violation."

This is an obvious reference to the number of translations, both close and loose, found at this period. S.T. Coleridge's translation (1800) of Schiller's Die Piccolomini is an example of the latter. He does not transliterate; he omits lines, e.g. Die Piccolomini, ll.209-257; he inserts lines of his own, e.g. The Piccolomini, II, xiii, 9-15; he does not always keep Schiller's act and scene division, e.g. where Schiller

starts Act II Coleridge continues his Act I, and his Act II does not start until Schiller's Act III; he translates Schiller's blank verse into prose when servants are concerned, e.g. Die Piccolomini, II, xiii from Schiller, IV,v. Coleridge has trouble with German compounds: Die Piccolomini, II.1822-3

"Beweise,  
Dass du des Ausserordentlichen Tochter bist"  
becomes, in The Piccolomini, II, vii, 57 ff

"Give them proof,  
Thour't the daughter of the Mighty - his  
Who where he moves creates the wonderful."  
At times Coleridge's enthusiasm runs away with him:

The Piccolomini, I, iv, 149:

"The ramparts are all filled with men and women,  
With peaceful men and women, that send onwards  
Kisses and welcomings upon the air,  
Which they make breezy with affectionate gestures."

comes from Die Piccolomini, II.542-3

"Von Menschen sind die Wälle rings erfüllt,  
Von friedlichen die in die Lüfte grüssen."

In passing we may note a tendency of this period towards doubling, as Coleridge has done here, and more particularly in, e.g. I, viii, 6, where

"Yes! pure and lovely hath hope risen on me."  
is a sentimental doublet from Schiller's I.722

"Ja! Schön ist mir die Hoffnung aufgegangen."  
or, I, iii, 22, where Coleridge makes his own addition -

"Alas, my friend! alas, my noble friend!"

Loose adaptations range from Sheridan's Pizano, 1799, an adaptation of Kotzebue's Die Spanier in Peru, 1796; to J.C. Cross's Spectacle, The Songs....in the New Splendid Serious Spectacle called Cora; or, The Virgin in the Sun. Principally taken from Marmontel's Incas of Peru and the German Drama of The Virgin of the Sun, by Kotzebue, being the first part of his Popular Play of the Death of Rolla, 1799.

Howard, in the epilogue to The Step-Mother (unacted), 1800, writes :

"Should you to-night our Poet but endure,  
You'll fix his frensy, and beyond all cure.  
Lord! how he'll vapour, and how domineer  
How little in his eyes shall we appear!  
God knows but he'll attempt, in desperate rage,  
To amend the taste, and fashion of the age,  
And, grown quite wild, blaspheme the German stage!  
.....  
This, you'll confess, is folly in the extreme;  
O do not then improve his dangerous dream;  
But, damning him, decree it be his fate,  
Twelve plays, a year, from Kotzebue to translate." -

Showing that he, for one, recognised the folly of his compatriots in showing such uncritical enthusiasm for the German stage,

(iv) Shakespearean influence.

G.A. Rhodes refers to another element in the drama of this period - the influence of Shakespeare and the Jacobean

dramatists - which also hindered the writers who were trying to find a genuine dramatic idiom for their age. Whilst in lyric poetry we find poets branching out with a new Romantic conception of the value of poetry and its relationship to each individual; in the theatre we find, for example, J. Galt asserting in his preface to The Tragedies of Maddalen, Agamemnon, Lady Macbeth, Antonia and Clytemnestra (unacted) 1812:

"With respect to the style, I consider the characteristics of the British dramatic verse as having been fixed by Shakespear; and his successors, in my opinion, would shew as bad a taste in attempting to introduce a new manner, as in imitating the obsolete quaintness peculiar to the writers of his age. I have, therefore, endeavoured to adapt his simple and colloquial metres to modern modes of expression. But in the structure of the drama, I have ventured to present the unities of the Greek theatre, along with the natural circumstances and dialogue of the English; and I have chosen to divide the fable into three parts, (I know not why five should have been hitherto preferred,) and my text will be found to indicate without the aid of marginal notes, what should be the business of the stage."

Galt has inevitably failed to distinguish between "characteristics .....fixed by Shakespear," and the Shakespearian language: no such distinction is possible and any attempt at distinction can too easily lead to distortion. Thus in Lady Macbeth, I, iv, Macbeth asserts -

"The priestly benediction, and the oil,  
Nor all the ritual of the stone at Scone  
Can charm my eyes to innocent repose." -

no doubt an attempt "to adapt his simple and colloquial metres to modern modes of expression," but really an unhappy and unnatural piece of blank verse for Galt's own time. We notice how flaccid and inevitable the adjectives are here - "priestly," "innocent" - how "charm" weakens the impression, and how the rhetorical grouping in the first two lines robs the passage of any immediacy of effect. This preface reveals the weaknesses not only of Galt, but of his age: the unquestioned assumption that British dramatic verse can have characteristics which have been eternally fixed by ~~one~~ dramatist, who, moreover, is not properly understood: Shakespearean texts were uncertain and stage presentations were usually adaptations made by an eighteenth century improver. Also the non-artistic conscious imitation of certain aspects of his model - the "simple and colloquial metres," and the decision to maintain the unities, in spite of criticism such as Johnson's Preface to Shakespeare, 1768, - both amount to a deliberate framework to which his own conception had to conform, instead of allowing the nature of his inspiration and of his material to find its own natural, organic form, much more relevant to his age than any resuscitated antiquities. In lyric poetry no poet regard-

ed, let us say, Chaucer with this wrong-headed, misplaced, insulting sycophancy. The best praise to have given Shakespeare would have been to write in his spirit not according to his letter. None of Galt's plays is successful. His failure is due to ignorance of the theatre, verbosity and lack of dramatic form. One contemporary reviewer of his tragedies asserts :<sup>28</sup>

"It has seldom been our misfortune to witness a more striking and deplorable example of self-confidence, united with contemptible imbecility, of affectation with vulgar and detestable grossness, and of perverse or helpless ignorance, with the most ostentatious pretensions to scholastic knowledge, than is exhibited in these motley performances.....We firmly believe that a composition more prolific in nonsense, absurdity, vulgarity, pedantry and all the qualities of bad writing, and less destitute of every poetical quality, than Mr. Galt's Tragedies has never polluted the press, or degraded the literature of England..."

This is certainly harsh, but the reviewer gives his reasons:

"...the state of modern drama at present is so deplorable, and the taste of the theatrical community so lamentably perverted, that every composition which tends in the slightest degree to promote the diffusion of bad taste, and the degradation of the drama, demands from its friends the most severe and most immediate reprobation."

28. The Theatrical Inquisitor, iv, (June, 1814) 358.



J. Bidlake shows the same failings in Virginia; or The Fall of the Decemvirs,<sup>29</sup> 1800. There is no character delineation, instead there is verbosity, sentimentality, and would-be overwhelming assertions of moral integrity with no speech differentiations between the characters and a great reliance upon Shakespeare; e.g. Virginius declares, I,iii,

"But praise must not be scattered lavishly,  
It is too sacred to be lightly giv'n.  
When well apply'd, it most enriches virtue,  
Making e'en that more worth: it is the spur  
Which quickens honour's pace, and emulates  
The gen'rous breast to deeds of high achievement;  
It puts dishonour to the blush. Then weigh  
With care most scrupulous thy precious gifts,  
Nor let them wasteful fall like common dews,  
Upon the wholesome and the noxious herb.  
The good alone deserve thy commendation,  
Praise is like gold, of little estimation  
If it be plenty, and 'tis valued most  
By scarceness: heap'd on all, it flatters none.  
Let not dement steal the dues of virtue."

This is verbose comment with "proper sentiments," relying largely upon Shakespeare in rhythm and language, and not furthering the play. If Virginius was a character who genuinely experienced and gave utterance to such sentiments in such a way, our understanding would be extended, but all the characters in the play use the same unnatural stilted mode of expression. It is

29. A revised version of Bidlake's play, retitled Virginius; or The Fall of the Decemvirs, was performed D.L.29/v/1820, after Knowles' Virginius, or The Liberation of Rome had appeared at C.G. 17/v/1820.

Bidlake versifying, not<sup>a</sup> character functioning. When this play was performed, in a revised form, Virginus; or The Fall of the Decemvirs, at Drury Lane, 29/v/1820 - in reply to the Covent Garden production of Knowles's Virginus, or, The Liberation of Rome, (C.G.17/v/1820), 1820, one critic regarded it as "completely below the standard of criticism." 30

Grahame's Mary Stewart, Queen of Scots, has already been mentioned in this context of Shakespearean imitation.<sup>31</sup> The anonymous Zapphira (unacted), 1792, presents a genuine Elizabethan villain, Rhynsault, who the moment he is alone upon the stage, I,i, has a soliloquy such as Richard III and the bastard Edmund have, announcing himself for the villain he is and concluding :

"So I shall dupe this virt'ous fool, my master,  
With that most useful garb, hypocrisy....."

whilst in III, i, another character, Jacquilina, has a soliloquy upon a crown, with references to royalty and to the common man which, though certainly found in other dramatists, are largely associated with Shakespeare.

30. The Theatrical Inquisitor, and Monthly Mirror, new series, vol. i (May, 1820) 392.

31. cf. p.62.

The most notorious Shakespearean influence was upon W.H. Ireland, who "found" a hitherto unknown play by Shakespeare, Vortigern, an Historical Tragedy, (D.L. 2.iv.1796), 1799. This forgery, along with the less publicised Henry the Second, an Historical Drama (unacted), 1799, was so obviously false that at the performance of Vortigern members of the audience, Shakespeareans or "Malone-ites," cried out "Henry the Sixth," "Richard the Third," or whatever was appropriate for the Shakespearean echo on the stage.<sup>32</sup> This furore reached its climax when Kemble, as Vortigern, had a speech containing the line

"And when this solemn mockery is over,"  
and the audience howled its agreement.

The plot itself has Shakespearean echoes. Vortigern has been given a share in the ruling of Britain by Constantius; he then has Constantius murdered, as Macbeth had Banquo, and blames the Scots. Vortigern recalls Constantius's two sons from Rome, intending to murder them, but they are warned and join the Scots. They attack Vortigern, but are defeated.

32. J.C. Trewin, The Night Has Been Unruly, 1957, pp.31-46. The best account of the Ireland forgeries is in J. Mair's The Fourth Forger, 1938.

Hengist and Horsa now join Vortigern. Horsa is killed. Vortigern spurns his own wife for the love of Rowena, daughter of Hengist, who encourages the union as he schemes for the throne himself. Flavia, Vortigern's daughter, falls in love with Aurelius, Constantius's elder son; the Britons revolt and Aurelius and Flavia are left king and queen, Rowena poisons herself and Vortigern is led off stage - no doubt to his deserved doom.

This is derived from Holinshed and strengthened by King Lear and Macbeth in its plot. In language it is undigested Shakespeare, e.g., I., i, a soliloquy by Vortigern:

"Fortune, I thank thee!  
Now is the cup of my ambition full!  
And by this rising tempest in my blood  
I feel the fast approach of greatness which  
E'en like a peasant stoops for my acceptance.  
But hold! O conscience, how is it with thee?  
Why dost thou pinch me thus, for should I need thee,  
Then must my work crumble and fall to nought;  
Come then, thou soft, thou double fac'd deceit!  
Come dearest flatt'ry! Come direst murder!  
Attend me quick, and prompt me to the deed!  
What! jointly wear the crown? No! I will all!  
And that my purpose may soon find its end,  
This, my good King, must I unmannerly  
Push from his seat and fill myself the chair.  
Welcome then glittering mark of loyalty!  
And with thy pleasing yet oppressive weight,  
Bind fast this firm, and this determin'd brow. "

This is a mixture of King Lear, with the dangers of a shared crown and the daring of an Edmund; of Macbeth, Lady Macbeth's

invocations and purposeful screwing up of courage; of Richard III, the open ambition and ruthlessness. In I, ii, a Shakespearean fool appears, a sad shadow of his original, the fool in King Lear, and lacking all Shakespeare's bite and bawdry. In I, iii Vortigern holds forth largely in obvious Macbeth strain -

"Now then good King prepare thee for the worst  
For ere the thick and noisome air of night  
Shall with damn'd Hecate's baneful spells be fill'd,  
Thou must from hence to the cold bed of death,  
To whom alike peasant and king are slaves.  
Come thou black night, and hood the world in darkness,  
Seal close the hearts of those I have suborn'd  
That pity may not turn them from their purpose."

The most distasteful and unsuccessful of Ireland's imitations is in V, i, when Edmunda, Vortigern's wife, who has gone mad, regains consciousness in the presence of her son, Plascentius, and daughter Flavia:

"Edmunda:

Indeed, my gentlemaid, indeed thour't kind  
And by those tears that glaze thy lovely eyes,  
'Twould seem that truly thou did'st pity me.

Flavia:

Pity thee, O Gods!

Edmunda:

Nay, wherefore weep ye both?  
'Tis long, long since I was thus kindly treated,  
Your pardon, but I fear you scoff at me.

Plascentius:

Doth she yet know you?

Flavia:

Wou'd to Heaven she did.

Edmunda:

And yet there was a maid that once did love me,  
Heigh ho! she went alack! . . . . .

Edmunda:

Then be it so, and wilt thou sit and watch me?

Flavia:

Aye, and I'll kneel and pray, and some times weep."

This is a miserable rehash from King Lear.

There is no unity, nor firmness in the plot; the language is bombast or imitation; there is no climax, little conflict and no conviction, yet this play is not unlike many of the period which are now forgotten as they were printed under their author's own name and never performed.

Ireland's Henry the Second is an imitation Shakespeare history play, and a better forgery, as it has, unintentionally I would think, the same disjointedness as the early history plays, combined with echoes of ideas common to most of the history plays, e.g., a Shakespearean apostrophe to sleep - the gift of peasants, but not of kings. In I, i, Henry declares:

"I'de not give fifty, fifty! nay not five  
Of these, my sturdy bow-men, for a world  
Of such loons . . . . ."

relying obviously upon Henry V, IV, iii, 20-39.

In Act V, Henry has one unusually strong speech -

"O! this, this is the very curse of kings!  
If we but nod, that nod must be obey'd;  
And though we only have the thought of sin,  
Yet there are many that surround the throne,  
Who to gain love and favour of their Prince,  
Will nourish and ripen such sinful thoughts,  
Till in the soul, they take a lasting root,  
And in the end seal us for destruction."

Ireland's other play, Mutius Scaevola; or, The Roman Patriot (unacted), 1801, is sentimental, unpoetic, undramatic, but, in its way, is really a tribute to Shakespeare's genius which, apparently, could enlighten, though feebly and intermittently, even such a heavy-handed writer as Ireland.

W. Watkins, in The Fall of Carthage (Whitby, c.1801), Whitby, 1802, has written a tragedy of Elizabethan inspiration. The plot is deceptively slight for this period: Bomilcar returns to Carthage to find it besieged by the Romans; he is reunited with Bartè, whom he loves, but who is beloved by Hanno, a Carthaginian who wants to desert and to surrender to the Romans, asking for Bartè as his reward when the city falls. Hanno persuades Asdrubal, the Carthaginian leader, that the best way to save his wife Phoenisia and their children is to surrender. Bomilcar and Bartè flee and meet the traitor Hanno, whom Bomilcar kills. Phoenisia kills her children and herself, through shame, leaving Bomilcar and Bartè together and alive.

This plot is used in a grand manner, as a sort of peg upon which may be hung much rhetoric and, more often, ranting. Naturally, however, the Elizabethan rhetoric seems false in the nineteenth century, and is overdone because Watkins obviously puts it upon the play; it is not his natural mode of expression, which is, more likely, the eighteenth century sentiment that clogs up much of the play. These elements are not fixed into an artistic unity, but intrude unnaturally, and as it is an imitation of Elizabethan playwriting, there is no main passion burning through it, and not even a leading character.

It opens with Bomilcar viewing Carthage and expressing his° feelings as an Elizabethan character might have done:

"And is Bomilcar then at last return'd  
To find thee thus? O most unhappy city!  
Where now, is all the pomp I left behind me?  
Where thy tall towers that glitter'd high in air?  
Alas, they glare, but now by hostile fires!  
Where thy proud ships, (whose variegated flags  
Stream'd to the moon and wanton'd with the wind)  
Rich with the produce of extraneous climes?  
Consuming flames and undistinguish'd ruin,  
Involve their pomp, their opulence and fame  
Where now the choral band, the festal songs,  
That then re-echoing fill'd thy joyous streets? -  
The shriek of woe, the groan of lamentation,  
Are all the sounds that meet my wounded ear."

This use of anaphora and of rhetorical questions is typical of the period, probably because they are at once Elizabethan



and easily imitated. Another example from The Fall of Carthage is found in II, iv, where Phoenisia addresses her children:

" . . . . . O! ye unhappy babes,  
Who cling around your more unhappy mother,  
As clasp the willows the storm-shatter'd oak,  
Would ye my boys (though yet your infant tongues  
But feebly lisp) e'er sue to Rome for mercy,  
Or spread your little hands to beg your lives?  
First let me see you weltering in your blood,  
First let me hear your last expiring groans."

It may also be noticed how weak his simile is, in comparison with, say, Shakespeare: even allowing for nature's producing an oak, lover of dryish ground, and willows, lovers of wettish ground, in close proximity, the idea of a mother beaten down by misfortune and surrounded by her clamouring, innocent children, is not illuminated by the simile. This inaptitude is again demonstrated in IV, iv, where Bomilcar produces an epic rather than dramatic simile -

"Let us go forth like the Thessalian pair:  
(When the wild deluge swept Emathia's plains  
And carried dire depopulation round,)  
As on they wondered to the sacred fane  
Where reverend Therius held her lone abode,  
By pious men in ancient times rever'd  
But when Dencation cast his joyless view  
O'er the deserted waste, his spirits sunk,  
And all the heroe was absorbed in woe;  
Yet when his wife met his returning glance,  
All were forgot; since Pyrrha was not lost:  
And such a sacred comfort filled his heart  
As I feel now, who see my Barde's safe.  
Thy hand my Fair - A long farewell to Carthage. "

Another example of this speech elaboration is found in IV, ii,  
between Bostar and Bomilcar -

"Bostar

The morning cock has crow'd  
And through the breaks of yon disparting clouds,  
Disclosing soft variety of tints,  
(The shadowy crimson and the bright'ning gold,)  
The first effulgence of returning light  
Diffuses far the purple gleam of day.

Bomilcar

It does indeed, for see my Barte comes,  
Though dim the radiance of her eyes with tears:  
So shines the star of Venice through the mist  
That veils the rising of th'autumnal morn  
When first upon th'enpurpling mountain spreads  
In emanation bright her orient ray,  
Bidding the dewy buds their folds expand,  
And with fresh fragrance impregnate the breeze."

At the end of Act II Bomilcar delivers some Elizabethan sentences :

"Perhaps the Gods can thus their favours show,  
By wholesome lessons of instructive woe;  
Thus teach awaken'd mortals to disdain  
This transient world, and its amusements vain."

And Supia ends Act V with -

"So may you learn, by Heaven itself assur'd,  
Whatever ills are by the good endur'd  
Superior Beings make the just their care,  
So all the oracles of Heaven declare.  
Amidst the rage of war and din of arms,  
These bosoms which celestial Virtue warms,  
Secure in native innocence may rest,  
In death, or life, still fated to be blest."

Whilst the moralising Epilogue concludes -

"But what's the moral,' say you, 'of this Play?'

Patience, good people - hear what I've to say.  
All life's a moral; every history  
May teach us how to live and how to die:  
May teach us - Truth and Virtue cannot fail,  
(Whate'er may threaten or whate'er assail,)  
Or soon or late to meet requital due,  
If we their dictates steadfastly pursue."

(v) Contemporary influence.

When the dramatists attempted to write in the idiom of their own day, they had no more success than when they relied so much upon the past. The events of the French Revolution, and of other historical events which could provide an analogy, inspired many writers. The anonymous Hezekiah, King of Judah; or, Invasion Repulsed and Peace Restored. A Sacred Drama, of National Application at this Awful Crisis. (unacted), 1798, is a dramatisation of the Assyrian invasion of Judah with a preface including these remarks:

"As the pleasing return of peace was the ultimate object of this Drama, the three unities were not attempted to be preserved; and as the motive, though good, can have but little effect to shield its defects from the eye of criticism, which in some views, may dart severity . . . . ."

- a pathetic revelation of the inadequacy of the author's conception of drama, which he apparently believes may succeed in furthering a moral aim, although the play itself is not a good play.

Another anonymous play, Thermopolyae; or Repulsed Invasion (unacted), 1814 - though written in 1792 - is also an example of contemporary circumstances inspiring a writer. It is full of long expositions, and exclamations with no dramatic sense. It has one notable sentiment: in I, i, Megisthias asserts:

"Hold thee, my son, the times require despatch;  
And speech superfluous suits for light occasions."

- a piece of advice unhappily as neglected in this as in most other minor tragedies of the period. J. Bartholomew's The Fall of the French Monarchy, or Louis XVI (unacted), 1794, is also without any signs of dramatic or poetic talent. J. Haggitt's The Count de Villeroi; or The Fate of Patriotism, (unacted), 1794, shows the same lack. In describing the events of the French Revolution, he concludes with a rhymed moral exhortation -

"Thrice happy Britons! o'er whose favour'd land  
No haughty despot rules with iron hand:  
Where equal laws just government produce,  
And leave wild Anarchy without excuse..  
Ah! if less highly some your blessings prize,  
Devoted still to desperate theories;  
Of France, let such view well the dreaded fate,  
Nor tempt the ruin she deplores too late."

The French Revolution is also the subject of R. Hey's The Captive Monarch (unacted), 1794, in which again the verse is

bad, sententious, bloated with verbosity and pointless apostrophes; of W. Preston's Democratic Rage; or Louis the Unfortunate, (Crow Street, Dublin, vi.1793), Dublin, 1793, which is too long and didactic to convince in any way; and of J. Wolcot's The Fall of Portugal (unacted), 1808, a bad piece of heroics, which culminates with an ode - "At the conclusion of the ODE the two Fleets fire a Royal Salute."

The revolutionary events inspired J. Penn's The Battle of Eddington; or British Liberty (The Little Theatre in the Haymarket, 10,v.1797), 1792, which deals with Alfred freeing England from the Danes. It is pretentious and prosy and uses a chorus composed of attendants upon the queen, which sings patriotic songs. Each act ends with a song. A. Portal's Vortimer; or, The True Patriot (unacted), 1796, is of revolutionary inspiration with patriotism of the Saxon period. W. Warrington's Alphonso, King of Castile, (unacted), 1813, though set in Spain, is directed at Britain: in I, v, Alphonso declares:

"True is the dark ring'd picture [of their unfortunate position] thou hast drawn:  
But minds attempt'd, and in Virtue's cause,  
No perils dread, howe'er the tempest howls.  
T'avert its ills and guard their native land,  
What men can do, the gen'rous and the brave,  
Spaniards will do, then leave the rest to God."

In his "Argument" Warrington says:

"Should a sense of honor, and love of virtue appear in this Work as prominent features, and its governing spirit, with a patriotic devotion to our country, it may then, if such be admitted, lay some claim to public indulgence...."

H. Boyd, in The Helots (unacted), Dublin 1793, uses the revolt of the Helots to propound his views upon the slavery of negroes in the West Indies. In the preface he says :

"The similarity between the situation of these slaves (Helots) and our negroes in the West Indies (the Helots of modern times) will at once suggest itself to the reader."

The play is directed towards "the reader," being undramatic and verbose. Boyd holds his convictions strongly, but he does not know how to translate them into good contemporary drama. J. Delap treats the same subject in Abdalla (unacted), 1803. The slaves have very elevated "proper" sentiments in measured language, whilst the traders are as coarse as Delap can portray. Of Delap's other plays, The Usurper (unacted), 1803, set in Calydon, is the most openly classical in theme and inspiration, but the execution fails, as in Gumilda and Matilde (both unacted), 1803, where the scene is Anglo-Saxon England, whilst the inspiration remains classical. Delap strains after literary effect; all four plays were published together, in 1803, under the title "Dramatic Poems." In pursuit

of literary effect he shows no sense of dramatic form. The complete lack of earthiness, of any coarse or even normally human element, emasculates his plays, as it does so many others of the period.

(vi) Use of language.

Rhymed couplets occur at the end of plays, and, less frequently, at the end of individual acts. N. Ashe has all the last speech of his bad play, Panthea; or, The Susian Captive (unacted), Dublin, 1800, in rhymed couplets. T.O'Neill in his unprinted The Siege of Warsaw,<sup>33</sup> likes to end each act with a series of rhymed couplets. J. Haggitt, The Count de Villeroi; or, The Fate of Patriotism (unacted), 1794, as well as ending his play with rhymed couplets, has rhymed couplets in I, vi, concluding with a triplet printed with the bracket-

"If yet I may, retire till better times,  
And quit this medley of unheard of crimes.  
But whereso'er I go, for France my soul  
Shall longing pant, as for its destined goal.  
So the wreck'd seaman o'er the sea-beat strand  
Wanders, distracted by his native land;  
Or climbs some lofty rock, from whose steep brow  
He sees the waste of waters roll below,  
- And sees no more; no prosperous bark appears     }  
To waft him home, and dry his falling tears:         }  
An exile through his sad remaining years.     "

33. M.S. in the British Museum.

The anonymous Hezekiah, King of Judah; or, Invasion Repulsed and Peace Restored (unacted,) 1798, does the same in I, i -

"May'st thou on us thy heav'nly blessings send: }  
From ev'ry evil all our paths defend; }  
And prove to mortals both a guide and friend" }

The use of rhyme, apart from act or play endings in rhymed couplets, becomes less frequent as the period progresses, apart from songs, hymns and incantations. J. Bartholomew in The Fall of the French Monarchy, or Louis XVI (unacted), 1794 finishes with verse that sounds more like unrhymed heroic couplets than blank verse -

"That government, by Wisdom's self approved,  
O'er which GREAT GEORGE presides in regal sway,  
Where vice is checked, and virtue meets reward;  
Where every man enjoys his proper right. "

Of all these minor dramatists, W. Godwin, in Antonio; or, The Soldier's Return (D.L. 13.xii.1800), 1800, uses verse most freely. This play has a Gothic plot and atmosphere. Antonio returns from warfare to discover Helena, his sister, married to Gusman, whilst he had thought her ever faithful to Rodrigo, a friend of Antonio's, to whom she was affianced at her father's death-bed. Antonio pleads with his friend the king, to interfere and separate Helena and Gusman. The king refuses, so Antonio forcefully removes Helena to a convent, from which she is rescued, <sup>only</sup> for it ~~is~~ to be discovered that



~~only~~ influenced by Antonio's attitude and rhetoric, she wants to return voluntarily. She is forbidden to do so by the king. Antonio stabs her to death. The play is compelling from the simple force of making one wonder what will happen next, but as a dramatic conception it fails, whilst the Gothic atmosphere of a precipitate plunging into gloom and doom, via a death-bed vow and a convent, well nigh forbids any true delineation of character. The verse, however, is interesting. Antonio proclaims in Act II :

"Honour! -  
What is the world to me, if robb'd of honour?  
No kindred, no affection can survive,  
'Tis the pure soul  
Of love, the parent of entire devotion,  
Without it man is heartless, brutish, and  
A clod. This was my infant creed; in this  
I'll die. "

The device of using a line of two syllables is frequently used, perhaps too frequently until the variation becomes itself a norm. Most of the verse, though undifferentiated as far as characters are concerned, has freedom and looseness, following the rhythms of speech, rather than the demands of metre, but the speech it embodies is itself unnatural, stilted and largely devoid of dramatic spark: in IV, Antonio -

"I am truly sorry that I must disclaim  
The near affinity which thus thou tender'st.  
Thy meek forbearance might deserve  
Another's thanks; but I have never lov'd  
To incur an obligation, least of all,  
To him,  
To whom I do not feel I could return it.  
Therefore I thank thee not. - "

or, Helena, V:

"Gusman,  
My conduct is resolv'd. Not royal might,  
Not all the eloquence love can turn me.-  
This then remains.  
While thus I yield me to the voice of duty,  
While I resolve to take away the cause  
Of strife and blood,  
Thou may pursue Antonio's life, and blast  
Me with his murder. - Wilt thou, Gusman?"

Antonio was performed at Drury Lane, 13.xii.1800. One critic  
observed :

"This evening added another to the condemned list  
of unfortunate dramas brought forward, under the  
present management.....its premature extinction  
is, in a great measure, owing to inherent causes  
amongst which we rank a want of stage effect,  
and sufficient intracacy of plot."

34

And another :

"After the third act the indignation of the audience  
began to manifest itself and it increased to such a  
degree that not a word of the last scene was dis-  
tinctly heard. A fruitless attempt was made by  
BARRYMORE to give one the Tragedy for a second  
representation. It was fairly judged, and is, we  
trust, consigned to the disgrace which it has so  
deservedly incurred. Some of the passages were,

34. The Dramatic Censor, xxxiii (January, 1801).

however, poetically turned, and received the applause to which they were entitled; but who can be at a loss to find some excellent lines even in a composition of a BLACKMORE? "

35

Perhaps the most extreme verse oddity is in the anonymous The Surrender of Calais (unacted), York, 1801, where a prosy, undramatic play produces in I, i,

".....till in blank despair  
John gave a last assault; from morn to noon  
The battle rag'd, from noon to pitchy night."

which is not only Miltonic rhythm, but Miltonic language.

35. The Times, 15.xii.1800.

It is interesting to note that Godwin wrote a tragedy which is almost entirely in prose. Faulkner (D.L. 16/xii/1807), 1807. He explains this in his Preface:

"A few parts of the following pages are in verse, and the rest in prose. The cause was this: I began my composition in verse, but soon grew discouraged..."

The convention of the period expected tragedy to be in blank verse.

CHAPTER IV.

Minor Tragedy, 1815-1825.

In this period, 1815-1825, 71 authors wrote 98 plays, 11 others appeared anonymously, making 109 in all. The same themes found from 1790<sup>to</sup> 1814 are continued or developed and in the minor tragedy as a whole no originality of treatment appears.

(1) Sentimental, Melodramatic and Gothic Themes.

Sentimentality is still applauded, and fine feelings, whether simulated or natural, are still admired. Mrs. Hemans, as one might expect from her lyric poetry, excelled in sentimental tragedies. The Vespers of Palermo, (C.G.12/xii/1823), 1823 abounds in sentiment and high moral issues woven around the story of the Sicilian John of Procida. One critic declared :

"As a poetical composition, it is beautiful in the extreme; but that is not enough to form an effective tragedy. The dialogue is smooth, flowing and elegant - the diction classically chaste - the illustrations, many of them novel, none exaggerated. The poetry is attuned with perfect harmony; not a line can be found that is not musical: but it was not striking, because it wanted the essential and indispensable foundation of all genuine tragedy - action. Wanting this, the liquid and graceful numbers, even of Addison, are consigned to the closet."

1

1. The Drama; or The Theatrical Pocket Magazine, V.  
(December 1823) p.243.

This is another example<sup>2</sup> of the ineffective contemporary criticism which could do little or nothing to help the dramatists in any attempt they may have made to write poetic tragedy for their own age. The critic in this notice has separated the poetry from the action - an attitude as fatal to critic as to writer - and then found the poetry beautiful, which it manifestly is not, so shackled is it by sentiment and early XIX century propriety. The critic should have regarded The Vespers of Palermo primarily as a play: an art form, whose total impression should be unified. Had he done so he would have realised that in mentioning the lack of a core of action in the play his criticism had damned it outright. As in the plays of the earlier period 1790-1814,<sup>3</sup> there is no lack of stage business in these plays, only a lack of any tragic action.<sup>4</sup>

Another critic realised that The Vespers of Palermo lacked not only action, but poetry as well:

"Its chief faults, as a tragedy, are, that it wants poetry and passion. It is like all the plays that we recollect which have been suffered to live just six nights within the last sixteen years. There is no fault in it - save now and

2. cf. p. 59.

3. cf. pp. 57-113.

4. The distinction between dramatic action and stage business is made by Hazlitt in criticisms quoted infra, cf. pp. 127-128.

then a little awkward arrangement: but neither is there, that we can perceive, any excellence at all. We never are in spirits enough to hiss such pieces as those; but they ruin us in snuff to keep awake. "

5

In saying poetic tragedy "wants poetry and passion" one inevitably condemns it, as any virtue it may have will be frustrate.

Mrs. Hemans' other plays, {both unacted} - De Chatillon; or, The Crusaders, and The Siege of Valencia, 1823 suffer from the same faults - pretentious sentiment and morality dressed up in undramatic verse. As long as Mrs. Hemans, or any of the other writers, was concerned to show her delicacy of feelings, and pure morality, instead of dramatically depicting human beings as they lead their lives, tragedy could not be achieved.

Charles Lloyd blatantly acknowledges this sentimental failing in his The Duke d'Ormond (unacted), 1822, where he prints, after his *Dramatis Personae*,

"N.B. wherever commas are prefixed {thus"} the passage may, without injury to the thread of the piece, be omitted at the discretion of the reader."

The passages which are enclosed in commas are sentimental, moral and/or specifically religious pieces - even more obviously so than the rest of the play. Evidently Lloyd is quite prepared to write a play under such a condition: that

much of it remains irrelevant to the action. He goes even further in a preliminary Advertisement containing a long speech which he has decided to include in the play, leaving the reader to insert it in the appropriate place for himself as the inspiration came to Lloyd once the play had been set up in type. <sup>an</sup> Such/ additional speech could be appropriate to the action, but Lloyd has merely given another piece of empty sentiment. The play itself has only the mechanics of stage production and nothing else remotely dramatic. Long, tedious~~immoralising~~ speeches, aimed at an imaginary, and pious, reader bog the play down in sentiment, with no feeling for poetry or even for language.

Charles Bucke's The Italians; or The Fatal Accusation (D.L.3.iv.1819), 1819, is another tragedy with sentiment and proper feelings running through it. At least one critic showed sense in his review; after damning the play roundly, he concluded:

"of all the dramatic exhibitions we ever witnessed,  
this was, indeed, the most disgusting." 6

It is a sad reflection upon the theatrical management and conditions of the day that such a play ever reached the stage.

6. The Theatrical Inquisitor, xiv, (April 1819) 301.

As we saw in the last chapter,<sup>7</sup> this sentimentalism was often accompanied by a Gothic and melodramatic element. By 1825, the most extreme forms of Gothicism had been worked off. The mystery, terror and horror unfolded amongst old ruins, haunted castles and eery convents had lost a great deal of their attraction. A few playwrights still used them, as the Rev. T. Streatfield, The Bridal of Armagnac, (unacted), 1823. This is an involved tale of relationships. The Count of Armagnac is about to marry Blanche, a French princess. He is being encouraged by his abbot, who we gather from sundry hints, has an evil hold over the Count. The Dauphin is unwilling for his sister to marry Armagnac, especially as she is loved by his friend Archambold, an orphan whom the Queen of France had adopted. It transpires that Armagnac murdered his own brother to gain the title - hence the abbot's power over Armagnac, as he knew of the fratricide - and Archambold is the son of the murdered brother. A former mistress of Armagnac's helps to enlighten the other characters upon these events and finally Blanche and Archambold can get married. Once again we have familiar Gothic elements : a past event - the murder - shrouded in mystery, an unknown young man, a sinister cleric and the

7. cf. p.66.



recognised stage direction "starting back" - as Armagnac does when he sees Archambold carrying the dagger with which his father had been murdered. But The Bridal of Armagnac lacks the abandoned excess of Gothic properties which characterised the earlier plays, e.g. in III, i, Adelaide, Armagnac's former mistress, addresses him with much more restraint than would have been shown twenty years before :

"All incoherently,  
Mutter'd confessions and convulsive cries  
Frightful and dark. 'Twould sound upon your ear  
Like pealing thunder, what your lips disclosed.  
I do not think you are so deep in hell  
As that dread tale has plunged you; not so foul.  
You are a villain. Do not start and frown:  
It is the picture you have drawn I show.  
I will not make it more deform'd than you  
Have painted it. I do not like to look  
Upon its shades and think I ~~knew~~ the man.  
I would not think it; but, I fear, I fear  
That I have held a murderer in my arms. "

As we may see from this quotation, Gothicism has been diluted by a good shot of sentimentalism. This new mixture was dispensed by R.L. Sheil. Hazlitt commented upon Sheil's Adelaide; or, The Emigrants (C.G. 23.v.1816), 1814:

"A tragedy, to succeed, should be either uniformly excellent or uniformly dull. Either will do almost equally well. We are convinced it would be possible to write a tragedy which should be a tissue of unintelligible common-places from beginning to end, in which not one word that is said shall be understood by the audience, and yet, provided appearances are saved, and nothing is done to trip up the heels of the imposture, it would go down. Adelaide, or The Emigrants is an instance in point. If there had been one good passage in this play, it would infallibly have been damned. But it was all of

a piece; one absurdity justified another. The first scene was like the second, the second act no worse than the first, the third like the second, and so on to the end. The mind accommodates itself to circumstances. The author never once roused the indignation of his hearers by the disappointment of their expectations. He startled the slumbering furies of the pit by no dangerous inequalities. We were quite resigned by the middle of the third simile, and equally thankful when the whole was over. The language of this tragedy is made up of nonsense and indecency. Mixed metaphors abound in it. The 'torrent of passion rolls along precipices' . . . . . /more examples given/ . . . . . The plot of this play is bad, for it is unintelligible in a great measure, and where it is not unintelligible, absurd. " 8

The Times agreed with Hazlitt.<sup>9</sup>

Yet Sheil persevered in the same idiom and every one of his plays was performed.<sup>10</sup> The Apostate (C.G.3.v.1817), 1817, is best summed up by The Times critic :

"The situations are full of horror, and this horror is often of a kind that we submit to with most repugnance, because it is unnecessary, and brought about by improbable means, merely for the sake of effect...We cannot without some repugnance see her (Miss O'Neill as the heroine Florinda) tear her hair and strain her eyeballs, and rattle with her throat, and utter shrieks like mandrakes, and dig for her husband's grave with her nails; the pain is greater than the pleasure: the physical horror overpowers the poetical interest." 11

8. The Examiner, 26.v.1816, Hazlitt, v.308-309.
9. The Times, 25. v.1816.
10. Nicoll, iv, 400-401.
11. The Times, 5.v.1817.

----- This review could be applied to nearly all sentimental Gothic plays: the unnecessary horror is "brought about by improbable means," so that the end of tragedy is prostituted until it becomes nothing more than a race to see who can pile on the horror thickest, no matter how it may be done. Inevitably, "the physical horror overpowers the poetical interest" because the writer has had more thought for the horror as it is the ingredient most likely to make his play acceptable to a theatre manager. This is another example<sup>12</sup> of the interaction of theatrical management and dramatists' aspirations which contributed to the poor dramatic writing of the period. Miss O'Neill's acting, graphically described by the reviewer, is obviously in a melodramatic, exaggerated style, impressing as a virtuoso performance for its own sake, instead of being the means by which the dramatist's vision, such as it is, may be expounded. Again, a means has become an end in itself, as happened with so many of the Gothic properties.<sup>13</sup> Another reviewer, in The Theatrical Inquisitor<sup>14</sup>, has little good to say of The Apostate either, and treats it as if it were no more than an exercise for the actors where they could exhibit their various excellences as they made their way through the horrors of the play.

12. cf. p. 20.

13. cf. p. 82.

14. X (May 1817), 388.

But as a play, a unified work of art, the reviewer seems to regard it as not worthy of mention. As long as dramatists were finding their plots, characters and effects by a mere shifting about of sentimental, melodramatic and Gothic attributes, they could not hope to produce works of art. As we saw in the earlier period, these writers were exploiting a frame-work, a convention, for its own sake, instead of writing within it.<sup>15</sup>

Sheil's Bellamira; or, The Fall of Tunis (C.G.22.iv.1818), 1818, is probably his most successful, certainly by audience reaction standards.

"The testimonies of approbation at the close of the tragedy, were loud and vehement, and quite unmixed as far as we could discern, with sounds of a less agreeable nature."

16

This success may be due to the fact that in Bellamira, like so many of the sentimental, Gothic tragedies, the tragedy, as it affects the hero and the heroine, consists of the horrors and lamentations they go through on the stage during most of the play, and of their final emergence, shaky, tear-stained, ennobled by suffering, both alive and ready to find everlasting happiness in each other's arms. Most of the dramatists of this period are too superficial and obvious. They have failed to

15. cf. p.82.

16. The Times, 23.iv.1818.

look for, and certainly have never stumbled upon accidentally, the depth of tragedy which consists, not in the externals of action, but in the internal motives and conflicts of the characters, which certainly result in actions, but of a different kind from that embarked upon for horrifying properties alone. They do not realise that what is presented in the play should image a total vision of human life which has been genuinely apprehended by the dramatist.

As a writer of tragedies Sheil was ruined by the age he lived in. Throughout all his plays there is a suggestion that he might have written good tragedy had he been disciplined by higher tragic standards. As it is, like others of the period, he wrote well enough to satisfy the huge contemporary theatre audiences: his plays were performed, he achieved success, fame and no doubt a financial competence. There was nothing to spur him on to greater efforts: particularly is this evident when we realise that under the existing theatrical conditions a good tragedy would have had great difficulty in achieving performance. So Sheil wrote on, allowing himself to write, e.g. from Adelaide, where Julia meets her fiancé hitherto believed dead:

" Alas! my Albert!  
I never thought to look again upon thee.  
I wept unceasingly: full many a kerchief  
Grew heavy with the weight of fallen sorrow  
Yet is there a forgetfulness of grief  
In thus beholding thee."

17

The language is clumsy, "I never thought to look again upon thee" is both awkwardly written and difficult to enunciate, whilst

" full many a kerchief  
Grew heavy with the weight of fallen sorrow"

is unnecessarily involved and ridiculous, rather than reveres, grief.

C.R. Maturin is another writer who might have written better plays. Underneath his conventional horror there lies the suggestion of a dramatist who could by discipline and a higher regard for the art of tragedy, have written much better than he does. Bertram; or, The Castle of St. Aldobrand (D.L. 9.v.1816), 1816, has a typical Gothic plot, sentimentally treated. Bertram's ship is wrecked on the wild cliffs near the Castle of St. Aldobrand, whose owner has been pursuing Bertram for his past misdeeds. He is saved from drowning by monks who, as the custom is, send him to the Castle to recover. In the Castle, Imogene, St. Aldobrand's wife, has been passing months

17. IV.i.

in sad contemplation and lamentation over her fate: she married St. Aldobrand to save her father from starvation, but she loved another - Bertram. Bertram and Imogine meet. Bertram still loves her and wonders what she is doing in the Castle, as he had had to flee the country and does not know of her marriage. When he hears of it his desire for revenge upon St. Aldobrand is overpowering. St. Aldobrand returns and appears as a gentle forgiving man, yet Bertram murders him in spite of Imogine's entreaties. Imogine goes mad with grief, Bertram becomes penitent through her madness and kills himself. Imogine dies.

The whole plot consists of one highly incredible coincidence after another, all unfolded in the Gothic tradition, with the usual dramatic properties: the setting of the monastery and the castle perched upon cliffs, closely hemmed in by woods and roaring seas; the past event; the mystery of who Bertram is and what he has done:

"He Bertram sleeps, if it be sleep; this starting trance,  
Whose feverish tossings and deep muttered groans  
Do prove the soul shares not the body's rest -  
How the lip works, how the bare teeth do grind -  
And beaden drops course down his writhen brow -  
I will awake him from this horrid trance,  
This is no natural sleep - ho, wake thee, stranger - "

18

Imagine's long cherished grief; her nocturnal ambles on the battlements; all ending in madness and suicide. The absurdities of this play, and, by inference, of all others of the same genre, were ruthlessly exposed by Coleridge in Biographia Literaria, xxiii. Coleridge analyses the play, ridiculing such things as the extent of the opening storm as being pointlessly vast and supernatural - a typical Gothic device to inspire fear and a terrified expectancy of what is liable to follow:

"But what is there to account for the prodigy of the tempest at Bertram's shipwreck? It is a mere supernatural effect without even a hint of any supernatural agency; a prodigy without any circumstance mentioned that is prodigious; and a miracle introduced without a ground, and ending without a result."

19

So Coleridge continues through the play, which finally emerges as improbable, inertistic, fatuous and ridiculous. Even if Coleridge wrote this critique in anger that the Drury Lane management had accepted Bertram instead of his own Zapolya; A Christmas Tale,<sup>20</sup> 1817, the criticism still stands.

Hazlitt writing of Bertram made points which could also be applied equally well to other such plays:

19. Op. Cit.

20. Unpublished Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. E.L. Griggs, 1932, ii, 176, n.1.



"...Its beauties are rather those of language and sentiment than of action or situation. The interest flags very much during the last act, where the whole plot is known and inevitable. What it has of stage effect is scenic and extraneous, as the view of the sea in a storm, the chorus of knights, &c, instead of arising out of the business of the play. We also object to the trick of introducing the little child twice to untie the knot of the catastrophe. One of these fantoccini exhibitions in the course of a tragedy is quite enough.

The general fault of this tragedy, and of other modern tragedies we could mention, is, that it is a tragedy without business. Aristotle, we believe, defines tragedy to be the representation of a serious action. Now here there is no action: there is neither cause nor effect. There is a want of that necessary connection between what happens, what is said, and what is done, in which we take the excuse of dramatic invention to consist. It is a sentimental drama, it is a romantic drama, but it is not a tragedy, in the best sense of the word. That is to say, the passion described does not arise naturally out of the previous circumstances, nor lead necessarily to the consequences that follow. Mere sentiment is voluntary, fantastic, self-created, beginning and ending in itself; true passion is natural, irresistible, produced by powerful causes, and compelling the will to determinate actions. The old tragedy, if we understand it, is a display of the affections of the heart and energies of the will; the modern romantic tragedy is a mixture of fanciful exaggeration and indolent sensibility; the former is founded upon real calamities and real purposes: the latter courts distress, affects horror, indulges in all the luxury of woe, and nurses its languid thoughts, and dainty sympathies, to fill up the void of action. As the opera is filled with a sort of singing people, who translate everything into music, the modern drama is filled with poets and their mistresses, who translate everything into metaphor and sentiment. Bertram falls under this censure..... The poet does not describe what his characters would feel in given circumstances, but lends them his own thoughts and feelings out of his general reflections on human nature, or general observations of certain objects. In a word, we hold for a truth, that a thoroughly good tragedy is an impossibility

in a state of manners and literature where the poet and philosopher have got the better of the man; where the reality does not mould the imagination, but the imagination glosses over the reality; and where the unexpected stroke of true calamity, the biting edge of true passion, is blunted, sheathed, and lost, amidst the flowers of poetry strewn over unreal, unfelt distress, and the flimsy topics of artificial humanity prepared before for all occasions. We are tired of this long-spun analysis....

[Here Hazlitt quotes a long speech beginning in I.v.]  
This is very beautiful and affected writing. The reader would suppose it related to events woven into the web of the history; but no such thing. It is a purely voluntary or poetical fiction of possible calamity, arising out of the experience of the author, not of the heroine." 21

This provides a criticism of the artificiality, unnaturalness and sentimentality of these plays. Hazlitt's criticism is unusual for this period in its integrity and the genuine interest he shows, not only in Bertram, but in the tragedy of his own age and in the theory of tragedy generally. Other critics had a more hand-to-mouth attitude, as witness, The Theatrical Inquisitor: 22

"Of all the authors of the present day, Mr. Maturin is decidedly the one whose writings take the strongest hold upon the feelings and the imagination; dull indeed must be the heart that is not thrilled and interested by them. He possesses the faculty of working up the feelings even to a painful pitch of interest; they yield themselves entirely to his controul, and unresistingly obey his powerful mandates. He excels in depicting the dark, the terrible,

21. The Examiner, 19.v.1816, Hazlitt, v.304-306.

22. viii (May, 1816), 375 ff.

and the mysterious; his writings display, in a remarkable degree, that union of refinement and wildness, of ardent feeling and touching melancholy....."

This is bad criticism as it says<sup>s</sup> nothing about the play. The critic relies upon vaguely emotive words and calls upon our "heart" to respond.

The Dublin correspondent of The Theatrical Inquisitor, commenting upon the performance of Bertram, in Dublin on 13.ii.1817, remarks :

".....!Bertram," a tragedy in which Mr. Maturin has amalgamated the obsolete phraseology of Spenser with the modern snip-snap of Lord Byron and Walter Scott." 23

On the Edinburgh performance, with Kean as Bertram, the correspondent has this to say:

"He /Kean/ has been unquestionably the sole support of this drama as a stage composition." 24

Genest simply comments:

"Bertram met with more success than it deserved." 25

Manuel (D.L.8.iii.1817), 1817, is written in the same style and with the sentimental, melodramatic, Gothic atmosphere enveloping it. Its climax is a surprise revelation to a son

23. The Theatrical Inquisitor, X (April, 1817), 314.

24. The Theatrical Inquisitor, XI (July, 1817), 10.

25. Genest, ix, 570

that his father is a murderer. Again sentiment and melodrama have replaced any tragic impulse, whilst the mechanics of tragedy have been borrowed from Shakespeare, e.g. V, i, where Manuel's state of wandering, witless shock on the finding of his daughter by his side, is a poor echo of Lear's bewilderment at finding Cordelia.

Manuel was unfavourably reviewed. The Theatrical Inquisitor<sup>26</sup> gives the published play a bad, carping review influenced by the spirit of Coleridge's criticism of Bertram. The Times<sup>27</sup> is unfavourable and notices:

"The style of Bertram was rather too highly decorated. The language of the new play is still more thickly set with similes, and even more aspiring to a preternatural strength."

Fredolfo (C.G.12.v.1819), 1819, the last Maturin tragedy of this period is almost completely melodramatic and very much in the sentimental, Gothic tradition. It has a plot lacking any development or climax, and including a secret murder - inevitably witnessed - a daughter surrendering her charms in exchange for her father's life (a device already used in Bertram, where Imogene married St. Aldobrand to save her father

26. X (March, 1817), 201, ff.

27. 10.iii.1817.

from financial ruin) then a few final and open murders and the death of one character as a result of all the terrors experienced in the play. It is unusual in having only one female part: in this period the heroine is more usually attended by at least one, and more often by a group of confidantes, either friends or servants, to whom she unbosoms herself so that the audience may the better follow the plot and experience Gothic thrills. The settings are very Gothic: Swiss mountains, chasms and roaring torrents, "A Gothic Hall in the Castle of Fredolfo," and finally a monastery. I, i has a storm as inexplicable as the one in Bertram. In I, i this interchange appears - though it is omitted from the acting version -

"Waldo. Where wouldst thou rush?

Urilda. Where the tempest raves  
To bare my bosom to the forked lightnings!  
To shriek in tones that will appal the thunder!  
To yell in nature's ear a daughter's prayer! " -

a romantic, but impracticable decision. III,iii finishes its verbosity with a grand gesture :

"Urilda. Lost! Lost! forever lost!

Fredolfo. (calmly clasping her hand, and pointing  
to heaven)  
Not lost for ever!!!

∟Curtain Drops. "

Whilst the play concludes with this stage direction for

Urilda -

"Falls on the body of Adelmar, and expires slowly, forcing a smile as she sees her father's agony."

The Theatrical Inquisitor and Monthly Mirror observed :

"This Tragedy is a complete illustration of all these peculiarities, as well ~~as~~ excellencies as defects, which have characterised Mr. Maturin's former productions. The same powers of imagination, the same vein of poetry, richness of imagery, and nervousness of diction, which marked Bertram and Manuel, are displayed in Fredolfo; and there are likewise the same want of real character, the same outrageous incident, and the same want of appeal to natural sympathies." 28

The same journal reviewed the printed edition of Fredolfo, 1819:<sup>29</sup>

"We are too impatient to vindicate the laws of insulted justice, which have been terribly assailed by the fate of this tragedy, to hesitate in proclaiming our opinion of the poem with which Mr. MATURIN has consented to gratify its readers. Fraught with every charm that can fix the imagination or arrest the judgement "Fredolfo" was rejected at the great ordeal of public scrutiny, and we rejoice in the event. It has strengthened our conviction that the stage is but the grave of genius, and that if poetry will appreciate its proper reward, it must look in the pages of criticism, as it were, for the world to come. "

This reviewer is distinguishing two standards of judgement: the one used by an audience watching a play in a theatre - "public scrutiny" - and the other by a critic reading a play in his closet - the play's "readers." By the former standard he realises that Fredolfo must be condemned out of hand and in

28. xiv, (May, 1819), 392. 1

29. xv (September 1819), 143, cont. in October, p.200.

so doing reveals a warped idea of the nature of plays: for him theatrical success or failure is immaterial: if he has any preference, it is towards failure. The play form may certainly be used, and has been, by a poet to communicate with others, in a form that is not practical theatre, e.g. Shelley, Prometheus Unbound, but such plays constitute a very small and exceptional minority. Their authors do not expect stage production. Maturin, on the other hand, wrote his plays in a definite theatrical form and submitted them to theatre managers. The standard of criticism for them should be theatrical. On one point the reviewer is no doubt correct - the stage of this period was usually the grave of genius, but it does not follow that interments such as Fredolfo were those of genius, and a critic certainly has a duty to go behind that judgement to discover what is wrong with the stage, and the theatre generally, that forces him to come to his conclusion. One strange aspect of Fredolfo is that the audience did reject it:

"the announcement for repetition [of Fredolfo] was stifled by the most decided remarks of disapprobation. The play, we have since understood, is to be withdrawn; and we feel disposed to give every credit to the managers for the ready and just deference they have shown to the opinion of the public."

30

It is puzzling that Fredolfo failed to please whilst other plays with the same mixture of characters and events were enthusiastically received. One possible explanation is that the actors gave a very poor performance. Young played Fredolfo, Macready took the part of Wallenberg, the Austrian governor of Switzerland and Miss O'Neill played Urilda.

Mary Russel Mitford wrote Julian (C.G.15.iii.1823), 1823, in the same tradition, complete with apparent patricide - the father survives - a heroine, pursued by a scheming, wicked nobleman, and then finally killed shielding the man she loves, who promptly dies, all this with much undramatic verse and great sentiment. Such plots are more akin to fairy tales, dealing with a remote nobility living in some far distant mountainous land and having no contact with day to day humanity, its cares, attitudes and manners. Some writers intensify this atmosphere by giving their dramatis personae names such as we find in Meturin's Fredolfo: Adelmar, Urilda, Waldo, Berthold.

The Gothic element, found in these writers along with the sentimental, is seldom found on its own, with a whole play built upon and around Gothic horror alone. The most Gothic is Major B.B. Parlbys Revenge, or The Novice of San Martino (unacted), 1818. It deals with Father Angelo, who lives only to



revenge himself upon Carantani, who, by tempting Angelo to gamble, ruined him and then married his fiancée. When the play opens Carantani, a ruthless nobleman, has two daughters: this lapse of eighteen to twenty years since the first kindling of Angelo's desire for revenge, is a typical Gothic effect, intended to add mystery and suspense. Carantani is determined to marry his younger daughter, Victoria, to the Duke of Milan, in spite of her love for Celestini. Victoria is impolite to the Duke, and Angelo, helped by Jerome his assistant in villainy, arranges for her to elope with Celestini. Meanwhile Angelo has discovered that Olivia, Carantani's elder daughter, who is about to take her final vows as a nun, is in love with, and is loved by, Florian. Angelo uses this knowledge for his own ends and offers Olivia the alternative either of being openly revealed for the straying novice she is, or of taking poison - either way Carantani would be disgraced and disheartened. Olivia refuses to damn her soul, and does not have regard for her father who has given her no sympathy. On the contrary, he has been most harsh as he is concerned only with Victoria's wedding, which depends upon Olivia's taking vows and so renouncing her inheritance. Fredolfo comes to elope with Olivia, is surprised by Angelo and Jerome, and is finally shot. Olivia

goes mad in the Elizabethan idiom. Meanwhile Victoria has eloped and Carantani rushes in a changed man, full of remorse. Angelo reveals himself and gloats over his work. Florian and Olivia both die. Then : "He /Angelo/ is led off." The play ends with a variety of echoes from Shakespeare and the Bible: -

"Olivia.

Ha! Where is he fled? - Signor, my Florian  
Is gone abroad; your worship knows not whither.  
Is he here, or here? What cruel fate has parted us?  
Oh, no, no, no - I see him, my eyes behold him!  
Look, sir, in yon bright cloud, see how benign his  
aspect,  
And in his hand a wreath of hyacinth.  
Mark how he points aloft, the while his arm upheld  
Describes a boundless day.  
I come, I come, where we shall part no more.  
My father - oh, my father!

Carantani.

My child, Olivia:

Would I had died for thee, my child, my child. "

This play is almost impressive in the sincerity, however misplaced, with which it has been written, but it has been spoiled by an undue length, so that even melodramatic suspense is lost in weariness. Had Parlby been acquainted with the theatre and stage craft this fault would probably have disappeared. The characters are more ambitiously varied than is usual at this time. Carantani tends to be a stock heavy-father figure, and Parlby's worst fault is the way he has changed Carantani's character towards the end of the play merely to suit the plot, instead of allowing any character development to evolve naturally from within Carantani. Celestini is an unusual figure

for this age - an effeminate fop, well portrayed, which makes Victoria's conduct somewhat puzzling as her love for such a man goes much deeper than the romantic-tragic level of the play. Victoria is a hard-headed woman with a will of her own who knows very clearly what she does not want. Olivia is much more typical of the period: self-questioning, self-dramatising in her convent, exclamatory and constantly looking for the noble, i.e., self-sacrificing, course of action. But like Carantani, though to a lesser degree, all the dramatic personae fail because Parlby has portrayed them as best suited his plot, not as would have been most natural to the kinds of people he is attempting to portray.

His settings and language are Gothic. I, i, opens -  
"The chapel of the Convent of San Martino. (As the curtain rises lights are seen through the windows of painted glass. The organ sounds and the vesper hymn is chaunted at intervals. FLORIAN, who was concealed behind one of the pillars, comes gradually forward during the performance of the hymn. The front of the stage darkened.)"

Then Florian speaks :

"This is the place Olivia named, the hour appointed.  
Sure the deep gloom that shrouds these ancient aisles  
Has shed its influence o'er my drooping spirit..."

In the same scene, I, i, Father Angelo exclaims:

"Revenge, thou art a harpy, whose fowl ravenous claw  
Delights to pounce upon the daintiest morsels; else why  
                                this quickening pulse  
At the sight of yonder maid?"

In V, iii, Olivia bewails her fate -

"Emilia, thou would'st wake a final lingering hope;  
'Tis but a flag to stem the mountain torrent,  
A transient beam, that 'ere its warmth is felt  
The frowning cloud eclipses; oh no, no, no, my  
                                kinsmen have no heart  
To step between my father's haughty mandate  
And a poor trembling maid. Yet I'll make trial of  
                                their hardihood,  
And at the alter claim their sheltering arm to save me;  
Failing in that, here shall my sorrows close,  
Here shall my sufferings find a worthy end.  
I will not with iniquitous breath lie in the face of  
                                heaven,  
Nor shall they force me to those hated vows."

The larger than life exaggeration of these plays is very noticeable in Revenge, or, The Novice of San Martino, until the reader feels he has lost all contact with ordinary life-sized existence.

The cult of melodrama appears also in the greatly over-  
dramatic tragedies of the period; plays which are overloaded  
with acting possibilities of the most obvious and melodramatic  
nature, and charged with an incredible verbosity, as if the  
very volume of words would surge them to success. Conrad the  
Usurper and The Kinsmen of Naples, published together in 1818  
(Conrad the Usurper was performed, before publication in Bir-

mingham<sup>31</sup> and The Kinsmen of Naples was unacted) and "By the Author of Tancred," are two such plays. The former was "emendated" by Alfred Bunn, the opera librettist -

"The author's obligations to Mr. BUNN are inexpressible; in addition to the benefit which the Tragedy derived from the emendations of his elegant pen, he gave it every advantage of scenery and music, which it could have received from a London Theatre. "

32

Bunn's "elegant pen" may have helped to produce, e.g. I, i -

"Monk. Fly, fly and leave the princess to my care  
/ Adelheid faints.

Leopold. One last, last look and now for Palestine.  
/ Exit Leopold. "

and II, iii,

"Conrad. Must this garb,  
These vile plebian weeds, disgrace for ever  
The struggling heart which swells with shame  
beneath them? "

and certainly Bunn must have had a large share in the songs which a chorus tends to break into from time to time.

The Kinsmen of Naples is no better. The plot was taken from Ford's The Witch of Edmonton, then improved by the author -

"The double marriage is the only incident which was retained from the old play; it was considered necessary, in order to heighten the stage effect, to give a

31. Advertisement to Conrad the Usurper.

32. Ibid.

stronger contrast in the females than is to be found in Ford. "

33

William Monney's Caractacus, 1816, unacted and intended for the closet, is another undigested mass of words. It opens with three druids relating to one another, at great length, but obviously directing their remarks to the audience, or rather reader, all the bad omens - thunder, lightning and the like - which filled the previous night with terror. Bugged down in a great mass of undigested words, the play proceeds to dramatise Britain on the eve of the Roman invasion.

(ii) Shakespearean influence.

It is, however, quite noticeable that specifically Gothic plays, and even plays with Gothic intermixtures, diminish in number as the period progresses. A number of explanations may be suggested: the inevitable popular decline of an art genre which had once been so widely acclaimed and eagerly read and written; the German influence being largely replaced by a growing interest in French drama;<sup>34</sup> the interest in Elizabethan literature leading to a closer imitation, especially amongst poetic dramatists.<sup>35</sup> This Elizabethan influence

33. The Kinsmen of Naples, Advertisement.

34. Nicoll, iv, 78-88.

35. ibid, pp.88-90.

is seen mixed with Gothic in G. Soame's The Bohemian (unacted), 1817. The plot is Gothic: Herman discovers from the confession of a supposedly dying man (in Gothic plays such men seldom die) that his mother murdered his father. Herman's enemy overhears the confession and revives the dying man so that he may use this man's evidence as a basis for revenge by a secret society that exists solely to attend to such emergencies. Herman, a member of the society, is elected to revenge the death of his father upon his mother - if he fails his own wife and child will be murdered. (One wonders if another secret society deals with such revenge as this would call for). Herman has already murdered the dying man whose confession started the action; he cannot, however, murder Ida, his mother, who promptly commits suicide. Haunted by his mother's blood - for which he could hardly be held responsible, Herman kills his wife and child before he himself is struck and killed by lightning. His enemy is killed by a deus ex machina in the form of some gypsies who have long borne him a grudge. The play is very slow-moving against a background of castles, a monastery and its chapel, dark and gloomy woods, and the grand finale of a tremendous storm.

The plot is, however, clothed in Shakespearean language and rhythms. Ida has a guilt-obsessed sleep-walk, closely

copied from Lady Macbeth; Hamlet keeps cropping up: elements in the plot, the mother's crime, the son being summoned to vengeance and many of Herman's speeches remind us of Hamlet, e.g.

Herman. Am I not honest?

Ida. You have still seemed so.

Herman. Were men but what they seem, their sum of good  
Might match the bright perfection of the choir,  
That wake in immortality, when now  
Their best of virtue stands in so great doubt  
The laughing demon writes them in the book  
Of sin condemned. "

Or Herman's apostrophe to a human skull which has been presented to him by the deranged but far-seeing, Edith as he is en route to commit a murder:

"A human skull! 'tis a fit gift for him  
Whose thought is ripe to murder - strange! is this  
The hand of heaven? Or shall we call it chance?  
Whate'er it be thy dumbness speaks with more  
Than life's persuasion. How poor is the world  
To thought that dwells on thee; at thy sad sight  
Hope fades, for thou dost teach the end of hope;  
Thou art man's mirror; his eye can not see  
Its proper form, and in that blindness thinks  
His features ape immortal loveliness;  
But thou dost show him as he truly is,  
So foul his own gorge rises at himself.  
The outward flesh is but a garment, which  
Or time or sickness moulders; once thrown off,  
So looks the naked man, so fiercely grins,  
So stares from eyless sockets - "

Soame is quite contented with his play and admits in the

Preface :

"I agree perfectly with the opinion of the liberal critic who pronounced this TRAGEDY to be unfit for REPRESENTATION, at least in its present state, yet



I shall hope that it may please in PERUSAL. "

Barry Cornwall (Bryan Waller Procter) does the same in Mirandola (C.G.9.1.1821), 1821: A Gothic plot clothed by imitation Shakespearean language. Mirandola was well received upon the stage;<sup>36</sup> it is much more dramatically alive than The Bohemian, no doubt because Cornwall was himself an actor, but it leans too much upon Shakespeare, especially King Lear and Othello. The plot concerns the Duke of Mirandola, whose son, Guido, is believed to be dead. He marries Isidora, who had been secretly engaged to Guido. But Guido's death is no more than a rumour purposely left uncontradicted by Isabella, the Duke's sister, who is plotting with Gheraldi, a Monk, and arranging that no letters are received by Mirandola from his son, as she hopes her own son will inherit the Dukedom. Guido returns and is greatly embittered by the marriage of the Duke, but as the explanation shows no malice aforethought, he is reconciled with his father and prepares to leave. Isabella then forces Isidora to give Guido a ring given to her by Mirandola and also arranges a last meeting between Isidora and Guido making it seem as suspicious as possible and then has Mirandola informed. Mad with jealousy, he orders Guido's execution.

36. The Times, 10.i.1821.

Meanwhile a friend of Guido's finds Guido's letters, hoarded by Gheraldi for blackmail purposes against Isabella, which should have been delivered to Mirandola. He informs the duke - but too late. Isidora and Guido have both been executed. Mirandola dies.

The resemblances to Othello emerge in the treatment of mistaken jealousy; to King Lear, in the treatment of the ageing Mirandola and his reactions to the discovery of Isidora's supposed faithlessness and the final revelation of her innocence, e.g.

"Duke. Mercy! -  
No more of that. I am a desolate man:  
Much injured; almost mad. I want - I'll have  
Vengeance - tremendous vengeance! Ha! pale  
thing;  
I will not tread upon her. Tears? What, tears?  
Take her away. " 37

And the ending:

"Casti. Sir, be calm.

Duke. Sulphur and blistering fire. I want to die:  
Unloose me here, here: I'm too tight - Some one  
Has tied my heart up; no, no; here, Sir, here.  
All round my heart, and round my brain - quick,  
quick -

I'm burning. - Hush! a drug - a -

Casti. Hold him up.

Duke. Some dull - some potent drink. I'll give -  
I'll give  
The world away for peace. Oh! round my heart,  
And - Ah! unloose this cord about my throat.  
Has no one mercy here? I am the Duke -  
The Duke. Ha! - I am - nothing. " 38

37. V.ii.

38. V.ii.

But more than may be illustrated by such quotations is the Shakespearean atmosphere of the play, emasculated by early XIX century sentiment into an uneasy imitation having some physical resemblance, but no spiritual likeness, to Shakespearean tragedy. There is also a slight outward resemblance to John Ford's Love's Sacrifice in the plot of Mirandola. It is interesting to note that in Cornwall's Dramatic Scenes and Other Poems, 1819, there is a short play, The Broken Heart, which has evidently been<sup>38a</sup> inspired by Ford.

James Sheridan Knowles also relies upon Shakespeare a great deal, adding from his own inspiration, and the conditions of his age, a domestic quality to his tragedies, which deprives the heroes of their full tragic stature and lessens such tragic<sup>39</sup> intensity as he might have developed. Macready, as we have seen, had introduced a new domestic style of acting. Knowles wrote Virginius; or, The Liberation of Rome (C.G. 17.v.1820), Glasgow, 1820, with Macready in mind as the hero,<sup>40</sup> and when Caius Gracchus (Belfast, 13,ii.1815, D.L.18.xi.1823), 1823, Glasgow, was performed in London, Macready played the title role.

Caius Gracchus was the first of his tragedies - he had

38a. Cf. C. Leech, John Ford and the Drama of his Time, 1957, pp.137-138.

39. cf. p.16.

40. The play is "Dedicated to William Macready, Esq."

plays  
written two/previous to 1815 - and depends upon Shakespeare's  
Coriolanus for most of its power. Even the plot is reminiscent  
of Shakespeare. Caius Gracchus has decided to retire from the  
public life of Rome, much to the joy of his devoted and doting  
wife, Licinia; and to the bemusement of his mother Cornelia,  
who is a typical Roman matron, as his brother had been executed  
by order of the senate, for acting as the people's tribune,  
whilst one of his friends is being tried upon a trumped-up  
charge and all Rome knows the case has been pre-judged against  
him. Persuaded by these circumstances, and his mother's oratory,  
Caius Gracchus enters public affairs again, has his friend  
acquitted and incidentally gains the affection of the plebs.  
The senate, which dislikes him, promptly sends him off to a  
province on a spell of duty where he may do least harm to their  
scheming and personal interests. When his time is up Caius  
Gracchus returns to Rome and is made tribune. The senate con-  
spires with his fellow tribune against Caius Gracchus, the  
people are turned against him, and the senate plans to murder  
him. Caius Gracchus, assured of his own rectitude, faces them  
boldly. In the ensuing fight he stabs himself rather than  
surrender to his enemies. There are slight resemblances to  
Coriolanus: Caius Gracchus finds himself in the people's

favour, not having courted it, but by doing his duty. When the people are turned against him by the underhand scheming of the senate, he refuses to court them in anything:

"Pomponius.

Follow him, Caius! Seek the people!

Caius.

Not a foot

I'll stir to win them. Though the price of their love  
Were but the breath that ask'd for't, it should go  
Unbought for me! What! would they take our tigers,  
They've seen a hundred times tear limb from limb  
The malefactor - would they take them, think you,  
For dogs, suppose they fawn'd on them? No wonder  
And if they should! I will not go among them,  
To pay court to them for their own sakes; cry  
'Be served, I pray you, masters! pray you, be served!  
Consent that I supply you food; provide you  
Clothing and lodging; find you lands to till!' -  
While, all the time, they lean the ear to Drusus,  
And I must pull them by the cloak to win  
Attention! No! No honest man could do it!  
I will not go among them! If they are told  
That poison's poison, yet will swallow it  
For food, in Jove's name, let them! Nothing but  
The proving on't will satisfy them. Vettius,  
Keep silence! No men further urge me!  
I should not - cannot - will not court the people!"

Cornelia, Caius Gracchus's mother, is Knowles's version of Volumnia; Licinia, his wife, is softer, more gentle and even more home-centred than Virgilia - as suited the atmosphere of Knowles's time. Licinia is a positive force pleading the happiness of love and home life against the male world and its preoccupations which enmesh Caius Gracchus; whilst Cornelia, as it were, holds a balance, both appreciating domesticity and

realising that Caius Gracchus, as a man, and more especially as her son, must do as honour bids him, e.g.

"Cornelia.

Hath he hands and feet? - Hath he brains  
and heart? - Is he  
A man? - What do you take him for? - Have men  
No parts to play but lovers? - What? are they  
Not citizens as well? - Have they no crafts,  
Callings, professions? Women act their parts,  
Then, when they make their order'd houses know them  
Men must be busy out of doors, - must stir  
The city - yea, make the great world aware  
That they are in it; for the mastery  
Of which they race, and wrestle, and such feats  
Perform, the very skies, in wonderment,  
Echoing Earth's acclaim, applaud them, too! " 41

and Licinia's attitude is then displayed.

"Cornelia

Are not you pleased at this, Licinia?

Licinia. No;

Nor pleased, yet nor displeased, Cornelia.  
What care I that the world allows him good  
And wise? Did I not know him so before?  
Had I a doubt of it? - When did I ask  
To give their oath of it? - I was content  
With mine own knowledge. Why should I be glad  
That all applaud him? - For his sake? - Alas!  
For any cause but that! Whom all applaud,  
Let the tide change, though never change the man,  
All are as sure to blame! I did not wed  
Thy son as one would choose an idle gem,  
For sparkle, for the praise of others' eyes,  
But that he blazed in mine. " 42

Cornelia is not so ruthless as Volumnia. Caius Gracchus has Coriolanus's pride, but does not hold it so aggressively, as it

41. I, iii.

42. III, ii.

is tempered by a love of the people. Caius Gracchus could never make Coriolanus's speech in III,iii,118-133 of Coriolanus.

Caius Gracchus is largely, however, a sort of diluted Coriolanus watered down to suit the sentiment of Knowles's own age. There are also echoes of Julius Caesar, e.g. in the skillful manipulation of the plebs, I,ii :

"Caius Gracchus.

I pray you, gentle friends, if I should make you  
A poor, confused, disjointed, graceless speech  
Let it not hurt the man for whom I plead.  
If I should falter - if my heart should rise  
Into my throat, and choke my utterance,  
Or if my eyes should with a torrent drown  
My struggling words, Let it not, I beseech you,  
Let it not hurt the man for whom I plead! "

He continues in this strain until the people are willing to agree to anything he may say.

The effect of this play is saddening in its implications: Knowles has managed to portray a hero undone by a tragic flaw - his pride, which leads him honourably to revenge his brother and yet ultimately to neglect his one hope of safety, the support of the plebs. This is a grand achievement for the age Knowles was writing in, when most dramatists depended upon external circumstances for the hero's downfall, rather than upon a flaw in his character. Yet how did Knowles encompass it? Not from any genius of his own, but by leaning upon and borrowing from, Shakespeare. Once he had gathered his characters to-

gether the spirit of the age bade him order them in an untragic and pathetic fashion, so that the tragic impact, though so nearly achieved - thanks to Shakespeare - is sadly elusive and vanishes through Knowles's weakness; his inability boldly to stand by his own undoubted talent and to allow his plays to appear as a unity, emerging from himself, not a mixture of Shakespeare and an attempt to pander to the desires of his own age for sentiment and scaled down, domestic passions. Like the other dramatists Knowles has refused to be involved in the problems of his own age, and instead has pleased the public by easy sentiment.

His other tragedy in this period, Virginus; or, The Liberation of Rome (Glasgow, 1820, C.G.17.v.1820), 1820 is similarly treated. It is a dramatisation of the Roman tale of Virginia: Rome is ruled by evil Decimvirs; Virginus and Dentatus are trying to stand out against them. Virginus's daughter, Virginia, is betrothed to Icilius. Appius, one of the Decemvirs, sees Virginia and lusts after her. To obtain her Appius makes one of his men claim that Virginia is the daughter of one of his slaves and was adopted by Virginus's wife. Under Roman law Virginia would therefore be his slave as her mother was. So Virginia is carried off. Virginus and Icilius are away fighting, but Icilius returns, finds this



situation and sends for Virginius to refute the allegation. Virginius, meanwhile, is deeply grieved because Dentatus has been deliberately killed by agents of Appius. He comes home to find this greater grief. Appius tries the case to decide whether or not Virginia is Virginius's daughter and arranges with his supporters so that the verdict goes against Virginius. Virginius kills Virginia rather than have her taken by Appius, and then goes mad. He imagines Virginia has been abducted by Appius, chases him and murders him. Finally Icilius and other friends appear with Virginia's ashes to convince him she is dead - a strange manner of conviction, by unidentifiable ashes. The play ends -

"Virginius.     ∟Icilius places the urn in his hand.  
                  Ha! What's this?

Icilius.     Virginia!

∟Virginius looks alternately at Icilius and  
the urn - looks at Numitorius and Lucius  
- seems struck by his mourning - looks at  
the urn again - bursts into a passion of  
tears and exclaims, "VIRGINIA!" Falls on  
Icilius's neck. Curtain drops. "

In comparing Knowles's play with Webster's Appius and Virginia - which treats the same story - we can see the early XIX century sentimentality clearly defined in comparison with Webster's classic restraint and simplicity of construction.

Knowles has not used the plot well: he centres the interest upon Virginia and her fate, but Virginius is not por-

trayed strongly enough to be convincing and, after her death in Act IV, Knowles has to depend upon Virginius's doubtful imitation-Lear meanderings to sustain Act V. The verse is not so good as that in Caius Gracchus, and is eked out by too much exclamation and apostrophe. Dentatus has most conviction and uses language well, though owing much to Shakespeare, e.g. in the ironical prose passage, I, ii -

"That was a very pretty echo! - a most soft echo. I never thought your voices were half so sweet. A most melodious echo! I'd have you ever after make your music before the patricians' palaces. They give most exquisite responses! - especially that of Appius Claudius! A most delicate echo! "

Hazlitt praised Virginius:

"Virginius is a good play. It is a real tragedy; a sound historical painting. Mr. Knowles has taken the facts as he found them, and expressed the feelings that would naturally arise out of the occasion..... Some cold, formal, affected, and interested critics have not known what to make of this. It was not what they would have done. One finds faults with the style as poor, because it is not inflated. Another can see nothing in it because it is not interlarded with modern metaphysical theories, unknown to the ancients. A third declares that it is all borrowed from Shakespeare, because it is true to nature. A fourth pronounces it a superior form of melodrama, because it pleases the public. The two last things to which the dull and envious ever think of attributing the success of any work (and yet the only ones to which genuine success is attributable) are Genius and Nature. The one they hate, and the other they are ignorant. The same critics who despise and slur the Virginius of Covent Garden, praise the Virginius and David Rizzio of Drury Lane, Drury Lane produced J. Bidlake's Virginia 29.v.1820, in rivalry with Covent Garden because (as

it should appear) there is nothing in them to rouse their dormant spleen, stung equally by merit or success, and to mortify their own ridiculous, inordinate, and hopeless vanity.... Besides the merits of Virginus as a literary composition, it is admirably suited to the stage. It presents a succession of pictures. We might suppose each scene almost to be copied from a beautiful bas-relief, or to have formed a group on some antique vase. 'Tis the taste of the ancients, 'tis classical lore.' But it is a speaking and a living picture we are called upon to witness. These figures so strikingly, so simply, so harmoniously combined, start into life and action, and breathe forth words, the soul of passion - inflamed with anger, or melting with tenderness... " 43

R.H. Horne had a truer assessment of Knowles's talents -

"All his dramas are domestic, and strange to say, those that should be most classic, or most chivalric, most above and beyond it, are the most imbued with this spirit. In what consists the interest and force of his popular play of "Virginus"? The domestic feeling. The costume, the settings, the decorations are heroic. We have ~~Roman~~ tunics, but a modern English heart - the scene is the Forum, but the sentiments those of the "Bedford Arms". " 44.

Of these two tragedies, Virginus had the better reception as a performance. The Times correspondent listened to Caius Gracchus with "not the breathless silence of suspense, but of apathy."<sup>45</sup> This comparative failure is surprising because Knowles was at least trying to write spontaneously in

43. The London Magazine, July 1820, "The Drama, No.vii", Hazlitt, xviii, 345-346.

44. A New Spirit of the Age, 1844, ii, 81.

45. The Times, 19.xi.1823

both. Apart from his over reliance upon Shakespeare his plays are sincere; they are not as lavishly inflated with heroic verbosity or Gothic horror as were so many plays of his time - though, of course, this could account for the apathy. Even in his domesticity there is at least an attempt at a fresh approach to his themes. We may find it tiresome, at times ridiculous, but it was the almost inevitable derivative of sentiment; sentiment, once sincerely felt, became sentimentality, a spurious assumption of the outward appearances of the sentimental emotion; then, as sentimentality palled, this domesticity, a reduction of the universe to an intimate, all-important circle, took its place. As the XIX century continued, this too became debased to an outward appearance to encompass some of the worst aspects of the Victorian age with hypocritical domesticity and lurid melodrama employed to interest the average play theatre-goer. Knowles was at least opening up a fresh field, even if we do not find it a very attractive one.

Dr. Whitelaw Ainslie may exemplify another writer who relied upon Shakespeare, but having no originality of his own combines this reliance with the sentimental appearances of the preceding years, producing, in Clemenza; or, The Tuscan Orphan, (Bath, 1.vi.1822), 1822, a strange, repulsive mixture. Dudley,

in Italy, loves Clemenza, but has to return to England to see his mother on her death-bed. When he returns to Italy he finds Clemenza's father has died and she is en route to a nunnery. His love remains. The villain Rinaldo also loves Clemenza and attempts to kill Dudley, but fails. Rinaldo, to further his villainy, disguises himself as Dudley and is unwittingly killed by his own friend Scevola, who wants to marry Dudley's sister and to gain Dudley's wealth, which he could only do if Dudley were dead. Clemenza goes mad when she sees what is apparently Dudley's corpse. Dudley, however, turns up, Clemenza swoons, comes round restored to her senses, Clemenza and Dudley embrace and the play ends. Ainslie shows a Shakespearean influence in describing Clemenza -

"Already does this overwhelming woe  
Feed on thy fading cheek and angel form." 46

an echo from Twelfth Night, II, iv, 113-114. Stiff with unnatural language and Shakespearean echoes - Clemenza's madness is as near Shakespearean as Ainslie can manage - the play drags on. The characters wander around the stage discussing situations, or relating the plot to each other at great length, but there is no real action. The language, when not echoing

Shakespeare, drops to undramatic words put together: it is said of Dudley's mother -

"That pious lady, hastening to the grave,  
Worn not by years, but premature decay,  
Had breath'd a solemn and a last request,  
That, ere she yielded up her soul to heaven,  
She might again behold her darling son."

47

"premature decay" is an unhappy description, even of the hero's mother.

Ainslie provides a Preface to explain his use of song and witchcraft; to stress his adherence to the unities; to demonstrate how his characters are meant to impress us; finally, to deliver himself upon dramatic writing -

"It has been the Author's wish, that the versification should be natural yet flowing, equally distant from the extremes of an inflated and over-familiar diction; of the success of all these endeavours, he has many doubts, - of the candour of the British public, none. Whatever may be the fate of the Drama, **however**, it is hoped that no objections can be found to the sentiments it contains."

Charles Maturin's Bentivoglio (unacted), 1824 is more successful as a Shakespearean imitation than as a XIX century play standing on its own merits: therefore it fails because it lacks any genuine inspiration, the whole play having been derived from sources beyond Masterton's compass. The plot

47. I, i.

owes much to Othello. Bentivoglio returns home to Venice from warfare to discover that whilst he was fighting for Venice his father had been executed for treason. Bentivoglio is befriended by Debroglío, who feigns friendship so that he may <sup>use Bentivoglio</sup> as Iago does Othello - ~~use Bentivoglio~~ as he burns with the desire for revenge upon Bentivoglio, who, before he went to the wars, had exposed Debroglío for the villain he is. This is a grave weakness in the plot, as it makes Bentivoglio's faith in the false Debroglío difficult to accept. Debroglío makes Bentivoglio believe that the Duke of Venice had his father executed because he had forbidden the Duke to marry his daughter. Debroglío also tells Bentivoglio that his sister, Polymnia, now engaged to the Duke, is a strumpet. Bentivoglio is in love with Cassandra, the Duke's daughter, but he immediately renounces her, organises the army for a revolt, and is then arrested for treason. Debroglío arranges his escape. Bentivoglio disguises himself as a friar and hears Polymnia's confession before her marriage and then kills her. The end of the play is a lavish Jacobean-inspired blood bath, with violence offered by all to all. Bentivoglio is finally killed by his love, Cassandra, who kills him rather than allow him to kill her father. Debroglío, unmasked, is removed, glorying in his iniquity.

Debroglio is almost an exact copy of Iago: in his language -

"Revenge - revenge - the thought's a heaven-born vision!  
I'll stand, like Samson in his might, and pull  
Some pillar'd fabric of destruction down;  
Although the crumbling of its rubbish gulf  
My foe and me, in one death-vault together." 48

and:

"Mock thee - not I -  
'Tis but a picture of the world - young men,  
Art thou a lily amidst thistles? pshaw!  
I tell thee, Sirrah, but for pride and cant,  
Men's virtues all might be within a nut-shell!  
No more of this - now let's proceed to business. " 49

Also in his actions, eg. II,ii, where he stands apart with Bentivoglio and describes the behaviour of Polymnia and the Duke to suit his own desired interpretation, as Iago ~~did~~ *does* with Othello in Othello, IV,i. Debroglio also uses events as they turn up to further his scheming, e.g. III, i, where he wants to get rid of Adolpho, murders him, but makes the guilt seem Bentivoglio's -

"Debroglio.

In crowded places, where resort the idle,  
To see and be seen, to hear lies and to tell lies,  
I'll be a frequent visitor; and there,  
With gentle whispers, give surmise a birth  
Which rumour's tongues will shortly spread afar  
With loud reverberation.

48. I,i.

49. I,i.



I'll tell how once, when they were upon service,  
Count Bentivoglio with Adlopho quarrèll'd:  
Then talk of rancour, which I know was cherish'd:  
And hint that words pass'd lately, over wine:  
Then will I use my handkerchief; and moan  
With eyes turn'd heavenwards, praising the deceas'd;  
And, casting then my eyeballs to the earth  
Express surprise that any mortal breathing  
Could have a soul so callous as to murder him -  
The art of life is mummery; and men  
Who mask the best, the sooner cheat their neighbours.  
I've learnt the art - then why not cheat the cheaters?  
But, Gaspar, mark me, - if to mortal, thou  
Breathe but a hint of what thou now hast heard;  
I am no lambkin; and, by earth and heaven  
Thou shalt not hint it twice - - if thou be true,  
And keep my secret, thou shalt find in me  
A constant benefactor - more anon. "

Bentivoglio, in III,ii, treats his sister Polymnia just  
as Othello does Desdemona (Othello IV,ii). Echoes of Hamlet  
appear in Bentivoglio,

"Thou grave! thou grave! the dusk of whose dank clod  
Destroying life, perpetuates philosophy!  
Thou! in whose chasm friends and foes commingle;  
Hurl'd, like the waters foaming down a cataract,  
Amidst convulsions, to eternity:  
Or, peaceful, sinking to eternal rest;  
Like blue stream'd rivulet, from sight escaping,  
By oozing gently thro' the green sward - say -  
Since we're at last but pasture for the worm -  
Why are these struggles, why these wild turmoils,  
Which fade our energies, as chill, blowing airs  
Despoil the proud clad floweret in the garden?" 50

Reminiscence of Hamlet appears also in Bentivoglio's attitude  
to the task which he believes he should accomplish - revenge

upon the Duke for murdering his father and debauching his sister. Instead of killing the Duke, he delays, with much less justification, poetry or dramatic power than Hamlet does. In III, iv, he organises the army for a revolt which puts ideas of personal revenge even further from him.

The atmosphere of the play and the nature of the characters are not Shakespearean, but are pervaded by a contemporary spirit, existing as a background and coming forward from time to time, in, e.g. Cassandra's sentimentality when Bentivoglio returns to Venice:

"It was not Tuscany that gave me birth!  
It was not Tuscany that taught me love!  
There, there, the rays, from heaven's blue vault,  
                                descending,  
With golden tints, would tinge earth's face in vain!  
There, there, in vain, the moon, in night's still sky,  
Would o'er the world its silver radiance spread!  
For there, if e'er I breathe the Tuscan air,  
Compell'd to marry him who now sues for me,  
I'll dwell upon the tallest steeple's top,  
Whence my sad eye can fix itself on Venice;  
And weep, to find myself remov'd, so far,  
From my lov'd father, and from Bentivoglio  
Behold, he comes - with all his virtues blooming!  
Like feather'd Mercury he nimbly steps;  
His grace is as Apollo's: and, like Mars,  
His stately port bespeaks the warrior, crown'd  
With honour's chaplet, from the new pluck'd laurel!  
Oh Bentivoglio! When thou wentest, methought,  
On every feature was perfection seated:  
And now, methinks, what then perfection seem'd,  
Displays perfection, better than at first. "

51

The XIX century spirit also appears in V,iii, where Bentivoglio hears Polymnia's confession whilst a vast, supernatural storm is raging. This was probably derived from the storm in King Lear, but it lacks the Shakespearean power and implication. Certainly Bentivoglio is in a turmoil before he kills Polymnia, but the murder itself is an illegitimate expression of his primary desire for revenge upon the Duke, and deliberate sororicide - pace Aristotle<sup>52</sup> - is more likely to be horrific than tragic: it certainly is in Masterton.

William Bailey also tried basing an early XIX drama upon Shakespeare in his Grimaldi (unacted), 1822. It has the same plot as H.H. Milman's Fazio (Surrey, 22,xii,1816, as The Italian Wife; C.G.5.ii.1818), 1815. In his Preface Bailey shows anger because his play was written, though not printed, before Milman's and he suspects Milman of copying, or at least using the record of the event which his Grimaldi must have brought to Milman's notice. Grimaldi, an old miser, is accidentally stabbed by a bravo, who mistook him for someone else. He staggers into Fazio's house and dies. Fazio is trying to find the philosopher's stone, but decides Grimaldi's key will be a good substitute. He goes to France, exchanges Grimaldi's

52. Poetics, 14, 1453<sup>b</sup>.

gold and returns to Italy rich. He and his wife are very happy even though some people are suspicious of Fazio's claim to have found the philosopher's stone. Fazio invites a widowed relation and her daughter to live with them. He pays undue attention to the daughter; his wife is jealous and tells the authorities of the murder as if Fazio had committed it. She is believed and Fazio is executed for Grimaldi's murder. The bravo confesses to the murder, but too late. On the execution platform, Valentia, Fazio's wife, stabs her children and herself.

Shakespeare's influence emerges in patches: Grimaldi is modelled upon Shakespeare's old men -

"Thank 'e, thank 'e, thank 'e! no, no, no, no -  
Tut, tut, tut, tut, - debauch, debauch, what would,  
What will men say of old Grimaldi?  
Good night, good night: I must go home  
And press my counsel pillow. " 53

though it is only fair to remember Hazlitt's criticism of Knowles's critics:<sup>54</sup> how far is Grimaldi modelled upon nature and not upon Shakespeare? It would be better if we could decide it was nature, but if so, why does Bailey and so many of his fellow dramatists, follow nature at the points where

53. I,iii.

54. cf. p. 152. Hazlitt alleges that some critics declare "that it is all borrowed from Shakespeare, because it is true to nature" - they do not allow any modern author to be true to nature independently of Shakespeare. (Hazlitt xviii, 345).

Shakespeare, delineating man as he found him, is more easily copied than at other points? If all these plays impressed by their natural spontaneity, by their close portrayal of men and manners, then to suggest Shakespeare as the source of this or that element would be foolishly misguided, but when, repeatedly, we encounter obvious Shakespearean characteristics existing by themselves in the midst of ~~avid~~ plays, we must conclude that they have come, not direct from nature, but *via* Shakespeare.

Bailey uses prose more frequently than is usual in this period: the Bravoes - hired assassins - speak prose, so does Fazio when deeply moved by Grimaldi's death and when excited by his wealth. Shakespeare's influence is found in this prose, particularly in comic relief scenes, when Pico and Pestle chaff one another in a would-be humorous, in fact very irritating manner; or when the Old Woman, III, viii, addresses Fazio -

"God bless your worship's honor! how glad I am that you have found this phlogobular stone! What sort of stone is it, an't please your honor's worship? Is it a millstone, or a grunstone, or a stepping stone? or is it that what-you-may-call-um stone, that has always been kept hid, like?"

His humour too easily lapses into farce not suitable for a tragedy. Sentiment oozes throughout III, V, where Marcella and Adelaide, the widow and her daughter, in long, pious speeches brood over their poverty and the frequent unhappiness of the rich. Typical of the sentiment is Adelaide's speech telling

us she has been in love once:

"Alas! one only wave hath glided past me,  
One fleeting wave in the great tide of time:  
Since that dread frown my ringlet head had brought  
In modest sorrow even to the ground;  
Since danc'd my heart to Fancy's sweetest note;  
Since love rode lightly on the noon-tide web  
Of gale-betwisted gossamer to me.  
Why, dearest mother, force me to repeat,  
That long ere evening clos'd that fleeting day,  
A breeze sprung up that bore away the god,  
And left the downy film upon my brain,  
A sad memorial entangling there.  
Ah! say what now is all the world to me  
That I should tremble at its dark'ning power?" 55

"Fleeting wave", "ringlet head", "modest sorrow" are, sadly, to be expected in this period, but the involved speech figures, concealing instead of revealing, or illuminating, what Adelaide means, are almost bewildering in their badness - how is love to ride

"lightly on the noon-tide web  
Of gale-betwisted gossamer to me" ?

Miss Muffet is bound to be our first thought.

Grimaldi is an irritating play because it does have possibilities, all of which have vanished in the writing. Bailey has related the story of Fazio and Grimaldi evidently without any attempt to transmute it into a tragedy of his own; had he

been capable - and the fault of many of these writers is their dramatic incapacity - he could have developed the conflicts within Fazio over his theft and subsequent misrepresentation, over his infatuation for Adelaide; within Valentina, Fazio's wife, over her revelation of the murder, and the conflict between her and Fazio as their position in society is changed, and their own relationship. Bailey could also have arrived at a less melodramatic finale. Instead of making any effort he has left his play weak and flabby, lacking the firmness and tautness of good drama, with a plot that moves weakly forward having no compulsion of its own, but only that put upon it by Bailey.

H.H. Milman's Fazio (Surrey, 22,xii,1816, as The Italian Wife; C.G. 5,ii.1818) 1815 uses the same plot with variations: once Fazio is established as a rich man he is cordially received by Aldabella, a Florentine beauty, whom he had loved, but who had scorned him when he was poor. Fazio's wife, Bianca, is neglected and miserable, so she tells the Duke of Florence where to find Grimaldi's body buried in Fazio's garden. Fazio is charged and realises how wrong he has been in seeking gold and in loving Aldabella. Completely penitent, he goes to his execution for a murder he did not commit as it were in compensation for his other weaknesses. Bianca is horrified, as she

had thought the money would be taken away, but Fazio would remain. She pursues Aldabella, denounces her influence upon Fazio before the Duke, and explains why she acted as she did. The Duke investigates the murder and discovers the judicial error. Aldabella is condemned to a convent (a strange punishment, especially as Milman was a cleric, but very typical of the period) and Bianca dies.

Fazio is interesting at first, depicting Fazio's despair of finding the philosopher's stone and in the subsequent study of the corrupting power of gold upon him, also in showing how a man having once sinned, is all the more ready for the next sin when it appears. But Milman cannot keep it up, the play fizzles out into set declamations and speeches based upon the more easily imitated Shakespearean characteristics..

(iii) Dramatic poems.

The dramatic poems of this period were not intended for the stage. On the other hand, none of them flout the physical limitations of the theatre as Shelly does in Prometheus Unbound. Most of these dramatic poems are shorter than the average play, although Charles Wells's Joseph and his Brethren, 1824, is one of the exceptions, R.E. Landon's The Count Arezzi, 1824, another.

Milman wrote dramatic poems as well as plays.



His intention in writing them is explained in the preface to Belshazzar: A Dramatic Poem (unacted), 1822 -

"May I presume to hope that this, as well as the preceding works of the same nature, may tend to the advancement of those interests, in subservience to which alone our time and talents can be worthily employed - those of piety and religion?"

His manner of writing is explained in the introduction to The Fall of Jerusalem: A Dramatic Poem (unacted), 1820:

"Every reader will at once perceive from the nature of the interest, and from the language, that this drama was neither written with a view to public representation, nor can be adapted to it without being entirely remodelled and rewritten."

These poems are significant in as much as Milman is obviously writing a more closet-designed form of poetic drama than had been usual before this time. The decades of large theatres, star actors, managerial rivalry and other abuses of the period<sup>56</sup> had inevitably resulted in the assumption that such verse plays could be written and printed with no reference to the stage. Byron certainly did not want stage production for his plays<sup>57</sup> but he did write them in a dramatic mould - they are only at one remove from the living stage - while Milman's Dramatic Poems are quite remote from theatrical production.

Charles Wells, in his Joseph and His Brethren, A Dramatic

56. cf. pp.3-28.

57. cf. p.1.

Poem (unacted), 1824, wrote a play whose standards are very obviously poetic rather than dramatic. It is no use criticising it for being untheatrical: Wells obviously did not intend that it should be so. Regarded as a long poem, it offers an exhilarating sweep of poetry, e.g. Simeon in I,iii -

"These dry Egyptians are like all the rest.  
Strangers or not, man paints commodity  
As though he lov'd to give its virtues up;  
Dazzling your fancy with a gay report  
Till you shall die of longing all this while.  
'Tis but a shift to keep the money back  
And save it in the pouch. Gold is the thing:  
Get much of that, and you may pick your way  
Over the crouching world: this tawny key  
Can open wide the secrets of all hearts  
And nature wears a universal smile!  
A hundred slaves with all their hundred wills  
Are but mute shadows following your eye.  
Gold is the ribs of power. "

Joseph and His Brethren intoxicated Swinburne,<sup>58</sup> but as a blank verse play it does not have an important place in this study.

Slightly nearer to the theatre than Wells; R.E. Ländor's The Count Arezzi, 1824, offers good dramatic speech, e.g.,  
Cimbelli -

" World! O! world!  
All sort of men are moonstruck or possessed,  
Priests, elders, bachelors, and those with wives -  
All wretched, all forlorn, all prone to darkness,  
All tempted, vexed, tormented! I would find

58. cf. Swinburne's introduction to Joseph and His Brethren,  
World's Classics, 1908.

Some wizard with his almanack, to learn  
The worst at once."

59

who has the gay, almost hysterical wit of a Shakespeare clown or of Mercutio. Admittedly what is dramatically good owes much to Shakespeare, but in this period we tend to accept that. But the play is too long, the plot too complicated for dramatic urgency. It could not be performed as it stands, and if cut down, it would be incoherent. The climax is followed by too many scenes which drag any tragic impression down into tedium. The poetic element, lyric rather than dramatic, appears in e.g. Arezzi's soliloquy, IV,iii:

"Their shadows move upon the walls within,  
And o'er the softer cadences of song,  
I hear their mirth! What was so pleasant once -  
Night with her coolness, and that crimson moon  
Whose rising wakes the nightingale - the flowers,  
Too prodigal of their dewy sweetness, now  
Tire and offend. I would not breathe again  
The orange blossom's fragrance thus or hear  
The fountain waters dash their marble vase.  
No sounds disturb the moonlight sea beyond:  
They seem to rest whose barks are anchored there,  
This music does not reach to them! - but I  
Shall sleep no more till death - my heart still tells me  
Its throbs are numbered. - Amongst so many blessed,  
There is but one that can remember yet  
The wretch shut out:- she would forget me too  
If fear were not as strong as this new love -  
Now they must watch together, and a breast  
So innocent once, become the incestuous couch  
Where shame engenders falsehood! Let her bring

59. I.iv.

New lies upon her lips, and then go back  
To flutter in the light of those fair halls,  
Breathe their sweet incense, render sigh for sigh,  
Or dubious pressure of dividing palms,  
And blush beneath the lengthened gaze of love -  
She did so, late, with me. - The strongest takes her,  
And I, who might be such, stand here aloof  
For fools to bait and hoot at! - Hark - she comes."

(iv) Gonzalo, the Traitor; Eurypilus, King of Sicily; Durazzo.

There are three plays in this period which impress as better than the average. One is Thomas Roscoe's Gonzalo, the Traitor (unacted), 1820. It is not entirely original. Roscoe is indebted certainly to Shakespeare and probably to Joanna Baillie. The plot is built around revenge, but the impression is less of Iago and more of the passions of revenge and hatred, as Joanna Baillie portrayed them in, e.g. De Monfort.<sup>60</sup>

Gonzalo wants to have revenge upon Rodriguez, who has always managed to achieve what Gonzalo wanted before Gonzalo did so himself. Now Rodriguez is about to marry Estrella, whom Gonzalo also loves. Gonzalo arranges for Alvarez, Rodriguez's father, and Montalva, Estrella's father, to quarrel, to the extent of having<sup>a</sup> duel. Alvarez is old, and by appealing to family honour he prevails upon Rodriguez to fight in his place. Rodriguez does so and wounds Montalva, but believes he has killed him. Meanwhile, by trickery, Gonzalo makes Rodriguez

60. cf. p.198 ff.

believe Estrella does not love him, but himself, Gonzalo, and makes the Infanta believe that Rodriguez returns her love for him. The wedding of Rodriguez and Estrella is postponed, because Rodriguez is imprisoned for duelling and wounding Montalva who may die. Gonzalo, by further trickery, marries Estrella himself but his hired assassins fail to kill Rodriguez, whose nobility shames them into penitence. Rodriguez, released from prison, as Montalva has survived, leads the army against Gonzalo, who has treacherously leagued with the Moors, hoping to become king. Gonzalo and Rodriguez fight and Gonzalo stabs Rodriguez in the back when Rodriguez offers to embrace and be friends before the wounded Gonzalo dies. Rodriguez is not mortally wounded, Estrella appears, and all is well. Word is brought that the Infanta, whom Rodriguez had married by Gonzalo's trickery, has committed suicide.

This plot is used with power, largely deriving from Gonzalo's single-minded purpose, which makes him ruthlessly subdue all else to the accomplishment of his goal -

"I'll sleep no more - Oh God! dreams, dreams of hate,  
Without revenge, will kill. - It was Rodriguez -  
Again he had me down - again he smote me  
As once in boyhood: then, e'en to my face,  
Methought, he took the woman that I loved  
From 'neath my arm, and led her to the altar.  
Am I awake? and are not these things dreams?  
No, true, too true, if I should fail to-day,  
How my soul withers in the dread suspense!  
What hour is it? - How far from my revenge? - " 61

And later in the same scene :

"Flattery! thy breath is sweeter sure than woman's,  
Whispering th' enamoured ear of youth. How greedily  
He suck'd it in! -  
Yes! I will think and toil, and creep and whine,  
Belie my very nature to achieve it.  
What! have a puling boy preferred before me? -  
Refuse my hand? - I second here to any? -  
Hate be my guide - now to the King....."

And again:

"Why, who cries out on fortune, and reviles her?  
'Tis but a cloak to hide our ignorance,  
And cover blunders, that would else expose us.  
And thus we cry, forsooth, it was unlucky! -  
There's nought but fortune to a careful man;  
She is the kindest mistress! - ever pleas'd  
With those who know to use her handsomely,  
And take her in the humour....."

62

Gonzalo's character comes over very well with its passion  
of hatred and revenge, studied and developed in the way first  
used by Joanna Baillie.<sup>63</sup> He is at his best in scheming  
soliloquies :

"Now stand I on the threshold of my glory;  
And shall I venture on? If death should front me,  
And spurn me back upon my native nothing!  
This is the thought that gives my purpose pause:-  
I calculate on life as well as honor,  
First, I have satisfied my vast revenge  
And reached its summit in my foe's dishonor;  
And he but lives to hear it from my lips.  
I helped to wed him - true; to play him false -  
This is the sting: I'll haste to prick him with it;

62. III, i.

63. cf. p. 198 ff.

And when he feels it, I shall be reveng'd  
For his long overtopping me in all things.  
His fist, his sword, his love did still oppress me;-  
He was the vampyre that consum'd me living.  
Revenge is sped - I spurn not on the dust -  
My hate is satisfied - ambition something;  
And I had better rest upon my laruels,  
For, venturing forwards, death may snatch them from me.  
But see! within the temple I approach  
Upon his golden throne, sits high Ambition,  
With his rich throng of nobles and dependents  
Who kiss his feet, and wait upon his motions.  
And shall I turn my back in coward flight,  
Scar'd at the fire that fills his awful eye,  
When I am come so far to hail his presence?  
He beckons me - I will approach, and seat me  
In quiet majesty upon - the throne! " 64

Unfortunately the whole play does not come up to the standard of Gonzalo's characterisation. The plot is slightly too complex, so that Roscoe has to spend time simply in describing events. It lacks a controlled design, but instead seems to wander at times without an artistic limit. The relatively happy ending is blatantly contrived. Nevertheless, because of Gonzalo, the play does impress.

Another good play, D.W. Paynter's Eurypilus, King of Sicily (unacted), 1817, Manchester, also derives a lot of its power from Shakespeare. Eurypilus, King of Sicily, marries Melona - a woman of doubtful antecedents, who sends out fifty rings to noble virgins of Sicily. Hermoline, one of the chosen

recipients, refuses a ring as she has just lost her chastity to Laterno - one of Melona's former paramours. Hermolina and her sister approach Melona for justice against Laterno. Melona decides to have him banished, for her own safety, as he knows too much about her. Laterno persuades Melona's priest that if he stabs Melona with a dagger given to him by Laterno, Melona will not be killed, but an evil spirit dwelling within her will die. Laterno's sins finally catch up with him as so many people denounce him to Eurypilus. He is killed by Hermolina's brother. Melona dies by the priest's misguided hand. All Melona's life is now revealed. Eurypilus curses his fate and commits suicide.

The plot has various strands in it: sentimental, melodramatic, Gothic and a Jacobean love for villainy openly displayed. But the language, whilst indebted to Shakespeare, does have some force of its own, almost as if Paynter had so thoroughly absorbed Shakespeare that his language is naturally Shakespearean - as in I,ii, a soliloquy by Laterno:-

"Now, do my projects wear a goodly face! -  
A shrewder knave ne'er form'd and rais'd, from naught,  
Such passing fabricks! - In a short liv'd month  
I've caus'd the king to woo, and couple with  
A skilful drab - a harlot o' the trade! -  
A virgin once, 'tis true; whom I myself  
Beguil'd - and stripp'd of that - which charter'd fools  
Call chastity, - ev'n in the very core  
Of lustful Venice. But, to serve my turn,  
Of late, by dint of special promises,  
I lur'd her hither; gave her private precepts;



Reform'd th' unseemly witchcraft of her tongue, -  
 And made it use a bashful, sober diction:  
 Repair'd th' offensive flaws and blemishes  
 Of wry-neck'd Vice, with paint - and holiness;  
 Did canonize her, sans the wonted rites;  
 Bray'd out her praise, with pithy, grave discretion; -  
 Anon, the am'rous king was smit with passion; -  
 And, now - why, now, I have created her  
 The mighty, star-like queen of Sicily!  
 'Twas excellently done! in faith, 'twas brave! -  
 But why was't done? - To feed my hungry coffers, -  
 And lift myself to royalty: - for gold  
 Ne'er fails to give the daring spirit triumph!  
 Deformity is oft, by it, transform'd  
 To comeliness; sharp, penal spite, to love; -  
 A wrinkled age-worn Hag 'twill render fair,  
 And sprightly, as the unfading Amaranth; -  
 'Twill make a man a fool, - a fool, a man, -  
 A coward valiant, - and a villain upright! - "

The poetry is uneven, but altogether the play has power. There are sudden vivid uses of imagery that give a good atmosphere to the play.

"Melona [to Laterno disguised as a Friar.]

Wherefore thus accoutered?

Laterno

To keep our galley in its even course.  
 Suspicion is a wakeful cur, which snarls  
 And yelps, at ev'ry heedless tread." 65

Then Paynter produces this :

"Hermolina

Meanwhile, I'll gather yonder bashful flow'r  
 Which droops for lack of rain - Ah, me! - 'tis  
 wither'd! -  
 All, all its sweetness gone! -

Castella.

E'en such a flow'r as thy sick fancy  
 shew'st thee,  
 Art thou thyself, unhappy sufferer! - " 66

65. II,iii.

66. IV,iii.

where Castella's gloss is quite unnecessary and unpoetic.

In reading it there is an impression of strength and compulsion, unusual for the time and deriving largely from Paynter's use of language: he has a certain facility in blank verse, combined with a capacity for keeping interest alive in his quite complicated plot.

Paynter's other play, King Stephen, or The Battle of Lincoln, (unacted), Manchester, 1822, is more obviously modelled upon Shakespeare's history plays. It is competent, but no more, and much of the competence is derived from Shakespeare. There is no attempt at character drawing and very little dramatic form.

James Haynes managed to gain a greater freedom than any of the others. In Conscience; or The Bridal Night (D.L. 21.ii.1821), 1821, he had assembled Gothic elements and fused them as best he could, with bad verse, into a bad plot, resulting in a useless play. But his Durazzo (C.G.xi.1838), 1823, is quite different. There are still Gothic, sentimental, melodramatic elements, but they are secondary to the progress of the plot. Durazzo is the grandson of an exiled lord of Grenada, whither he returns full of ambition and schemes the overthrow of Alonzo, the fiancé of Zelinda, whom Durazzo loves, but whose father, Benducar, is his enemy. Durazzo's plot

succeeds and Alonzo and Benducar, accused of treason, are banished. Zelinda refuses to marry Alonzo before he goes, and, in penitence, renounces Durazzo as well. Durazzo's false accusations against Alonzo and Benducar are exposed. Alonzo and Benducar return. Alonzo is put in control of the defence of the city against the Moors. Durazzo wants to be reconciled to Benducar, who is adamant in his enmity and gives Durazzo a blow - the second one he has delivered, so Durazzo kills him. Zelinda goes mad. In fighting the Moors, Durazzo acts most heroically, saves the king's life and ensures victory. Wounded, he goes to the convent where Zelinda is and stabs himself.

Durazzo is unusual for this period in that he is much more of a rounded character instead of a mere cardboard puppet. He has a good conflict in his ambition versus his better feelings; there is also conflict in his love for Zelinda versus his hatred of Benducar. He speaks and acts with an inner conviction, and not as if Haynes were simply putting words into the mouth of a clay figure. Durazzo's feeling of unhappiness comes over, but the other characters are not sufficiently alive to help give a rounded impression of Durazzo - they are much more conventional types, especially the women, who are sentimental and long-winded. Haynes<sup>N</sup> catches a good oratorical rhythm which goes well with Durazzo's firmness -

"Yet be not rash; my speech, I doubt, was warm -  
It may be wrong; but, as my heart conceived,  
My tongue has utter'd. I would have you firm,  
But nothing violent; prepared to urge  
Your wrongs in accents that inform, and not  
Offend the Royal ear. Thus shall your cause  
Find favour; your dishonour, full redress -  
Outrage expires in weakness. Peace, my friends;  
Peace in the city, conduct in the field,  
And justice on the throne: be this your motto  
And prosper. "

67

Durazzo's pride is well expressed:

"Garcia.

'Twere fitting more such uprise to be humble.

Durazzo.

How! by what process of the intellect  
Prove you this fitness? Do we not go arm'd  
Into the field of arms; and shall we not  
Tread proudly in the palaces of pride?  
I come amongst you a competitor,  
To answer taunts with tauntings. When the wind  
Scold at the sea, the sea rebukes the wind  
With lips of foam; and when a comet starts  
Into our system, angrily he glares  
That the bright multitude of stars turn pale  
To see the mighty stranger pass along. "

68.

Haynes's poetic grasp emerges in, e.g.,

"Durazzo.            My prosperity  
Came on as sudden as a northern spring,  
That shoots its growth up like a culverin  
To meet the instant season; but, as quick  
As winter strikes the pole, misfortune turns,  
To sweep away the track and vestige of  
My perishing hopes.            "

69.

67. I, ii.

68. III, ii.

69. IV, i.

Though these three plays stand out from the minor tragedy of this period, it must be remembered that their merit is relative and not absolute.

(v) Verse in the Minor Tragedies, 1815-1825.

The verse is little different from that of the earlier period,<sup>70</sup> apart from a greater use of prose and a lesser of rhyme. Peter Bayley, in his Sophoclean derived Orestes in Argos, 1825, (C.G. 20.iv.1825), gives the Furies incantations of rhymed couplets, but, such exceptional uses apart, rhyme has dropped from poetic tragedies. Prose, on the other hand, is increasingly used, owing something to Shakespeare, as its use is confined, largely, to the mechanicals. The anonymous, The Queen of Argos (unacted), 1823, is a brisk play with more varied dramatic verse than is usual, although it does suffer from undramatic tedium in its length and comparative lack of action; once the play is finished we are left with only a record of external events, which cannot compensate for lack of dramatic action, no matter how complicated it may be. The verse, however, seems to be a genuine attempt to bring vividness into the play and to break away from heavy, conventional forms:

70: cf. p.109.

"Aye, we have married in the teeth of luck;  
 The moon's not full - nor this by Jove the fourth.  
 Oh! we're a wretched pair! no settlements,  
 Nor store of virgins stale, to set us right.  
 Jewels not thought of - miserable we!  
 Ungarlanded - pipers and dancers none!  
 We haven't a link - unkneaded the bride-cake -  
 Lugubrious couple! And to top our woes,  
 Furnished, unfurnished, not a house have I! " 71

The prose comes from the comic lower characters, who are involved in a slight secondary action of their own. They are well portrayed, earthy people, expressing themselves naturally, and if they do owe a lot to Shakespeare, they are better than the usual Shakespearean imitations of genteel clowns uprooted from their mother earth and with all the soil shaken from their roots, e.g.

"To be petted and pinched and be slobbered by a wizen'd old dotard, a mess of chaff and water! Sha-ah-ah-ah! (shuddering) fretted and fondled and sneezed on and snarled at: I can't have him. My dear'd and my darling'd; lovey, mouse, honey-comb, sweet! and anon, pert, wanton, butterfly, baggage! Harried off my stomach by the precise paddling of a toad-skin paw; and mayhap - I won't have him: it's too much - " 72

We have already noticed W. Bailey's use of prose in <sup>73</sup>Grimaldi, 1822<sup>73</sup> for humour among mechanicals. He also uses it when Fazio is deeply moved by Grimaldi's death and when he is excited by his new-found wealth: two points of heightened

71. II, i.

72. III, ii.

73. cf. p. 163.

excitement in the play which would more usually be written in verse, normally of a most luxurious and expensive nature. Bailey's practice here is most unusual for his age. J.S, Knowles also uses prose, for his plebs and occasionally for other characters. John Roby, The Duke of Mantua<sup>(unacted)</sup>, 1823, gives prose to his servants and to Laura, a cousin of Hermione, the heroine, probably because she is exploited as a slightly comic, elderly person, owing much to Shakespeare; e.g., Hermione and Blanch have a typical mistress-servant scene, including a song and comments:

"Blanch. How like you the song?

Hermione. Indifferent well; methinks it were too sad.  
But sadness and I must have close fellowship ere  
Or I mistake the note of her approach..."<sup>long,</sup> 74

William Tennant in Cardinal Beaton (unacted), Edinburgh, 1823, intersperses long, undramatic, undifferentiated speeches with sprightly Scottish prose spoken by old women and a jailer. The effect of contrast emerges :

"Mrs. Strang.

O little knows this stony-hearted man  
How dear to me this passing interview!  
Else he would grudge not this poor span of time.  
O husband, I am grieved for your sake;  
Sad terrors vex me for your state of life.  
There is a cloud of mischief in the sky  
Ready to drop its hail on some poor head;  
Nor know I well if yours shall be secure.

74. I,iii.

--Caldcleuch-(jailer)-

That I dinna ken neither -  
There are faggots gatherin', sticks splittin', coals  
drivin', stakes rammin', gun-powther pokes  
crammin', a' about the Castle and the Priory  
puffin' an' blawin' wi' business.....Now,  
a' this wark is no done for naebody and naething -  
heretics maun burn - it's a law i' the kirk -  
they that will to Cupar maun to Cupar.

Mrs. Strang

Oh do not, with your croakings raven-like,  
Increse to an intolerable load,  
These fears with which already I'm oppress'd..."

75

William Woodley in James the Third, printed with Catherine de Medicis, 1825, uses prose in the same way, only his attempts at Scots dialect are pathetic.

It may be observed of these plays mentioned which make great use of prose, apart from Caius Gracchus, 1815, whose prose is obviously of Shakespearean derivation like the rest of the play, that all of them appeared in the 1820s. With a study ending in 1825 it would be foolish to draw any conclusions but I would tentatively suggest that, just as, e.g. Wells in Joseph and His Brethren, has left the usual poetic drama form to become more poetical - a line which was increasingly followed - so other writers are re-introducing a greater prose element. The writers of both deviations must have been aware of the unhappy inadequacies of the contemporary poetic drama and each deviation was an attempt at a remedy.



CHAPTER V.

Joanna Baillie.

During the period 1790-1825 Joanna Baillie published three volumes of plays, each entitled A Series of Plays; in which it is attempted to delineate the stronger passions of the mind. Each passion being the subject of a tragedy and a comedy. Volume i, 1798, contains, of blank verse tragedy, Count Basil and De Montfort; volume ii, 1802, Ethwald (in two parts, each of five acts); volume iii, 1812, Orra. She published another tragedy, The Family Legend, in 1810. These volumes are particularly interesting on account of the long "Introductory Discourse" which forms a preface to volume i, and the preface, "To the Reader" of volume iii, where Joanna Baillie develops her own dramatic theory.

(i) Dramatic theory.

Joanna Baillie's theory is fully treated in Chapter II,<sup>1</sup> It is not, however, out of place, to remind ourselves here of her main contention before proceeding to a study of the plays. Joanna Baillie, with strong moral sanctions, determined

"that an attempt to write a series of tragedies, of simpler construction, less embellished with poetical decorations, less constrained by that lofty seriousness which has so generally been considered as necessary for the support of tragick dignity, and in which the chief object should be to delineate the progress of the higher passions in the human breast, each play exhibiting a particular

1. cf. pp. 29-37.

passion, might not be unacceptable to the publick." <sup>2</sup>  
The main innovation is the deliberate intention that each play will be built around one passion.

(ii) Count Basil.

Count Basil (unacted), printed in the first Series of Plays, 1798, is built around the passion of love. Count Basil is a brave, honourable and honoured general in the service of Charles V. When the play opens he is leading his troops towards Pavia to join the Emperor. He stops in Mantua, where he falls in love with Victoria, whom he had seen once before, two years ago, and of whom he has dreamed ever since.<sup>3</sup> Victoria is the daughter of the Duke of Mantua, who wants to delay Basil's advance as he secretly hopes Francis I will defeat Charles V in the forthcoming battle. Basil refuses to stay at the Duke's request, but agrees to remain another day after Victoria, completely innocent and knowing nothing of her father's schemes, has asked him to stay. In staying Basil alienates his friends and officers, and the Duke has no trouble in spreading revolt among Basil's soldiers. Basil manages to

2. A Series of Plays, i, 41.

3. In the third (1802) edition of the first Series of Plays, Joanna Baillie alters this, reverting in fact to her original plan, so that Basil first sees Victoria in the procession and the whole process of the passion is thereby enacted before us. (Note at the end of Basil, I, pp. 89-90 1802 edition, in which Count Basil is altered as a title to Basil.)

regain their trust, but he is too besotted with love to leave Victoria. Whilst he is delaying in Mantua the battle of Pavia is fought. The Emperor waited for Basil until he could wait no longer. Basil, bitterly ashamed at this loss of honour, shoots himself.

Basil is quite a well drawn, rounded character. In the opening scenes we are prepared for his appearance by the talk of his friends; we hear of his character; "he disciplines his men severely"<sup>4</sup>, "he loves not ease and revelry"<sup>5</sup>, "Basil is of flinty matter made."<sup>6</sup> When he does appear, however, he has already fallen under Victoria's spell:

"Rosinberg.        That olive branch  
The princess [Victoria] bore herself, of fretted gold,  
Was exquisitely wrought. I mark'd it more,  
Because she held it in so white a hand.

Basil (in a quick voice)

Mark'd you her hand? I did  
not see her hand,  
And yet she wav'd it twice."

7

This is Basil's first speech. He and his friends have just seen Victoria in a procession. Basil's rapid speech and strange visual dichotomy - he saw her hand and yet did not see it - are pointers to his condition. This is clearly indicated further on in the same scene:

4. I.i.

5. I, ii.

6. I,ii.

7. I.ii.

"Rosinberg.

What mighty thoughts engage my pensive friend?

Basil

O! it is admirable.

Rosinberg.

How runs thy fancy? What is admirable?

Basil

Her form, her face, her motion, ev'rything!

Rosinberg

The princess? Yes, have we not prais'd her much?

Basil

I know you prais'd her, and her off'rings too;

She might have giv'n the treasures of the east

Ere I had known it.

She came upon my wond'ring sight -

O! didst thou mark her when she first appear'd?

Still distant, slowly moving with her train;

Her robe, and tresses floating on the wind,

Like some light figure in a morning cloud;

Then as she onward to the eye became

The more distinct, the lovelier still she grew.

That graceful bearing of her slender form;

Her roundly-spreading breast, her tow'ring neck,

Her face ting'd sweetly with the bloom of youth -

But when on near approach she tow'ards us turn'd,

Kind mercy! What a countenance was there!

And when to our salute she gently bow'd,

Didst mark that smile rise from her parting lips?

Soft swell'd her glowing cheek, her eyes smil'd too;

O! how they smil'd! 'twas like the beams of heav'n!

I felt my roused soul within me start,

Like something wak'd from sleep.

Rosinberg

Ah! many a slumb'rer heav'n's beams do wake

To care and misery!"

8

This long speech is, unfortunately, marred by many typical faults of this period: the opening image is poetic in describing Basil's feelings with imagination:

"She might have giv'n the treasures of the east  
Ere I had known it."

Then Basil continues with conventional tedium - "tresses floating on the wind", "bloom of youth", "glowing cheek", all amounting to a poetic description in the worse meaning of the word "poetic" - fulsome, unnatural, obviously not prose; instead of which Basil should have described her appearance as he saw it for himself and as it reacted upon his imagination. Joanna Baillie evidently could not endow her character with poetic vitality. This speech invites comparison with Enobarbus's speech describing the appearance of Cleopatra in Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra.<sup>9</sup> Enobarbus does not merely describe, by his language and interpretation the fires our imagination as, for example, in

"Purple the sails, and so perfumed, that  
The winds were love-sick with them, the oars were silver,  
Which to the tune of flutes kept stroke, and made  
The water which they beat to follow faster,  
As amorous of their strokes..." 10.

Enobarbus personifies wind and water and wisely permits Cleopatra's appearance to beggar all description. Basil particularises with unhappy results :

"Her roundly-spreading breast, her tow'ring neck."

9. II, ii, 199-226  
10. II, ii, 201-205.

Throughout this period we find a similar stifling of poetic imagination, which is replaced by plodding, "poetical" description.

Basil's obsession is conveyed, not, as we learned to expect from the minor writers, by talk of the other characters, but by his own undeniable adoration of Victoria - an extreme explained by his friend and kinsman Rosinberg when he says:

".....thus earnest from your lips  
Her praise displeases me. To men like you  
If love should come, he proves no easy guest." 11

This links up with an earlier description of Basil as a man who has only one weakness:

"One fault he has, I know but only one;  
His too great love of military fame  
Destroys his thoughts, and makes him oft appear  
Unsocial and severe." 12

From this it is easy to follow Basil's development as his love for Victoria conflicts with his first love - military fame - and as the physical presence of a beautiful woman conquers the spiritual idea of honour. This conflict makes his suicide, though slightly drawn out, nevertheless acceptable because we can understand how much military honour means to him and how crushed he must have been by the message he received from Piscaro, Charles V's general:

11. I,ii.

12. I,ii.

"Piscaro sent me to inform Count Basil  
He needs not now his aid, and gives him leave  
To march his tardy troops to distant quarters " 13

During the play Basil does evoke our sympathy, and we may enter into his character and sympathise with him as we never can with any of the characters presented by the minor dramatists of this period.

Unfortunately Basil's character is the only one we may begin to understand: the other characters are too easy to understand, in accord with Joanna Baillie's theory,<sup>14</sup> they are flat and used more like mirrors in which we may see Basil reflected. This would be justified were only minor characters affected, e.g., Valtomer or Frederick, two of Basil's officers, but Victoria's flatness strains our credulity. We rightly expect a much fuller study of the woman whose feminine attractions and power are going to bring Basil to destruction. In a way, this lack results in a foreshortening of Basil's character which would be fuller if we could meet more fully the woman whom he loves. Instead we have a *flighty*, spoiled girl who falls into a stock stage character part: a woman who mocks man's passion until it is too late, then she is overwhelmed by melodramatic remorse. Victoria cannot come to life because at every turn she must act as the passion - the pivot

13. IV, v.

14. A Series of Plays, 1798, p.59.

of the play - dictates.

On the other hand, Victoria's character could be accounted for by seeing it as a further and most convincing proof of the extremity of Basil's passion. This would accord with Joanna Baillie's primary intention: to portray a passion rather than to dramatise characters. It would also pinpoint one of the great weaknesses of her theory. She always puts the passion first, so that, at times, she fails to see that by so doing she has strained a character unnaturally and so defeated her own end that we no longer believe in the character and consequently may not accept the passion connected with him, or her: e.g., in IV, v, of Count Basil, where Victoria deliberately and coldly illtreats Basil's declaration of love, not with any mischievous, flirtatious suggestion of teasing him, but almost with the cruelty of a cat taunting a captured mouse. Yet in V,iii, a few hours later, she makes most extravagant protestations over his corpse, though it is interesting that the reason she gives for her genuine passion is that he loved her, not that she loved him. This behaviour might have illumined our knowledge of Victoria, except that the sketchy outline we do have of her is not clear enough to suffer such apparent inconsistency or be strengthened by it.



Generally the dramatic construction is not good in Count Basil. It opens with scenes of exposition which serve to introduce us to Basil's character without too much unnatural straining; then it continues to develop Basil's passion. But Joanna Baillie cannot maintain our interest with Basil's weakness alone, for she has little else to dramatise. Indeed her theory would oblige her to keep any secondary interests to the minimum. Instead of cutting down and making the play of a length with its content, Joanna Baillie drags it out to its pre-ordained five acts, and our interest inevitably drags as well.

Perhaps Joanna Baillie has gone to an extreme with the good principle that the primary conflict should be between two passions within a character rather than between the character and external events.<sup>15</sup> That principle is obviously of paramount importance, but it does not exclude additional external conflicts or entanglements with which a character has to deal. Basil's only entanglement is an easily placated rebellion among his soldiers. Apart from that, all conflict is connected with his internal one: love for Victoria versus love of honour, and Joanna Baillie does not maintain our inter-

15. A Series of Plays, 1798, p.59.

est powerfully enough. This was her first play, so we could / expect  
that her theory, not yet experienced, would not find it easy  
to pull evenly with her practice. In the delineation of a  
leading character and the passion which obsesses him, she has  
had some success, but she has failed to integrate this with the  
rest of the play, so that Count Basil droops limply. Joanna  
Baillie, like other dramatists of this period, had theories  
about dramatic writing, but she lacked first-hand experience  
of the stage itself. She was not writing so much for the  
physical stage and massive audiences of her own age, but more  
for some kind of ideal stage, which she, like so many others,  
had conceived in the closet, a sort of XVIII century bastard,  
sired by Shakespeare. Genest spotted these drawbacks in Jo-  
anna Baillie :-

"Two things are requisite to make a good dramatic  
poet - genius and a knowledge of the stage....."

Miss Baillie possessed in a very high degree  
the first and more essential of these qualifications  
- she was very deficient in the second - the con-  
sequence has been, that she has presented to the  
public much fine poetry in a dramatic shape, without  
having written one single play which is well calcul-  
ated for representation - as she wished her plays  
to have been acted, she should have frequented the  
theatre herself, or have consulted some person who  
was conversant with the stage....."

16

The blank verse of Count Basil is mixed. The general background of verse tends to stiffness and an unnatural diction - a mixture of Shakespeare and XVIII sensibility, e.g.

"Frederick.

Now pray thee do confess thou art asham'd  
Thou, who art wisely wont to set at nought  
The noble fire of individual courage,  
And call calm prudence the superior virtue,  
What sayst thou now, my candid Rosinberg?  
When thy great captain, in a time like this,  
Denies his weary troops one day of rest  
Before the exertions of approaching battle,  
Yet grants it to a pretty lady's suit? "

17

Here we have to make our way, as best we can, through a clutter of "thees", "thous" and "thys", and much circumlocution, to the meaning of the speech. Dramatic speech cannot afford to be so meticulous with its subordinate clauses: the audience, or reader, wants to be compelled into the heart of action, not kept at a studied distance. But there are passages where Joanna Baillie has shown the dramatic power she definitely possesses, where she seems to be approaching her subject freshly, feeling it upon her own pulses and not via Shakespeare or the preconceptions of her own age: Basil addressing his rebellious soldiers after having dragged one particularly troublesome rioter from the ranks :

"Stand there, damn'd, meddling villain, and be silent;  
For if thou utt'rest but a single word,  
A cough, or hem, to cross me in my speech,  
I'll send thy cursed spine from the earth,  
To bellow with the damn'd!

. . . . .  
New from battles, where my native troops

So bravely fought, I felt me proud at heart,  
And boasted of you, boasted foolishly.  
I said fair glory's palm ye would not yield  
To e'er the bravest legion train'd to arms.  
I swore the meanest man of all my troops  
Would never shrink before an armed host  
If honour bade him stand. ....  
.....  
But ye do peace, and ease, and booty love,  
Safe and ignoble service - be it so -  
Forgive me that I did mistake you thus,  
But do not earn with savage mutiny,  
Your own destruction. We'll for Pavia march,  
To join the royal army near its walls;  
And there with blushing forehead will I plead,  
That ye are men with warlike service worn,  
Requiring ease and rest."

18

One need hardly add that the soldiers now want to follow Basil anywhere. This crowd oratory has power because Basil is immediately concerned with action, he is not enlarging upon an abstract emotion, but urgently trying to convince his troops of his own integrity. Not only does Basil use excellent crowd psychology but his language has a vigour and compulsion which is so often, and so wearily, lacking from this period. The verse has attained a new freedom, it is no longer con-  
strained by the length of a line, as was Frederick's in III,i;  
and it has achieved a rhythm much nearer to that of speech.

19

Unfortunately this kind of language is seldom heard, and none of these points of heightened power, good though they

18. IV,ii.

19. cf. p.193.

may be, can obliterate the impression of heaviness made by the general run of unnatural verse. This is particularly so in undramatic scenes, e.g. II,iv, where Victoria and her women attendants discuss love and allied subjects, and a young boy is sentimentally introduced. Though this precocious boy may be introduced to demonstrate a part of Victoria's character, that as old Geoffry has said:

"She is fair,  
But not so fair as her good mother was. " 20

Tedium is found in long descriptions, e.g. III, i; where Basil is described, by one character to another, as he had appeared when introducing an old soldier, Geoffry, to his own soldiers; in III,iii, at a masked ball, and in the long, undramatic dialogue of IV,iii, this same lack of interest is found. All these points help to promote a most undramatic lack of urgency.

In Act V, Joanna Baillie yields to the Zeitgeist in her Gothic settings:

"A dark night, no moon, but a few stars glimmering; the stage represents (as much as can be discovered for the darkness) a church-yard with part of a chapel and a wing of the ducal palace adjoining to it." 21

20. I,i.

21. V,i.

The bracketed interpolation in these stage directions shows an unusual commonsense for this period. This Gothic element mingles with a romantic in V,ii: .

"A Wood, wild and savage; an entry to a cave, very much tangled with brushwood, is seen in the background. "

22

Genest, commenting upon Count Basil, remarks :

" - ~~this~~ an interesting T., but there is too much said and too little done - some of the scenes might be omitted, or shortened to advantage - Geoffry, an old soldier, who has been very much maimed in the wars, is a good character - but he does not in the slightest degree contribute to the conduct of the plot....."

23.

Genest's reference to Geoffry is misleading. In Geoffry, if I am not mistaken, Joanna Baillie undertook an ambitious design: unfortunately, it may not have been entirely successful, but the idea was good. Geoffry is an aged, honourable and revered ex-soldier. He fought bravely, but was passed over for promotion because :

"After that battle where my happy fate  
Had led me to fulfil a glorious part,  
Chaf'd with the gibing insults of a slave,  
The worthless fav'rite of a great man's fav'rite,  
I rashly did affront; our cautious prince,  
With narrow policy dependent made,  
Dar'd not, as I am told, promote me then,  
And now he is asham'd or has forgot it."

24

- 22. V,ii.

23. Genest, viii, 334.

24. III,i.

From Geoffry's first appearance in the opening scene we are forcibly made aware of the esteem in which he is held by all Mantua. He is rather a stock-figure old soldier, but this is almost an advantage as he is being used as a symbol, and there is no individuality to hinder our recognition of him as such. He has always put the trade of war and the love of honour first in active life. Now, in revered retirement, he is applauded by all; Basil comes specially for the honour of shaking his hand and then presents Geoffry as a hero to his soldiers and he is borne across the stage in triumph, in one of Joanna Baillie's relief scene endings.<sup>25</sup> We are meant, I think, to realise how proportionally greater Basil's position will be when he retires, honoured by all who know him for an honourable man. Yet Basil leaves the narrow path of honour and duty. In V,i, as he is repenting his folly before committing suicide, it is old Geoffry who meets him and tries to dissuade him, but Basil says to him:

"Then go thy way, for thou art honourable;  
Thou hast no shame, thou needst not seek the dark  
Like fallen, fameless men. I pray thee go! " 26.

But the execution of this parallelism has not equalled its conception and we may easily gain Genest's impression - that

25. III,i; A Series of Plays, i,60, footnote.

26. V,i.

Geoffry is quite irrelevant to the action. He would, I think, certainly upon the stage, appear irrelevant because he does not seem in any way integrated with the other characters and his entrances and exits have no good reason behind them. But the idea of having such a contrast is good.

(iii) De Monfort.

In De Monfort (D.L.29.iv.1800), 1798<sup>26a</sup> Joanna Baillie treats of hatred, not, as she explains in her "Introductory Discourse"<sup>27</sup> the quick, flaring hatred more commonly associated with anger, but a slow gathering hatred, accumulating over many years. This distinction is an artificial one which Joanna Baillie has made, I would think, because she realised that a sudden overpowering hatred would prove much more difficult to dramatise into tragedy. Her distinction could be challenged by reference to the earlier distinction she made for Count Basil: there she accepts love as a sudden passion -

26.a. Kemble revised De Monfort for the stage, but the revised version has not survived. Dutton compared a copy of the first edition with a copy of Kemble's acting version and concluded that the changes consisted largely of the correction of grammatical errors, cf. M.S.Carhart, The Life and Works of Joanna Baillie, 1923, p.112. (I am indebted to Miss Carhart's study throughout this chapter). Joanna Baillie, in a note to De Monfort in The Dramatic and Poetical Works of Joanna Baillie, 2nd edition, 1853, p.104, refers to the Drury Lane performance as "adapted to the stage by Mr. Kemble," which does not suggest any great alteration.

27. A Series of Plays, 1798, p.64.



Basil had only caught one fleeting glimpse of Victoria two years before - whilst others might term Basil's passion "infatuation," arguing that love is a passion which can only be of a slow growth. It is obvious, however, that love in that sense would be more difficult to dramatise. Similarly, she has made her own distinctions with hatred so that she may adopt the more easily dramatised aspects of the passion; the slowly accumulated hatred is not dramatic, but when this growing passion explodes, then a dramatist's task is much easier.

The plot centres upon de Montfort who, since childhood, has nursed hatred for Rezenvelt. When the play opens de Montfort is discovered newly arrived in a German town where he has secretly retired to lick his spiritual wounds after a duel with Rezenvelt in which de Monfort was defeated and Rezenvelt spared his life. De Monfort discovers that Rezenvelt is also in the town. Friends attempt to reconcile the two, but only with a very partial success. Jane de Monfort, de Monfort's sister, also arrives in the town, intent upon helping her brother, with whom she has a close, almost maternal relationship. Her persistence in bringing de Monfort and Rezenvelt together is spitefully misinterpreted by a jealous woman, Countess Freburg, who feels her husband admires Jane too much, and at her expense, <sup>so</sup> ~~and~~ circulates a rumour that Jane and Rezenvelt are in

love and secretly engaged. De Monfort hears this rumour and attacks Rezenvelt, who once again disarms him and spares his life. Then de Monfort determines to murder Rezenvelt. He does so and dies of remorse.

De Monfort is a difficult character, both for writer and reader. Joanna Baillie never accepted her own challenge more closely:

"Though belonging to such characters, they [the various passions she portrays] must still be held to view in their most baleful and unseductive light; and those qualities in the impassioned which are necessary to interest us in their fate, must not be allowed, by any lustre borrowed from them, to diminish our abhorrence of guilt." 28

Never again was she come so near to succeeding in this self-appointed task than she did in De Monfort. She portrays him as a good man who has been poisoned by this one weakness, hatred, which is exhibited to us as a horrible evil, corrupting his whole being. The reader has to maintain two ideas of de Monfort at the same time - an almost inevitable result of Joanna Baillie's theory. Any character who is so powerfully mastered by one passion as she advocates cannot be in any way an integrated character. In dealing with, let us say, love,

this is not such a bad thing: we do not expect consistency, or integration from a person passionately in love, and as it is a sympathetic passion, we do not object to the behaviour of the lover. But hatred is displayed as a horrid, antipathetic passion in de Monfort, one with which we cannot easily sympathise, and the inconsistency is not so much in de Monfort's character being blemished by this hatred, as in the hatred having apparently dwelt so long with de Monfort's character as it is presented to us. As Aristotle said,

"even though the original character, who suggested the type, be inconsistent, still he must be consistently inconsistent." 29.

But de Monfort is not consistently inconsistent, he has a dual personality. He is regarded by his servant as a changed man: then we discover that the "change" has more or less been the norm for ten to fifteen years. His servant, Manuel, remarks:

"I've been upon the eve of leaving him  
These ten long years; for many times is he  
So difficult, capricious, and distrustful,  
He galls my nature - yet, I know not how  
A secret kindness binds me to him still." 30.

and later:

"My lord, I cannot hold. For fifteen years,  
Long troubled years, I have your servant been." 31

29. Poetics, XV, 1454 a; translation from S.H. Butcher, Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art, 1895, p.51.

30. I, i.

31. III, iii.

~~His friends still set great store by de Monfort's friendship~~ but it is the friendship of the de Monfort of years before.

We are forced to conclude that either his friends have incredible charity and memories, which is unlikely from their portrayal, or that de Monfort has spells of his old self frequently enough to encourage them. The praise of de Monfort, e.g.

"He is a quiet and a lib'ral man:

A better inmate never cross'd my door."

32

is never aimed at de Monfort as we meet him, but at this earlier de Monfort who, we are insistently reminded, was a paragon. It is very hard to accept such a man as the hero.

Rezenvelt seems a much more likely hero. He is gay, witty, admired, noble, victorious. He did not come from a prosperous family, yet, as a youngster, he refused to kow-tow to wealth (one reason for de Monfort's hatred); he succeeded in life and now, rich, he has, we hear,<sup>33</sup> waived his right as an heir in favour of a poorer relative of the dead man. Presumably to hold up de Monfort's hatred in its "most baleful and unseductive light",<sup>34</sup> Rezenvelt is constantly spoken of as "noble" +

"There is no good I would not share with thee,  
And this man's company, to minds like thine,  
Is the best banquet-feast I could bestow.  
But I will speak in mystery no more,  
It is thy townsman, noble Rezenvelt."

35

32. I, i.

33. III, i.

34. A Series of Plays, 1798, p. 59.

35. I, ii.

and

"of living men  
I know not one, for talents, honour, worth,  
That I should rank superior to Rezenvelt." 36

and

"do you still remain  
With noble Rezenvelt....." 37

He is genuinely praised in such a way that we are forced to wonder why anyone bothers about the intractable de Monfort whilst Rezenvelt is there. This, of course, leads us to conclude that de Monfort must be a very startling character indeed. But Joanna Baillie might have made this more apparent and not left so much - too much - to her readers' imaginations and powers of deduction. Negatively Rezenvelt's character supports Joanna Baillie's theory: she has permitted Rezenvelt, who is, by her standards, a minor character, to develop into something more than a two-dimensional mirror: i.e., her practice here betrays her theory, and the resultant character has a disastrous effect upon the sympathy we should have for the hero.

Count Freberg, a friend of both Rezenvelt and de Monfort, is another minor character who has almost achieved a stature of his own. He is a fatuous, ever hopeful man, who, one feels, must be well into a rather muddled middle-age. He is portrayed

36. III,i.

37. III,ii.

as foolish, and Joanna Baillie obviously meant him to be. He praises and almost worships Rezenvelt in front of de Monfort - an action which, by itself, condemns him to insensitive stupidity - and, when de Monfort challenges him on the shortness of his acquaintance with Rezenvelt, his reply is the culmination of a series of fatuities -

"De Monfort

How virtuous he hath been in three short days!

Freberg.

Nay, longer, Marquis, but my friendship rests  
Upon the good report of other men;  
And that has told me much....."

38

Grimbald, a chance stranger, who seeks de Monfort, and who is the first to tell him of the rumour concerning Jane and Rezenvelt, remarks of Freberg : "this mild, ready, promise-making courtier."<sup>39</sup> The way Joanna Baillie allows Freberg's fatuity to emerge is quite startling for this period; Grimbald excepted, no character openly exclaims upon Freberg's stupidity and ineptness, but these qualities emerge in his speech and in his actions. With Freberg and his wife we find ourselves in an ordinary, humdrum, very human world we can really believe in. People do muddle along as they do, whilst, for example, the constant, unvaried, atonal nobility of a Jane de Monfort is

38. III,i.

39. III,ii.

slightly incredible.

Jane de Monfort is almost alienatingly noble and virtuous. Her praises are sung even more excessively than Rezenvelt's, but unlike Rezenvelt, she never displays anything but a complacent, self-sacrificing nobility; Rezenvelt can become impatient or sarcastic with de Monfort<sup>40</sup>. Jane is obviously an important stage property in shoring up de Monfort's character, but as a character in her own right she is too much one of Joanna Baillie's mirrors: a flat mirror where we may see the main character, and more particularly his passion, reflected.

These characters interact to disclose the theme of the play: the portrait of a man doomed by hatred. But de Monfort's obsession is not really the cause of his tragedy, but only apparently so. The real cause is the pride which evoked the hatred. De Monfort becomes a much more powerful play if, pace Joanna Baillie, we almost disregard the intention of the play to form an exemplar of the passion of hatred and instead consider de Monfort as a good man knocked awry by his own pride. Why does he hate Rezenvelt? Because Rezenvelt had upset his pride, not once, but time and time again. De Monfort speaks of Rezenvelt -

40. cf. II,i.

"Thy hateful visage ever spoke thy worth:  
I loath'd thee when a boy.  
That—— should be besotted with him thus!  
And Freberg likewise so bewitched is,  
That like a hireling flatt'rer at his heels,  
He meanly paces, off'ring brutish praise.  
O! I could curse him too! "

41

Where de Monfort is angered because town and townspeople all praise Rezenvelt and neglect him. Speaking to Jane, de Monfort reveals how far back his hatred goes:

"Oh! that detested Rezenvelt!  
E'en in our early sports, like two young whelps  
Of hostile breed, instinctively reverse,  
Each 'gainst the other pitch'd his ready pledge,  
And frown'd defiance. As we onward pass'd  
From youth to man's estate, his narrow art,  
And envious gibing malice, poorly veil'd  
In the affected carelessness of mirth,  
Still more detestable and odious grew.  
. . . . . But when honours came,  
And wealth and new-got titles fed his pride;  
Whilst flatt'ring knaves did trumpet forth his praise,  
And grov'ling idiots grinn'd applauses on him;  
Oh! then I could no longer suffer it!  
It drove me frantick - What! what would I give!  
What would I give to crush the bloated toad,  
So rankly do I loathe him! "

42

From what we have seen of Rezenvelt this speech is an envious calumny dreamed up by a weak, proud man, who impotently watches one to whom he used to feel superior, gaining applause and admiration for his good qualities. Rezenvelt says of de Monfort :

41. I,ii.

42. II,ii.



"O! from our youth he has distinguished me  
 With ev'ry mark of hatred and disgust.  
 For e'en in boyish sports I still oppos'd  
 His proud pretensions to pre-eminence;  
 Nor would I to his ripen'd greatness give  
 That fulsome adulation of applause  
 A senseless crowd bestow'd. Tho' poor in fortune,  
 I still would smile at vain-assuming wealth:  
 But when unlook'd-for fate on me bestow'd  
 Riches and splendour equal to his own,  
 Tho' I, in truth, despise such poor distinction,  
 Feeling inclin'd to be at peace with him,  
 And with all men beside, I curb'd my spirit,  
 And sought to soothe him. Then, with spiteful rage,  
 From small offence he rear'd a quarrel with me,  
 And dar'd me to the field. The rest you know.  
 In short, I still have been th' opposing rock,  
 O'er which the stream of his overflowing pride  
 Hath foam'd and fretted."

43

This speech is much more in accord with the action in the play and the characters of Rezenvelt and de Monfort as we see them. De Monfort, after having heard the rumour of Jane's attachment to Rezenvelt, sees the two of them together and in the resulting sililoquy we find :

"O! I did love her [Jane] with such pride of soul!  
 When other men, in gay pursuit of love,  
 Each beauty follow'd, by her side I stay'd;  
 Far prouder of a brother's station there,  
 Than all the favours favour'd lovers boast."

44

Again, his pride, and in addition emphasis, which I do not think was intended by Joanna Baillie, was laid upon the weakness of de Monfort which kept him tied to his sister's apron strings.

43. III,ii.

44. III,iii.

Looked at from this point of view, de Monfort becomes more understandable: were he in fact obsessed by hatred, mastered by the passion, it would affect his character so strongly that, as I have pointed out, the patience of his servants and friends would be incredible, as this over-riding passion would inevitably have poisoned his whole character. But if he were a proud man their patience would be understandable: servants would find reflected glory in serving him, and friends, such as the weak and fatuous Freberg, the only friend we see at any length, would ask for nothing better than to triumph in the glory of his friendship. Even the rumour inciting him to action - that Jane and Rezezenvelt are to marry - calls upon his pride: no de Monfort, and certainly not Jane his sister, could marry an upstart Rezenvelt.

Love, ambition and fear, as exhibited in Count Basil, Ethwald and Orra respectively, may all be primal passions. Love is notoriously irrational, requiring no rational first cause; ambition, as an over-riding passion, is more usually fostered by early circumstances in a man than logically produced; fear may be induced by outward events, though seldom by a character flaw, but in Orra it is definitely displayed as a primary element of the heroine's disposition. Psychologists would no doubt suggest that it results from an impact, not

rationally apprehended, of some external event upon the mind of Orra. Hatred, on the other hand, is a passion which may, as love, be quite irrational, but is more normally provoked by something definite though it, too, may not be rationally apprehended. I would suggest that De Monfort is the most successful of Joanna Baillie's tragedies because in it she has broken free from the crippling effects of constantly placing a passion first. She has tried to build De Monfort around a passion, but, hatred being slightly different from the other passions she portrayed, she found she had to explain its presence in de Monfort and in so doing she shaped a character with a tragic flaw - pride - instead of, as she more usually did, thinking of a moral connected with a passion, thinking of characters and then of the plot.<sup>45</sup> In Count Basil we do not think of asking why Basil loves Victoria, we accept his love unquestioningly. But in De Monfort, we must wonder why de Monfort hates Rezenvelt, and in answering that question Joanna Baillie has produced a character instead of the exemplar of a passion.

As Mr. T.R. Henn has pointed out,<sup>46</sup> with reference to other tragic heroes, such pride as de Monfort exhibits is a

45. A Series of Plays, 1798, p.62.

46. The Harvest of Tragedy, 1956, pp.93-104.

psychologically accepted compensation for a sense of inferiority such as de Monfort obviously experiences when in Rezenvelt's company, or even at the mention of his name.<sup>47</sup> Such a sense of inferiority could further be accounted for, in psychological terms, by the insecurity of de Monfort's youth, with the early death of his parents, and his own continued reliance upon his sister. If Manuel, his servant, has served de Monfort for fifteen years as he says,<sup>48</sup> then this reliance has continued well into de Monfort's manhood when men normally have enough assurance to stand on their own feet. Finally, de Monfort acknowledges his failing after the murder:

"O that I had ne'er known the light of day!  
That filmy darkness on my eyes had hung,  
And clos'd me out from the fair face of nature!  
O that my mind, in mental darkness spent,  
Had no perception, no distinction known,  
Of fair or foul, perfection nor defect:  
Nor thought conceiv'd of proud pre-eminence!" 49

which recognition, of his fault as ~~one~~ of his notions of "proud pre-eminence," is in accord with Mr. Henn's theory -

"When hubris is punished the victor-victim usually, but not always, attains some consciousness of the nature of his sin." 50

If we examine de Monfort's character from this new angle,

47. cf. I,ii.

48. III,iii.

49. V,ii.

50. ibid, p.103.

we find it is much more coherent. De Monfort is discovered nursing his wounded pride after his duel with Rezenvelt. He is not a brave man. Rezenvelt says of him:

"Full often have I mark'd it in his [de Monfort's] youth,  
And could have almost lov'd him for the weakness;  
He's form'd with such antipathy by nature,  
To all affliction of corporeal pain,  
To wounding life, e'en to the sight of blood..." 51

De Monfort knows Rezenvelt is his master at duelling and his wounded pride naturally results in the brooding introspection, interspersed with unkind criticism of those around him, which we find in Act I. It explains his pathetic uncertainty over other people's reactions to him:

"Our landlord's kindness has reviv'd me much;  
He serves as though he lov'd me....." 52

for he feels that once his pride has been so openly defeated he will be spurned by others. We understand why he wants to evade Rezenvelt and curses all who bring news of him: more because de Monfort feels humiliated by the presence of Rezenvelt, than that he hates him. Were de Monfort deeply involved in the passion of hatred, he could not have rested with it, for so long - since childhood - without the passion resolving itself in some definite action. Either de Monfort would have removed himself far from Rezenvelt and this passion or else he would have indulged it. Hatred would have poisoned his

51. III, ii.

52. I, ii.

whole soul until any stratagem, no matter how vile, would have been employed to kill the hated serpent, Rezenvelt. Instead of meeting with an untimely end Rezenvelt has prospered and is now in a better position than de Monfort. On the other hand, were de Monfort the weak, basically insecure, proud man I suggest he may be, then this procrastination and evasion would be quite in character. De Monfort has almost a persecution mania:

"It is too much, by heaven it is too much!  
He Rezenvelt haunts me - stings me - like a devil haunts  
He'll make a raving maniac of me - Villain!" 53

The impact of de Monfort's character is also more understandable we do sympathise with him, not because he is a strong man obsessed by hatred, but because he is a weak man suffering from frustrated pride and in so doing he achieves a certain nobility:

Freberg  
How art thou now? How hast thou past the night?  
Has kindly sleep refresh'd thee?

De Monfort  
Yes, I have lost an hour or two in sleep,  
And so should be refresh'd.

Freberg  
And art thou not?  
Thy looks speak not of rest. Thou art disturb'd.

De Monfort  
No, somewhat ruffled from a foolish cause,  
Which soon will pass away." 54

His weakness is also explicable, as I have pointed out,<sup>55</sup>

53. I, ii.

54. I, ii.

55. cf. p. 207.

by Jane de Monfort's maternal protection. Early-left orphans,  
the de Monfort children depended upon Jane:

" within her house,  
The virgin mother of an orphan race  
Her dying parents left, this noble woman  
Did, like a Roman matron, proudly sit,  
Despising all the blandishments of love;  
Whilst many a youth his hopeless love conceal'd,  
Or, humbly distant, woo'd her like a queen." 56

De Monfort himself still depends on her. No grown man of any  
determination would be so dominated by, would find so much  
refuge with, his sister.

De Monfort's pride is naturally irritated by Freberg's  
praise of Rezenvelt, e.g.,

"He is indeed a man, within whose breast,  
Firm rectitude and honour hold their seat,  
Tho' unadorned with that dignity  
Which were their fittest garb. Now, on my life!  
I know no truer heart than Rezenvelt." 57

and also irritated by Rezenvelt's regard for him, a regard  
which Freberg makes clear :

"In truth, I thought you [de Monfort] had been well  
with him. [Rezenvelt]  
He prais'd you much." 58

The first meeting of de Monfort and Rezenvelt is well written:  
de Monfort's pride and rudeness compel Rezenvelt to sneer at  
him in self-defence against such incredible arrogance. Our

56. II, i.

57. III, i.

58. I, ii.

hearts warm to Rezenvelt in this scene,<sup>59</sup> for being so spontaneous and open towards de Monfort, both in his desire for friendship and in his uncomplicated reaction to de Monfort's attitude. We must admire Rezenvelt's forbearance throughout the play: before the action begins he has had de Monfort at his mercy, during the action that situation is repeated and yet Rezenvelt bears no malice for what is an apparently irrational, certainly unprovoked, assault upon him:

"De Monfort.

Then take my life, black fiend, for hell assists thee.

Rezenvelt

No, Monfort, but I'll take away your sword,  
Not as a mark of disrespect to you,  
But for your safety. By to-morrow's eve  
I'll call on you myself and give it back;  
And then, if I am charged with any wrong,  
I'll justify myself. Farewell, strange man!" 60

Certainly, de Monfort tells Jane he hates Rezenvelt :

"No, it is hate! black, lasting, deadly hate!  
Which thus hath driv'n me forth from kindred peace,  
From social pleasure, from my native home,  
To be a sullen wand'rer on the earth,  
Avoiding all men, cursing and accurs'd." 61

tells her of a highly Gothic and Romantic hatred, "black, lasting, deadly" which has driven him forth, accursed, as Manfred will be driven forth; like all Romantic heroes, more or less,

59. I, ii.

60. III, iii.

61. II, ii.



he is alone and misunderstood, a solitary wanderer on the face of the earth. He does hate Rezenvelt, but the reason is his pride. De Monfort says of Rezenvelt :

"Who e'en from childhood hath, with rude malevolence  
Withheld the fair respect all paid beside,  
Turning my very praise into derision." 62

De Monfort's wounded pride seeks revenge in murder only after it has been bolstered by jealousy. Jane was a source of great pride to de Monfort :

"How oft amidst the beauty-blazing throng,  
I've proudly to th' enquiring stranger told  
Her name and lineage." 63

and in the same scene :

"Oh! droop not thus, my life, my pride, my sister!"

It is immediately after he has seen Rezenvelt and Jane together, and misinterpreted their actions to confirm the rumour he has heard, that de Monfort attacks Rezenvelt and decides, after he has been deprived of his sword, to murder him. His easily convinced jealousy may be explained from his sense of insecurity and inferiority when opposed to Rezenvelt; in the same way Othello was more easily gulled by Iago because he felt insecure of his position.<sup>64</sup>

Once the murder is committed, de Monfort reacts, not as

62. III, i; also cf. II,ii, quoted on p.206.

63. II,ii.

64. cf. T.R. Henn, The Harvest of Tragedy, 1956, pp.96-7.

one who exults in the final consummation of an overwhelming passion, but as a man who has acted recklessly and is now quite startled by what he has done. When Jane comes to see him, it is of pride de Monfort thinks :

"I am a foul and bloody murderer,  
For such embrace unmeet. O leave me! leave me!  
Disgrace and publick shame abide me now;  
And all, alas! who do my kindred own  
The direful portion share - Away, away!  
Shall a disgrac'd and publick criminal  
Degrade thy name, and claim affinity  
To noble worth like thine?"

65

This same idea recurs in the scene: that de Monfort has sinned in being found out and bringing shame upon his name, the sanctions for condemning his behaviour being neither moral nor absolute.

Yet in the last act de Monfort rises to his highest stature. A sense of rest is conveyed through all the turmoil of the realisation that he is a murderer, as if finally he has done something definite, resolved an inner conflict, and may rest. He acknowledges his pride, as I have pointed out<sup>66</sup>; he is willing to accept his fate and does not wish to bring any more unhappiness to Jane. He tries to decoy her by a good poetic phrase from the convent where he is being kept :

65. V.ii.

66. cf. p.210.

"Tell her de Monfort far from hence is gone  
Into a desolate and distant land,  
Ne'er to return again. "

67

which metaphorically is what de Monfort has done by committing murder. Unfortunately this poetry is spoiled by what follows, with a facile stage effect :

"Fly, tell her this;  
For we must meet no more.

Enter JANE DE MONFORT, bursting into the chamber, and followed by FREBERG, ABBESS, and several NUNS.

Jane

We must! we must! My brother, O my brother!" 68

Later in the same scene de Monfort achieves a tragic depth unfamiliar to this period, belonging indeed, in its irony and understatement, to great tragedy :

"Jane

What, lies he there? - Unhappy Rezenvelt?

De Monfort

A sudden thought has come across my mind;  
How came it not before? Unhappy Rezenvelt!  
Say'st thou but this?

Jane

What should I say? he was an honest man;  
I still have thought him such, as such lament him.

(de Monfort utters a deep groan)

What means this heavy groan?

De Monfort

It hath a meaning."

69

67. V,ii.

68. V,ii.

69. V.ii.

De Monfort says no more about the rumour of Jane's attachment to Rezenvelt, which had finally determined him to commit murder. De Monfort's last speech is powerful, and, in its brevity, suggests he has more peace now than he has ever had:

"De Monfort.

Well, I am ready, Sir.

(Approaching Jane, whom the Abbess is endeavouring to comfort, but to no purpose).

Ah! wherefore thus! most honour'd and most dear?  
Shrink not at the accoutrements of ill,  
Daring the thing itself.

(Endeavouring to look cheerful)

Wilt thou permit me with a gyved hand?

(She gives him her hand, which he raises to his lips)

This was my proudest office.

EXEUNT, de Monfort leading out Jane." 70

In the two extracts just quoted Joanna Baillie shows great restraint, especially for her period, and in so doing achieves a tragic simplicity.

De Monfort was revived at Drury Lane, 27.xi.1821, with five performances in a revised version whose text we do not have. 70a

"this play had been altered by the author to suit Kean - instead of dying, as in the original 5th act, he was for a long scene on the stage with the body of Rezenvelt, and latterly left alone with it - after his last speech, he threw himself down, and the curtain fell - it did not exactly appear

70. V.ii.

70a. cf M.S. Carhart, The Life and Works of Joanna Baillie, 1923, pp.122-130. Cf. p.198, footnote, 26a.

whether he was supposed to die or not - the alteration was much for the worse."

71.

Joanna Baillie herself approved of the change. On 8th May, 1819, she wrote to Mr. George Bentley,

"The new ending I have given it [de Monfort] is not so good for the closet, but it still appears to me that it is better fitted for exhibition." 71a.

A further alteration was a reason given for de Monfort's hatred - as I said earlier, a reason is needed :

"A reason is added for the perverse enmity of the hero, besides that of school-boy rivalry; and that is the success of Rezenvelt, in alienating the regards of a female from De Monfort." 72

This reason given for de Monfort's hatred would fit in with my suggested interpretation, whilst it weakens Joanna Baillie's original intention: de Monfort's pride and his feeling of insecurity desired reassurance from the love of a woman apart from his sister, but he was frustrated by Rezenvelt, his pride wounded and hatred followed; but Joanna Baillie originally intended this hatred to be a deep-seated passion with no particular reason for its existence :

"this passion must be kept distinct from that dislike which we conceive for another when he has greatly offended us....."

73.

71. Genest, iv, 177.

71a. Letter in Shaw Theatrical Collection, Widener Library, Cambridge, Mass. Quoted by M.S. Carhart, The Life and Work of Joanna Baillie, 1923, p.124.

72. The Drama; or, Theatrical Pocket Magazine, volume ii, December 1821-May 1822, p.35.

73. A Series of Plays, 1798, p.64.

As I have said,<sup>74</sup> hatred needs some definite explanation and this addition is a poor attempt at providing it - poor, because such an incident may not be inserted in a play unless the whole play is revised at the same time. But it does strengthen the sources which have made de Monfort a proud man.

The verse of de Monfort is mixed. One good point is the reptile, more specifically serpent, imagery de Monfort always uses for Rezenvelt: "an abhorred serpent"<sup>75</sup> "th'envenom'd reptile's sting"<sup>76</sup> are but two examples from many. Joanna Baillie also shows a talent for dramatic understanding, e.g. in III, i, where Freberg is chattering to de Monfort about Rezenvelt's goodness and generosity and de Monfort answers shortly and changes the subject in an obvious, self-conscious manner. She shows a similar capacity for conveying de Monfort's uneasiness in the first meeting with Rezenvelt.<sup>77</sup> Thus de Monfort's envy, pride, lack of confidence are portrayed in action, not merely described by another character. Rezenvelt has an excellent speech after de Monfort has repulsed his friendly offer to embrace rather than merely to shake hands :

74. cf. p. 209.

75. I, ii.

76. III, i.

77. I, ii.

"Well, be it so, de Monfort, I'm contented;  
I'll take thy hand since I can have no more.  
(Carelessly) I take of worthy men whate'er they give  
Their heart I gladly take; if not, their hand:  
If that too is withheld, a courteous word,  
Or the civility of placid looks;  
And, if e'en these are too great favours deem'd,  
'Faith, I can set me down contentedly  
With plain and homely greeting, or, God: save ye!" 78

In IV, ii, our expectation has been well aroused: in IV, i, we have seen Rezenvelt and de Monfort in a wood and assumed murder will result. In scene ii, we are in a convent attending the funeral of a nun where, according to Joanna Baillie's theory of relief,<sup>79</sup> our attention is momentarily directed by a funeral procession before the tension is brought to a climax by the use of knocking upon a door and of various entries by distraught characters. Act V is too long drawn out and strains the effect by trying too eagerly to win our sympathy for de Monfort:<sup>80</sup> he may have murdered Rezenvelt, but

"Who shall call him blameless who excites,  
Ungen'rously excites, with careless scorn,  
Such baleful passion in a brother's breast,  
Whom heav'n commands to love?" 81

and

"Here lies the murderer. What think'st thou here?  
Look on those features, thou has seen them oft,  
With the last dreadful conflict of despair,  
So fix'd in horrid strength.

78. III, i.

79. A Series of Plays, 1798, p.60.

80. Joanna Baillie recognised this difficulty in a note appended to De Monfort, 1802 edition, p. 410.

81. V, iv.

See those knit brows, those hollow sunken eyes;  
The sharpen'd nose, with nostrils all distent;  
That writh'd mouth, where yet the teeth appear,  
In agony, to gnash the nether lip.  
Think'st thou, less painful than the murd'rer's knife  
Was such a death as this?" 82

This special pleading is altogether the wrong way to excite our sympathy for de Monfort. We are much more moved by the tragic irony of his conversation with Jane.<sup>83</sup> De Monfort's death is also disappointing. A monk reports :

"Yes, death is dealing with him  
From violent agitation of the mind,  
Some stream of life within his breast has burst;  
For many times within a little space,  
The ruddy-tide has rush'd into his mouth." 84.

Circumlocution here results in a description difficult to apprehend and almost meaningless.

Throughout the play there is an impression that Joanna Baillie has almost written a good tragedy. She failed partly because her theory kept interfering with her practice and partly because she was not skilled enough to exploit the slight plot with sufficient dramatic force.

In performance De Monfort was not well received. The Dramatic Censor considered :

"that the success of the Play depends more, in our humble opinion, on the exquisite acting of MR. KEMBLE and MRS. SIDDONS, than on its own intrinsic

82. V.iv.

83. V.ii, cf. p. 217.

84. V.iii.



merit. The language is, indeed, chaste and elegant; the diction elevated and impressive, without becoming turgid, vapid, and bombastic; and the sentiments are delicate and natural. But the Piece wants interest - it wants variety - it wants activity - it is too barren of incident - and very little art has been employed in the conduct of the plot. It is, likewise, independent of these negative disqualifications, liable to stronger objections, in a moral and dramatic light, than any theatrical production we have of late witnessed. These objections, we fear, are inherent, constitutionally inherent to the Piece, and therefore irremediable." 85

Joanna Baillie put a note at the end of De Monfort, thanking Mr. Kemble and Mrs. Siddons -

"in endeavouring to obtain for it that publick  
favour, which I sincerely wish it had been found  
more worthy of receiving." 86.

It was performed for eight nights and the main interest seems to have been focused on the actors. On 3rd May, 1800, it was played along with Of Age To-Morrow, and The Dramatic Censor observed:

"It may justly be considered as a bad omen for the success of the new Tragedy, when it is found necessary to call in the aid of such a vile farrago of folly and absurdity, as the Entertainment of this evening. The crowded houses, and unbounded applause, with which De Monfort continues to be received, are unhappily confined to the Play-bills. The Theatre exhibits 'a beggarly account of empty boxes!'" 87

85. The Dramatic Censor, No. XVIII, 3.v.1800.

86. 1802, edition, p. 410.

87. The Dramatic Censor, No. XIX, 3.v.1800.

As far as the title of the play is concerned, it seems to have varied according to the whim of reviewers between De Monfort and De Montfort. Genest refers to De Montfort.<sup>88</sup> Joanna Baillie's printed text refers throughout, apart from a few printer's errors, to De Monfort.

Miss Carhart gives a full account of the stage history of De Monfort, both in this country and in America.<sup>89</sup> Kemble made some slight changes in the printed play for the performance, such as emphasising the German locality and giving the names a German pronunciation. An addition we could not gather from the text was provided by music specially written for the performance, this included a song, a glee and a sacred solo, as well as "highly pleasing and grand music" for the second, third and fourth acts."<sup>90</sup>

(iv) Ethwald, Part I and II

In Ethwald (unacted), 1802, Joanna Baillie deals with ambition as portrayed in Ethwald, the second son of a minor Mercian thane, Mollo. Ethwald is kept mewed up in his

88. Genest, vii, 465.

89. Miss M.S. Carhart, The Life and Work of Joanna Baillie, 1923, pp.110-142.

90. Genest's scrap book, quoted by Miss Carhart, op.cit, p.114.

father's house because of a prophecy that the line of Mollo would be destroyed through the valour of his younger son. Ethwald escapes from Mollo to join in some fighting where he distinguishes himself. He intrigues for greater glory, by stirring up the king's enemies, so that, in the ensuing fight, he may once again show his valour. Ethwald maintains personal popularity with his soldiers by an even distribution of booty. He makes a vow of friendship to Edward, the king's son and heir, and aspires to marry Elburga, the king's daughter, neglecting Bertha, his former love. He consults Druid sisters about his future and is shown a crown and sceptre, Mercia filled with misery, himself crowned, but covered in wounds. He intrigues further and marries Elburga, deposes the king and becomes king himself. Then a groom of the deposed king attempts to assassinate Ethwald. Part I ends with Ethwald apparently dead.

Part II opens with Edward, Ethwald's sworn friend and son of the deposed king, in a dungeon, thanks, we learn, to Ethwald, who is now fully restored to health and ambition. Ethelbert, a friend, and Selred, the brother of Ethwald, both try to make Ethwald see the mistakes he is making as an ambitious king, but are frustrated by Ethwald's ambition when he hears that the Welsh, by the death of their king, are now

ruled by an infant. Ethwald attacks the Welsh, and great slaughter ensues. There is trouble within his kingdom, so Ethwald arranges for Edward to be murdered. He imprisons the thanes who were murmuring against him and then murders one a day as a punishment. Ethwald, we now see terrified to be alone, especially in the dark. Some of the thanes escape, penetrate to Ethwald's room in disguise and murder him. This time he really dies.

In Part I ambition is quite clearly exhibited by Ethwald, but it lacks any particular conviction because Ethwald himself is not a well portrayed or convincing character. Part II is unfortunate: it lingers on at too great length with very little to say. This is a common weakness of the age and in De Monfort Joanna Baillie had lapses during which she fell into the same mistake, but in Ethwald the lapses are so frequent as themselves to become the general run, and not the exception.

In a footnote in IV, iii of Part I, where Ethwald consults the Druid Sisters, Joanna Baillie admits :

"I will not take it upon me to say that, if I had never read Shakespeare's Macbeth, I should have thought of bringing Ethwald into a cavern underground to enquire his destiny, though I believe this desire to look into futurity (particularly in a superstitious age) is a very constant attendant on ambition; but I hope the reader will not find in the above scene any offensive use made of the

works of that great master." 91

This indebtedness to Macbeth is not, however, confined to one scene, but appears throughout the play in the treatment of the plot. Ethwald is composed of a mixture of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. It is difficult to see how this could be avoided when the play treats of ambition in a setting somewhat similar to Macbeth's. The shadow of Macbeth, falling over a weak, undramatic play, makes it difficult to find any particular virtue in Ethwald. It is too verbose and lacks all sense of urgency. When it finally ends the reader is left without any definite impression of a passion, or of an accompanying moral.

The dramatic verse shows a sharp decline from De Monfort. It would have been improved had Joanna Baillie compressed Parts I and II into one quick running play, packed with a greater intensity than was possible in a tragedy of two parts, each of five long acts. As Ethwald stands, there is no urgency to make the verse change gear from a flaccid crawl into a more dramatic, compelling speed. This appears from the very beginning :

" Mark'd you that tawny hound,  
With stretched nostrils snuffing to the ground,  
Who still before, with animating yell,  
Like the brave leader of a warlike band,  
Thro' many a mazy track his comrades led  
In the right tainted path?

91. Part I, IV, iii, footnote.

I would not for the weirgelt of a Thane  
That noble creature barter."

92

This description of a hunt is hardly good English and it serves no purpose in the play. "Animating yell," "mazy track", "right tainted path", and the final transpositioning of "barter" are all "poetic" in the worst sense. A similar undramatic heaviness encumbers the whole play, e.g.

Seagurth. No, gracious king:  
The sight of you, unhurt, maketh the blood  
That in our veins remains so kindly glow,  
We cannot faint.

King. Thanks, noble chiefs! dear is the gain I earn,  
Purchased with blood so precious. Who are those  
Who thitherward in long procession move?

Seagurth. It is the pious brethren, as I guess,  
Come forth to meet you from yon neighbo'ring abbey,  
And at their head the holy Hexulf comes." 93

Here we have lines weighed down with padding. One only has to read the quotation aloud to realise how unnatural and cumbersome it is. Joanna Baillie still has moments of good verse as when Ethwald is planning how to achieve his ambition with his "creature" Alwy, described in "Persons of the Drama" as "an artful adventurer" :

"Alwy. Well softly then; we may devise a way  
By which the Seneschal himself will seem  
The secret culprit in this act.

Ethwald. No, no!  
I like it not: tho' I must work i' the dark,

92. Part I, I, i.

93. Part I, II, i.

I'll not in cunningly devised light  
Put on my neighbour's cloak to work his ruin.  
But let's to work a pace! the storm shall rise  
My sound shall yet be heard!"

94

Here "cunningly devised light" is good for the false appearance induced by trickery, and the image of the neighbour's cloak makes for vividness. Part II has insufficient matter to occupy five acts. It drags to its conclusion with nothing remarkable in its treatment.

The whole of Ethwald is a disappointment, especially after De Monfort, where Joanna Baillie showed so much promise.

(v) Orra.

Joanna Baillie's next blank verse tragedy, Orra (unacted), 1812, deals with superstitious fear, not as a transient passion, but as a deep-rooted characteristic of the heroine. Orra declines to marry Glottenbal, her guardian's son, as she is in love with Theobald. Advised by the villainous Rudigere, Hughobert, her guardian, banishes Orra to a lonely castle which is reputedly haunted. Orra has a well-known fear of the supernatural which Rudigere hopes to exploit for his own ends so that he can enjoy Orra himself. Theobald follows Orra and, helped by a band of outlaws, hopes to carry her off under cover of the

particular ghostly manifestation associated with the castle and which would be specially imitated by his followers. Unfortunately, Orra cannot read Theobald's letter advising her of this plan, as Rudigere is with her, so she burns it. When Theobald comes to fetch her, Orra, believing that the ghostly manifestations arranged by Theobald are real, goes mad. Hughobert and Glottenbal appear and Rudigere's villainy is disclosed. Rudigere kills Glottenbal and then commits suicide.

Superstitious fear is a strange passion around which to build a play. Joanna Baillie evidently discovered this, as she offers a form of apology in her introduction, "To The Reader,"<sup>95</sup> She also admits :

"I have endeavoured to trace the inferior characters of the piece with some degree of variety, so as to stand relieved from the principal figure....." <sup>96</sup>

This position marks a modification of her earlier statement on secondary characters.<sup>97</sup> Presumably she had to vary the minor characters in Orra because, without any interest in them, were all our attention focused upon Orra or, more accurately, upon Orra's passion, the play would have too uncertain a centre.

95. A Series of Plays, 1812, p.iv-v.

96. A Series of Plays, 1812, p.v.

97. A Series of Plays, 1798, p.59. cf. p 3/.



There is too much self-indulgence in her passion. The fear comes and goes, normally at Orra's invitation. When it does come, she asks for fearful, supernatural stories:-

"Orra. How pray? What fearful thing did scare him so?  
Cathrina.

Hast thou ne'er heard the story of Count Hugo,  
His ancestor, who slew the hunter-knight?

Orra (eagerly).

Tell it I pray thee."

98

Orra seems to hate and to love the effect of fear upon her.

"Cathrina.

What story shall I tell thee?

Orra. Something, my friend, which thou thyself hast  
known,

Touching the awful intercourse which spirits  
With mortal men have held at this dread hour.

Did'st thou thyself e'er meet with one whose eyes  
Had look'd upon the spectr'd dead - had seen  
Forms from another world?

Cathrina

Never but once.

Orra (eagerly)

Once then thou didst! O tell it! Tell it me!"<sup>99</sup>

She is well able to describe the fear with its mixture of  
terror and fascination.

"Orra. And let me cow'ring stand, and be my touch  
The valley's ice: there is a pleasure in it.

Alice. Say'st thou indeed there is a pleasure in it?

Orra. Yea, when the cold blood shoots through every  
vein:

98. II, i.

99. IV, iii.

When every hair's pit on my shrunken skin  
A knotted knoll becomes, and to mine ears  
Strange inward sounds awake, and to mine eyes  
Rush stranger tears, there is a joy in fear." 100

The other characters give variety. They are the best company of minors Joanna Baillie has given us. This is another illustration<sup>101</sup> of the weakness to be found in Joanna Baillie's theory - that the minor characters should be insignificant themselves, only serving as minors for the main passion.<sup>102</sup> In Orra Joanna Baillie has neglected her theory, though whether the introduction admitting this contains a post or propter hoc it is impossible to say; in doing so, however, she has created a much more credible group of people than ever before. It is much more true to life for the leading figure to play his part among other, recognisable people, instead of moving between flat, uninteresting types.

In Orra, however, as in Ethwald, Joanna Baillie seems to have declined in dramatic power. It is as if the whole undertaking - to write plays around passions - is no longer a project she willingly undertakes, but a joyless imposition she must accept. This feeling is strengthened by the introduction to the third Series of Plays, 1812, where once again<sup>103</sup>

100. II, i.

101. cf. p.189.

102. A Series of Plays, 1798, p.59.

103. A Series of Plays, 1798, p.65-6.

she mentions stage production, her ambition for performance and, in this introduction, her disappointment that none of her plays with the exception of De Monfort was performed.<sup>104</sup> About this whole introduction there lingers a suggestion of weariness: it must have been most discouraging trying to write, and gain performance for, a series of plays such as Joanna Baillie wrote, during this period. Certainly in Orra our interest is never sufficiently held. There is no unified core of action to keep the play going; what action there is is too negative: Orra, the heroine, has to act against, make the best of, situations put upon her, she herself making only one positive move in refusing to marry Glottenbal. The tragic ending of Orra's madness may be espied afar off by the percipient reader, who is bound to see what will happen: it is not tragic inevitability, but something to be wearily accepted. Orra herself is not sufficiently responsible to be a tragic heroine: in a different setting she could well be termed a silly, superstitious girl. The fault of the plays lies almost entirely with fear itself; it is too negative a passion to form the key-stone of a dramatic structure, unless handled by a more powerful dramatist than Joanna Baillie.

Joanna Baillie's weakening dramatic sense completes the confusion. This is seen when Theobald says of Orra, ~~when~~

104. A Series of Plays, 1812, p.xv-xix.

whom he loves:

"O fair indeed as woman need be form'd  
To please and be belov'd! Tho', to speak honestly,  
I've fairer seen; yet such a form as Orra's  
For ever in my busy fancy dwells,  
Whene'er I think of wiving my lone state." 105

It may well be true, but it should have been expressed differently - Theobald should show more enthusiasm for Orra.

Another speech of the same kind is found in the advice of Urston, a confessor to Hughobert upon the death of his son:

Urston.  
Heaven oft in mercy smites ev'n when the blow  
Severest is.

Hughobert. I had no other hope,  
Fell is the stroke, if mercy in it be!  
Could this - could this alone atone my crime?

Urston.  
Submit thy soul to Heaven's all-wise decree.  
Perhaps his life had blasted more thy hopes  
Than ev'n his grievous end.

Hughobert.  
He was not all a father's heart could wish;  
But oh, he was my son! - my only son - " 106

This is too prosaic and heavy-footed, there is no feeling of poetry or drama in it.

105. I, i.

106. V, ii.

(vi) The Family Legend.

This play, The Family Legend (Edinburgh, 29.i.1810; 1D.L. 29.iv.1815), 1810, is apart from the Series of Plays upon the passions. It is the dramatisation of a story of the Highlands of Scotland: Helen of Argyll marries Maclean, not for love, but in an attempt to keep peace between the Campbells and Macleans. Maclean, a weak man, allows his advisers, who hate this new Campbell influence, to do away with Helen on condition that her blood be not shed. They maroon her upon a rock which is covered by the full tide. She is saved by the noble Sir Hubert de Grey, a friend of her brother's and the man she really loves. Argyll, Helen's father, plans to trick the Macleans when they come to his castle mourning for the supposedly dead Helen. He appears to believe their story and then, just before the meal is served, Helen makes a dramatic entrance. Once the Macleans are beyond the castle walls they are attacked by Lorne, Argyll's son, Maclean himself is killed, and Helen is free to marry Sir Hubert.

The story could be grim. Unfortunately Joanna Baillie treats it romantically, sentimentally and fatuously, e.g. in II, i, where de Grey wants to see Helen's child :

"Lorne

To see the child?

De Grey.

Ev'n so: to look upon it: -  
Upon the thing that is of her; this bud -  
This seedling of a flower so exquisite." 107

This unnatural language continues throughout :

"Ye lazy lubbards!  
Grumble ye thus? - Ye would prefer, I ~~th~~ow,  
To sun your easy sides, like household curs,  
Each on his dung-hill stretched, in drowsy sloth.  
Fy on't! to grumble on a day like this,  
When to the clan a rousing feast is giv'n,  
In honour of an heir born to the chief -  
A brave Maclean, still to maintain the honours  
Of this your ancient race!" 108

In writing this play Joanna Baillie seems to be troubled by an unhappy self-consciousness about her subject: for too long the Highlands and Highlanders of medieval Scotland have been regarded as pure fountains of poetry and romance. Joanna Baillie here pictures a set of strange beings, not Highlanders as she herself could have honestly conceived, but, I suggest, as she felt she should conceive them. The Family Legend is inscribed: "To / WALTER SCOTT, Esq., / whose friendly zeal / encouraged me to offer it to the notice of / my indulgent countrymen, / I inscribe this play." It is interesting to note that this romantic conception of the Highlands has nearly always been fostered by Lowland Scots - or, of course, by people even further south of Inverness. Certainly Joanna Baillie's Highlands are ludicrous :

107. II, i

108. I, i.

"Yes, chieftain; evil that doth make the blood  
Within your grey-hair'd warriors' veins to burn  
And their brogued feet to spurn the ground that  
bears them." 109

Let us discount the unnatural awkwardness of such a speech,  
the very doubtful usage of "chieftain" in the vocative -  
but why "brogued feet"? Does Joanna Baillie, in her other  
plays, ever feel moved to refer to "shoed feet" or "shod feet"?  
It is all too laboured in its attempt at local colour: this  
is what a piper has to say:

"Think'st thou I am a Lowland, day-hired minstrel  
To play or stop at bidding? Is Argyll  
The lord and chieftain of our ancient clan,  
More certainly than I to him, as such,  
The high hereditary piper am?" 110

No doubt a very stirring sentiment - to ~~the~~ romantically inclined, but undramatic, unpoetic and as unlikely as the setting in which it is delivered: "A small Gothic Hall"<sup>111</sup>. Here, without a shadow of doubt, we find Joanna Baillie romancing.

One could continue in this niggling criticism, picking out equally fatuous speeches, or whole series of exclamations in which one character pitches against another and which, here, pass for tragedy, but The Family Legend is not worth it: there is no core of action, no genuine tragedy, drama or poetry.

109. II, ii.

110. IV, i.

111. IV, i.

Bonnie Prince Charlie's exclusion, one feels, is due only to a certain chronological inconvenience.

Perhaps I have been too hard upon The Family Legend, but after the promise of De Monfort and the high intentions of Joanna Baillie's theory such a great falling-off is most disheartening. As far as one may suggest reasons for such failures I would suggest that Joanna Baillie's minor talent did not meet with any encouragement from her contemporaries as a whole, so that she lost sight of her ideals and continued her writings at a lower level more likely to appeal to theatre audiences. Had she encountered wise, firm criticism, and been influenced to discipline her writing more, then the promise of De Monfort might have been fulfilled.

Miss Carhart provides a stage history of The Family Legend<sup>112</sup>. Its first performance in Edinburgh, 29th January 1810, with Mrs. Siddons as Helen, was a great popular success. Some critics attributed this to its overwhelming Scottish appeal; written by a Scotswoman about Scotland, with a prologue by Scott and an epilogue by Mackenzie.<sup>113</sup> The play was

112. op.cit. pp.142-154.

113. Correspondent, 12.iii.1810, quoted by Miss Carhart, op.cit. pp.146-147.



performed at Newcastle, 4.iii.1811 and 24.iii.1813, and at Bath 19.iii.1811, before it reached Drury Lane, 29.v.1815. The London performance had no distinguished actors to help the reception; it was performed for the benefit of Mrs. Bartley who played Helen. This performance was attended by none of the Edinburgh enthusiasm.

(vii) Conclusions.

Where Joanna Baillie failed in dramatic writing the chief cause of failure is to be found in her theory. The boldness with which she propounded her theory was unfortunately not equalled by dramatic talent. Joanna Baillie was shackled by her theory. Her characters are not so much human beings as "personifications of definite elements of human nature."<sup>114</sup> Another critic points out that the plays lack "character-revealing action" which drives the hero to reveal his own character, but what he says is "designed not so much to reveal the man in whose soul the passion works as the actual working of the passion itself."<sup>115</sup> This concentration upon the workings of one passion also led to an unnatural simplification; the main

114. Carhart, op.cit. p.191.

115. M. Norton, "The Plays of Joanna Baillie," The Review of English Studies, xxiii (1947), pp.131-143.

character, who exemplified the passion, stood alone, all other minor characters were depicted as lightly as possible so that no attention would be drawn from the central protagonist.<sup>116</sup>

Miss Carhart believes that this effect is pleasing upon the reader, if not the audience.<sup>117</sup> I would suggest, however, that this simplification leads to weariness, even for the reader because the chief protagonist moves in a limited world which yields no interesting minor characters - our interest must be upon the passion and its exponent, or else it is lost. To compensate for this lack of secondary interest Joanna Baillie<sup>118</sup> introduced pomp and display, as in Count Basil where a large military parade is introduced to stimulate our interest. But this relief is quite different from the dramatic relief which is required and could be provided by, for example, a secondary, minor sub-plot. Although, as Mr. Norton points out, this reliance upon spectacle was in keeping with the spirit of theatre audiences of this period.<sup>119</sup>

116. cf. Introductory Discourse, A Series of Plays, i, 60 note.

117. Op.cit. p.198; cf. also M. Norton, op.cit., p.135.

118. Act I, i.

119. Op.cit., pp.137-138.

CHAPTER VI.

Wordsworth and Coleridge.

WORDSWORTH.

In this chapter we begin the study of major writers of blank verse tragedy from 1790 to 1825: ~~As I distinguished them in another chapter,~~<sup>†</sup> those whom I term "major writers" are writers who have excelled in some other literary field before they turned to blank verse tragedy. The one exception to this distinction is the altogether exceptional Thomas Lovell Beddoes.<sup>2</sup>

In dealing with these major writers our standards, naturally, remain the same as those applied to minor writers. Some differences are, however, inevitable: in the minor writers a chance speech, or even phrase, of poetic merit was noteworthy; in the major writers, on the other hand, we expect, if not a dramatic, certainly a poetic grasp - in fact, as we shall see,<sup>3</sup> this dramatic-poetic dichotomy was one of the weaknesses of the period; poetry and drama were never happily teamed, but as one forged ahead so the other fell behind. Accordingly, in quoting from major writers, I shall be more selective and, of necessity, leave unquoted many passages which, had they occurred in a

1. ~~cf. p.~~

2. cf. p. 399 ff.

3. cf. p. 282.

minor writer, would have been mentioned. This decision is reinforced by the greater reputation and accessibility of even the minor works of major writers, in comparison with the works of minor writers.

(i) The Borderers.

In dealing with Wordsworth's one play, The Borderers, (unacted), (published 1842, composed 1796-97),<sup>4</sup> one is always tempted to analyse it with the hope of throwing more light upon Wordsworth's Godwinian period and his subsequent disillusionment, or else upon his life generally. Such an attempt has been made, e.g. by O.J. Campbell and P. Mueschke,<sup>5</sup> who develop a thesis that The Borderers is the working out of Wordsworth's remorse over his treatment of Annette, in Godwinian terms. For the purposes of the present thesis such lines of enquiry are beyond our brief, embracing, as they must, the whole of Wordsworth's life and work before the writing of The Borderers. Instead we shall rather emphasise the consideration of The Borderers as a blank

4. This date, 1796-97, contradicts Wordsworth's 1842 memory that The Borderers was composed 1795-96, cf. The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, edited by E. de Selincourt, 1940 i, 341, 342, 343; and J.R. MacGillivray, "The Date of Composition of The Borderers", Modern Language Notes, XLIX, (February, 1934), pp.104-111.
5. "The Borderers as a Document in the History of Wordsworth's Aesthetic Development", Modern Philology, xxiii, (1926), pp.465-482.

verse tragedy, and as the unique example of Wordsworth's dramatic capacities.

Four MSS. of the play are known to exist;<sup>6</sup> enumerated by de Selincourt as MSS. A, B, C and D. MS.A is the first draft; MS.B the completed 1797 text with a few 1842 corrections; MS.C, a transcript by Mary Wordsworth; MS.D, the press copy, made by Dora Wordsworth - both copied in 1842 at the same time that MS.B was corrected for the press. Both MSS. C and D follow the corrected MS.B. Wordsworth's intention in writing The Borderers is best expounded in a Preface attached to MS.B.<sup>7</sup> The note attached to the 1842 edition,<sup>8</sup> and a note dictated to Isabella Fenwick,<sup>9</sup> are both much shorter and more superficial.

In the MS.B preface Wordsworth adumbrates the character of Oswald, the villain and one of the chief protagonists of The Borderers. He is a proud man of great intellect, but lacking any moral sanction for his actions. He is betrayed into a great crime and immediately all hope there may have been for his virtuous development is at an end. The man uses his powerful intellect to argue with himself over his own crime and

6. The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, edited by E. de Selincourt, 1940, i, 343-4.
7. First published by E. de Selincourt in The Nineteenth Century and After, November 1926. Reprinted in E. de Selincourt's Oxford Lectures on Poetry, 1934, pp.165-170; and The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, i, 345-49.
8. The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, i, 341-2.
9. ibid, 342-3.

what the world terms virtue, until his pride forces him into a situation where, to justify himself in his own eyes and to make an end of all feelings of guilt at the recollection of his crime, he must continue in evil courses, commit new crimes to erase his memory of the past, and, if possible, argue others into following his example. At each fresh decision to commit a crime, the man feels again a moment of liberty and choice, thus continually creating a false illusion of freedom for himself, an illusion naturally intensified if he can convince another human being that the courses he adopts are, in fact, the right ones. Should anyone bestow a benefit upon such a man, it will, inevitably, arouse in him a spirit of malevolent hatred, because he must, to justify himself, deny the existence of all generous impulses. Enlarging upon this idea in his preface, Wordsworth displays a good psychological insight which is continued into the play.

The plot of The Borderers concerns Marmaduke, the leader of a band called "The Borderers," who are active along the Anglo-Scottish border in the reign of Henry III, existing to protect the innocent, promote virtue and extinguish vice. Marmaduke is a very noble young man, in love with Idonea, who looks after Herbert, her blind old father, who returned from a

Crusade to find that he had been ousted from his barony. Marmaduke has at one time saved the life of Oswald, the villain, who is determined to undo Marmaduke, not only because of this - to him - intolerable debt, but because there is "a daily beauty in his life" that makes Oswald's ugly. Some uncertainty exists over this part of the plot, because at times Oswald appears to want to repay Marmaduke as handsomely as possible for saving his life and believes that the best way of doing this is to give Marmaduke the same detached, unimpassioned view of the world that he has acquired for himself. I shall, however, refer to this point again.<sup>10</sup> Oswald tricks Marmaduke into believing that Herbert is not really Idonea's father, but a wanderer who adopted the infant Idonea from a poor peasant woman, imposed upon her to look after him and now intends to sell her to the notorious, debauched Lord Clifford. Oswald bribes a peasant woman to support his story and to claim Idonea as her daughter. Marmaduke, incited by Oswald, decides to punish Herbert for his sins and to protect the innocent Idonea. He cannot bring himself to kill Herbert, whose mildness and apparent innocence disarm Marmaduke, so he abandons Herbert on a desolate moor

10. cf. p.258.

leaving his fate to heaven. Meanwhile the king has pardoned Herbert and restored his title and his lands. Idonea rejoices, as yet ignorant of the fate which has overtaken her father. She feels sorry for having refused to listen to Marmaduke's suit; she did so because she felt obliged to remain by her blind father whilst he was alone and penniless. Oswald, believing that Marmaduke has killed Herbert, tells him that Herbert was really innocent, that he deceived Marmaduke to bring him to the same enlightened point of scorning the world and its standards as he himself had reached. Marmaduke rushes off to save Herbert, but he is too late - Herbert has died. Marmaduke confesses to Idonea and then leaves her and his comrades to become a Romantic, eternal Wanderer;

"in silence hear my doom;  
A hermitage has furnished fit relief  
To some offenders; other penitents,  
Less patient in their wretchedness, have fallen,  
Like the old Roman, on their own sword's point.  
They had their choice: a wanderer must I go,  
The Spectre of that innocent Man, my guide.  
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." 11



Considered as a play, The Borderers fails. As we might expect from Wordsworth's lyric poetry, he is too subjective to be able to enter fully into the dramatic medium. None of his characters come to life as individuals, each is used as a mouth-piece for Wordsworth's own ideas, whereas most dramatists<sup>12</sup> present their vision of life, not through this character or that character, but through the actions and interactions of the dramatis personae, which bring, as it were, a microcosm before us, substantial and credible, and so ordered by the dramatist that we may catch something of his total view. An undramatic writer, on the other hand, presents two dimensional phantoms, mouthing theories into a void and incapable of the full blooded, rough-and-tumble life of action that normally forms the core of good theatre. Hazlitt regarded such a weakness as almost inevitable:

"Mr. Wordsworth (we are satisfied with him, be it remembered, as he is), is not a man to go out of himself into the feelings of anyone else; much less, to act the part of a variety of characters. He is not, like Bottom, ready to play the lady, the lover, and the lion. His poetry is a virtual proscription passed upon the promiscuous nature of the drama. He sees nothing but himself in the universe; or if he leans with a kindly feeling to any thing else, he would impart to the most uninteresting things the fulness of his own sentiments, and elevate the most insignificant characters into the foremost rank - before kings, or heroes,

12. I am aware of such exceptions as Bernard Shaw, but they form a small minority.

or lords, or wits, - because they do not interfere with his own sense of self-importance. He has none of the bye-play, the varying points of view, the venturous magnanimity of dramatic fiction. He thinks the opening of the leaves of a daisy, or the perfume of a hedge (not of a garden) rose, matters of consequence enough for him to notice them; but he thinks the 'daily intercourse of all this unintelligible world,' its cares, its crimes, its noise, love, war, ambition (what else?) mere vanity and vexation of spirit, with which a great poet cannot condescend to disturb the bright, serene, and solemn current of his thoughts. This lofty indifference and contempt for his dramatis personae would not be the most likely means to make them interesting to the audience. We fear Mr. Wordsworth's poetical egotism would prevent his writing a tragedy. " 13.

This opinion of how Wordsworth might have written drama is confirmed by The Borderers. Wordsworth has been fascinated by

"this awful truth, that, as in the trials to which life subjects us, sin and crime are apt to start from their very opposite qualities, so are there no limits to the hardening of the heart, and the perversion of the understanding to which they may carry their slaves. " 14

He has exercised his interest in the figure of Oswald and has assumed that all readers, and audiences, will be as interested as he himself is, with the result that he has treated this plot inadequately; all five acts are concerned with Oswald's corruption of the innocent, trusting Marmaduke, not so much as

13. The London Magazine, April 1820; Hazlitt, xviii, 308.

14. Preface to 1842 edition; de Selincourt edition i, 342.

a dramatic action, but as a case of psychological and moral interest. Oswald's character is firmly established along with lengthy explanations of how he has become the kind of man he is. This may be of interest in other literary forms, but only when it is skilfully woven into the natural development of the work, which skill Wordsworth lacks in The Borderers: Iago - and comparisons with Othello must be evoked by The Borderers - is a villain whose apparent "motiveless malignity" has troubled critics, yet surely all are agreed that in watching Othello we are compelled by Iago's villainy to accept his character and the evil in which he lives. Shakespeare, concerned with a dramatic action, has hurtled Iago at us, leaving us almost to our own devices as far as an explanation is concerned. Nearly all the explanations given for Iago's villainy come from Iago himself and serve rather as a dramatic revelation of his present condition than as a psychological examination of his past. Wordsworth, on the other hand, was more interested in the springs of a villain's conduct than in a dramatic action. He wanted to ponder upon conduct such as Oswald's and Marmaduke's. In the preface to the "Lyrical Ballads", this attitude, which he maintained towards his lyrical poetry, is defined as follows :

"the feeling therein [in his poems] developed  
gives importance to the action and the situation,  
and not the action and situation to the feeling" 15

This theory accords well with Wordsworth's lyrical practice,  
as, e.g. in "Resolution and Independence"; but it is contrary  
to dramatic practice, where the audience must first of all be  
captured by an action or situation which, as it develops,  
throws light upon much more than its own sequence of events.

Act I of The Borderers introduces us to Oswald and  
Marmaduke, illuminating their characters by open assertion, e.g.-

"he [Marmaduke] hath sought, what'er his aim,  
Companionship with One of crooked ways, [Oswald]  
From whose perverted soul can come no good  
To our confiding, open-hearted, Leader." 16

Herbert and Idonea likewise appear - Idonea as a typical, un-  
corrupted, golden girl :

"Why, if a wolf should leap from out a thicket,  
A look of mine would send him scouring back." 17

who is unsuspecting of any evil: speaking to her father of  
Marmaduke she says:

"Alas! you do not know him. He is one  
(I wot not what ill tongue had wronged him with you)  
All gentleness and love." 18

15. The Poetical Works of Wordsworth, 1951, p.735.

16. 11. 7-10.

17. 11. 317-8.

18. 11. 166-8.

Whereas a small investigation, or even suspicious thought, would have suggested Oswald as the "ill tongue."<sup>19</sup> This act also fills in the background of the life of Herbert and Idonea,<sup>20</sup> and indicates the conflict within Marmaduke as he fights between believing what Oswald tells him about Herbert and accepting his own personal feelings about Herbert.

Wordsworth shows that he is interested in the psychology of his characters, but he has forgotten that an audience faces a new play with little or no knowledge of what it is going to be about. Consequently Act I is almost bound to fall flat, because we are not sufficiently interested in the characters to follow their conversation with sufficient attention. In reading the play it certainly is interesting to return to Act I to see how Wordsworth has exposed the springs of action in his characters, but The Borderers was submitted to Covent Garden for consideration as a play to be acted, and as such we must consider it. Othello opens with more action and an atmosphere of haste; we are plunged in medias res and are eager to know what happens next. This elementary attribute of all storytelling, whether in books or on boards, the eager anticipation of what happens next - this is missing from The Borderers.

19. Although this is paralleled in Othello by Emilia's suspicion that "some eternal villain" had "devised the slander" against Desdemona, voiced in the presence of Iago, Othello IV, ii, 130-133.

20. 11. 175-210.

Act II has more activity, but it lacks the vigour and forward motion of drama. Instead it is long drawn out, and where it is not actually static, such movement as there is is backwards, seeking the reasons for behaviour, as when Oswald is soliloquising upon Marmaduke and their respective positions:

"They chose him for their Chief! - what covert part  
He in the preference, modest Youth, might take,  
I neither know nor care. The insult bred  
More of contempt than hatred; both are flown;  
That either e'er existed is my shame:  
'Twas a dull spark - a most unnatural fire  
That died the moment the air breathed upon it.  
These fools of feeling are mere birds of winter  
That haunt some barren island of the north,  
Where, if a famishing man stretch forth his hand,  
They think it is to feed them. I have left him  
To solitary meditation; - now  
For a few swelling phrases, and a flash  
Of truth, enough to dazzle and to blind,  
And he is mine for ever. - " 21

This speech gives us the measure of Oswald: cold, calculating and firmly opposed to emotional reactions dictating behaviour; and also gives us a good, romantic image - the vision of "mere birds of winter" is illuminating, both for its vividness and in completing the revelation of Oswald's general contempt for life itself. This is emphasised by another soliloquy later on in Act II -

"The Villains rose in mutiny to destroy me;  
I could have quelled the cowards, but this stripling  
Must needs step in, and save my life. The look  
With which he gave the boon - I see it now!

The same that tempted me to loathe the gift -  
For this old venerable grey-beard Herbert - faith  
'Tis his own fault if he hath got a face  
Which doth play tricks with them that look upon it:  
'Twas this that put it in my thoughts - that countenance -  
His staff - his figure - Murder! - what, of whom?  
We kill a worn-out horse, and who but women  
Sigh at the deed? Hew down a withered tree,  
And none look grave but dotards. He may live  
To thank me for this service. Rainbow arches,  
Highways of dreaming passion, have too long,  
Young as he is, diverted wish and hope  
From the unpretending ground we mortals tread;-  
Then shatter the delusion, break it up  
And set him free. What follows? I have learned  
That things will work to ends the slaves o' the world  
Do never dream of. I have been what he -  
This Boy - when he comes forth with bloody hands -  
Might envy, and am now - but he shall know  
What I am now - " 22

There are a few strands in this speech: Oswald's hatred of Marmaduke, who conferred such a great benefit upon him, combined with an attempt to convince himself that, instead of revenging himself upon Marmaduke, he is giving him a new and precious freedom; along with this goes a most unpleasant contempt for life. These two soliloquies are almost glosses upon points in the Preface:

"Perhaps there is no cause which has greater weight in preventing the return of bad men to virtue than that good actions being for the most part in their nature silent and regularly progressive, they do not present these sudden results which can afford sufficient

stimulus to a troubled mind. In processes of vice the effects are more frequently immediate, palpable and extensive. Power is much more easily manifested in destroying than in creating." 23

and :

"Benefits conferred on a man like this will be the seeds of a worse feeling than ingratitude. They will give birth to positive hatred." 24

So are the general remarks upon the pride, the restless disposition, disturbed mind, superstitious and immoral readiness to put his most extravagant speculations into practice. This retrograde movement is suitable for a psychological study, but not for a tragedy intended to capture the attention of an audience who want the psychology of the characters to take its place naturally as an element in the action, but not to be exploited for its own sake. Wordsworth has created a character, but he is not able to make him develop in action.

There are, however, in Act II, some dramatic interchanges when Marmaduke's hesitation and Oswald's villainy do emerge in action, and not from the observations of others :

|                      |                                                           |
|----------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| " <u>Marmaduke</u> . | 'Tis a wild night.                                        |
| <u>Oswald</u> .      | I'd give my cloak and bonnet<br>For sight of a warm fire. |

23. de Selincourt, i, 345.

24. ibid. p.347.



Marmaduke.

The wind blows keen;  
My hands are numb.

Oswald

Ha! ha! 'tis nipping cold.  
/Blowing his fingers.

I long for news of our brave Comrades: Lacy  
Would drive those Scottish Rovers to their

dens  
If once they blew a horn this side the Tweed.

Marmaduke. I think I see a second range of Towers;  
This castle has another Area - come,  
Let us examine it.

Oswald

'Tis a bitter night;  
I hope Idonea is well housed. That horseman,  
Who at full speed swept by us where the wood  
Roared in the tempest, was within an ace  
Of sending to his grave our precious Charge:  
[Herbert]  
That would have been a vile mischance.

Marmaduke.

It would.

Oswald. Justice had been most cruelly defrauded.

Marmaduke. Most cruelly. "

25

This interchange takes place before Marmaduke's first attempt to summon up enough conviction to kill Herbert. Oswald's forced naturalness is well portrayed, and the casual mention of Idonea at a time when Marmaduke is obviously needing his determination to be heightened as much as possible, is a good, natural stroke, as is Marmaduke's pre-occupied echoing of what Oswald says. This device Wordsworth could have picked up from Othello<sup>26</sup>, but the deeper levels of dramatic art cannot be picked up from another writer, and Wordsworth, the lyric poet, did not command

25. 11.725-740.

26. III,iii, 92-257.

them. The speeches just quoted of Marmaduke and Oswald, in common with all the other speeches of the play, are individual only in content, not in form. Oswald's beliefs differ from Marmaduke's, but not the language in which he expresses them. The very few exceptions to this general, level tone of speech are found in the speeches of insignificant characters, e.g. the beggar woman whom Oswald bribes to support his falsehoods, answers Marmaduke's question whether she <sup>i</sup>s Herbert's wife with -

"Wife, Sir! his wife - not I; my husband, Sir,  
Was of Kirkwald - many a snowy winter  
We've weathered out together. My poor Gilfred!  
He has been two years in his grave. "

27

However, the business of Herbert's attempted murder is too long drawn out, beyond any proper dramatic tension which might be derived from it, whilst Oswald's explanation of why he is now acting as he is, is not dramatic, but is rather the kind of psychological inquiry Wordsworth enjoys.<sup>28</sup> In Macbeth II, ii, which Act II of The Borderers resembles, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are completely engrossed in their deed and Shakespeare does not pause to permit one of the characters to give any kind of psychological explanation, knowing that the effect is so much more powerful as things are. But Wordsworth's interests

27. 11.511-514.

28. 11.917-940, quoted on pp.252-253.

compel him to introduce psychology and philosophy. In this scene of attempted murder the most vigorous, convincing lines come from Marmaduke when he is hag-ridden by the fear of what he is on the point of doing.

In Act IV the introspection is continued and Herbert elevated into a general symbol, such as Wordsworth loved in his lyrical poetry. He is a genuine, simple, old man, close to nature, and because of that innocent and trusting. In spite of all indications that Marmaduke is not really trustworthy, he will continue in his deep, simple faith in the fundamental goodness and soundness of the created universe - much as Michael does. Faced with this figure, Marmaduke finds his task of murder impossibly hard, because he is siding with an evil man - Oswald - who has purposely turned his back upon all promptings of natural goodness and adopted instead a dispassionate, cruel, self-interested rationality, and siding with him against natural goodness - Herbert. This act underlines Oswald's wickedness. Wallace, one of the Borderers, answers the question of Oswald's possible motive :

"Natures such as his  
Spin motives out of their own bowels, Lacy!  
I learn'd this when I was a Confessor.  
I know him well; there needs no other motive  
Than that most ~~strange~~ incontinence in crime  
Which haunts this Oswald. Power is life to him

And breath and being, where he cannot govern  
He will destroy."

29

In Act IV Oswald explains the true situation to Marmaduke and reveals how they are now united by wrong doing; psychologically this is a good scene, but not dramatically. Act V concludes the revelation of how Oswald has tricked Marmaduke and ends with Marmaduke leaving his friends to wander alone as an outcast.

The management of Covent Garden would not accept the play, but Wordsworth and his sister did not expect them to ;

"William's play is finished, and sent to the managers of the Covent Garden Theatre. We have not the faintest expectation that it will be accepted."

30

In portraying Oswald, Wordsworth had neither the experience nor the power to do it dramatically. At one point Oswald appears to hate Marmaduke,<sup>31</sup> To satisfy this hatred he plans for Marmaduke to murder a harmless old man, knowing that such a murder would torment Marmaduke pitifully. Yet Oswald is also presented as an enthusiast for an enlightened rationalism, who wants to spread his good news of freedom and turns to Marmaduke as the

29. 11.1427-1433.

30. Early Letters of William & Dorothy Wordsworth (1787-1805). Arranged & edited by Ernest de Selincourt, 1935, p.174: Dorothy Wordsworth to Mary Hutchinson (?), 20.xi.1797.

31. cf. p.253.

first, lucky man to share this enlightenment - which he would hardly want to do if he sincerely believed in his own message and at the same time hated Marmaduke.

This confusion is more apparent than real; we never really expect a man to be capable of a sustained rational behaviour overriding all personal, irrational emotion. Nevertheless, this confusion has been seized upon ~~by critics~~<sup>32</sup> because it provides so obvious a demonstration of the weakness inherent in some aspects of Godwin's philosophy, which had prompted Wordsworth to write The Borderers, yet which were diametrically opposed to the philosophy which suffuses his later lyrical poetry. As I said earlier,<sup>33</sup> I do not intend to use The Borderers simply as a map on which to plot Wordsworth's Godwinian route-march, but where The Borderers can be illuminated by reference to Godwin then it would be a mistake to omit the reference. Oswald's philosophy is largely Godwinian - but for all the wrong reasons. He did not arrive at his conclusions after cool, reasoned reflection, but was hounded into them in proud self-defence and self-justification after his ship mates betrayed him.<sup>34</sup> Being a proud man, Oswald did not retrace his

32. cf. e.g. E. de Selincourt, "Wordsworth's Preface to The Borderers," The Nineteenth Century and After, November, 1926 B. Willey, The Eighteenth Century Background, 1940. G.W. Meyer, Wordsworth's Formative Years, University of Michigan Publications. Language and Literature XX (1943).

33. cf. p. 242.

34. 11.1748-1859.

steps and admit his crime as a crime: instead he pretends to himself that he has gained immeasurably by the experience :

"I seemed a Being who has passed alone  
Into a region of futurity,  
Whose natural element was freedom. - "

35

The result of this is that "Oswald becomes at once a mouthpiece and an exposure of Godwinism."<sup>36</sup> He proclaims Godwin's philosophy in its most obvious aspects and as it is most readily understood by the common-reader. Yet Oswald's reasons for adopting this philosophy are obviously unGodwinian, and his retention of it is largely fired by his own pride and emotional reactions; whilst his attempts to enlighten Marmaduke are not based upon radical rationalism, but upon deliberate lies, bribery and misrepresentation. Godwin's definitions both of "virtue" and of "duty"<sup>37</sup> expose Oswald as a criminal by Godwinian standards. Wordsworth, as well as anyone with more than a superficial, second-hand acquaintance with Godwin, was bound to realise that Oswald could only be "justified" not by the normal human mixture of reason and emotion, nor by Godwin's philosophy, but solely by his own proud, self-seeking,

35. 11.1816-1819

36. E. de Selincourt, Oxford Lectures on Poetry, 1934, p.171.

37. Godwin, Political Justice, 1796, i, 149: "I would define virtue to be any action or actions of an intelligent being, proceeding from kind and benevolent intention, and having a tendency to contribute to general happiness."  
ibid, p.156: "Duty is that mode of action on the part of the individual, which constitutes the best possible application of his capacity to the general benefit."

warped personality. If Oswald were a consistent exponent of Godwin's rationalist theories, then The Borderers would no doubt illuminate Wordsworth's thought at this period and would, itself, be illuminated by reference to Godwin, but The Borderers lacks consistency in its presentation of any one line of thought. This inconsistency is interesting as it probably springs from Wordsworth's own realisation of the limitations of the Godwinian philosophy which led to his renouncing it.

Philosophical theories apart, some of Wordsworth's dearest beliefs are exercised in The Borderers: the innate goodness of country people as in the Peasant who cheerfully and willingly volunteers to help Idonea and Herbert,<sup>38</sup> whilst Oswald's baseness is in part revealed by his corrupting one such simple soul, a beggar woman, to give false evidence concerning Herbert to Marmaduke,<sup>39</sup> who then reveals his nobility by his reaction to her :

"Come hither, Fathers,  
And learn what nature is from this poor Wretch." 40

The triumph of natural goodness is demonstrated by the beggar's penitence at having misled Marmaduke, and by her final confession.<sup>41</sup> Eldred, a peasant who helps Herbert, is also naturally

38. 11.213ff.

39. 11.396ff.

40. 11.443-444.

41. 11.2243ff.

good, but his primal virtue has been corrupted by civilisation in the shape of an apparently unwarranted term of imprisonment:

"On such a night my husband  
Dragged from his bed, was cast into a dungeon,  
Where, hid from me, he counted many years,  
A criminal in no one's eyes but theirs -  
Not even in theirs - whose brutal violence  
So dealt with him."

42

A little later his wife remarks of Eldred :

"Good Eldred  
Has a kind heart; but his imprisonment  
Has made him fearful, and he'll never be  
The man he was."

43

Thus corrupted by civilisation, Eldred finally leaves Herbert alone upon the moor to die, as he is frightened that he may be incriminated and accused of murder.

But, as I said at the beginning, it is as a blank verse tragedy, and not as an element in the pattern of Wordsworth's work, that we must regard The Borderers, and as a tragedy it fails because Wordsworth's conception was not sufficiently dramatic to maintain a five act tragedy.

42. 11. 1891-1896.

43. 11.1899-1902.



COLERIDGE.

Coleridge started writing tragedy in partnership with Southey. Between them they wrote The Fall of Robespierre (unacted), 1794, Coleridge writing Act I, Southey Acts II and III. Coleridge's act comprises 274 lines of stiff, self-conscious blank verse, as exemplified in this speech of Robespierre's :

"What? did La Fayette fall before my power?  
And did I conquer Roland's spotless virtues?  
The fervent eloquence of Vergniaud's tongue?  
And Brissot's thoughtful soul unbribed and bold?  
Did zealot armies haste in vain to save them?  
What! did th' assassin's dagger aim its point  
Vain, as a dream of murder, at my bosom?  
And shall I dread the soft luxurious Tallien?  
Th' Adonis Tallien? banquet-hunting Tallien?  
Him, whose heart flutters at the dice-box? Him,  
Who ever on the harlots' downy pillow  
Resigns his head impure to feverish slumbers! " 44

Coleridge himself seems to have regarded the play more as a potential source of income than as a tragedy. Writing to Southey on 19th September, 1794, he says -

"The Tragedy will be printed in less than a week -  
I shall put my Name - because it will sell at least  
an hundred copies at Cambridge - It would appear  
ridiculous to put two names on such a Work - But if  
you choose it, mention it - and it shall be done -  
To every man, who praises it, of course I give the  
true biography of it - to those who laugh at it, I  
laugh again. - " 45

44. The Fall of Robespierre, I, 56-67.

45. Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. E.L. Griggs, 1956, i, 106 (Hereafter referred to as "Collected Letters").

Yet it is interesting to note that in the dedicating letter to Henry Martin, Coleridge outlines his intentions in writing the play and we may see how Coleridge's conception of The Fall of Robespierre was much grander than the execution. He was using Robespierre to illustrate the downfall of a "great" though bad man:

"ACCEPT, as a small testimony of my grateful attachment, the following Dramatic Poem, in which I have endeavoured to detail, in an interesting form, the fall of a man, whose great bad actions have cast a disastrous lustre on his name. In the execution of the work, as intricacy of plot could not have been attempted without a gross violation of recent facts, it has been my sole aim to imitate the impassioned and highly figurative language of the French Orators, and to develop the characters of the chief actors on a vast stage of horrors."

46

This same weakness is to be found in Coleridge's Osorio (first published 1873) and Remorse (D.L.23.i.1813), 1813: starting from an intellectual decision to demonstrate an idea dramatically, then creating figures to expound the idea, yet never quite succeeding in embodying the primary conception. This philosophic and dramatic dichotomy in Coleridge could not be happily resolved upon the stage.

46. ibid, pp.106-107.

Coleridge started writing Osorio early in 1797 after Sheridan himself had asked him to write a tragedy for Drury Lane. On 6th February, 1797, he wrote to Sheridan :

"I received a letter last Saturday from a friend [probably William Linley<sup>47</sup>] of the Revd. W.L. Bowles, imparting that You wished me 'to write a tragedy on some popular subject.' I need not say, that I was gratified and somewhat elated by the proposal; and whatever hours I can win from the avocations, by which I earn my immediate subsistence, shall be sacred to the attempt. The attempt I shall make more readily, as I have reason to believe, that I can hope without expecting, and of course meet rejection without suffering disappointment. Indeed I have conceived so high an idea of what a Tragedy ought to be, that I am certain I shall myself be dissatisfied with my production; and I can therefore safely promise, that I will neither be surprized or wounded, if I should find you of the same opinion. I should consider myself well paid for my trouble by the improvement which my mind would have received from it, as an Exercise; and by the honor conferred upon me by your having proposed it." 48

However much Coleridge may have contradicted his words by his later actions - his resentment of rejection, his definite surprise and sense of injury - the tone of this letter does suggest that Coleridge was flattered by the request and applied himself to Osorio specifically as to a stage play, with the closet only of secondary importance.

When Sheridan received the play he treated it and its author with a startling lack of good manners, though not quite

47. Note appended by E.L. Griggs.

48. Collected Letters, i, 304.

as contemptuously as Coleridge remembered in retrospect. Coleridge sent his MS. to W.L. Bowles,<sup>49</sup> whose friend, probably William Linley, Sheridan's brother-in-law,<sup>50</sup> had first informed Coleridge of Sheridan's desire. Sheridan rejected Osorio, through Linley. Coleridge, writing to Poole in a letter endorsed 2nd December, 1797, tells him :

"I received a letter from Linley, the long & the short of which is that Sheridan rejects the Tragedy - his sole objection is - the obscurity of the three last acts." 51

Sheridan himself, however, did not write to Coleridge, nor did he, personally, or through any intermediary, return the MS of Osorio, the only one which, Coleridge thought at the time, existed.<sup>52</sup> Then Sheridan changed his mind. Coleridge, writing to his brother George, 14th May, 1798, tells him:

"I will write again in a few days, and send you the Tragedy, &c, &c - Sheridan has again promised to fit it for the stage and bring it on, which promise he will as certainly break . . . ." 53

Nothing, however, came of this renewed offer. It was, as Coleridge later angrily asserted to Daniel Stuart, high-handed treatment of an author who had been commissioned to write a

49. ibid, pp.355-6.

50. ibid, p. 304.

51. ibid, p. 358.

52. Preface to Remorse, 1813: these facts were only given in the first edition of Remorse.

53. ~~ibid, i, 409.~~ Collected Letters, i, 409.

play which had been submitted to Sheridan, the theatre manager, to alter as he saw fit. Coleridge wrote to Stuart in May, 1807:

"to have desired a young man struggling for bread to write a Tragedy at 23 - to have heard from him an unfeigned acknowledgement of his unfitness, to have encouraged him by promises of assistance and advice, to have received the Play with a letter submitting it blankly to his alterations, omissions, additions, as if it had been his own MSS, yet still expressing the Author's acknowledgement that it was not likely to suit the Stage, and that a repulse would create no disappointment, nay, that he would even consider himself as amply rewarded if only Mr. Sheridan would instruct him as to the reasons of it's unsuitableness - then to utterly neglect this young man, to return no answer to his letter soliciting the remission of the Copy. (N.B. all this I had forgiven, and attributed to Mr. Sheridan's general character and complexity of anxious occupations) - but, 10 years afterwards, to take advantage of a MSS. so procured, to make the author ridiculous, and that among those disposed to be his friends, and by a downright falsehood!" 54

This making "the author ridiculous" is again referred to in a Preface to the first edition of Remorse, 1813, the only edition in which the reference is printed. Coleridge is indignantly listing Sheridan's faults in the treatment he has received -

"/Sheridan/ suffered this Manuscript /of Osorio and the only one in existence, as Coleridge wrongly thought at the time / to wander about the Town from his house, so that but ten days ago I saw the song in the third Act printed and set to music, without my name, by Mr. Carnaby, in the year 1802; likewise that the same person asserted (as I have been assured) that the Play was rejected because I would not submit to the alteration of one ludicrous line; and finally in the year 1806

54. Unpublished Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. E.L. Griggs, 1932, i, 375-6.

amused and delighted (as who was ever in his company, if I may trust the universal report, without being amused and delighted?) a large company at the house of a highly respectable Member of Parliament, with the ridicule of the Tragedy, as 'a fair specimen' of the whole of which he adduced a line :

'Drip! drip! drip! there's nothing here but dripping.'

In the original copy of the Play, in the first Scene of the fourth Act, Isidore had commenced his Soliloquy in the Cavern with the words :

'Drip! drip! a ceaseless sound of water-drops,'

as far as I can at present recollect . . . 55

There is, however, no MS. authority for the line as Coleridge quotes it in this Preface;<sup>56</sup> the fourth act opens :

"Drip! drip! drip! drip! - in such a place as this  
It has nothing else to do but drip! drip! drip!" -

Coleridge may have been confused by changes he had made in making Osorio into Remorse.

The action of Osorio takes place in Spain during the reign of Philip II. It tells the story of Albert and of his younger brother, Osorio, the only children of Velez, a Spanish nobleman. Albert has been missing on an expedition, and supposed dead, for three years, during which time Osorio has

55. Preface, Remorse, 1st edition, 1813. Re-printed in The Complete Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. E.H. Coleridge, 1912, ii, 813-4. (Hereafter referred to as "Complete Works").

56. Complete Works, ii, 814, note 9 continued from p.813.

been wooing Albert's fiancée, Maria. We gradually learn that Osorio has deliberately planned his brother's murder so that he can marry Maria himself. The murderers, however, discovered that Albert was Osorio's brother and could not bring themselves to be accomplices in fratricide. Albert returns disguised to Spain, not for revenge, but to summon up one pang of genuine remorse in Osorio's soul. This purpose is all the stronger because he wrongly believes that Osorio and Maria are married. But Maria has always been sure that Albert was alive, and in spite of the entreaties of Velez, her guardian, that she marry Osorio, she has remained single. Albert, disguised as a Moor, poses as a wizard and agrees to help Osorio prove to Maria that Albert really is dead by a species of seance. Albert stage-manages this to throw everyone - including the audience - into confusion. Osorio, suspecting that his infamy is known, assumes that the wizard and Ferdinand, who was engaged to murder Albert, are in league against him. He murders Ferdinand, then attempts to murder Albert, still ignorant of their relationship. Albert talks to him, and Osorio, startled by a footstep, retires, giving Albert a chance to reveal himself to Maria and then, on Osorio's return, to Osorio, who, overwhelmed by his guilt, attempts to commit suicide. He is prevented by Albert and Maria

and then finally led off stage, presumably to death, by a band of Ferdinand's friends seeking, not remorse, but revenge.

Coleridge, as we saw,<sup>57</sup> seemed surprised that Sheridan's "sole objection is - the obscurity of the three last acts" - but, as I see it, the whole play is confused, this confusion being an almost inevitable consequence of Coleridge's own uncertainty in writing the play. He has tried to build a dramatic structure upon an abstract idea, much as Wordsworth does in The Borderers. Coleridge's idea is that a man, no matter how debased his actions may have been, is saved from the full consequences of these actions if he finally experiences a genuine remorse - in fact, the Christian doctrine of repentance. He also has a definite idea of the type of man who is to experience this remorse :

"In the character of Osorio I wished to represent a man who, from his childhood, had mistaken constitutional abstinence from vices for strength of character - thro' his pride duped into guilt, and then endeavouring to shield himself from the reproaches of his own mind by misanthropy." 58

Throughout the play Albert is motivated by the wish to inspire remorse in Osorio, but Coleridge has not managed to

57. cf. p.266.

58. Preface affixed to one transcript of Osorio, numbered by E.H.Coleridge "MS.III", cf. Complete Works, ii, 518, footnote 1. This MS. will henceforth be termed "MS.III"



combine this with other elements in Albert's character, nor has he left him so characterless that he might become a sort of Christian Erinyes, crying not for revenge, but remorse. So, like a puppet, Albert is jerked from being a long lost son and lover, to being a heavenly instrument for remorse, but these two aspects evidently cannot be united into an integrated character. Hence we find :

"That my return involved Osorio's death  
I trust would give me an unmingl'd pang -  
Yet bearable. But when I see my father  
Strewing his scant grey hairs even on the ground  
Which soon must be his grave; and my Maria,  
Her husband proved a monster, and her infants  
His infants - poor Maria! - all would perish,  
All perish - all! - and I (nay bear with me!)  
Could not survive the complicated ruin! " 59

In the next act Albert has an aside after his father has spoken fourteen lines of loving remembrance of his supposedly dead son -

"My tears must not flow -  
I must not clasp his knees, and cry, my father! " 60

Whence this compulsion unless he is a heavenly agent, and if a heavenly agent whence his hesitation? Albert's character is bound to be unsatisfactory because the plot is an unconvincing one.

59. Osorio, II, 169-177.

60. III, 73-74.

The confusion, however, is more around Albert's character than Osorio's, because, I would suggest, Osorio is more of an active, positive character than Albert, and his inequalities can be partly resolved in action within the plot. Osorio's character, as envisaged by Coleridge,<sup>61</sup> is a powerful one, aspects of which may be found in Wordsworth's Oswald as well, but, unlike Oswald, who is fired too much by intellectual decisions, by the mind rather than, more humanly, by the heart, Osorio acts from a mixture of rational and emotional motives. Rationally acting for his own advantage - as he emotionally sees it - he hires assassins to murder Albert and later murders Ferdinand himself, because Albert stood between him and Maria, whom he loved, and also the inheritance, as elder son; whilst Ferdinand knew too much concerning Osorio's activities for him to be left alive. Osorio does not decide upon action at a solely intellectual level. We are not told how he came to the conclusion that Albert must die, except at the emotional level of his love for Maria, and we do see remorse beginning to work upon him as a whole man: after Ferdinand has told him how Albert, on being told it was Osorio who had plotted his murder, threw away his sword, Osorio exclaims :

61. cf. p. 270.

"And you kill'd him?  
O blood-hounds! may eternal wrath flame round you!  
He was the image of the Deity. /A pause.  
It seizes me - by Hell! I will go on!  
What? would'st thou stop, man? thy pale looks  
won't save thee! /Then suddenly pressing his forehead  
Oh! cold, cold, cold - shot thro' with icy cold!  
. . . . .  
O this unutterable dying away here,  
This sickness of the heart! /A pause.  
What if I went  
And liv'd in a hollow tomb, and fed on weeds?  
Ay! that's the road to heaven! O fool! fool! fool!  
/A pause  
What have I done but that which nature destin'd  
Or the blind elements stirr'd up within me?  
If good were meant, why were we made these beings?  
And if not meant - 62

Oswald, in The Borderers, in a somewhat similar position when he learns that the man he left to die, thinking that he had plotted against his, Oswald's life, had in no way harmed him, reasons his way to a cold misanthropy. Before the murder of Ferdinand we watch Osorio being wound up to the deed in some of the most powerfully dramatic speeches in the play:

"Love - love - and then we hate - and what? and wherefore?  
Hatred and love. Strange things! both strange alike!  
What if one reptile sting another reptile,  
Where is the crime? The goodly face of Nature  
Hath one trail less of slimy filth upon it.  
Are we not all predestined rottenness  
And cold dishonor? Grant it that this hand  
Had given a morsel to the hungry worms  
Somewhat too early. Where's the guilt of this?  
That this must needs bring on the idiotcy  
Of moist-eyed penitence - 'tis like a dream! " 63

62. 11.102-107; 110-117.

63. III, 211-221.

Osorio follows that with :

"I kill a man and lay him in the sun,  
And in a month there swarm from his dead body  
A thousand - nay, ten thousand sentient beings  
In place of that one man whom I had kill'd.  
Now who shall tell me, that each one and all,  
Of these ten thousand lives, is not as happy  
As that one life, which being shov'd aside  
Made room for these ten thousand?"

64

Later in the same act, when Osorio has persuaded himself that Ferdinand and the disguised Albert are in league, he exclaims:

"O! I am green, a very simple stripling -  
The wise men of this world make nothing of me.  
By Heaven, 'twas contriv'd! And I, forsooth,  
I was to cut my throat in honour of conscience.  
And this tall wizard - ho! - he was to pass  
For Albert's friend! He hath a trick of his manner.  
He was to tune his voice to honey'd sadness,  
And win her to transfer of her love  
By lamentable tales of her dear Albert,  
And his dear Albert! Yea, she would have lov'd him.  
He, that can sigh out in a woman's ear  
Sad recollections of her perish'd lover,  
And sob and smile with veering sympathy,  
And, now and then, as if by accident,  
Pass his mouth close enough to touch her cheek  
With timid lip, he takes the lover's place,  
He takes his place, for certain! Dusky rogue,  
Were it not sport to whimper with thy mistress,  
Then steal away and roll upon my grave,  
Till thy sides shook with laughter? Blood! blood! blood!  
They want thy blood! thy blood, Osorio!"

65

Then, before the actual murder of Ferdinand, Osorio is brought decisively to action by Ferdinand's suspicion which had led him to be prepared for an attack :

64. III, 224-231.

65. III, 292-312.

"Ferdinand

I would have met him arm'd, and scared the coward!  
[Ferdinand throws off his robe, shows himself armed,  
and draws his sword.

Osorio

Now this is excellent, and warms the blood!  
My heart was drawing back, drawing me back  
With womanish pulls of pity. Dusky slave,  
Now I will kill thee pleasantly, and count it  
Among my comfortable thoughts hereafter." 66

In Act V when Osorio intends to poison the disguised Albert,  
he is again strengthened in his determination by external  
circumstances:

"Albert

Whom dost thou think me?

Osorio

The accomplice and sworn friend of Ferdinand.

Albert.

Ferdinand! Ferdinand! 'tis a name I know not.

Osorio.

Good! good! that lie! by Heaven! it has restor'd me.  
Now I am thy master! Villain, thou shalt drink it,  
Or die a bitterer death." 67

Osorio is, in fact, composed of a credible, human mixture  
of motives, if somewhat weighted towards the bad ones in action.  
He is faced with a series of circumstances and reacts to them  
as positively and directly as he can, motivated by the desire  
to marry Maria and to keep his iniquity hidden; whereas Albert  
has to initiate these circumstances, more or less, and his

66. IV, 141-146.

67. V, 173-178.

motivation is less clear cut than Osorio's, whilst the means he adopts are confusing, for who can believe in the efficacy of the magic scene or that a man of Albert's apparent sense could believe that it would be effective. Coleridge himself realised this: in a MS. of Osorio,<sup>68</sup> he inserted a marginal note by this scene -

"Instead of Maria's portrait, Albert places on the altar a small picture of his attempted assassination. The scene is not wholly without poetical merit, but it is miserably undramatic, or rather untragic. A scene of magic is introduced in which no single person on the stage has the least faith - all, though in different ways, think or know it to be a trick - consequently, &c. " 69

In this MS. and in MS.III, Coleridge has introduced a few marginal glosses to clarify this magic scene,<sup>70</sup> but it was the body of the play he should have revised - dramatically.

Towards the end of the play, however, Osorio ceases to be even moderately clear-cut as a character and joins in the confusion: in Act V he is coldly determined to kill the as-yet unrevealed Albert, and, as we have seen, his determination was strengthened by Albert's apparent falsehood,<sup>71</sup> yet his confidence is quite unexpectedly undermined when Albert

68. "a contemporary transcript sent by Coleridge to a friend," note by E.H. Coleridge in Complete Works, ii, 518.

69. Complete Works, ii, 555, note 1.

70. cf. Complete Works, ii, footnotes on pp.555,556,558.

71. cf. p.275; V.173-178.

confronts him :

"Osorio. Thou mountebank!

Albert. Mountebank and villain!

What then art thou? For shame, put up thy sword!  
What boots a weapon in a wither'd arm?  
I fix mine eye upon thee, and thou tremblest!  
I speak - and fear and wonder crush thy rage,  
And turn it to a motionless distraction!  
Thou blind self-worshipper! thy pride, thy cunning,  
Thy faith in universal villainy  
Thy shallow sophisms, thy pretended scorn  
For all thy human brethren - out upon them!  
What have they done for thee? Have they given  
thee peace?  
Cured thee of starting in thy sleep? or made  
The darkness pleasant, when thou wakest at midnight?  
Art happy when alone? can'st walk by thyself  
With even step and quiet cheerfulness?  
Yet, yet, thou mayest be saved.

Osorio (stupidly reiterating the word) Saved? saved?" 72

This unexpected volte face of one who "from his childhood had mistaken constitutional abstinence from vices, for strength of of character,"<sup>73</sup> is followed by Osorio's exit, which is demanded by the plot but is obviously artificial - Osorio withdraws and reappears without sufficient motivation:

"Albert. It is the step of one who treads in fear  
Seeking to cheat the echo.

Osorio. It approaches -  
This nook shall hide me."

74

72. V.181-196.

73. Preface to Osorio, MS.III, Complete Works, ii,519;cf.p.270.

74. V, 226-228.

Thus Osorio withdraws from Albert's dungeon, so allowing Albert and Maria - whose footsteps were heard - to meet alone. Osorio's need for remorse, Albert's need for Maria and, I am afraid, Coleridge's need for a conclusion to a very long play, have all awkwardly and confusedly come together. After Albert and Maria have met and Albert has revealed himself, Osorio rushes forth to kill Albert, as he still believes the disguised Albert to be a fraud; then discovering Albert is indeed Albert, he tries to kill himself. Foiled in both attempts, Osorio demonstrates his remorse by a dramatic, almost evangelical, confession of his misdeeds. Before being led off, supposedly to death, he asserts to Ferdinand's widow :

"O woman!

I have stood silent like a slave before thee,  
That I might taste the wormwood and the gall,  
And satiate this self-accusing spirit  
With bitterer agonies than death can give."

75

If we examine Osorio's character carefully, picking up all possible hints to show any fundamental unease over his actions, we can follow the final act, but it remains too melodramatic and startling an ending, which, in some ways, concludes nothing. Certainly Osorio seems to have experienced remorse, even though it is of rather an egotistical kind, but the hurried conclusion, and Osorio's hustled exit at the hands of minor characters almost mechanically produced for the purpose, do not accord with the rest of the play, which is, if anything, too



slow in getting under way. We have got, as it were, a thesis: Osorio's immoral conduct; an antithesis : Albert's belief in the Christian doctrine of repentance; but we are hardly given a synthesis at all.

After the immediate passions aroused by the rejection of Osorio had subsided, Coleridge set about re-shaping the play into Remorse (D.L.23.i.1813), 1813. In a letter to Robert Southey, 22nd July, 1801, Coleridge says -

"If I am well enough, I mean to alter, with a devilish sweep of revolution, my Tragedy, & publish it in a little volume by itself with a new name, as a Poem."

76

He evidently started reworking it in 1801;<sup>77</sup> but it was not performed until 23rd January, 1813, when it had a run of twenty nights.<sup>78</sup>

In a Preface to the MS. of Osorio, Coleridge had outlined his hopes for Osorio and their frustration :

"In this sketch of a tragedy, all is imperfect, and much obscure. Among other equally great defects (millstones round the slender neck of its merits) it pre-supposes a long story; and this long story, which yet is necessary to the complete understanding of the play, is not half told. Albert had sent a letter informing his family that he should arrive about such a time by ship; he was shipwrecked; and wrote a private letter to Osorio, informing him alone of this accident, that he might not shock Maria. Osorio destroyed the letter, and

76. Collected Letters, ii, 745.

77. ibid, ii, 764, n.1.

78. Genest, viii, 354.

sent assassins to meet Albert...Worse than all the growth of Osorio's character is nowhere explained - and yet I had most clear and psychologically accurate ideas of the whole of it...A man, who from constitutional calmness of appetites, is seduced into pride and the love of power, by those into misanthropism, or rather a contempt for mankind, and from thence, by the co-operation of envy, and a curiously modified love for a beautiful female (which is nowhere developed in the play), into a most atrocious guilt. A man who is in truth a weak man, yet always duping himself into the belief that he has a soul of iron. Such were some of my leading ideas.

In short the thing is but an embryo, and whilst it remains in manuscript, which it is destined to do, the critic would judge unjustly who should call it a miscarriage. It furnished me with a most important lesson, namely, that to have conceived strongly, does not always imply the power of successful execution."

79

As we see, he confesses to the obscurity of the play - particularly of the growth of Osorio's character - and to the gulf between the conception and the execution, and admits that Osorio is in fact "but an embryo." It would clearly need a radical reformation were such defects to be remedied, but in the re-writing Coleridge's alterations are mostly superficial. The most obvious, and least important, change is the re-naming of all but two, minor, characters, so that Velez, Albert, Osorio, Maria and Ferdinand become Marquis Valdez, Don Alvar, Don Osorio, Dona Teresa and Isidore respectively: in discussing Remorse I <sup>so</sup> will refer to them.

Remorse opens with a completely new scene in which the newly returned Alvar and his faithful attendant discuss their situation and make things much clearer for the audience: Alvar's long absence is explained - his assassins made it a condition of sparing his life; we hear of Alvar's love for Teresa and his doubts concerning her faithfulness because of something the leader of his would-be assassins had said; and of what Alvar has been doing during the three years - fighting in Belgium. In a copy of the second edition of Remorse presented to Miss Sarah Hutchinson and annotated by Coleridge, Coleridge has noted :

"This Tragedy has a particular advantage - it has the first scene, in which Prologue plays Dialogue with Dumby."

80

Presumably he had felt the lack of such a scene in Osorio.

Throughout the first act such changes as there are all try to make the plot more understandable and acceptable, as if Coleridge had realised that he was asking too much from his audience. One such slight change is in the passage in Osorio where the disguised Albert is talking with Maria and says :

80. Complete Works, ii, 819, footnotes, 1,2. This is rather an obscure remark; I would, however, suggest that Coleridge sees the dialogue between Alvar and Zulimez, in I, i, in which Alvar tells Zulimez what Zulimez already knows, as a prologue in which Zulimez plays "Dumby". "Dumby" is an alternative spelling of "dummy" which besides the colloquial meaning of "a dumb person" can also mean "A person who has nothing to say or who takes no active part in affairs; a dolt, blockhead." (O.E.D.).

"that voice! that innocent voice! she is no traitress!  
it was a dream, a phantom of my sleep,  
A lying dream.

He starts up, and abruptly addresses her.

Maria! you are not wedded?" 81

In Remorse the very direct question and approach, 11.275-6 of Osorio, are omitted: such directness in Act I is bewildering, because we are awaiting Maria's realisation of Albert's identity and must await it for some time.

In Act II of Remorse the main difference is one of re-arrangement; two alterations are notable: in Remorse, II, 1, 182-191, there is a poetic passage not found in Osorio, of a strange, haunting compulsion, but completely undramatic and serving no purpose for the progress or understanding of the play:

"Ordonio.

Ha! - Who lurks there! Have we been overheard?  
There where the smooth high wall of slate-rock  
glitters -

Isidore.

'Neath those tall stones, which propping each the other  
Form a mock portal with their pointed arch?  
Pardon my smiles! 'Tis a poor idiot boy,  
Who sits in the sun, and twirls a bough about,  
His weak eyes seeth'd in most unmeaning tears.  
And so he sits, swaying his cone-like head,  
And staring at his bough from morn to sun-set,  
See-saws his voice in inarticulate noises." 82

Ordonio's rejoinder to this speech emphasises its remoteness from the play - " 'Tis well..."<sup>83</sup>

81. Osorio, I, 274-276.

82. II, 1, 182-191.

83. II, 1, 192.

The second alteration is from Osorio II, 162-166, where Albert is discussing Osorio with Maurice his attendant:

"Albert. He doth believe himself an iron soul,  
And therefore puts he on an iron outward  
And those same mock habiliments of strength  
Hide his own weakness from himself.

Maurice His weakness!  
Come, come, speak out! Your brother is a villain! 84

These lines are not included in Remorse II, ii, which is a re-arrangement of the section of Osorio, Act II, in which this passage occurs. It is interesting to note that these same five lines have been omitted from Osorio MS.III; the variants in this MS. usually reveal a measure of dis-satisfaction which Coleridge evidently experienced with Osorio before he actually set about re-writing it. This may be illustrated simply in the Title given to the play in various MSS. MS.I - as sent to Sheridan - "Osorio A Tragedy"; MS.II - a contemporary transcript - "Osorio, a Dramatic Poem"; MS.III - "Osorio, The Sketch of a Tragedy".<sup>85</sup> Evidently Coleridge became less certain that it was "A Tragedy". Throughout Osorio alterations later found in Remorse are first recorded in MS.III, e.g. Osorio I, 62-73 is changed in MS.III and the same change is made in Remorse, I,ii,63-74.

84. Osorio II, 162-166.

85. Complete Works, ii, 518.

To return to the omission in Remorse of Osorio, II, 162-6: this omission makes Ordonio a more understandable character. Coleridge certainly intended Osorio to be as he is here described by Albert, but he did not succeed. Throughout the action Osorio's cold-blooded ruthlessness is only, temporarily, checked by a certain hesitation surely natural to all but the most depraved of villains and Osorio is not completely depraved: otherwise he would not have permitted Maria to remain unmarried for so long. Maurice, in asserting that Osorio is a villain, is putting forward the simple and obvious reaction of an ordinary man to Osorio's behaviour. Maurice cannot see "an iron outward" to "hide his own weakness from himself." The omission of Maurice's reply is difficult to understand, unless Coleridge felt that the following lines in Remorse -

"And all the wealth, power, influence which is yours,  
You let a murderer hold?" 86

by introducing the term "murderer" adequately replaced those in Osorio<sup>87</sup>. Coleridge may have recognised that his conception and Albert's description of Osorio did not fully accord with his stage character.

86. II, ii, 29-30

87. "Come, come, speak out! Your brother is a villain!"  
Osorio, II, 166.

Act III, with the pseudo-séance, is greatly changed from Osorio to Remorse, all the changes being directed towards clarity. Coleridge, as we have seen,<sup>88</sup> was aware of deficiencies in this act, as he showed by marginal comments in both MS.II and MS.III. In Remorse Coleridge has attempted to clarify the text, but the difficulties were well nigh insuperable unless he changed the primary conception of the act, which he has not done. In Remorse Coleridge introduces a new element in Teresa's suspicion of Ordonio; when Ordonio appears Teresa exclaims :

"Hush!who comes here? The wizard Moor's employer!  
Moors were his Alvar'smurderers, you say? Saints  
shield us  
From wicked thoughts." 89

Ordonio's motive, not given nearly enough prominence in Osorio, is emphasised :

"Teresa. - O Heaven!  
I haste but to the grave of my belov'd!  
Exit . . . .

Ordonio  
This, then, is my reward! and I must love her?  
Scorn'd! shudder'd at! yet love her still? yes! yes!  
By the deep feelings of revenge and hate  
I will still love her - woo her - win her too!" 90

It is, however, a weakness of Remorse, as it had been of Osorio.

88. cf. p.276.

89. III, ii, 47-49

90. III, ii, 166-171.

that we can all too easily forget Ordonio's passion for Teresa and see his villainy as a strange form of "motiveless malignity".

In the alterations of Osorio in this act, Remorse unfortunately loses most of the force of the interchange between Osorio and Velez,<sup>91</sup> when both are at complete cross-purposes and Osorio's confused bewilderment and consequent resolution are very well portrayed with good dramatic effect - though, of course, this is only true if we have followed the earlier part of the scene.

In Act IV, where, in Osorio, Osorio murders Ferdinand, in Remorse our attention is directed more to the crevice in the cave where Isidore is killed, e.g. IV, i, 27-43. Isidore is also allowed to be more aware of the danger he is in than Ferdinand was: he voices his suspicions of Ordonio, before he reveals himself ready armed to resist Ordonio -

"I am on my guard, however: no surprise." 92

But this interpolation does not in any way change the development of the scene: Isidore might as well be as "surprised" as Ferdinand for all the good it does him.

The scene in Osorio, IV, between Maria and her Foster-Mother is omitted in Remorse, IV, ii, obviously to tighten the

91. Osorio, III, 148-245.

92. IV, i, 104.



play up dramatically, as "The Foster-Mother's Tale" is clearly more poetic than dramatic, and was printed separately as "A Dramatic Fragment" and published in the Lyrical Ballads, 1798.

In Act V there are more changes than in any of the other acts. The opening scene in Osorio V, 1-106, is omitted, where the Moors capture Francesco, the Inquisitor, who has been mercilessly persecuting them for years. This personal, Moresco vengeance is out of place in Act V of a play in which the Moors are peripheral characters, whose actions, unless directly bearing upon the main characters, are not relevant to the plot. V, i of Remorse is taken from Osorio, III with new additions. It recounts the meeting of Alvar and Teresa and Teresa's realisation that Alvar is indeed Alvar. In Osorio, III, Maria does not realise who Albert is, but the close encounter of the two lovers gains in dramatic relevance from being placed in the last act and including recognition. Further dramatic power is gained by Ordonio's remorse being followed by his death, inflicted by Isidore's widow, upon the stage. Certainly, it borders upon the contemporary taste for melodrama, but it brings the play to a more rounded conclusion than Osorio, and the new ending given to Remorse is, I think, obviously influenced by contemporary sentiment, with Alvar and Teresa, united, meeting and being blessed by the Marquis Valdez.

When performed and published, Remorse, on the whole, was not well received. The Morning Post praises it -

"We never remember a serious Drama so universally well received on its first night by a crowded audience."

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But this notice is fulsome and uncritical, and its praise, as the above quotation shows, is of a very relative kind. The Times picks upon the obvious fault which Coleridge, as a poet - not to mention philosopher - rather than a dramatist, was more or less bound to commit: the poetry and the thought are too often unconnected with the drama:

"it must be acknowledged that this drama has sins, nay, a multitude, almost beyond the covering of charity. Its first fault, and the most easily avoided, is its unwieldy length: it was almost five hours long. Its next, is its passion for laying hold of everything that could allow an apology for a description . . . /examples given/. This may be poetical, but it has no connection with the plain, rapid, and living truth of the Drama. There is an essential difference in those two branches of the art. With the mere poet, time is nothing . . . To the dramatist, time is everything."

94

This weakness was pilloried once again by The Theatrical Inquirer :

"The business of this piece<sup>is</sup>, on numerous occasions, interrupted, to give the author an opportunity for displaying his talents for fine writing; there is a continual attempt at force, which often degenerates into abruptness, and no opportunity is lost for

93. The Morning Post, 25, i.1813.

94. The Times, 25.1.1813.

stinging metaphors and balancing antitheses. The dramatis personae, might be mistaken in some of the in-door scenes, for a set of poetesses and poets assembled together for the purpose of recitation."

95

This criticism is an exaggerated one: the "continual attempt at force" is too strong an expression for the relatively few passages, e.g., after the magic episode in Act III of Remorse, where Coleridge attempts to gain dramatic power by making a character react strongly and passionately to his situation.

The next month the same periodical reviewed the newly printed Remorse.<sup>96</sup> The reviewer shows the same signs of impatience as the dramatic critic, not entirely with Remorse,  
also  
but with Coleridge as a man and poet belonging to a "school of poetry" that his exertions first contributed to establish" and  
being distinguished by "various peculiarities and absurdities"<sup>97</sup>  
The reviewer sees as the great fault of Remorse -

"its exuberant volubility of soliloquy and dialogue. Instead of proceeding through their parts with the forcible, but expressive rapidity of actual passion, the dramatis personae indulge in their most agitated moments, and on the very brink of anxious expectation or precipitate revenge, in long and flowery descriptions of the scenery that surrounds them, in narratives of dreams and fancies, and sweet remembrances; in rhetorical

95. The Theatrical Inquisitor; or Literary Mirror, ii, (February, 1813), 57.

96. The Theatrical Inquisitor, ii, (March, 1813), 111.

97. The Theatrical Inquisitor, ii, (February, 1813), 157.

raptures, and splendid amplifications of imagery."

Hazlitt was unimpressed: writing in 1820, he describes Coleridge as the author "not only of a successful but a meritorious tragedy" but continues :

"We may say of him [Coleridge] what he has said of Mr. Maturin, that he is of the transcendental German school. He is a florid poet, and an ingenious meta-physician, who mistakes scholastic speculations for the intricate windings of the passions, and assigns possible reasons instead of actual motives for the excesses of his characters. He gives us studied special-pleadings for involuntary bursts of feeling, and the needless strain of tinkling sentiments for the point-blank language of nature. His Remorse is a spurious tragedy. Take the following passage, and then ask, whether the charge of sophistry and paradox, and dangerous morality, to startle the audience, in lieu of more legitimate methods of exciting their sympathy, which he brings against the author of Bertram, may not be retorted on his own head. Ordonio is made to defend the project of murdering his brother by such arguments as the following :- [Quotes Remorse III, ii, 96-104 and 107-114]. This is a way in which no one ever justified a murder to his own mind"

98  
99

I would agree with Hazlitt until he comes to a definite example: it is in the character of Ordonio to go in for "sophistry and paradox, and dangerous morality," and to attack Coleridge through his critique of C.R. Maturin's Bertram is no way to criticise Remorse. I think that this passage does show how a man like Ordonio might well approach a murder. Finally, Hazlitt

98. cf. Biographia Literaria, xxiii.

99. The London Magazine, 1820, Hazlitt, xviii, 309-310.

is wrong to say "murdering his brother" as Ordonio does not realise that the wizard is Alvar, his brother.

P.P. Howe feels sure that Hazlitt wrote the notice of Remorse in The Morning Chronicle, 25.i.1813, which praises Remorse at great length, but Mr. Howe suspects that Hazlitt "may have received orders which he dutifully carried out,"<sup>100</sup> Coleridge at this time still being a power in The Morning Chronicle. This suspicion is strengthened by the fact that Hazlitt is nowhere recorded as having referred to this article. In The Spirit of the Age,<sup>101</sup> Hazlitt does say of Remorse that "it is full of beautiful and striking passages," but from his first viewing of Remorse<sup>102</sup> Hazlitt seems to have been unimpressed by Coleridge as a dramatist.

H.C. Robinson reacted similarly after seeing the first performance of Remorse:

"Coleridge's great fault is that he indulges before the public in those metaphysical and philosophical speculations which are becoming only in solitude or with select minds. His two principal characters are philosophers of Coleridge's own school; the one a sentimental moralist, the other a sophisticated villain - both are dreamers."<sup>103</sup>

100. Hazlitt, xviii, 462-466, where most of the notice is printed.

101. Hazlitt, xi, 35.

102. cf. The Examiner, 17, ix. 1815; Hazlitt, v, 247.

103. H.C. Robinson, Diary, Reminiscences and Correspondence, selected and edited by T. Sadler, 1869, i, 406.

This criticism gives the most succinct assessment of Alvar and Ordonio that we could desire.

Such criticisms go beyond the play to the nature of the dramatist: Coleridge was not capable of sustained dramatic production. We came to the same conclusion in considering Wordsworth and The Borderers. With Wordsworth the dramatic defect lies in his profoundly personal and assured vision: he saw events from his own viewpoint and was convinced that it was the only viewpoint, or, at least, the only correct one. In The Borderers he has, as we have seen, dramatised a realisation he has had of one aspect of the nature of man, but in so doing he has concentrated upon it to such a degree that the play is <sup>put</sup> out of focus. Coleridge's defect lies rather in "those metaphysical and philosophical speculations," noticed by Robinson, combined with Coleridge's impatience over minutiae which has made Remorse - though not as bad as Osorio - a muddled play for an audience to follow as it should. The philosophical strain could not be removed and the work remains Coleridge's; it leads, however, to a disregard of the harmony of a character, as in this passage where Alhadra, Isidore's wife, is talking to Teresa:

"What was it then to suffer? 'Tis most right  
That such as you should hear it. - Know you not,  
What nature makes you mourn, she bids you heal?  
Great evils ask great passions to redress them  
And whirlwinds fitliest scatter pestilence." 104

We do not expect Alhadra to talk like this, but, if she does, then we want her actions to correspond.

The gain derived from Coleridge's philosophical side is found in Ordonio's speeches after the séance.<sup>105</sup> Here Ordonio is working out his thoughts, developing them, justifying himself - a "sophisticated villain", as Robinson said - all in an impassioned heat; we can sense and follow the tension and disturbance within the man: were Coleridge's metaphysical speculations all on this level we could not complain. But more often the speculations are delivered, not in the agony of birth, but as in a settled and peaceful middle-age, accepted and most undramatic. This weakness is seen at its worst in the conception of the play. Remorse, as Coleridge presents it, is a particularly Christian virtue, involving, as it does, recognition of sin, a request for forgiveness and a determination to amend one's ways. The sanction for Alvar seeking Ordonio's remorse is the Christian one of Ordonio's ultimate salvation. This is not easy to weave into the fabric of a play so that an average audience would understand and sympathise with the springs of

105. Remorse, III, ii; cf. p. 273<sup>and p. 274</sup> for quotation of these speeches from Osorio.

the action. The motives leading to a dramatic action are more convincing if they appeal immediately to the more human side of man's nature. Hazlitt notices this in The Morning Chronicle article previously referred to.<sup>106</sup>

"The duty of forgiveness, however amiable in itself, is not a dramatic virtue; and a tragic writer ought rather to effect his purpose by appealing to the passions of his audience, than to their goodness."

107

In Remorse Ordonio's motives are such as we can understand, not by reference to Christian doctrine, but simply to the human nature and passions which will be found in nearly every member of an audience: Ordonio loves Teresa. Certainly this in no way justifies attempted fratricide and suicide, and actual murder, deliberate fraud and misrepresentation, but it goes a long way in explaining them. Whereas Alvar, unless one is conversant with and accepts a certain amount of Christian metaphysics, seems to act in a rather unlikely fashion, and such an explanation as Alvar's when he meets his father -

"My tears must not flow!

I must not clasp his knees, and cry, My Father!" 108.

seems to be sanctioned as much by the need for the usual five acts to deploy the plot as by anything else. Alvar's decision

106. cf. p.291.

107. The Morning Chronicle, 25.1.1813; Hazlitt, xviii, 465

108. Remorse, III, 1, 16-17.



to leave Spain and return to Belgium could aggravate our confusion, so we are confronted with his conclusion, which seems completely opposed to his earlier determination, and do not see the struggle we may presume he must have had in which the good of bringing his brother to a sense of remorse battled with the good of showing charity to his father and Teresa.

Professor Allardyce Nicoll has summarised the dramatic weakness of both Wordsworth and Coleridge :

"They [the earliest romantic poets] were all so immersed in the study of philosophy and of political thought, they were all so downright in their convictions, that they felt it incumbent upon them to inform the world in direct terms of their opinions and their beliefs . . . . All these poets, too, were filled with admiration of German thought and literature. Unfortunately again they took from Germany, not its strength, but its weakness. They became immersed in a vague transcendental philosophy which often they could not appreciate or know not how to express . . . . 109

"In both The Borderers and Remorse there is action of a kind, but the trouble with most of the romantic dramatists was that they could not think of action and of character together. These two, in all greater plays, are fused. A romantic poet seemed to think of a 'passion' first of all, fit that 'passion' next to some quite harmless individual, and then add, as a last ingredient, a dash of action unrelated to either. Coleridge's Inquisition scenes are of this nature. At first sight they would appear to indicate that the poet-philosopher was not without his interest in the outward movements of men but a later consideration shows that these scenes have been introduced solely because the author feels that something is necessary to enliven his lengthy

109 This does not, of course, refer to Coleridge.

soliloquies and pages of poetic narrative. Both for Coleridge and for Wordsworth it is the abstract passion that counts, Wordsworth writing his drama to prove the thesis that 'sin and crime are apt to start from their opposite qualities,<sup>110</sup> and Coleridge, as his later title shows, dealing primarily with a 'passion.'"

111

A good play requires at least two levels: first, the simple story unfolded so that an audience awaits the outcome eagerly, as, e.g., the story of Macbeth; secondly, the deeper implications of the play, the insight given into the nature of a man, as, e.g., ambition and the pursuit of a desired end by evil means. The second can hardly exist, never mind have any meaning, without the first. Both Wordsworth and Coleridge approached the writing of tragedy from the wrong angle; having determined what the deeper implication was going to be, they tried to tack it on to a group of characters and make a story to fit it.

110. Preface to The Borderers.

111. Nicoll, iv, 192, 193.

CHAPTER VII

Shelley and Keats.

(i) Prometheus Unbound.

In dealing with Shelley we meet the first play of this period which was genuinely composed with no thought of the stage. We have encountered the so-called "closet drama" but even it was composed with the stage in mind, and very often became a closet drama faute de mieux, as Wordsworth's The Borderers,<sup>1</sup> which was submitted for performance, and only became a "closet drama" when it had been turned down by the theatre. Shelley's Prometheus Unbound (1820) is of a different nature. As Professor Allardyce Nicoll says, it is obviously making "no pretence towards theatrical form."<sup>2</sup>

Shelley published Prometheus Unbound as "A Lyrical Drama" and, writing to T.L. Peacock, 8.x.1818, he refers to it as "a lyric and classical drama."<sup>3</sup> Again writing to Peacock, 6.iv.1819, Shelley mentions Prometheus Unbound as "a drama, with characters and mechanism of a kind yet unattempted."<sup>4</sup> Writing to T. Medwin, after the play had been printed, Shelley referred to it, 20.vii.1820 :

1. cf.p.258.

2. Nicoll, iv, 191.

3. Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley, ed. R. Ingpen, ii,630. (Hereafter referred to as "Letters.")

4. ibid,p.688.

" "Prometheus Unbound" is in the merest spirit of ideal Poetry, and not, as the name would indicate, a mere imitation of the Greek drama, or indeed if I have been successful, is it an imitation of anything." 5

The differences between Prometheus Unbound and other dramas are immediately apparent. In the dramatis personae we find "The Earth", "Ocean", "The Spirit of the Earth", various "Spirits" and "Echoes", and a Dream plays a part in II, i. The only comparable list of dramatis personae would be found in the early miracle or morality plays, as, e.g., in Everyman we encounter "Good Deeds." But these early plays were written to be acted and were deliberately allegorical, whilst Prometheus Unbound was not written for a theatre and is not an allegory. Then the mechanics of Prometheus Unbound are very different from those of a more normal play. The scene is set in various localities: "A Ravine of Icy Rocks in the Indian Caucasus,"<sup>6</sup> "THE CAVE OF DEMOGORGON,"<sup>7</sup> "within a Cloud on the top of a snowy Mountain,"<sup>8</sup> "Heaven"<sup>9</sup>. We move easily and rapidly between such places, whilst spirits float on to the scene as required. Shelley has made no attempt to adapt his thought to theatrical dimensions or requirements. In the closet drama we can at least

5. ibid, p. 805.

6. I, i.

7. II, iv.

8. II, v.

9. III, i.

act the play in the theatre of our minds, but with Prometheus Unbound there can be no theatre, not even a mental one. Instead we are forced to envisage sheer space, vast distances and a bird-like capacity for seeing and travelling. Again the only comparable dramatic form is to be found in the Miracle plays where we are confronted with Hell and Heaven, but in these plays such settings are designed to encourage a realistic acceptance of Christian doctrine as the writers interpreted it: in Prometheus Unbound it is done to cut us off from any physical realism and to transport us to a different dimension. The verse of Prometheus Unbound is also different. The conventional blank verse form is interspersed with purely lyrical passages which could stand alone as such. These lyrical passages are more than a XIX century attempt to reproduce the effects of a Greek chorus; nor are they interspersed songssuch as may be found in many dramas, in Shelley's own The Cenci, for example.<sup>10</sup> The rhythms of these lyrical passages vary from

"Never such a sound before  
To the Indian waves we bore.  
A pilot asleep on the howling sea  
Leaped up from the deck in agony,  
And heard, and cried, 'Ah, woe is me!'  
And died as mad as the wild waves be."

11

10. The Cenci, V, iii, 130-145.

11. Prometheus Unbound, I, 93-98.



time-space nexus with which we are all familiar. From and by such a story we were enabled to follow the dramatist to his deeper meaning and to the thought which had gone into the writing of the play. We have already seen<sup>14</sup> how Wordsworth and Coleridge tried, but failed, to fit into this usual dramatic mould: instead of building a story around characters and so evolving a deeper meaning, they first - and last and all the time - thought of their deeper meaning or passion, and then tacked it unhappily upon a set of people and a story. Now we find Shelley suffering from the same trouble, only he does not attempt to cure it in a conventional way. Shelley in Prometheus Unbound has enlarged upon his ideas of the nature of the universe, particularly on the position of good and evil, just as he might develop his thought in lyrical poetry. He makes no attempt to give us a story: if we did not know the classical myth of Prometheus or did not read Shelley's Preface before we read the play, it would be completely bewildering. Instead of characters, Shelley gives us spirits for dramatis personae: Prometheus, Asia and the others are not consistent characters with their own personal, recognisable attributes, they are embodiments of thought.

14. cf. pp. 241-296.

This is emphasised throughout the play by the imagery Shelley uses. In the Preface Shelley says of the imagery:

"The imagery which I have employed will be found, in many instances, to have been drawn from the operations of the human mind, or from those external actions by which they are expressed." 15

This second type of imagery is, of course, quite a usual one; the first is far less common - it is exemplified in -

"From all the blasts of heaven thou hast descended:  
Yes, like a spirit, like a thought, which makes  
Unwonted tears throng to the horny eyes,  
And beatings haunt the desolated heart,  
Which should have learnt repose: thou hast descended  
Cradled in tempests; thou dost wake, O Spring!  
O child of many winds! As suddenly  
Thou comest as the memory of a dream,  
Which now is sad because it hath been sweet;  
Like genius, or like joy which riseth up  
As from the earth, clothing with golden clouds  
The desert of our life." 16

Here the coming of spring is "like a thought", and its suddenness "as the memory of a dream." Such a use of imagery is also found in Shelley's lyrics - another point of similarity between Prometheus Unbound and lyrical poetry. In comparison, more usual imagery stands out with a particular vividness -

"so the revenge  
Of the Supreme may sweep through vacant shades,  
As rainy wind through the abandoned gate  
Of a fallen palace." 17

15. Preface to Prometheus Unbound.

16. II, i, 1-12.

17. I, 215-218.



The sudden, clear picture evoked by this image is at one with the desolation we can imagine following upon "the revenge of the Supreme", yet it is here unexpected to have the immaterial concept of revenge brought home to us in such concrete terms<sup>18</sup> - a reversal of the earlier example where an actual event, the coming of spring, is likened to the asomatous coming of a thought.

Prometheus Unbound is concerned with Prometheus's defiance of Jupiter. As in the classical myth, Prometheus is bound to a precipice in everlasting torment, but in Shelley's drama he chooses to stay there and refuses to buy his freedom, as in the myth, by revealing to Jupiter the ill that will befall him if he marries Thetis. As Shelley says :

"But, in truth, I was averse from a catastrophe so feeble as that of reconciling the Champion with the Oppressor of mankind. The moral interest of the fable, which is so powerfully sustained by the sufferings and endurance of Prometheus, would be annihilated if we could conceive of him as unsaying his high language and quailing before his successful and perfidious adversary." 19

By this defiance of the servant of evil, and finally by the withdrawal of the curse he put upon Jupiter, Prometheus is ultimately freed as his noble, passive resistance enables

18. cf. Blake's "Pity like a new-born babe."

19. Preface.

Demogorgon to cast down Jupiter. When Prometheus repents him of his curse, Jupiter's fall is inevitable because Goodness - which is represented by Prometheus - has abjured all evil, as this curse was Prometheus's one fault. Prometheus calls to Earth his mother:

"Mother, let not aught  
Of that which may be evil, pass again  
My lips, or those of aught resembling me." 20

After hearing his curse re-spoken by the Phantasm of Jupiter, Prometheus exclaims :

"It doth repent me: words are quick and vain;  
Grief for awhile is blind, and so was mine.  
I wish no living thing to suffer pain." 21

Thus the spirit of man - Prometheus - completely embraces goodness and so may be re-united with Asia, who is full of love and beauty :

"Asia, thou light of life,  
Shadow of beauty unbeheld: and ye,  
Fair sister nymphs, who made long years of pain  
Sweet to remember through your love and care:  
Henceforth we will not part." 22.

so Prometheus addresses Asia and other "nymphs."

In Prometheus Unbound mankind is seen in the Shelley vision as capable of progress in goodness until the human race has achieved the state of freedom and brotherhood expressed by

20. I, 218-220.

21. I, 303-305.

22. III, iii, 6-10.

the Spirit of the Hour in III, iv, 98-204, an impassioned speech telling of the world as Shelley wanted it to be and thought it could be. This belief of Shelley's is not of supreme importance as such in the drama - we do not have to accept it, so long as we realise that it is important as providing the motive for Prometheus's resistance.

The metaphysical idea behind Prometheus Unbound is that

"the type of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature, impelled by the purest and truest motives to the best and noblest ends." - 24

embodied as Prometheus, when united with Love - as Asia - can successfully overthrow Evil - Jupiter; that all resistance to evil must be passive, as such resistance must be good before it can be effective; and that finally Evil encompasses its own end; for it is not Prometheus, nor Asia, nor both together, who overthrow Jupiter, but Demogorgon, who is Jupiter's own offspring. Demogorgon tells Jupiter his name is "Eternity".<sup>25</sup> C.M. Bowra<sup>26</sup> suggests that Shelley at an earlier period, with his belief in "the automatic amelioration of human life", might have meant by this that in the course of time evil was bound to be destroyed, but by the time Shelley was writing Prometheus Unbound he had modified his earlier views and that by "Eternity"

24. Preface.

25. III, i, 52.

26. The Romantic Imagination, 1950, pp.103-126.

he is much more likely to mean "those eternal things which are always present in the full scheme of being." Thus Bowra likewise interprets Demogorgon as being the Spirit of Life and significantly his dwelling is hard to find.<sup>27</sup> But Demogorgon cannot assert his power until Prometheus has perfected his goodness and is re-united with Asia. In Act I Prometheus is not completely filled with love: he cannot see in Christ an image of those who suffer because they love, he can only see the suffering men have inflicted upon each other in the name of Christ. Prometheus is presented with a mental image of Christ on the Cross and exclaims :

"O, horrible! Thy name I will not speak,  
It hath become a curse. I see, I see  
The wise, the mild, the lofty, and the just,  
Whom thy slaves hate for being like to thee,  
Some hunted by foul lies from their heart's home,  
An early-chosen, late-lamented home." 28

this is part of Jupiter's more refined torture, mental torture, as Prometheus is shown the apparently absolute futility of fighting or resisting evil -

"In each human heart terror survives  
The ravin it has gorged: the loftiest fear  
All that they would disdain to think were true:  
Hypocrisy and custom make their minds  
The fanes of many a worship, now outworn.

27. II, i and iii. F.L. Jones in an article "Shelley and Spenser," P.M.L.A., (1924), xxxix, 666, points out Shelley's debt to Spenser, The Fairie Queene, IV, ii, 47 for some aspects of the realm of Demogorgon.

28. I, 603-608.

They dare not devise good for man's estate,  
And yet they know not that they do not dare.  
The good want power, but to weep barren tears.  
The powerful goodness want: worse need for them.  
The wise want love; and those who love want wisdom;  
And all best things are thus confused to ill.  
Many are strong and rich, and would be just,  
But live among their suffering fellow-men  
As if none felt; they know not what they do." 29

The chorus prophesies that once Prometheus is aware of love mankind's position will miraculously improve.<sup>30</sup> Asia realises anew her love for Prometheus and with her sister descends to Demogorgon's cave to discover, if possible, the mystery of the universe. Demogorgon can only reply: "the deep truth is imageless" <sup>31</sup>, but when Asia voices her belief in Prometheus's ultimate triumph over Jupiter, Demogorgon immediately shows her the Chariot's of the Hours preparing to ascend to Jupiter and dethrone him, because Prometheus is perfected in goodness, by withdrawing his curse, and in love, for he finally said to Panthea, Asia's sister - "I said all hope was vain but love"<sup>32</sup> and now Asia has shown her perfect trust in Prometheus. Once Jupiter is overthrown, Prometheus Unbound is a paean of joy celebrating the world as it should be, ending by Demogorgon

29. I, 618-631. This passage must surely have been in W.B. Yeats's mind in writing "The Second Coming", e.g. "The best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity."

30. I, 672-833.

31. II, iv, 115.

32. I, 824.

delivering a solemn warning that evil is unending and it is only by constantly resisting it that goodness can be kept alive as a power, or brought to perfection in an individual. Were Prometheus a dramatic character, the conclusion of the play would be disappointing because it is naturally difficult to make the released and relaxed Prometheus as strong a character as the lonely, heroic sufferer. But Prometheus is not a character, he is the embodiment of ideas, and the conclusion of Prometheus Unbound perfects these and shows them triumphant.

This slight exposition owes much to C.M. Bowra's interpretation in The Romantic Imagination. Professor N.I. White takes a slightly different view of the play:

"Jupiter, the active agent of evil, owes his power to Prometheus; and an inherent, ineradicable impulse in man's nature and in the whole universe stands always ready to free humanity from its sufferings (really self-imposed) when the human spirit, like Prometheus, demonstrates its worthiness by steadfastness and generosity."

33

and later :

"The philosophic basis of his poem /Shelley's Prometheus Unbound/ remains what it had been from the first - absolute faith in a tide of change that sets in as inevitably as the spring when conditions are made ripe for it. It is very clear (in the last lines of the poem) what these conditions were to Shelley so far as human behaviour

33. N.I. White, Shelley, 1947, ii, 117.

is concerned; and it is also quite clear that Shelley recognised their severity and difficulty." 34

Thus to Professor White Prometheus Unbound is more in the nature of a prophecy of what the world could be like if only men exercised the goodness within them; whereas to C.M. Bowra it is rather a challenge given by Shelley to mankind:

"[Shelley] hints that not only is there no end to evil but that evil is even necessary to create goodness, and the highest goodness lies in an unending struggle." 35

There is not a great deal of difference between the prophecy whose fulfilment is dependent upon such difficult conditions, and the challenge which really consists mainly of the difficult conditions upon which the prophecy depends. This difference is involved in Mrs. Shelley's "Note on Prometheus Unbound" where she says :

"The prominent feature of Shelley's theory of the destiny of the human species was that evil is not inherent in the system of the creation, but an accident that might be expelled.... Shelley believed that mankind had only to will that there should be no evil, and there would be none."

As Professor White has pointed out,<sup>36</sup> this is contradicted by statements in Prometheus Unbound itself, as in Demogorgon's

34. ibid. p.118.

35. op.cit., p.124.

36. op.cit., p.123-4.

warning at the end of the play :

"Gentleness, Virtue, Wisdom, and Endurance,  
These are the seals of that most firm assurance  
Which bars the pit over Destruction's strength;  
And if, with infirm hand, Eternity,  
Mother of many acts and hours, should free  
The serpent that would clasp her with his length;  
These are the spells by which to reassume  
An empire o'er the disentangled doom.

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

37

This apparent contradiction between what Shelley has written and what Mary Shelley has noted may, I would suggest, spring from an uncertainty within Shelley himself, who was never absolute either in believing evil to be eternal or in believing it to be dependent for its existence upon mankind itself.

Interpretations of Prometheus Unbound as a whole, and also of various individual passages or characters, are numerous, but in dealing with Prometheus Unbound as a blank verse tragedy it is not my intention to scrutinise such interpretations. Instead I would rather refer to Prometheus Unbound as a play

37. IV, 562-578.



excelling in its poetry, and as an example of a very limited number of comparable plays.

Shelley's blank verse in Prometheus Unbound is strong, flexible, and imaginative; in reading many of the speeches one is filled with an excitement which seems to come directly from Shelley's own creative power, an experience which is very rare in the plays of this period. A certain debt to Shakespeare has been pointed out by D.L. Clark in an article "Shelley and Shakespeare"<sup>38</sup> as, for example, single lines such as Shelley's "By his thought-executing ministers,"<sup>39</sup> and Shakespeare's "Yon sulphurous and thought-executing fires"<sup>40</sup>, and longer passages such as Prometheus Unbound, III, iii, 10-36 and Lear V, iii, 8-19.<sup>41</sup> But unlike so many of his contemporaries Shelley has not allowed Shakespearean or Elizabethan influences generally to vitiate his work. Particularly is this so in the dramatic form he chose for Prometheus Unbound. In the more regularly dramatic form of The Cenci the influence of Shakespeare is more obvious and, in some scenes, slightly regrettable.<sup>42</sup>

Prometheus Unbound has a form differing from that of

38. P.M.L.A., liv (1939), 261-287.

39. I, 387.

40. Lear, III, ii, 4.

41. In dealing with The Cenci we again find a debt to Lear; cf. p. 345 ff.

42. cf. p. 340 ff.

most other dramas. Some of its characteristics are shared by other plays, for example its most obvious feature - its remoteness from the theatre. This is also found in C. Wells's Joseph and His Brethren (1824),<sup>43</sup> a long, dramatic poem written in blank verse, which is assigned to the various characters, but with no other theatrical concession being made. The two plays, Prometheus Unbound, and Joseph and His Brethren, are not to be compared in poetic quality but it is interesting to see that Wells could also conceive of a play with no theatrical reference. Swinburne delighted in Joseph and His Brethren; his introduction to the play abounds in what Swinburne obviously regards as praise -

"There are lines even in the overture of his poem which might, it seems to me, more naturally be mistaken even by an expert in verse for the work of the young Shakespeare . . . "

and, after a quotation :

"This is another of those instances of reserve which abound in Shakespeare only. Touches like these occur in Webster, but hardly in any third dramatist. Cyril Tourneur perhaps has hit here and there upon something of the same effect."

This comparison of Wells with Shakespeare, not to mention the condescension towards Webster and Tourneur, even if it were correct, is surely nearer to condemnation than to praise for

43. cf. p. 167.

an early XIX century dramatist who should be writing in the idiom and atmosphere of his own age. Swinburne's own attempts at lyrical drama are not comparable with Prometheus Unbound, neither in thought nor execution. On the other hand, in such a play as Atlanta in Calydon the Greek influence is most apparent and the play could be staged.

To return to Shelley's contemporaries, Milman<sup>44</sup> wrote what he termed "Dramatic Poems," e.g., The Fall of Jerusalem (1820), where in his introduction Milman says :

"Every reader will at once perceive from the nature of the interest, and from the language, that this drama was neither written with a view to public representation, nor can be adapted to it without being entirely remodelled and rewritten. The critic will draw the same conclusion from certain peculiarities in the composition, irreconcilable with the arrangements of the theatre..."

Matthew Arnold essayed the same genre in Empedocles on Etna (1852), which has a resemblance to Prometheus Unbound beyond that of untheatrical conception. Arnold is also concerned, in his way, with the eternal questions of good and evil, and he uses a definite lyric form as well as blank verse, as in I, ii, where a long speech is delivered in five line stanzas of four acatalectic iambic trimeters rhyming a b a b, ending with an alexandrine rhyming with the alexandrine of the next stanza.

44. cf. p. 167.

Thomas Hardy in The Dynasts (Part First, printed 1903; Part Second, 1906: Part Third, 1908), is another example of a writer using the dramatic form for entirely non-theatrical ends. Hardy has deliberately excluded the theatre because he wanted to use vast panoramic settings which no mental theatre, never mind a physical one, could encompass. He probably approaches nearer to Shelley than any other dramatist in his use of abstract ideas. His formidable dramatis personae include "Phantom Intelligences" such as "The Ancient Spirit of the Years" and "The Spirit of the Pities." Nevertheless, no other poet has produced a play really comparable to Prometheus Unbound, for no other poet exclusively dramatised ideas instead of people. Who is Prometheus? is a question we may not readily answer, proof of which is to be found in the number of different answers critics have so often given. It is, in fact, a question which may not properly be posed. Joseph or Napoleon, however, are historical figures concerning whom a certain amount of recorded history remains. Swinburne follows the record of Atlanta in a way different from Shelley's treatment of Prometheus, which depends so much upon his own ideas of the universe. No matter what abstract qualities or ideas may be evoked by such figures as Joseph or Atlanta, the treatment is not the same as that of Prometheus, who starts his Shelleyean existence as an abstract idea and then becomes a

dramatic character. The two are well fused, but the ideas represented by Prometheus are obviously more important to Shelley than Prometheus as a character or Prometheus Unbound as a play. This may be proved, I think, by Act IV, which was written

"several months after [Shelley] when at Florence . . . . . conceived that a fourth act, a sort of hymn of rejoicing in the fulfilment of the prophecies with regard to Prometheus, ought to be added to complete the composition." 45

This act serves, not to enlarge Prometheus's character, nor to improve the form of the play, but to emphasise the ideas lying behind Prometheus Unbound. As we will see in The Cenci<sup>46</sup>, Shelley was always unwilling to leave any important idea, but felt he had to repeat it to make sure his point was made clearly enough. Act IV of Prometheus Unbound reveals the world relaxed and happy, as it should always be, once Jupiter has fallen. The character of Prometheus is not strengthened by Act IV - on the contrary, such character as he does have is weakened, because, once he has won the battle and is no longer a lonely, tragic, suffering hero unjustly persecuted, Prometheus cannot hold our attention with the same intensity as he did before. The dramatic structure of the play is not strengthened but weakened, for this act is dramatically unnecessary. But

45. Mary Shelley, "Note on Prometheus Unbound."

46. cf. p. 339.

what is strengthened is the presentation of the ideas underlying Prometheus Unbound, which, for Shelley, was the most important factor -

"Let this opportunity be conceded to me of acknowledging that I have, what a Scotch philosopher characteristically terms 'a passion for reforming the world' . . . . .  
My purpose has hitherto been simply to familiarise the highly refined imagination of the more select classes of poetical readers with beautiful idealisms of moral excellence . . . ." 47

I am not suggesting that Arnold or Hardy felt that the ideas underlying their plays were unimportant, but I am suggesting that Shelley regarded his ideas as of such paramount importance that his dramatis personae become embodiments of the ideas, whereas for other poets the dramatis personae are playing roles which all combine to present the play's underlying vision. With Shelley, however, the vision is not underlying, but presented boldly and openly.

(ii) The Cenci.

Shelley started to write The Cenci after reading a MS. which, he says, presents such a story that -

47. Prometheus Unbound, Preface.

"if told so as to present to the reader all the feelings of those who once acted it, their hopes and fears, their confidences and misgivings, their various interests, passions and opinions, acting upon and with each other, yet all conspiring to one tremendous end, it would be as a light to make apparent some of the most dark and secret caverns of the human heart. "

48

In her "Note on The Cenci," Mrs. Shelley tells us, "Shelley's imagination became strongly excited" both by the MS. and a portrait which was supposedly by Beatrice Cenci.<sup>49</sup> As Shelley tells the story, it concerns Count Cenci, an elderly, debauched and thoroughly evil man who hates his children and plans their death. Cenci, in Act I, gives a banquet to celebrate the deaths of two of his sons; then he contrives a living death for another son, Giacomo, by turning all Rome and even his own wife and children against him; finally he commits incest with his daughter, Beatrice. Beatrice and Lucretia, her step-mother, encouraged by Giacomo and Orsino - "a Prelate" in the dramatis personae - plan Cenci's assassination, but the attempt fails because Cenci arrives at the fateful spot unexpectedly early. Then two men - both at one time injured by Cenci - are hired to kill him, which they finally do by strangulation. The

48. The Cenci, Preface.

49. A. Bertolotti, Francesco Cenci e la sua famiglia, 1879, "disproved the authenticity of this picture. Cf. E.S. Bates A Study of Shelley's Drama 'The Cenci' New York, 1908 p.4. note 1. This section of Chapter VII is greatly indebted to E.S. Bates (Hereafter this book will be referred to as "Bates").

deed is no sooner done than messengers arrived from the Pope to arrest Cenci. Hitherto Cenci has been more or less secure from any punishment for his misdeeds, as he pays the Papacy large sums to atone for his sins and consequently the Pope has a continual interest in his existence. When the messengers arrive, Cenci's death is discovered, suspicions are aroused by the circumstances, the murderers are caught, and from a letter found on one of them Beatrice and Lucretia are suspected and arrested. At the subsequent trial Beatrice scornfully denies that she murdered her father or had anything to do with the men arrested as murderers, only one of whom survives to be tried as the other was killed whilst being arrested. Beatrice, along with Lucretia and Giacomo, is, however, found guilty and they are all sentenced to death.

We can see from this outline that the story has aspects well calculated to attract Shelley; organised religion appearing in such a bad light; evil springing, not from any external agent, but from the mind of man himself; the power, courage, suffering and beauty of Beatrice, and, on a lesser level, the parental tyranny of Cenci. These points are emphasised by noting some of the changes Shelley made in using the MS.<sup>50</sup> account:

50. For this I am indebted to N.I. White, Shelley, ii, 143, and to Bates, p.49-50.



Orsino, in the MS. is a priest who is friendly and sympathetic towards Cenci's family. Shelley changes the emphasis and makes Orsino's friendship a cloak for his lustful desire for Beatrice and motivates him throughout either specifically by lust, or more generally by a decidedly un-Christian attitude to life. N.I. White observes that Shelley's 'numerous references to priests throughout his works never once contain a favourable adjective' and that Orsino is 'made a part of the net of evil by which Beatrice is surrounded.'<sup>51</sup> In the MS. Cenci is an atheist, but Shelley portrays him as an abominable Christian who creates God in his own image and gives "Christian" sanctions to justify his evil. This change is particularly effective from Shelley's point of view because not only is the church revealed as riddled with iniquity, but the effects of Christianity upon an individual are described as pandering to his evil will. It also emphasised Shelley's belief that tyranny and religious organisation of any kind were always united.

Other changes are made for the sake of propriety; Cenci's sin, for which, as the play opens, he has just paid a large sum to the Pope, is referred to by Shelley as murder, whilst in the MS. it is his third conviction for sodomy;

51. White, ii, 143.

neither are Cenci's dealings with courtesans mentioned, nor his attempt to persuade Beatrice to incest. In the MS. Cenci is murdered by nails being driven into his head, and Beatrice and Lucretia draw out the nails before throwing the body into the garden; Shelley has hired assassins who strangle Cenci and dispose of the body. A sense of tragic irony probably accounts for two other, minor, changes: in the MS. one of Cenci's sons is killed at Mass, by a private enemy, in Shelley he is killed by the church falling down; in the MS. the other son is simply assassinated, but in Shelley he

"was stabbed in error by a jealous man,  
Whilst she he loved was sleeping with his rival." 52

Then Shelley invents the order from the Pope to arrest Cenci which is put into operation just after the murder is committed. This, whilst ironic, is unfortunately very much out of step with the Papal character as manifested throughout the play. The Pope as portrayed in Shelley is, nevertheless, a much less depraved character than in the MS. account - no doubt Shelley realised that if he followed the MS. on this point he would lose sympathy by his apparent exaggeration. On the other hand he may have wanted to stress Cenci's villainy by setting it in a slightly less dark mould.

W.S. Landor dealt with the same subject in Beatrice Cenci (1851), but, as we might expect, his rendering is very different from Shelley's. Beatrice is portrayed as a child who thinks highly of "Father dear",<sup>53</sup> and unless we know her history the reason for Beatrice's crime is almost unfathomable, so disguised is it by Landor's very "poëtic" verse. This portrayal makes one all the more aware of the strength of Shelley's Beatrice and the positive evil of Count Cenci - in Landor Cenci is not so much evil as just not good. Landor's interpretation, like that of Shelley, rests upon his idea of the character of Beatrice, which he expressed in a letter to J. Forster :

"Alas, alas, poor Cenci! she never told her grief. Of this I am certain. In her heart was the same heroism as that of Prometheus; no torture could extort the dreadful secret; she would have died without disclosing it." 54.

In a letter to Leigh Hunt, Landor describes his attitude to Shelley's Count Cenci :

"on reading it [The Cenci] again, it struck me as impossible that a criminal and hypocrite should boast of his cruelty. Scene 3 is beyond all credibility - A feast to celebrate the death of his children." 55

53. Beatrice Cenci, iii, 115.

54. J. Forster, Walter Savage Landor, ii, 494. This is quoted by K.G. Pfeiffer, "Landor's Critique of 'The Cenci'", Studies in Philology, XXXIX (1942), 676.

55. From a letter to Leigh Hunt first printed in K.G. Pfeiffer's article, cf. preceding note.

Landon's attitudes to Beatrice and Count Cenci explain his different interpretation.

The thought behind The Cenci is typical of Shelley. Evil is presented, not as a power scouring the earth seeking whom it may devour, but as a subjective attribute which is nurtured in the mind of man. This evil is constantly fighting good - as in Prometheus Unbound - but the goodness must be of a very high quality indeed if it hopes to gain the victory, though it may gain a moral victory. Beatrice's purity and goodness are marred by her evil desire for revenge; goodness should suffer passively as Prometheus does. Shelley recognised this as Beatrice's tragic flaw:

"Revenge, retaliation, atonement, are pernicious mistakes. If Beatrice had thought in this manner she would have been wiser and better; but she would never have been a tragic character."

56

Yet as Professor N.I. White has pointed out :

"in writing the drama Shelley is so sympathetic with his heroine that he can scarcely tolerate his own notion of revenge as a part of her character. Her real motive for the murder is self-protection and an almost religious mission to rid her family and the world of a dangerous monster. It is only by a narrow margin that she escapes the dramatic fault of being a flawless character."

57

56. The Cenci, Preface.

57. White, ii, 139.

Another Shelley theme is in the representation of the Church of Rome, not so much as evil in itself, but rather as inevitably corrupted by the evil found in her members as individuals. This is particularly applicable to Orsino, who is revealed in an odious light and is not only a member but a priest of the Church.

There are larger issues in The Cenci apart from such Shelleyan themes, but before passing on to them it is interesting to note that there is little or no internal conflict within the characters themselves. Cenci is never seriously torn by indecision about his deed: before the play opens he has made up his mind and, although he may pause, he never wavers :

"/Drinking the wine.

Be thou the resolution of quick youth  
Within my veins, and manhood's purpose stem,  
And age's firm, cold, subtle villainy;  
As if thou wert indeed my children's blood  
Which I did thirst to drink! The charm works well;  
It must be done; it shall be done, I swear!" 58

Similarly Beatrice is not torn by conflicting feelings or thoughts: she "retires absorbed in thought"<sup>59</sup> and then advances to the front of the stage determined, so that she experiences no conflict which the audience could observe:

58. I, iii, 173-178; also cf. II, i, 174-193.

59. III, i, 179.

"I have prayed  
To God, and I have talked with my own heart,  
And have unravelled my entangled will,  
And have at length determined what is right." 60

Lucretia asks :

"You think we should devise  
His death?  
Beatrice. And execute what is devised  
And suddenly. We must be brief and bold." 61

In the Preface Shelley refers to a quite different kind of  
conflict :

"It is in the restless and anatomizing  
casuistry with which men seek the justification  
of Beatrice, yet feel that she has done what  
needs justification; it is in the superstitious  
horror with which they contemplate alike her  
wrongs and their revenge, that the dramatic  
character of what she did and suffered, consists."

In connection with this point in particular, and the  
Preface in general, Joan Rees has made an interesting note.<sup>62</sup>  
Mrs. Rees points out a similarity between Shelley's remarks  
upon Beatrice<sup>63</sup> and Plato's Republic, X, 603c-605c. Plato is  
dealing with dramatic poetry and describing the conflict within  
a good man when afflicted: reason tells him to resist grief,  
but emotion desires an outlet. Reason is the higher authority  
but the emotional impulse permits of a variety of response and  
is thus highly suited to dramatic representation. Shelley

60. III, i, 218-221.

61. III, i, 226-228.

62. "The Preface to The Cenci" The Review of English Studies,  
viii, May, 1957, 172-173.

63. cf. p. 322.

asserts that a "wiser and better" Beatrice, who rejected revenge, would have no appeal for a theatre audience, and this links up with his remark to Charles and James Ollier that "Cenci is written for the multitude, and ought to sell well."<sup>64</sup>

The Cenci presents a problem as no other play of the period does: if a man commits crime after crime and the proper authorities take no decisive action to prevent the continuance of this evil, are those whom he is irreparably injuring entitled to take the law into their own hands? Shelley's answer would be that, whenever retribution leaves the hands of an impersonal state and goes into the hands of individuals, particularly those directly concerned, then it becomes revenge, which is evil. In The Cenci the issue becomes more involved because Beatrice, Giacomo and Lucretia are encouraged in their determination by Orsino, a priest whose advice, as good Romans, they should respect.<sup>64a</sup> Not only that, but Cenci's death results from the decisions of a number of people, not only his family, but Orsino and the two murderers. Another point raised is that of parental authority: children are completely dependent upon their parents, and as young men and women they are expected to

64. Letters, ii, 766.

64a. E.S. Bates does, however, point out that Beatrice is not really a good Roman Catholic, as she addresses herself directly to God and does not depend upon a priestly intermediary (cf. Bates, p.71).

respect their parents - yet since parents are not, ipso facto, founts of pure goodness or common sense, how far may a child go in defiance of parental authority?

In this we can immediately see something that sharply distinguishes The Cenci from all other plays we have examined so far apart from Prometheus Unbound: none of them have raised issues beyond those of their immediate story. Even Wordsworth and Coleridge, in spite of the thought lying behind their plays, raise few deeper issues: Oswald shows his evil, Marmaduke his goodness, but there is very little suggestion that the two are locked in a never-ending struggle: Wordsworth has merely demonstrated his thesis that

"as in the trials to which life subjects us, sin and crime are apt to start from their very opposite qualities, so are there no limits to the hardening of the heart, and the perversion of the understanding to which they may carry their slaves." 65

Such larger themes as The Borderers does have do not emerge as clearly as those in The Cenci because Wordsworth was not such a good dramatist as Shelley.

→ In Coleridge Ordonio is ultimately brought to remorse by the gentle Alvar, but again there is no suggestion of a perpetual struggle beyond those characters, and not even a development of the place of remorse in the Christian world, which was surely

65. Wordsworth, The Borderers, note.



as much a theme of Coleridge's thinking as, let us say, the idea of evil as springing from individuals themselves was a part of Shelley's. Wordsworth and Coleridge, in fact, seem to have got one idea into their heads and pursued it so implacably and with such single-minded zeal that all other ideas are forgotten or temporarily laid aside, so that one could find it hard to believe that Remorse and Biographia Literaria were written by the same man. In such plays, the plot, its dramatic unfolding and the language in which it is described may all impress us, but if we are not faced with some larger theme lying behind the plot and with a wide range of stimulating ideas connected with it we are aware, however slightly, of a deficiency in the play. I think Wordsworth has the first of these prerequisites, but it loses much of its power because the second is missing.

In developing the story, Shelley, as we might expect, uses language to excellent effect. The blank verse is amazingly flexible: we are never unhappily aware that we are reading blank verse, but only aware of a poetic rhythm which carries the play smoothly and beautifully forward. Cenci's speeches are among the most powerful in the play and bring him and his evil vividly to life. This passage is a fair example :

"Camillo.

Art thou not

Most miserable?

Cenci.

Why, miserable? -

No. - I am what your theologians call  
Hardened; - which they must be in impudence  
So to revile a man's peculiar taste.  
True, I was happier than I am, while yet  
Manhood remained to act the thing I thought;  
While lust was sweeter than revenge; and now  
Invention palls: - Ay, we must all grow old -  
And but that there yet remains a deed to act  
Whose horror might make sharp an appetite  
Duller than mine - I'd do - I know not what.  
When I was young I thought of nothing else  
But pleasure; and I fed on honey sweets:  
Men, by St. Thomas! cannot live like bees,  
And I grew tired: - yet, till I killed a foe,  
And heard his groans, and heard his children's groans,  
Knew I not what delight was else on earth,  
Which now delights me little. I the rather  
Look on such pangs as terror ill conceals,  
The dry fixed eyeball; the pale quivering lip,  
Which tell me that the spirit weeps within  
Tears bitterer than the bloody sweat of Christ.  
I rarely kill the body, which preserves,  
Like a strong prison, the soul within my power,  
Wherein I feed it with the breath of fear  
For hourly pain."

66

We may notice how Cenci is expressing himself in ordinary speech, and yet it falls, naturally it would seem, into blank verse rhythms. Cenci is here giving a very good account of his own character to Cardinal Camillo, who replies :

"Hell's most abandoned fiend  
Did never, in the drunkenness of guilt,  
Speak to his heart as now you speak to me;  
I thank my God that I believe you not."

67

66. I, i, 91-117.

67. I, i, 117-120.

This is part of the Cenci tragedy; such evil as Cenci exults in, plans, and commits is, to the normal person, unbelievable.

In accordance with the theory expressed in the preface, Shelley uses imagery with power:

"In a dramatic composition the imagery and the passion should interpenetrate one another, the former being reserved simply for the full development and illustration of the latter. Imagination is as the immortal God which should assume flesh for the redemption of mortal passion" 68

M.E. Prior, commenting upon this, remarks:

"Such methods, admirably suited to poems of a lyrical nature, are less well adapted to the drama where properly the diction demands to be ordered finally by the action, and not by emotion." 69

This weakness, a reliance rather upon emotion than upon action is, more or less, found in all the romantic poets who turned dramatists. Shelley does, however, blend the imagery and the passion well, as when Beatrice, fearful of the future, wishes :

"O God! That I were buried with my brothers!  
And that the flowers of this departed spring  
Were fading on my grave!"

70

This links up with the presentation of Beatrice throughout as a young girl who has just blossomed into a fleeting womanhood.

The imagery of night and day, of darkness and of light, is well used by Cenci as he is contemplating his final horrific deed :

68. Preface.

69. M.E. Prior, The Language of Tragedy, 1947, New York, p.244.

70. I, iii, 137-139.

"The all-beholding sun yet shines; I hear  
A busy stir of men about the streets;  
I see the bright sky through the window panes:  
It is a garish, broad, and peering day;  
Loud, light, suspicious, full of eyes and ears,  
And every little corner, nook and hole  
Is penetrated with the insolent light.  
Come darkness! Yet, what is day to me?  
And wherefore should I wish for night, who do  
A deed which shall confound both night and day?  
'Tis she shall grope through a bewildering mist  
Of horror: if there be a sun in heaven  
She shall not dare to look upon its beams;  
Nor feel its warmth. Let her then wish for night;  
The act I think shall soon extinguish all  
For me: I bear a darker deadlier gloom  
Than the earth's shade, or interlunlar air,  
Or constellations quenched in murkiest cloud,  
In which I walk secure and unbeheld  
Towards my purpose. - Would that it were done!" 71

As well as the contrast of evil and goodness, of darkness and light, this illustrates Cenci's character, showing that he is seeking evil for its own sake. "Would that it were done!" links up with an earlier passage in the same scene :

" 'Tis an awful thing  
To touch such mischief as I now conceive:  
So men sit shivering on the dewy bank,  
And try the chill stream with their feet; once in...  
How the delighted spirit pants for joy!" 72

This suggests that Cenci is not propelled by any external power of evil, but has conceived this hideous deed within himself and now sees it as a challenge - as a man will not turn back once he has decided to go in swimming.

71. II, i, 174-193.

72. II, i, 124-128.

Beatrice shows the same use of imagery after the deed is done, when she has determined to kill Cenci. Beatrice is describing the spot chosen for the murder:

"But I remember  
Two miles on this side of the fort, the road  
Crosses a deep ravine; 'tis rough and narrow  
And winds with short turns down the precipice;  
And in its depth there is a mighty rock,  
Which has from unimaginable years  
Sustained itself with terror and with toil  
Over a gulf, and with the agony  
With which it clings seems slowly coming down;  
Even as a wretched soul hour after hour,  
Clings to the mass of life; yet clinging, leans;  
And leaning, makes more dark the dread abyss  
In which it fears to fall; beneath this crag  
Huge as despair, as if in weariness,  
The melancholy mountain yawns...below,  
You hear but see not an impetuous torrent  
Raging among the caverns, and a bridge  
Crosses the chasm; and high above there grow  
With intersecting trunks, from crag to crag,  
Cedars, and yews, and pines; whose tangled hair  
Is matted in one solid roof of shade  
By the dark ivy's twine. At noonday here  
'Tis twilight, and at sunset blackest night." 73

This passage is not only a wonderfully vivid, poetic description of a deep ravine, but it is an image of Beatrice's condition, as is emphasised by the direct comparison of the rock with a soul. It also echoes Cenci's use of dark and light: the sun never penetrates the darkness of this chasm which is completely shaded over by the dark, funereal cedar, yew, pine, ivy. The implications of this speech for Beatrice's own condition are obvious.

Shelley's language displays the power we expect. In his descriptions he appeals immediately and vividly to our senses, in, for example, the passage where we first see Beatrice after the incest:

"O, horrible!  
The pavement sinks under my feet! The walls  
Spin round! I see a woman weeping there,  
And standing calm and motionless, whilst I  
slide giddily as the world reels...My God!  
The beautiful blue heaven is flecked with blood!  
The sunshine on the floor is black! The air  
Is changed to vapours such as the dead breathe  
In charnel pits! Pah! I am choked! There creeps  
A clinging, black, contaminating mist  
About me ... 'tis substantial, heavy, thick,  
I cannot pluck it from me, for it glues  
My fingers and my limbs to one another,  
And eats into my sinews, and dissolves  
My flesh to a pollution, poisoning  
The subtle, pure, and inmost spirit of life! " 74

The vividness stands out: "beautiful blue heaven" and "blood", black sunshine: the light has turned to darkness and the very source of light itself is black; whilst the contamination Beatrice feels is expressed as "A clinging, black, contaminating mist" which, in all its blackness, has fastened upon her, "poisoning the subtle, pure and inmost spirit of life." She feels herself and the world tottering, yet realises that for other people the world remains stable. The description of the sinking pavements and reeling world naturally goes beyond "An Apartment in the Cenci Palace" to the whole fabric

of Beatrice's life. This same power is found, as we saw,<sup>75</sup> in the description of the ravine which is presented to us so vividly. Again, when Beatrice hears her death sentence :

"                                 O

My God! Can it be possible I have  
To die so suddenly? So young to go  
Under the obscure, cold, rotting, wormy ground!  
To be nailed down into a narrow place;  
To see no more sweet sunshine; hear no more  
Blithe voice of living thing; muse not again  
Upon familiar thoughts, sad, yet thus lost -  
How fearful! to be nothing! Or to be ..."

Beatrice continues her speech, doubting the existence of God, or of anything save the horror of what she has suffered. This speech, with the vivid earthiness of earth and the desirability of sunshine, concludes with doubt and despair, the first utter despair Beatrice has shown, and the effect is to make us even more deeply aware of the nightmare world Beatrice has been living in since her father's sin.

Shelley also knows how to achieve vividness by suddenly presenting a description and emphasising it by calling upon our sense of hearing; before the murder of Cenci a strange noise frightens the assassins, and Beatrice scornfully tells them :

"Ye conscience-stricken cravens, rock to rest  
Your baby hearts. It is the iron gate,  
Which ye left open, swinging to the wind,  
That enters whistling as in scorn."

75. cf. p.331.  
76. V, iv, 47-55. The obvious resemblance to Claudio's speech in Measure for Measure, III, i, 116-130, may be noted.  
77. IV, iii, 39-42; cf. Prometheus Unbound, I, 215-218.

The desolation of an iron gate swinging in the wind emphasises the desolation of the whole Cenci family.

Throughout the play Shelley differentiates the cadences and imagery so that each of the main characters has his own particular idiom and is not entirely dependent upon the content of his speeches for individuality. Beatrice, for example, addressing the guests at the banquet Cenci has given to celebrate the death of two of his sons,<sup>78</sup> is manifestly the same Beatrice who speaks in Act V at her trial. Beatrice's speech normally has more rhetorical figures in it than the speech of other characters - though in Act III, i, after the incest, she properly becomes impassioned beyond rhetoric. In Act I, iii, 99-129, however, there is a purposeful use of rhetorical question and skilfully placed caesuras. The whole speech has an air of calm dignity trembling upon despair which comes out in the deliberate cadences and avoidance of hyperbole.

Cenci's speeches also stand out as obviously his own, not only by the vigour and evil of his thought, but in the overall impression of one who cares not a fig for any person or ideal beyond himself. Some of the most chilling and truly horrible parts of The Cenci are found in Cenci's frightening

78. I, iii, 99-129.



pseudo-blasphemy which arouses, in the Christian reader at least, a genuine terror. What renders this so dreadful is that we are never sure if Cenci honestly believes in what he says or not: if he does, if in Act IV, i, 114-136 he sincerely prays to God that He curse Beatrice and that she should bear a hideous child from this incestuous union<sup>79</sup> then the depths of self-deception and evil in Cenci are almost too abysmal to be contemplated. It is likely that Shelley meant Cenci to be sincere, thus showing again how mankind has corrupted the meaning of Christ until His name "hath become a curse."<sup>80</sup> On the other hand, if Cenci does not believe in God and in the efficacy of what he says, then in these speeches he is deliberately<sup>devilishly</sup> mocking that in which all around him believe and so adding mental torture to their present suffering.<sup>81</sup> Such phrases as Cenci's address to his wine -

"Could I believe thou wert their [his dead sons']  
mingled blood,  
Then would I taste thee like a sacrament,  
And pledge with thee the mighty Devil in Hell." 82

Whether Cenci is a genuine Christian or not, are incredibly

79. cf. King Lear, I, iv, 299-313; but Lear has been goaded to this cursing whilst Cenci enjoys it for its evil.

80. Prometheus Unbound, I, 604.

81. cf. Prometheus Unbound, I, where Jupiter - "Thou subtle tyrant!" - inflicts mental torture upon Prometheus, who finds it harder to sustain than physical torture alone.

82. I, iii, 81-83.

blasphemous. It is strange that the theatre managers turned down The Cenci largely on account of the indelicacy of the major issue - incest - whilst this blasphemy was largely accepted. When the Shelley Society wanted to give a public performance, in 1886, they were refused a licence.

The dramatic quality of The Cenci has been very differently received. When the play was published, most adverse criticism was directed upon Shelley's choice of incest for the theme of a play.<sup>83</sup> Leigh Hunt, as we might expect from both a friend of Shelley's and the man to whom The Cenci was dedicated, praised it as "the greatest dramatic production of the day."<sup>84</sup> Its dramatic qualities, in the sense of theatrical representation, were not tested until The Shelley Society's production at the Grand Theatre, Islington, 7.v.1886, with Miss Alma Murray as Beatrice. The Shelley Society had been formed with the specific intention of staging The Cenci<sup>85</sup>, so that the audience's enthusiasm is not a certain guide to theatrical merit, but their enthusiasm may not be doubted.<sup>86</sup> The

83. cf. Bates, pp.11-19.

84. The Examiner, 19,iii,1820.

85. N.I. White, "Shelley's Debt to Alma Murray," Modern Language Notes, xxxvii (1922) 411-415.

86. K.N. Cameron and H. Frenz, The Stage History of Shelley's The Cenci, P.M.L.A., lx (1945), 1080-1105. I am greatly indebted to this article for my remarks upon the performances of The Cenci.

critics, on the other hand, agreed, either on moral or on aesthetic grounds that The Cenci was not a play to be acted. The defects found by the critics fall into six categories, according to K.N. Cameron and H. Frenz -

"the play is too long; [the performance lasted almost four hours] the speeches are too long; the action lacks variety; the action lacks movement; the play declined after the murder of Cenci; the scenes which announce, first, the threats, and, second, the action, of Beatrice's father are confused; Beatrice's denial of her guilt withdraws audience sympathy from her."

87

I would agree with the critics, except for their assurance that "the play declines after the murder of Cenci." Certainly there is a real danger that it may, but so powerful is Shelley's portrayal of Beatrice that she steps naturally into the leading position and holds the play firmly until the end. The critics' last objection - concerning Beatrice's denial - is not as simple as it would seem: the fault is not so much in Beatrice's denial, as in Shelley's failure, in the earlier acts, to make it clear that Beatrice, in her action, regards herself as God's instrument and guiltless; although I agree that, even if that were made clear, Beatrice's imperious attitude towards Marzio, the assassin, ill accords with a figure calculated to appeal to the sympathy of an average theatre audience. Again, I would suggest that the fault may lie in an earlier failure, and that

Beatrice's attitude during her trial may be intended to demonstrate how changed Beatrice had been by the evil in which she has been plunged, but Shelley has failed to make this clear enough. Two other explanations may cover this point: firstly, that Beatrice had to be revealed finally as having her share of the Cenci blood, demonstrated by her ruthlessness towards Marzio, her father's vassal; or, secondly, that Shelley was so impressed by the trial scene in The White Devil that he modelled his own upon it. Whatever we may say, Beatrice's denial of her guilt remains slightly puzzling.

The next English production was by Sybil Thorndike, who also played Beatrice, at the New Theatre, London, in November, 1922.<sup>88</sup> This production had four performances to an average theatre-going audience, but again it was enthusiastic, and this time the critics shared their enthusiasm. From his attendance at the production, St. John Ervine was convinced that Shelley was a genuine stage dramatist and he later examined The Cenci as a piece of theatre at length and decided that Shelley was "a born dramatist,"<sup>89</sup> and that "The Cenci" was written for the

88. Clemence Dane, in an address specially written for Sybil Thorndike's production, suggested that Beatrice rejected the accusation of guilt as being true to fact, but false to spirit.

89. St. John Ervine, "Shelley as a Dramatist", Essays by Divers Hands (Royal Society of Literature) xv (1936), 77-106.

theatre and is, in all respects, a stage play."<sup>90</sup> This conclusion, coming from an active theatre critic, would seem to be at least a strong indication that Shelley's play has a good dramatic quality. This is another point that differentiates The Cenci from all other plays of this period: it has been successfully revived in a public theatre in the XX century.

Any audience is bound to react to the language and Shelley's poetical power, which sweeps the play along as we read it, and must be particularly effective when spoken by a good actor; but for dramatic purposes there is, perhaps, too much poetry. Shelley is seldom content to say a thing once. The characters play a variation upon the theme of their thought, as Giacomo does here :

"Do evil deeds thus quickly come to end?  
O, that the vain remorse which must chastise  
Crimes done, had but as loud a voice to warn  
As its keen sting is mortal to avenge!  
O, that the hour when present had cast off  
The mantle of its mystery, and shown  
The ghostly form with which it now returns  
When its scared game is roused, cheering the hounds  
Of conscience to their prey! Alas! Alas!  
It was a wicked thought, a piteous deed,  
To kill an old and hoary-headed father."

91

I am not suggesting this is not good dramatic poetry, but I am suggesting that too much of such poetry holds up the dramatic

90. ibid., p.90.

91. V, i, 1-11.

unfolding of the play. In a play, if every rift is loaded with ore, the accumulation is too rich. E.S. Bates has commented upon this tendency with special reference to Act III, i :

"This passage is typical of the whole drama. The dialogue in general is expressed with a lyric amplitude of emotional detail; each feeling is dwelt upon and drawn out so that every shade of its significance may be made plain. Shelley dares not trust himself to a single terse utterance, lest it should not do justice to his subject. He is unwilling to merge the minor accompanying elements of an experience in its one fundamental feeling. His style cuts to the bone, but it does not stab to the heart. It lacks the inevitableness of Shakespeare, it lacks the terrible intensity of Webster. It is a style of valiant experimentation rather than one of assured finality."

92.

Mention of Shakespeare leads us to another weakness in The Cenci: Shelley depends too much upon the Elizabethans, particularly Shakespeare.<sup>93</sup> Throughout the play we are troubled by these echoes. Of this aspect of Shelley Professor Allardyce Nicoll has remarked :

"He [Shelley] is so occupied with the Elizabethan theatre that he echoes and re-echoes mechanically the phraseology and the situations of Shakespearian days."

94.

It would indeed appear at times that Shelley has almost been mesmerised into writing words which have not been so much

92. Bates, p. 92.

93. For lists of Shakespearean echoes, cf. Bates, pp.54-56 and D.L. Clark, "Shelley and Shakespeare" P.M.L.A. liv (1939) 261-287.

94. Nicoll, iv. 197.

deliberately chosen by him as automatically entered his mind, as fitting the situation he is describing, from his Elizabethan reading. This may have happened in the banquet scene, which has similarities with the banquet scene in Macbeth.<sup>95</sup> Cenci dismisses his guests :

"My friends, I do lament this insane girl  
Has spoilt the mirth of our festivity.  
Goodnight, farewell: I will not make you longer  
Spectators of our dull domestic quarrels." 96

Whilst Lady Macbeth had said :

"Think of this, good peers,  
But as a thing of custom: 'tis no other;  
Only it spoils the pleasure of the time.  
. . . . .  
At once good-night,  
Stand not upon the order of your going." 97

This dismissal is out of keeping with Cenci's character: a man of such open and acknowledged wickedness, who enjoys and exults in his evil, would make much better use of Beatrice's impassioned plea for help delivered to her father's guests. The conclusion of this scene is likewise unsatisfactory, for Beatrice remains alone with Cenci until he has cursed her and told her to go - it would have been more in keeping had Beatrice gone with the others. This is an example of Shelley's theatric-

95. The Cenci, I, 111; Macbeth, III, iv.

96. The Cenci, I, 111, 160-163.

97. Macbeth, III, iv, 96-98 and 118-119.

al awkwardness: he was not familiar with the stage. Mr. St. John Ervine has certainly pointed out theatrical tricks used by Shelley, but there are - and probably as many - theatrical faults. M.E. Prior has suggested that this unfamiliarity may have led to the inclusion of scenes merely because they could be treated in a manner similar to scenes in plays which Shelley admired.<sup>98</sup> Mr. Prior suggests this of Act III, ii, where Giacomo is awaiting news complete with a supernumary storm and lamp - neither of which is necessary, as each was in King Lear and Othello respectively.

A much fuller dependence upon Othello has been suggested by Miss S.R. Watson.<sup>99</sup> Miss Watson also sees an obvious parallel between Giacomo's soliloquy before his father's murder and Othello's before the murder of Desdemona;<sup>100</sup> she then proceeds to suggest a similarity between Orsino and Iago, and adds that, in fact, Orsino was modelled upon Iago. I would disagree with this conclusion: to see a similarity between Orsino and Iago is to make far too much of Orsino, whom Miss Watson terms a "villain." Certainly he is a villain, but a mean, unimaginative villain who plots specifically to seduce

98. M.E. Prior, The Language of Tragedy, New York, 1947.p.226.

99. "Shelley and Shakespeare: An Addendum. A Comparison of Othello and The Cenci," P.M.L.A., lv, (1940), 611-614.

100. The Cenci, III, ii, 1-52; Othello, V, ii, 1-15.



Beatrice. Iago is an unrestricted villain central to Othello, as Orsino is not to The Cenci. Miss Watson quotes Orsino :

"I thought to act a solemn comedy  
Upon the painted scene of this new world,  
And to attain my own peculiar ends  
By some such plot of mingled good and ill  
As others weave: but there arose a Power  
Which grasped and snapped the threads of my device  
And turned it to a new of ruin." 101

Commenting upon this passage she says -

"Note the Shakespearean quality of style;  
Iago might well have uttered such words as  
these if he had been permitted to speak at  
the close of Othello." 102

Iago would not have made such a speech, and the fallacious element in Miss Watson's thought is exposed by the phrase, "if he [Iago] had been permitted to speak" - Iago's character is such that of course he would not speak or comment upon his failure, he chooses silence :

"From this time forth I never will speak word." 103

Such parallels and similarities are helpful as long as they illumine either the specific work concerned or the mind of the writer, but it is too easy to press them beyond usefulness and to find some kind of similarity which arises more from

101. V, i, 77-83.

102. Op.cit. p.613.

103. Othello, V, ii, 303.

one's own determination than from an objective survey of the works concerned.

• Professor Allardyce Nicoll also mentions the most glaring example of dependence upon Shakespeare in the whole play, a dependence which comes very close to plagiarism in Act IV, ii and iii :

"[the imitative quality of Shelley's style] is made even more palpable in the finest scene of the drama - the murder of Cenci. It is the finest scene, yet it is but a variation of the murder-scene in Macbeth." 104.

It is a magnificent scene, but such dialogue is too obviously copied :

|                 |                       |     |
|-----------------|-----------------------|-----|
| " <u>Marzio</u> | "What?                |     |
| <u>Olimpio</u>  | Did you not call?     |     |
| <u>Beatrice</u> | When?                 |     |
| <u>Olimpio</u>  | Now                   | 105 |
| <u>Beatrice</u> | I ask if all is over" |     |

Whilst "If it were done when 'tis done"<sup>106</sup> echo and re-echo through the scene in various guises - "Would it were done!"<sup>107</sup>  
 "What is done wisely, is done well"<sup>108</sup>

"O, fear not  
 What may be done, but what is left undone."<sup>109</sup>

104. Nicoll, iv, 197.

105. IV, iii, 7-8.

106. Macbeth, I, vii, 1.

107. IV, iii, 38.

108. IV, iv, 35.

109. IV, iii, 5-6.

Another dependence is found in the first failure of Cenci's assassins -

"We dare not kill an old and sleeping man,  
His thin gray hair, his stern and reverend brow  
His veined hands crossed on his heaving breast,  
And the calm innocent sleep in which he lay  
Quelled me."

110

The other assassin says :

"I knew it was the ghost  
Of my dead father speaking through his lips,  
And could not kill him."

111

This reminds us of Lady Macbeth -

"Had he not resembled  
My father as he slept I had done't."

112

As Professor Nicoll suggests, when a thoroughly dramatic scene was required Shelley could not trust to his own invention."<sup>113</sup>

In The Cenci Shelley owes more to Shakespeare than may be shown by listing specific Shakespearean echoes. The whole treatment has an underlying debt to King Lear. In King Lear Shakespeare dramatises an old man, two of whose children have turned against him; in The Cenci Shelley has reversed the situation so that Cenci preys upon his family with a fiendish cruelty which is different only in degree from Goneril's cruelty to Lear. Certainly Shelley derived his plot from

110. IV,iii, 9-13.

111. IV,iii, 20-22.

112. Macbeth, II, ii, 14-15.

113. Nicoll, iv, 197.

history, but no reader of Shakespeare could remain unaware of the reversal of the Lear situation which it contained and only by a great effort could he remain uninfluenced by it. Cenci's cursings, when he curses either from himself

"Ay ...Rocco and Cristofano my curse  
Strangled."

114

or by calling upon God, as in his great cursing of Beatrice,<sup>115</sup> are all distorted reflections of Lear's disillusioned reactions to his daughters' evil.<sup>116</sup> This likeness, and yet profound unlikeness, between Cenci and Lear adds an almost unconscious mockery to Cenci's character: any comparison between Lear and Cenci must lead us to feel that such devilment as Cenci shows can only be some kind of devilish mockery at goodness. Cenci himself says :

"I do not feel as if I were a man,  
But like a fiend appointed to chastise  
The offences of some unremembered world."

117

E.S. Bates draws attention to another influence upon The Cenci - that of Greek drama.<sup>118</sup> This is not as important as the Elizabethan influence, but may be traced in Shelley's habit of having scenes consisting of two people engaged in dialogue, and usually alone upon the stage. The speakers may

114. IV, i, 46-47.

115. IV, i, 114-136, 141-159.

116. King Lear, iv, 267-289.

117. IV, ii, 160-162.

118. Bates, p.57.

change, but there is a tendency for only two characters to be talking. This may also account for the long speeches in The Cenci, which are unusually long by both Elizabethan and early XIX century standards.

Shelley himself wanted his play to be acted and expected Mr. Harris, the manager of Covent Garden, to produce it.

Writing to T.L. Peacock, July 1819, Shelley said :

"What I want you to do is, to procure for me its presentation at Covent Garden. The principal character, Beatrice, is precisely fitted for Miss O'Neill, <sup>119</sup> and it might even seem written for her. (God forbid I should ever see her play it - it would tear my nerves to pieces), and, in all respects, it is fitted only for Covent Garden."

120

Harris, however, replied to Peacock's showing him the play, by asserting that not only would he not permit Miss O'Neill to play Beatrice, he could not allow her to read The Cenci, so unpleasant was its theme. Opinion remains divided upon its theatrical qualities: E.S. Bates, who has produced the fullest study of The Cenci so far, concludes it is not dramatic;<sup>121</sup> St. John Ervine, as we saw,<sup>122</sup> decided Shelley was a born dramatist. These opinions represent two extremes, but that such extremes exist is in itself a tribute to The Cenci: no great arguments

119. Shelley had been very impressed by Miss O'Neill's performance as Bianca in H.H. Milman's Fazio, (C.G. 5.ii.1818), 1815, cf. Letters, ii, 596, note 2.

120. Ingpen, p.699

121. Bates, p.63, decides "a great literary [As distinct from theatrical] drama 'The Cenci' remains after all."

122. cf. p.338.

arise, for example, upon the theatrical qualities of Coleridge's Remorse. But in between these extremes, I would suggest, lies a position which may be adopted by those who, while recognising aspects which make The Cenci an awkward stage play, are bound at the same time, to judge from the enthusiasm of audiences that The Cenci must have a good measure of dramatic power.

(iii) Hellas.

Hellas (unacted), 1822, was inspired by two of Shelley's passions: liberty and Greece, united, as they were, in the Greek struggle for independence. The play has no pretensions to the stage:

"The drama (if drama it must be called) is, however, so inartificial that I doubt whether, if recited upon the Thespian waggon to an Athenian village at the Dionysiaca, it would have obtained the prize of the goat."

123.

It is, rather, "a series of lyric pictures"<sup>124</sup> in which Shelley shows his support of the Greeks. The plot is almost unimportant, being rather a peg upon which Shelley hangs his lyrical genius than a significant action itself. Mahmud, the Turkish Sultan, is troubled about the continuance of his rule. Four

123. Hellas, Preface.

124. ibid.

messengers increase his anxiety by news of land and sea battles. Mahmud talks with Ahasuerus, a Jew, and through him talks with the founder of his dynasty and hears that its end is near. A chorus of Christian slaves comment upon the action.

The blank verse, as we would expect from the author of The Cenci, is good, but it is the choruses that make the greatest impression, for in them Shelley has allowed his lyrical gift to vary the blank verse with such choruses as "In the great morning of the world,"<sup>125</sup> and "Worlds on worlds are rolling ever,"<sup>126</sup> and the great final chorus, "The world's great age begins anew."<sup>127</sup> But this final chorus, and through it, the whole play, ends in a note of uncertainty, not only because the outcome of the Greek war was still uncertain, but because Shelley, as he had already indicated in Prometheus Unbound,<sup>128</sup> realised that a Golden Age, if it were attainable, could only be maintained by constant vigilance. Thus Hellas ends :

"Oh, cease! must hate and death return?  
Cease! must men kill and die?  
Cease! drain not to its dregs the urn  
Of bitter prophecy.  
The world is weary of the past,  
Oh, might it die or rest at last!

129

125. Hellas, ll.46-93.

126. ibid, ll.197-238.

127. ibid, ll.1060-1101.

128. cf. op.cit. IV, 554-578.

129. op.cit. ll.1096-1101.

Mr. R.D. Havens<sup>130</sup> has pointed out that this uncertainty, and almost pessimism regarding the future, is not limited to the final chorus, but "is still more marked in the semi-choruses which immediately precede it."<sup>131</sup> Mr. Havens traces the same uncertainty as to the future, combined with a growing realism, in Charles the First, 1824, and suggests that Shelley

"Was becoming less sure of the millennium that the escape from reality into an ideal world no longer yielded him the satisfaction that it once did. In other words, he was growing up."

132

(v) Charles the First.

Charles the First (unacted), was first published in the Posthumous Poems, 1824, as an unfinished fragment. W.M. Rossetti printed it in 1870 with the addition of some 530 lines, and various words introduced to supply lacunae.

Shelley had trouble in writing Charles the First - "a devil of a nut it is to crack"<sup>133</sup>

"Although the poetry [of Charles the First] succeeded very well, I cannot seize on the conception of the subject as a whole."

134

130. "Hellas and Charles the First," Studies in Philology, xliii (1946) pp.545-550.

131. ibid, p.545.

132. ibid, p.550.

133. Letters, ii, 928.

134. ibid, p.955.



The impression left by this fragment is one of uncertainty: Shelley does not seem decided upon his treatment. What is left relies too much upon Shakespeare and lacks the intensity of The Cenci. It is, however, impossible to say, from what is, after all, only a fragment, how Shelley might have developed the theme. One new experiment is a much greater use of prose than Shelley has shown in any of his other plays. The prose is not confined to Archy, the Court fool. Archy is an interesting figure: inspired no doubt by Shakespeare's clowns, Shelley tries to imitate them in Archy, but, as does happen in this period, the dramatist lacks lightness and the objectivity of humour, and Archy is presented with speeches far too long and serious - one could almost say pompous - instead of the short, quick, witty, biting dialogue of a genuine jester.

(vi) Oepidus Tyrannus, or Swellfoot the Tyrant; The Cyclops,  
translated from Euripides.

Here I would like to notice two other plays in blank verse by Shelley. Oepidus Tyrannus, 1820, is a dramatic satire upon the matrimonial affairs of George IV which Shelley composed in "an hour of merriment" as Mary Shelley tells us in her note to the play. She continues -

"This drama, however, must not be judged for more than was meant. It is a mere plaything of the imagination....."

The Cyclops, 1824, is an uncompleted translation from Euripides. At his death Shelley left unfinished translations from Calderon - "Scenes from the Magico Prodigioso," 1824, and "Scenes from the Faust of Goethe," 1824. In these fragments we are naturally made aware of Shelley's poetic power, but their incompleteness makes any dramatic assessment difficult.

#### KEATS.

Otho the Great was written in 1819 by Keats in collaboration with Armitage Brown, who "engaged to furnish him [Keats] with the title, characters, and dramatic conduct of a tragedy, and he was to enwrap it in poetry."<sup>135</sup> Not surprisingly, the result of such a collaboration is but a poor tragedy, and even Keats's poetry seldom rises above mediocrity.

The plot concerns Otho the Great, Emperor of Germany, and the traitorous schemes of Conrad, Duke of Franconia, and his sister Auranthe, to marry Auranthe to Ludolph, the Emperor's son. There are various complications, which need not delay us, and the play concludes with Auranthe and Ludolph

135. From a note given by Lord Houghton in the Aldine edition of Keats, 1876.

both dead and all the plotting revealed to a heart-broken Otho. There is, however, no genuine dramatic action in the play: the story unrolls, characters are revealed as true or false, but there is no structure, no climax, no conflict, no development.

The language may be exemplified in the following passages:

"Illustrious Otho, stay!  
An ample store of misery thou hast,  
Choak not the granary of thy noble mind  
With more bad bitter grain, too difficult  
A cud for the repentance of a man  
Grey-growing. To thee only I appeal,  
Not to thy noble son, whose yeasting youth  
Will clear itself, and crystal turn again.  
A young man's heart, by Heaven's blessing, is  
A wide world, where a thousand new-born hopes  
Empurple fresh the melancholy blood:  
But an old man's is narrow, tenantless  
Of hopes, and stuff'd with many memories,  
Which, being pleasant, ease the heavy pulse -  
Painful, clog up and stagnate."

136

The involved imagery of the granary, followed by a reference to "yeasting youth" is confusing and hardly illuminating. The wealth of imagery does tend towards obscurity in the whole speech, whilst "Empurple fresh the melancholy blood" is a bad blank verse line and unhappily romantic.

Later, Ludolph, aware that Auranthe, his newly-wedded bride, has been false to him, gives an ironic speech :

"Deep blue eyes - semi-shaded in white lids,  
Finish'd with lashes fine for more soft shade,  
Completed by her twin-arch'd ebon brows -  
White temples of exactest elegance,  
Of even mould felicitous and smooth -  
Cheeks fashion'd tenderly on either side,  
So perfect, so divine that our poor eyes  
Are dazzled with the sweet proportioning,  
And wonder that 'tis so, - the magic chance!  
Her nostrils, small, fragrant, faery-delicate;  
Her hips - I swear no human bones e'er wore  
So taking a disguise - you shall behold her!  
We'll have her presently; aye, you shall see her!  
And wonder at her, friends, she is so fair -  
She is the world's chief jewel, and by heaven  
She's mine by right of marriage - she is mine!  
Patience, good people, in fit time I send  
A Summoner - she will obey my call,  
Being a wife most mild and dutiful."

137

In this Keats's poetic power emerges and a dramatic quality is produced by the irony combined with the poetry.

In commenting upon Otho the Great, Professor Allardyce

Nicoll remarks :

"hardly anything good may be said....It is certainly true that the abstract 'passion' or 'theory' is not so marked in his play as it is in the works of many of his contemporaries - for Keats was less intellectually inclined than they - but both the plot and the delineation of character are weak...In spite of the fact that the close is 'tragic' (in the sense that it ends on death and misery) Keats' play is intimately connected with the regular melodramatic school. Nor does the language make amends for the poverty in other spheres. Hardly any of the poet's magic

appears in the dialogue, and many lines are of a hardness and crudity one might little have expected from the creator of Isabella." 138

This is a fair summing up of what must, after all, have been an experiment in tragedy by a young poet whose talents lay in lyrical rather than dramatic verse. King Stephen: A Dramatic Fragment is the only other dramatic attempt left by Keats. It is only a fragment, but in it again Keats has turned to the middle ages and a romantic treatment -

"If shame can on a soldier's vein-swoll'n front  
Spread deeper crimson than the battle's toil,  
Blush in your casing helmets! . . . ." 139

The importance of Otho the Great and King Stephen can only lie in an over-all assessment of Keats as a poet; but, considered as a blank verse tragedy, Otho the Great is a very minor work.

Keats and Brown both intended Otho the Great for performance. It was accepted by Drury Lane in 1819 for performance in their next season. Keats and Brown, impatient at this delay "determined to get Elliston [manager of Drury Lane] to bring it out this Season or to transfer it to Covent Garden."<sup>140</sup> They failed to persuade Elliston. In a letter to his sister-in-law, Georgiana Keats, written 13.i.1820, Keats tells her :

138. Nicoll, iv, 198.

139. King Stephen, I, i, 1-3.

140. Letter to Miss Fanny Keats, postmarked 20.xii.1819 in The Letters of John Keats, 1814-1821, ed. H.E.Rollins, 1958, ii, 237.

"Not having succeeded in Drury Lane with our Tragedy, we have been making some alterations and are about to try Covent Garden. Brown has just done patching up the Copy, as it is altered. The only reliance I had on it was in Kean's acting. I am not afraid it will be damn'd in the Garden."

141

The play, however, was not accepted.

141. ibid, p.241.

CHAPTER VIII

Byron.

(1) Byron's dramatic theory.

Byron's first serious attempt at dramatic writing was made in 1815 when he wrote the first act of the first, unfinished, Werner. When he wrote the complete Werner; or The Inheritance, 1822, this early act was neglected. However, it is unique in Byron's dramatic works in that it was definitely written for the stage. When writing of all his other plays, either in letters and journals or the actual prefaces to the plays, Byron always stressed that they were not<sup>to</sup> be acted. The reasons for this attitude varied. The experience he had had as a manager of Drury Lane Theatre made him resent the "popularity" of the stage - that a dramatist, to succeed, had to produce melodramatic action to appeal to the vast audiences.<sup>1</sup> Along with this unwillingness to put himself "at the mercies of an audience,"<sup>2</sup> Byron seems to have felt that his dramatic talent was not good enough to produce good plays :

1. cf. Preface to Marino Faliero; and Byron's Letters and Journals, edited by R.E. Prothero in six volumes, 1922, iv.55,72,137. (Hereafter this work will be referred to as Letters.) His hatred of a public performance was shown in his action over the unauthorised production of Marino Faliero, D.L. 25.iv.1821, when an injunction was obtained from the Lord Chamberlain prohibiting the performance. cf. infra p.363.
2. Preface to Marino Faliero.

... but many people think my talent "essentially undramatic," and I am not at all clear that they are not right. If Marino Faliero don't fall, in the perusal, I shall, perhaps, try again (but not for the Stage); and, as I think that love is not the principal passion for tragedy (and yet most of ours turn upon it), you will not find me a popular writer. Unless it is Love, furios, criminal, and hapless, it ought not to make a tragic subject: when it is melting and maudlin it does, but it ought not to do it; it is then for the Gallery and second price boxes." 3

This letter to Murray also expresses some of Byron's dramatic theories :

"I am, however, persuaded, that this /producing a great tragedy/ is not to be done by following the old dramatists, who are full of gross faults, pardoned only for the beauty of their language; but by writing naturally and regularly, and producing regular tragedies, like the Greeks; but not in imitation, - merely the outline of their conduct, adapted to our own times and circumstances, and of course no chorus." 4

Byron believed that the old English dramatists including Shakespeare<sup>5</sup>, were bad models, their power being derived as Byron says in this letter, from "the beauty of their language" which camouflaged their bad construction. Byron believed that the best dramatic models were the Greeks. In this belief Byron demonstrates the detachment with which so many of the

3. To John Murray, 4.i.1821, Letters, v, 218.

4. Letters, v, 217-218.

5. Letters, v, 323.



poets of this period regarded the stage, for in another letter Byron says of Marino Faliero :

"It was written solely for the reader. It is too regular, and too simple, and of too remote an interest, for the stage."

6

At the same time Byron noted in his Diary :

"it [Marino Faliero] was written for the closet... It is too regular - the time, twenty-four hours, - the change of place not frequent - nothing melodramatic - no surprises, no starts, nor trap-doors....."

7

Thus Byron makes a distinction between closet and stage plays, and makes no attempt to come to terms with the stage. Yet along with this Byron clung to the classical unities which were intended as rules for stage production. [But if a play is designed to be read, then even the unity of action could be modified, whilst those of time and place could be discounted.] Critics in the early eighteenth century were aware of arguments in favour of "Gothic" rules of art<sup>8</sup> and of genius actually transcending rules,<sup>9</sup> which makes Byron's adherence to classical rules all the more surprising. S.C. Chew<sup>10</sup> explains it by Byron's regard for the French, whose theatre continued, largely,

6. To John Murray, 11.i.1821, Letters, v, 221.

7. Letters, v, 167.

8. cf. Lord Kames, Elements of Criticism, 1762, ii, 404ff.; R. Hurd, Letters on Chivalry and Romance, 1762.

9. Addison, Spectator, No. 592; Johnson, Preface to Shakespeare.

10. S.C. Chew, The Dramas of Lord Byron, 1915, Göttingen. Throughout this chapter I am greatly indebted to Dr. Chew's study. (Hereafter this work will be referred to as "Chew".)

to maintain the classical rules,<sup>11</sup> also by a reaction from the extravagant melodrama of the contemporary English stage,<sup>12</sup> and by Byron's own temperament which made him prefer a classical poet, such as Pope, to his own romantic contemporaries.<sup>13</sup>

S.C. Chew suggests that Alfieri's influence was not the most overwhelming influence upon Byron, but reinforced the French influence, in as far as both Alfieri and the French pseudo-classical drama have a classical simplicity and brevity of action which impressed Byron in contrast to English productions.<sup>14</sup> Then Byron's own inclination in drama - to be more interested in character and motive than in action - found support in classical models.

Byron's ideas on the tragic hero follow Aristotle :

"...I must remark from Aristotle and Rymer, that the hero of tragedy and (I add meo periculo) a tragic poem must be guilty, to excite 'terror and pity,' the end of tragic poetry." 15

The phrase "must be guilty" seems an exaggeration of Aristotle, but in practice Byron appears to mean "an error of judgement" rather than actual guilt. Marino Faliero, The Two Foscari and

11. Chew, p.168.

12. Chew, p.36.

13. Chew, p.170; and cf. Byron's reply to a review of Don Juan in Blackwood's, V (Aug.1819), 512-518, printed in Letters, iv, 474-495; and cf. Letters, iv, 169, 304, 425-6; v, 274.

14. Chew, p.38.

15. Letters, V, 284; cf. Aristotle, Poetics, ch.13.

Sardanapalus are not guilty men, but find themselves in situations in which a certain characteristic is revealed as a weakness leading to an error in judgement.

(ii) Byron's plays.

Byron's plays were published in the following order : Manfred, 1817; Marino Faliero (D.L., 25.iv.1821), 1821; Sardanapalus, The Two Foscari and Cain in one volume, 1821; Werner; or, The Inheritance, 1822; Heaven and Earth, 1822;<sup>16</sup> The Deformed Transformed, 1824. Marino Faliero was the only play performed during Byron's life-time, and the performance was quite contrary to Byron's wishes. The Times reported on this performance: "The piece was received coldly."<sup>17</sup> The other plays were first performed: Manfred as a "choral tragedy in three acts" at Covent Garden, 29.x.1834; Sardanapalus, at Drury Lane, 10.iv.1834; The Two Foscari at Drury Lane, 7.iv.1838; Werner, or, The Inheritance at the Park Theatre, New York, 1826, the first British performance being at Drury Lane, 15.xii.1830. Cain, Heaven and Earth and The Deformed Transformed have not been given public performance.

For the purposes of this study it would be convenient to divide Byron's plays into three groups: those with a super-

16. published in the second number of The Liberal, 1.i.1822, pp.163-206.

17. The Times, 26.iv.1821.

natural element, Manfred, Cain, Heaven and Earth and The Deformed Transformed; the historical tragedies, Marino Faliero, The Two Foscari, and Sardanapalus; and the almost melodramatic Werner.

(iii) Manfred.

The action of Manfred is set in the Alps and concerns Manfred, a lonely figure, guilt-ridden by some past sin, the nature of which is never plainly stated, though incest is strongly suggested.<sup>18</sup> Brooding over the past, Manfred attempts suicide, but is stopped by a chamois hunter. Then Manfred calls up the "Witch of the Alps" to whom he expounds his misery. He next requests "The Destinies" to bring before him the spirit of Astarte, the woman whom he has loved. She appears and foretells that Manfred will die the next day. Manfred calmly awaits his death, but rumours of his contact with spirits have reached the Abbot of a nearby monastery who comes to help Manfred. Manfred reveals a blasphemous concept of the world and dismisses the Abbot, who returns in the last scene to denounce the spirits coming to carry off Manfred. The spirits do go, through the power of Manfred, not of the Abbot, and Manfred finally dies.

18. cf. II, i, 24-30.

S.C. Chew sees Manfred as embodying characteristics of Prometheus, Don Juan and Faust, and becoming in himself, "the expression of the romantic ideal as opposed to the classical."<sup>19</sup> Like Shelley's Prometheus, rather than AEschylus's, Manfred opposes the spirits which would oppress mankind :

"Obey! and whom? the Spirits  
Whose presence I command, and be the slave  
Of those who served me - Never!"

20

The Don Juan attributes are those of egoism and pride, whilst with Faust Manfred stands aloof from his fellows and like Faust is forever seeking a deeper knowledge of the universe. Manfred in his search for knowledge is opposed, as S.C. Chew sees it, by the chamois hunter and the Abbot, both representing doctrinaire religion - "the implicit acceptance of dogma as opposed to the search after absolute truth."<sup>21</sup> S.C. Chew concludes :

"To understand and appreciate Manfred one must see that its chief message is one of encouragement and hope. It tells of the triumph of mind over matter, of soul over body, in that conflict which a dualistic conception of the universe implies." 22

But I would suggest that S.C. Chew's insights are more interesting in connection with Byron as a man and with his non-

19. Chew, p.83.

20. II, ii, 158-160; cf. I, i, 152-158; II, iv, 46-49, III, iv.

21. Chew, p. 82.

22. Chew, p.84.

dramatic poetry, than with Manfred as a drama. In studying the play the looseness of the structure and the undramatic subjective emphasis upon Manfred render the underlying ideas almost worthless by making them more or less inaccessible; they are not unified with the complete impression of the play, as, for example, is the case with Shelley's ideas in Prometheus Unbound, but are understood separately by an independent intellectual effort. No matter how valid or important such separate ideas may be, they cannot change Manfred into a good, genuinely dramatic play.

Manfred's character is almost a caricature of the Gothic-Romantic hero: he is obsessed by guilt for some former sin which sets him apart from his fellows, but whereas previously the nature of the past sin has been revealed to us, in Manfred it is only hinted at. He has deserted human company, prompted by an almost self-indulgent brooding<sup>23</sup> and also by an attempt to find forgiveness for his sin.<sup>24</sup> He chooses wild, deserted landscapes and, like Sotheby's Julian, remote mountains. Over all the play hangs an air of mystery, at times of gloom and terror. B. Evans, in support of his thesis that in Gothic

23. cf. Julian in Sotheby's Julian and Agnes.

24. cf. Marmaduke in Wordsworth's The Borderers, esp. ll. 2339-2353.

drama the villain-hero became the hero-villain and then the Byronic hero<sup>25</sup> sees Manfred as the Gothic consummation and suggests that Manfred's crime is never revealed so that he may remain the hero and retain all the sympathies of the reader. Mr. Evans enlarges upon Manfred in an article "Manfred's Remorse and Dramatic Tradition."<sup>26</sup> Here Mr. Evans emphasises the Gothic theatrical tradition and suggests that even without other parallels, such as Prometheus or Faust, and without Byron's own personal remorse, Manfred, both as a play and as revealing the character of the hero, could have been substantially the same. I think the dramatic tradition is important, but only as an element. Byron's own nature had more to do with Manfred than had Manfred's own dramatic ancestry. Childe Harold's Pilgrimage reveals a hero who has much in common with Manfred,<sup>27</sup> and The Giaour and The Dream, as S.C. Chew points out<sup>28</sup> both contain a record of an illicit and an unhappy love producing remorse and a yearning for death. S.C. Chew suggests that, as The Dream refers to Mary Chaworth, so does Manfred, and Byron's betrayal of Mary Chaworth was akin to incest in Byron's eyes because she

25. B. Evans, Gothic Drama from Walpole to Shelley, 1947.

26. P.M.L.A., lxii (1947), 752-773.

27. cf. esp. III, xiii-xvi.

28. Chew, pp.67-73.

had regarded him as a brother. Professor Wilson Knight marshals the evidence for identifying Mary Chaworth with Astarte and though no positive conclusion can be reached he suggests Byron may have regarded Astarte as a composite figure combining Augusta Leigh and Mary.<sup>28a</sup>

The imagery Byron uses emphasises the lonely outcast element in Manfred's character, as in

"Think'st thou existence doth depend on time?  
It doth; but actions are our epochs: mine  
Have made my days and nights imperishable,  
Endless, and all alike, as sands on the shore,  
Innumerable atoms; and one desert,  
Barren and cold, on which the wild waves break,  
But nothing rests, save carcasses and wrecks,  
Rocks, and the salt-surf weeds of bitterness." 29

W.H. Auden has examined the Romantic use of sea and desert imagery<sup>30</sup>. Talking of "The Romantic Sea and the Romantic Desert" Mr. Auden remarks :

- "(1) Both are the wilderness, i.e., the place where there is no community, just or unjust, and no historical change for better or for worse.
- (2) Therefore the individual in either is free from both the evils and the responsibilities of communal life.....
- (3) But precisely because they are free places, they are also lonely places of alienation and the individual who finds himself there, whether

28a. Lord Byron's Marriage, 1957, pp.121-128, 137-142.

29. II, i, 51-58.

30. W.H. Auden, The Enchafed Flood, 1951.



by choice or fate, must from time to time,  
rightly or wrongly, be visited by desperate  
longings for home and company."

31

Manfred seems to sum up extreme Romanticism, and, as we have seen, is the consummation of Gothic drama as far as the hero is concerned. But as a theatre play it fails because the Romanticism is accompanied by a subjective, introspective brooding which affects the hero and, through him, the whole play. Professor Allardyce Nicoll comments on Manfred and Cain :

"we may leave them aside as purely dramatic poems, indicating in their form that one great weakness of the age."

32.

(iv) Cain.

The next supernatural play is Cain (1821) "entitled 'A Mystery', in conformity with the ancient title annexed to dramas upon similar subjects."<sup>33</sup> It is a dramatisation of the Old Testament account of Abel's murder, with the addition of Lucifer, who comes to tempt Cain to revolt against God, leading him into "The Abyss of Space" where Cain and Lucifer discuss good and evil and Manicheism is propounded by Lucifer.

31. op.cit, pp. 25-26.

32. Nicoll, iv, 169.

33. Cain, Preface. Cain was performed by a local company in St. Giles Cathedral, Edinburgh during the 1951 Edinburgh Festival.

This discussion, tending at times to be too exclamatory and verbose, is not dramatic, any possible dramatic content being lost by the agreement which exists between Cain and Lucifer. The verse relies too much upon italicized emphasis used in overlong speeches, as in Cain's long complaint over the behaviour of Adam and Eve.<sup>34</sup> It is more a debate than a drama, centred upon the mystery of good and evil. The one dramatic touch is the climax, which is approached with a restrained and tragic inevitability. S.C. Chew, discussing Byron's technique, writes of this climax :

"The catastrophe of Cain is finely conceived and veiled in mystery. In all the plays the force of individual will is shown finally succumbing to the power of the norm."

35

In Cain the language is often reminiscent of Milton's Paradise Lost, particularly in relation to Lucifer, who has much in common with Milton's Satan. Thus Byron describes Lucifer -

"Why should I quail from him who now approaches?  
Yet - he seems mightier far than them, angels nor less  
Beauteous, and yet not all as beautiful  
As he hath been, and might be; sorrow seems  
Half of his immortality."

36

And Milton says of Satan -

34. I, i, 438-462.

35. Chew, p. 56. I would make Manfred an exception to this assertion: Manfred's heroic quality depends in part upon his defiance of the norm, and even in succumbing to death he does so defiantly.

36. I, i, 92-96.

" . . . his form had not yet lost  
All her original brightness, nor appears  
Less than Arch-angel ruined, and the excess  
Of glory obscured."

37

and

" . . . but his face,  
Deep scars of thunder had intrenched, and care  
Sat upon his faded cheek."

38

In his Preface Byron asserts :

"Since I was twenty I have never read Milton;  
but I had read him so frequently before, that  
this may make little difference."

39

The chief public reaction to Cain was one of protest at such daring blasphemy.<sup>40</sup> Goethe thought "its beauty is such as we shall not see a second time in the world."<sup>41</sup> Sir Walter Scott, writing to thank John Murray for the copy he had sent to Sir Walter asking him if he would agree to having Cain dedicated to him, said "[Byron] has certainly matched Milton on his own ground."<sup>42</sup> Shelley was enthusiastic : "Cain is apocalyptic - it is a revelation never before communicated to man."<sup>43</sup>

37. Paradise Lost, i, 591-593.

38. ibid. i, 600-602.

39. Cain, The Preface.

40. cf. A Remonstrance to Mr. John Murray, respecting a Recent Publication. By Oxoniensis /Rev. H.J. Todd, 1763-1845/ 1822. A Vindication of the "Paradise Lost" from the charge of exculpating "Cain: A Mystery" by "Philo-Milton," 1822. W. Harness, The Wrath of Cain, 1822. Revolutionary Causes; with a postscript containing strictures on "Cain" by Brittonicus, 1822. A Letter of Expostulation to Lord Byron, 1822. Uriel; a Poetical Address to Lord Byron, 1822. T. Adams, A Scourge for Lord Byron, or "Cain: A Mystery" unmasked, 1823. H. Wilkinson, "Cain" A Poem containing an Antidote to the impiety & blasphemy of Lord Byron's Cain, 1824.

41. Conversations with Goethe, 1874, p.261.

42. Letter to Murray, 4.xii.1821, printed in Byron's Works, v.205.

43. Ingpen, ii, 955.

But Cain regarded, not as "A Mystery" but as a drama did not impress Shelley.

Stopford Brooke<sup>44</sup> has examined Cain and shown how it sprang largely from Byron's belief in, and abhorrence of, Calvinistic fatalism and the Augustinian doctrine of original sin. But Stopford Brooke had to admit that the theological discussion in Cain has got to be hunted out and that it is not unified with the poetry. In using the dramatic form for such a discussion Byron made a mistake.

Cain, however, does deserve praise for its literary qualities: it is an impressive piece of writing with a strong intellectual core provided by the discussion between Cain and Lucifer upon cosmic problems.<sup>44a</sup> Cain's doubts are expressed with vigour and restraint. Such a subject, in the hands of a lesser poet, could too easily have degenerated into flaccid repetition, but Byron grasps his arguments and expresses them lucidly and simply. Byron himself remarked of Cain: "I have a good opinion of the piece, as poetry."<sup>44b</sup>

44. Hibbert Journal, xviii, (October 1919), 74-94.

44a. Cf. W.J. Calvert, Byron: Romantic Paradox, 1935, p.174.

44b. Works, v, 361.

(v) Heaven and Earth.

Byron seems to have thought that Heaven and Earth, 1823, would calm the religious passions aroused by Cain -

"The new Mystery /Heaven and Earth/ is less speculative than Cain, and very pious; besides, it is chiefly lyrical." 44d

On the contrary, it aggravated them, which is hardly surprising when one considers the subject. On the title-page we are told :

"Founded on the following passage in Genesis, Chap. VI, 1,2. 'And it came to pass...that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose'."

In the play two angels are portrayed as the lovers of two mortals who, in their turn, are loved by two of Noah's sons. This unnatural passion culminates in the flood. The play is in three scenes and comes to no rounded conclusion. Writing to Murray, Byron remarked -

"As it /Heaven and Earth/ is longer, and more lyrical and Greek, than I intended at first, I have not divided it into acts, but called what I have sent Part first, as there is a suspension of the action, which may either close there without impropriety, or be continued in a way I have in view. I wish the first part to be published before the second, because, if I don't succeed, it is better to stop there than go on in a fruitless experiment. "

44d. Letters, vi, 31. John Murray put off publication of Heaven and Earth by requesting revision and omission (cf. Letters, vi, 130), and finally it was printed in the second number of the Hunts' The Liberal, 1.i.1823, pp.165-206.

However, Byron did not add anything to this first part, but his uncertainty illustrates the attitude which Byron had towards this "Mystery" and, to some extent, towards all his plays; he uses the dramatic form to exercise his own undoubted and poetic power over words, or to expatiate upon some aspect of life which interested him - if it did not actually obsess him - but he is not especially interested in the finished product as a unified work of art. Though he does put great store upon the unities, and upon simple, regular plays, in Heaven and Earth Byron was evidently not even interested in such dramatic rules. From his letters we realise that Byron was proud of the speed with which he could compose his plays,<sup>45</sup> but this haste too often leads to an imperfectly realised atmosphere in his plays. Some revision might well have tightened up the structure and condensed the verbosity. In a <sup>re</sup>view of Sardanapalus, The Two Foscari and Cain, John Wilson says of Byron :

"Could he submit to the patient pains of correction; would he weigh with more care his powers as adapted to his subject....what an ornament had he been to the literature of his country!....The defects, however, of injudicious haste, and the heaviness of some of his productions, will perhaps gradually sink his fame to a more reasonable level ....." 46

45. cf. Letters V, 300, 310, 319, 320, etc. The time Byron spent on his plays has been assessed as far as possible by E.H. Coleridge from Byron's letters: the first act of Sardanapalus took a month, the others followed in the next three months the last act having been "dashed off" in two or three days. The Two Foscari was written in a month, Cain in two months, Heaven and Earth "occupied about fourteen days" (Medwin, Conversations with Lord Byron, 1824, p.231), Werner took a month.

46. Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, xi (February, 1822) 217.

In Heaven and Earth Byron frequently departs from blank verse to lyrical invocation, either by a character or by a chorus of "Spirits of the Earth" or of "Mortals". But the poetry is often too facile in its verse and not tight enough in its meaning -

"All shall be void,  
Destroyed.'  
Another element shall be the lord  
of life, and the abhorred  
Children of dust be quenched; and of each hue  
Of earth nought left but the unbroken blue." 47

(vi) The Deformed Transformed.

The Deformed Transformed, 1824, was the last of Byron's plays and is the least satisfactory. It concerns Arnold, a deformed hunchback, who exchanges his form with that of a spirit called Caesar. Once this exchange is made, Arnold with Caesar in attendance, joins in the 1527 Sack of Rome, Arnold taking a leading position by virtue of his courage and the nobility of his appearance and bearing. Caesar continually taunts Arnold, as he is becoming haughty towards the spirit who has provided him with his new appearance. Arnold rescues a beautiful woman, then the play breaks off. Byron ends his preface -

"The present publication contains the two first Parts only, and the opening chorus of the third. The rest may perhaps appear hereafter."

In the fragment Byron published there is the same lack of dramatic tightness which we have already noticed. The language fails in parts, giving the impression of hastily written and unrevised speech.<sup>48</sup> Again we have evidence of Byron's misplaced pride concerning the speed of his composition, and his disdain of revision: Mary Shelley copied the play out for Byron and she notes on the fly-leaf of her copy:

"... I copied it - he sending a portion of it at a time, as it was finished, to me. At this time he had a great horror of its being said that he plagiarised, or that he studied for ideas, and wrote with difficulty..... he always dated when he began and when he ended a poem, to prove hereafter how quickly it was done. I do not think that he altered a line in this drama after he had once written it down. He composed and corrected in his mind...." 49

Byron's plays, more than those of any other dramatist of this period, are so caught up in the complexity of his private life that it is inadvisable in studying Byron's plays to forget Byron as a man. In the case of The Deformed Transformed particularly, we are presented with a good therapeutic exercise

48. cf. Part I, 1, 430ff.

49. The Works of Lord Byron. Poetry, edited by E.H. Coleridge 1924, V, 474, note 2. (Hereafter referred to as "Poetry").



for the writer,<sup>50</sup> but no dramatic experience for the reader. Had Byron's name not been a familiar one, The Deformed Transformed, if published, would have speedily sunk into the oblivion of so many other, better plays of this period. Even S.C. Chew finds that "It is all both puzzling and disappointing."<sup>51</sup>

(vii) Marino Faliero.

Marino Faliero like the two other plays in this group, is a historical tragedy. It tells how Marino Faliero, an elderly Doge of Venice, felt irreparably insulted by some scurrilous words written about his wife by a drunken young nobleman. The Council of Ten decreed that the nobleman should be imprisoned for a month. Faliero, disgusted by this light sentence, joins a band of malcontents who are planning a rebellion. One of the rebels, however, being greatly indebted to a member of the council, tries to save his life. The councillor

50. The play opens with Arnold and his mother, Bertha :

Bertha. Out, Hunchback!

Arnold. I was born so, Mother!

Bertha. Out,

Thou incubus! Thou nightmare!"

Byron's mother, in one of her fits of passion, called him "a lame brat!" (Poetry, V, 477, note 1).

51. Chew, p. 148.

suspects, the plot is discovered and overthrown. Faliero is executed.

Byron prided himself upon the historical accuracy of his tragedies.<sup>52</sup> In the Preface to Marino Faliero he quotes his authorities and, where he has departed from them, Byron explains why and how. The most radical alteration in fact is a temporal compression so that the unities may be preserved.<sup>53</sup> It is relevant to realise how meticulous Byron was in his attention to historical accuracy. On many points his sources have subsequently been proved faulty:<sup>54</sup> but as far as Byron knew he was dramatising historical fact: he emphasises this in the introductions to all three historical plays and seems to have found it an extenuating circumstance ever available to excuse any dramatic failure -

"Whether I have succeeded or not in the tragedy,  
I have at least transferred into our language  
an historical fact worthy of commemoration." 55

This is not a worthy sentiment for a tragic dramatist; many of the lesser writers dramatised memorable historical facts, but if the mould in which they are presented is unworthy then the

52. cf. Prefaces to Marino Faliero, Sardanapalus, The Two Foscari.

53. As we have seen, Byron strongly believed in the classical unities, cf. supra. p. 356.

54. cf. Poetry, iv, 325-343.

55. Marino Faliero, Preface.

facts sink into an oblivion almost as profound as the one from which they temporarily emerged. Byron has also permitted his sources to mould his creation -

"....before I had sufficiently examined the records, I was rather disposed to have made it turn on a jealousy in Faliero. But, perceiving no foundation for this in historical truth, and aware that jealousy is an exhausted passion in the drama,<sup>56</sup> I have given it a more historical form." 57

If close historical accuracy is not compatible either with the meaning of the tragedy or the vision of the author, then it should be discarded. Certainly Byron does modify the historical account in making the Doge accede to the conspiracy, instead of initiating it, but this modification is made to keep the unities. Neither historical accuracy, nor close adherence to the unities can, in themselves, produce tragedy.

Marino Faliero has been praised for the use Byron makes of dialogue. S.C. Chew<sup>58</sup> points out the skill with which it is used in the opening scenes of exposition, so that the characters are swiftly and dramatically set before us.<sup>59</sup> Genest likewise praises the dialogue, but he also points out the major fault of Marino Faliero, and one shared by all Byron's plays :

56. As long as love maintains its leading plot position, surely jealousy will not be an "exhausted passion"?

57. Marino Faliero, Preface.

58. Chew, p. 46.

59. cf. I, ii, 325ff.

"Lord Byron deserves the greatest credit for the beauty and spirit of his dialogue, and the just delineation of his characters - but here his praise ends - as a Drama, his Tragedy is liable to one serious objection - too much is said, and too little is done." 60

Naturally a play written about Venice and concerned with a rebellion invites comparison with Otway's Venice Preserved, 1682. S.C. Chew has summarised the differences -

"Byron is thoroughly in sympathy with the conspirators...Otway rather looks on the fate of [the conspirators] in the light of awful examples....Byron's play is serious from beginning to end....Otway's tragedy is disfigured by scenes of gross comedy.... The subjective element, so strong in all Byron's verse, is almost entirely absent from Otway...Byron's is a tragedy without love... In Otway's love is the leading motiv..." 61

Whilst the resemblances depend upon similarity of plot and setting, Byron says of such resemblances :

"I need hardly remind the gentlest reader, that such coincidences must be accidental, from the very facility of their detection by reference to so popular a play on the stage and in the closet as Otway's chef-d'oeuvre." 62

S.C. Chew<sup>63</sup> draws attention to a great hindrance to the success of Marino Faliero: by close adherence to the unities Byron plunges us too suddenly into an unknown situation. Byron

60. Genest, ix, 91.

61. Chew, p. 91.

62. Note to V, iii, 8.

63. Chew, p. 43.

himself said to John Murray, after insisting upon the historical source being translated and printed with the Play :

"Recollect that, without previously reading the Chronicle, it is difficult to understand the tragedy." 64

On the whole, however, Marino Faliero has too much verbosity - "too much is said, and too little is done" as Genest phrased it. The shape of the play is outwardly enforced by the unities and is shackling, whereas it should be a well defined, tight form held in place by the mind and dramatic skill of the author. The dialogue certainly deserves mention, but of what use is good dialogue if it be deeply embedded in a dramatically unformed mass? Before and after passages of dialogue there are too many long uninteresting stretches of speech, as in II, 1, where the Doge and the Dogaresse appear to be indulging in speech for its own sake. Byron certainly uses passages of natural description for purposes of dramatic relief,<sup>65</sup> but not all his long passages are to be justified in that way.

The verse varies. Some is bad -

"I cannot but agree with you  
The sentence is too slight for the offence;  
It is not honourable in the Forty  
To affix so slight a penalty to that  
Which was a foul affront to you, and even  
To them as being your subjects....." 66

64. Letters, V, 62.

65. cf. Lioni's soliloquy, IV, i, 23-111; but even this is too long drawn out for a good tragedy.

66. I, ii, 75-80.

This is thin in texture and is awkward to deliver. Again, the rapidity of Byron's creation and his unwillingness to settle down to revision seem to account for flaws in his plays. At other times the verse is rhetorically imitative, using anaphora -

"But craved my country's justice on his head,  
The justice due unto the humblest being  
Who hath a wife whose faith is sweet to him,  
Who hath a home whose hearth is dear to him -  
Who hath a name whose honour's all to him,  
When these are tainted by the accursing breath  
Of Calumny and Scorn." 67

Shakespearean echoes occur, as in I, ii, 260ff. where Faliero addresses the ducal cap in much the same style and manner as Shakespeare's kings address their crowns.<sup>68</sup> At other times

the verse can be pointed and imaginative :-

"You overrate my power, which is a pageant.  
This Cap is not the Monarch's crown; these robes  
Might move compassion, like a beggar's rags;  
Nay, more, a beggar's are his own, and these  
But lent to the poor puppet, who must play  
Its part with all its empire in this ermine." 69

The dramatic structure of the play is not good. S.C. Chew points out that the last act "is an undramatic aftermath"<sup>70</sup> :  
"Byron prolongs the play through another act (V) dull and action."

67. I, ii, 184-190.

68. e.g. cf. 1 Henry IV, IV, V, 23ff. S.C. Chew prints an Appendix - Appendix III, pp.179-181 - entitled "Shakespearean Echoes in Marino Faliero."

69. I, ii, 411-416.

70. Chew, p. 57.

less and utterly undramatic."<sup>71</sup> Too often any attempt at dramatic form is ruined by the uncontrolled verbosity of the characters. Most of Act II, i, of 513 lines, comprises an over-long discussion between Faliero and his wife which should have been swiftly compressed and illuminated by shafts of imagery, instead of which it is bogged down in an almost sentimental repetitiveness in which the Doge's constant use of "my child", when addressing his young wife, becomes somewhat tedious. Indeed, Byron shows a surprising lack of good, striking images in this play. When his poetic power does shine forth, as in Lioni's soliloquy on Venice<sup>72</sup> - a subject in which Byron excelled - there is too much of it for the dramatic form, even, as I have noted,<sup>73</sup> for the purposes of relief. Once the long soliloquy is finished, this scene develops into the best in the play: Bertram, one of the conspirators, comes to save Lioni, who has been his benefactor. The dialogue takes its place in a much more rapid development than heretofore, and the language is tighter -

" - but say on -

What has occurred, some rash and sudden broil? -  
A cup too much, a scuffle and a stab?" 74

71. Chew, p.56.

72. IV, i, 23-111.

73. cf. supra p.319.

74. IV, i, 141-143.

Act IV deals undramatically with the Doge's arrest, and after this reversal Act V, as we have seen,<sup>75</sup> is too long drawn out.

Byron has a tendency to over-write his historical subjects, and he has indulged it in Marino Faliero. By confining himself to the unities Byron started off at a disadvantage; he must describe the evils afflicting Venice, against which the conspirators were rebelling, at the same time describing the Doge's complaint and his confidence in obtaining ample redress from the Council of Ten. Instead of conveying the information quickly and clearly, Byron has allowed words to intrude for their own sake, and the essential background of the play is not clear. The evils of Venetian government, as distinct from the evils always attendant upon power, are never properly exposed,<sup>76</sup> whilst we are introduced to Faliero at a crisis in his life and are given little chance to understand his character. This is made worse because Faliero's hatred and passion for revenge are directed not at an individual, but at a state. As we have seen, Byron's first intention had been to motivate Faliero by jealousy:<sup>77</sup> had he done so he might have produced a more

75. cf. supra. p.380.

76. S.C. Chew sees Steno as "the concrete embodiment of the vileness of Venetian affairs" (p.81). I think Dr. Chew's enthusiasm for Byron's plays here runs away with his critical judgement: Steno is too slight a character to bear the interpretation of being a personification of an abstract idea. Rather he remains a relatively unimportant means to an end.

77. cf. supra p.377.



credible character because the force of Faliero's passion for revenge upon Venice is never fully realised.

Marino Faliero was the only one of Byron's plays to be acted during his life-time. The performance took place in spite of an injunction against its performance which was issued by the Lord Chancellor after Byron had instructed his lawyers to apply for it. Eldon, the Lord Chancellor, was, however, persuaded by Elliston to allow one performance. The injunction was withdrawn, in agreement with Byron's lawyers, after legal proceedings so that the play could be legally performed. Byron himself never wanted Marino Faliero - or any of his plays - to be performed.

Professor Wilson Knight in his connected group of essays upon sun imagery, "The Burning Oracle,"<sup>78</sup> 1939, has an essay upon Byron where he discusses Marino Faliero and Sardanapalus in detail. He compares Byron to Shakespeare and by quotation, demonstrates Byron's insight into character building -

"The human delineation is Shakespearian, especially in its feeling for destiny interwoven with close ethical penetration into the springs of action, and the combining of personal traits with general issues. The Doge could not exist in any other play; he and the action inform each other; the comments of others help, technically, to realise

78. The title comes from Sardanapalus, II, i, 14-17.

his personality. The texture of the whole is tight, yet we also get an insight into the man comparable of that we have, not of our friends, but of ourselves." 79

But Professor Knight seldom treats of Marino Faliero as a dramatic whole, preferring to examine instead the psychology of individual characters. This close analysis is dangerously near to reducing the play to pieces and Mr. Knight does not build it together again as a dramatic unity. No matter how sound a writer's psychology may be, if he does not give it a good expression<sup>in</sup> the interaction of his characters only the devoted few will attend to his works so that they may grasp the psychology. This is particularly the case with dramatic works.

Of Byron's poetic power Professor Knight notes -

"The language is reserved with no special striving after any overlay of metaphor and image, every accent arising from the tense thought or smouldering passion concerned, every speech from the speaker's nature, and situation's demands." 80

But this is surely disproved in, e.g. Act II, i, where five hundred and thirteen lines are devoted to discussion, largely between the Doge and his wife, upon Steno's sentence. Tense thought and dramatic speech are only maintained with difficulty for so long upon one subject. inevitably the characters flop

79. The Burning Oracle, p.229.

80. ibid. p.229.

into repetitiveness. Byron cannot compress his insight into a suitable dramatic length.

Professor Knight also maintains,<sup>81</sup> that

"Byron's Augustan apprenticeship has served to winnow away all trivialities, leaving him instinctively free for an unfettered, yet well-sorted, diction, that carries quiet profundities with Shakespearian ease, as in

. . . . as yet 'tis but a chaos

Of darkly brooding thoughts: my fancy is

In her first work, more nearly to the light

Holding the sleeping images of things

For the selection of the pausing judgement." 82

This passage surely does not show "Shakespearian ease" - the inversion is awkward and the last line in particular is affected and ungainly.

Professor Wilson Knight's power is to be found in his close character analysis and systematic search for imagery rather than in his assessment of Byron's plays as complete dramatic wholes.

(viii) Sardanapalus.

Byron's next historical tragedy was Sardanapalus. Once again he was particular about historical accuracy -

"In this tragedy it has been my intention to follow the account of Diodorus Siculus; reducing it, however, to such dramatic regularity as I best could,

81. The Burning Oracle, p.229.

82. I, ii, 282-286.

and trying to approach the unities."

83

As we see from this quotation, Byron was as concerned about the unities in Sardanapalus as he had been in Marino Faliero. Sardanapalus is, however, more successful than Marino Faliero or The Two Foscari, and one reason for this success is the greater amount of incident in the story of Sardanapalus. Byron's play concerns Sardanapalus, the last king of the Assyrians, an effeminate man who lives in slothful luxury surrounded by women. He has forsaken his queen and their children, but in his unfaithfulness he remains constant to Myrrha, an Ionian slave. The queen's brother, Salemenes, a noble, unselfish man, keeps the kingdom from the disaster which would speedily overtake it were the pleasure-loving Sardanapalus in sole control. Salemenes uncovers a plot for a rebellion which has been planned by some dissatisfied nobles. He warns Sardanapalus, who does not act decisively enough. We begin to realise that much of Sardanapalus's apparent laxness is not so much passive laziness, but a deep, positive love of life and a genuine hatred of inflicting any unnecessary pain on his fellows. Sardanapalus expels the nobles to their provinces, against the advice of Salemenes, who wants them to be speedily executed. Instead of

83. Sardanapalus, Preface.

leaving Nineveh, the nobles revolt. Sardanapalus proves his courage, without negating his humanity, during the fighting, but the nobles are too well organised to be defeated. Sardanapalus commands a pyre to be built in his palace and then Myrrha lights it before joining Sardanapalus among the flames.

As I have noted, there is much more action in Sardanapalus than in either of the Venetian plays. Consequently Byron's weakness towards verbosity cannot be so freely indulged because there is usually something happening which needs the words. But even in Sardanapalus many of the speeches are too long drawn out, as characters examine their own feelings and past events with an intensity and interest more appropriate to Romantic lyrical poetry than to the drama. Certainly, plays with these elements can succeed,<sup>84</sup> but Byron cannot achieve success with them. In dramatic poetry over-elaboration of a theme, by repetition or by an accumulation of various figures of speech, often obscures the point to be made which would emerge more clearly if simply put with one quick, sharp image, as happens in one of Myrrha's soliloquies, this one in the presence of the sleeping Sardanapalus :

84. cf. Oepidus at Colonus.

"Again he moves - again the play of pain  
Shoots o'er his features, as the sudden gust  
Crisps the reluctant lake that lay so calm  
Beneath the mountain shadow; or the blast  
Ruffles the autumn leaves, that drooping cling  
Faintly and motionless to their loved boughs." 85

Such elaboration in a soliloquy may provide dramatic relief, if rarely used, but Byron elaborates, not so much for the tragedy, as for the very words themselves. Dramatic economy is not easily achieved but it is particularly elusive for a writer who more usually writes non-dramatic poetry. Occasionally Byron does achieve it -

"He's gone; and told no more than that all's lost!  
What need have I to know more? In those words,  
Those little words, a kingdom and a king,  
A line of thirteen ages, and the lives  
Of thousands, and the fortune of all left  
With life, are merged; and I, too, with the great,  
Like a small bubble breaking with the wave  
Which bore it, shall be nothing." 86

The simile drawn from the breaking of waves upon the shore illuminates Myrrha's position better than any accumulation of detail could.

The most dramatic use of language is in Act III, 1, where Sardanapalus shows that his policy of peace was not prompted by cowardice, when, once fighting has begun, he goes into the very thick of it. Before going he eyes himself in a mirror -

85. IV, 1, 10-15.

86. III, 1, 231-238.

"Now - my spear! I'm armed.  
Sfero - I had forgotten - bring the mirror.

-----  
This cuirass fits me well, the baldric better,  
And the helm not at all. Methinks I seem

Flings away the helmet after trying it  
again.

Passing well in these toys; and now to prove them." 87

Again Byron writes good dialogue in this play,<sup>88</sup> but it is often surrounded by heavy verse. The play opens with one scene of 47 lines of soliloquy from Salemenes, which serve as an exposition, if not a very dramatic one. S.C. Chew remarks :

"The long soliloquy of Salemenes contains no information that could not be, and hardly any that is not, given in the following dialogue scene." 89

S.C. Chew suggests that Byron saw this soliloquy "as but half distinct from a prologue...and closely related to the Chorus of Romeo and Juliet."<sup>90</sup> S.C. Chew also draws attention to the scene numbering: at the end of the soliloquy the entrance of Sardanapalus is marked "Scene ii" in the French manner of scene-numbering according to important entrances. Once the situation has been revealed, Sardanapalus has a better dramatic structure than the other plays. Sardanapalus is gradually stirred from his sloth into action, and interwoven with the unfolding of the plot is a clear picture of Sardanapalus's character. Instead

87. III, i, 144-145, 163-165.

88. cf. II, i.

89. Chew, p. 45.

90. ibid.

of being an active ruler who leads conquering armies against neighbouring countries as his forbears had been, (Sardanapalus is a passive ruler: he desires peace and pleasure, and so long as the status quo is maintained, however uneasily, he is content to leave the actual government to others. But during the action we still see the struggle Sardanapalus experiences as he realises that, had he been a warrior king leading his people into battle, and, as like as not, into death, then the people would have acclaimed him instead of rebelling against him -

"The ungrateful and ungracious slaves! they murmur  
Because I have not shed their blood, nor led them  
To dry into the desert's dust by myriads  
Or whiten with their bones the banks of Ganges;  
Nor decimated them with savage laws,  
Nor sweated them to build up Pyramids,  
Or Babylonian walls." 91

Sardanapalus is a tragic figure: as a king his people expect qualities in him, which, as a man, he lacks. Speaking of Sardanapalus, S.C. Chew observes :

"With the exception of Manfred the biographical element enters more largely into Sardanapalus than into any of the dramas." 92.

In the figures of Sardanapalus and Myrrha, Byron seems to have portrayed himself and the Countess Guiccioli, whilst Zarina, Sardanapalus's wife, could be based upon Lady Byron, especially

91. I, ii, 226-232.

92. Chew, p.106.



in the scene of farewell.

→  
Along with Marino Faliero, Professor Wilson Knight analyses Sardanapalus in The Burning Oracle. Sardanapalus is more able to support close analysis because it is a better constructed and more coherent play - Once it has been analysed it is much more capable of synthesis. Professor Knight<sup>93</sup> enlarges our understanding by showing the construction of Sardanapalus's dream<sup>94</sup>; after dreaming of Nimrod and Semiramus, his ancestors whom he in no way resembles Sardanapalus awakes to find Myrrha beside him. Here, as so often in Byron, the power of ancestors, of a dynasty or noble line, becomes an almost visible force. As Sardanapalus himself exclaims,

"all the predecessors of our line  
Rose up, methought, to drag me down to them." 95

But Professor Knight's discussion of Byron appears at times to be dangerously akin to special pleading, as in this passage -

"His [Sardanapalus's] motto, 'Eat, drink, and love; the rest's not worth a fillip' (I,ii) though it may at first shock us, sinks deeper as you meditate it; and set against his ironic picture of a trophy raised over fifty thousand dead certainly makes one pause." 96

93. The Burning Oracle, p.254-255.

94. Iv, i.

95. IV, i, 175-176.

96. The Burning Oracle, p.244.

Here Professor Knight seems to make Sardanapalus's mistake and think that a ruler must either lead his people into battle and perhaps death, or else live in lascivious ease and think the people must be happy. There are other ways.

(ix) The Two Foscari.

The Two Foscari is the last of Byron's historical tragedies. Like Marino Faliero, it is taken from the history of Venice. Once again Byron is particular about the accuracy of his historical facts and any re-arrangement he made was designed to keep the unities. Consequently the tragedy of the two Foscari is condensed into one day. The elder Foscari is Doge of Venice and must perforce be among the judges who try his last remaining son on suspicion of treason. Young Foscari is tortured, and the maximum suffering imposed upon him, his wife and father, largely through the ill-offices of Loredano, a patrician who is convinced that Foscari arranged the murder of both his father and uncle. This suspicion of Loredano's is never explicitly confirmed throughout the play, although a hereditary feud between the families is openly admitted. Byron may have hoped to introduce a revenge motif by emphasising this feud. The play ends :

"Barbarigo           What art thou writing  
With such an earnest brow, upon thy tablets?

Loredano (pointing to the Doge's body)  
That he has paid me!

Chief of the Ten.   What debt did he owe you?

Loredano.       A long and just one; Nature's debt and mine." 97

But throughout the action the personal revenge is not nearly as dominant as the sheer force of the Council of Ten against Foscari - just as in Marino Faliero where Faliero's desire for vengeance against Steno is engulfed in the wider issue of Doge against the state.

Young Foscari is condemned to exile. His love for Venice, however, is so strong that he dies before leaving. As in Marino Faliero, Byron excels in the passages describing Venice and the delights associated with it.<sup>98</sup> The Doge, with his daughter-in-law, is lamenting his son's death when a message comes from the Ten calling upon Foscari to resign. Thrice before Foscari had asked the Ten if he might resign and had been refused. Now this request is tantamount to dismissal and Foscari sees it as the final insult. This, coupled with his son's death is too much for the old man, who dies. Thus Loredano's revenge is complete, but in fact it is obvious that X Loredano's efforts towards revenge have been slight and would

97. V, i, 367-371.

98. cf. I, i, 94-121.

have remained insignificant and probably unavailing without the Council of Ten. The real crux of the play is the agony inflicted upon a father when he must sit in civil judgement over his own son, and the consequent torment experienced by the whole family. Unfortunately Byron has not managed to convey this well enough. There is too much verbosity. Such circumstances demand restraint in the use of language, instead of which Byron gives the characters long, undramatic speeches serving rather to lower than to heighten the tragic effect. Young Foscari is an idealised, romantic figure, with whom, it is easy to see, Byron identified himself, as an exile from his native land.

The plot of The Two Foscari lacks a definite form: the important events have happened before the play begins; the play itself is filled with so many rhetorical expressions of grief that we are eventually benumbed by them and given little chance to feel the horror of Loredano's implacable revenge. As I have said, the revenge is not of supreme importance for the play itself, but there are scenes between Loredano and his "familiar" Barbarigo in which the revenge is so important to Loredano that it seems a magnitude which would be terrible were we permitted to feel it. But these scenes have little connection with the rest of the play. Barbarigo exists for no

other purpose than to give Loredano scope to demonstrate his hatred of the Foscari. This disjointedness is a bad weakness.

S.C. Chew sums up the faulty technique :

"The Two Foscari is hardly tragic, for there is no resistance; it is not dramatic, for the conflict is one-sided, that is, it is brute force against impotence, which is no true conflict at all." 99

(x) Werner; or, The Inheritance.

Werner stands in a class by itself in Byron's plays. Like the others, "The whole is neither intended, nor in any shape adapted, for the stage,"<sup>100</sup> but unlike the others it is, in fact, admirably suited for the stage and the audiences of Byron's own day. In fact, Werner is almost melodrama. In 1815 Byron wrote the first act of another version of Werner which definitely was intended for the stage. Byron took the story from Harriet Lee's "Kruitzner, or The German's Tale," one of the stories in the fourth volume of her Canterbury Tales, 1801. In fact, Byron took more than the story, he also adopted some of the language - "I have adopted the characters, plan, and even the language of many parts of this story."<sup>101</sup>

99. Chew, p.52.

100.Werner, Preface.

101.Werner, Preface, cf. Poetry, v, 326-327.

Byron's version concerns Werner, a noble exile, whose father, Count Siegendorf, has disinherited and cursed him because of his marriage with a lady of whom the Count did not approve, though he does adopt Ulric, the only child of the marriage. Werner and his wife wander around Europe pursued by spies of Stralenheim, a distant kinsman, who hopes to kill Werner and Ulric, thus succeeding to the Siegendorf inheritance. When the play opens, Werner and his wife are staying in an old castle and have just heard that Ulric has left his grandfather and disappeared. Stralenheim appears. He has just been saved from drowning by an unknown youth who reveals himself to Werner as Ulric. Werner, unrecognised by Stralenheim, steals gold from him so that he and his wife may get away. Werner allows the guilt to fall on another man, Gabor, who is then suspected of Stralenheim's murder, which quickly follows the theft. Gabor disappears, Siegendorf dies and Werner inherits. A year elapses between Acts III and IV, but we find that Werner is still haunted by Stralenheim's mysterious death. Gabor turns up and Werner insists upon seeing him. Gabor tells how, after the murder, he saw Ulric washing blood off his hands. Werner is heart-broken. Ulric is revealed as the ruthless leader of a band of outlaws. He is engaged to Stralenheim's daughter, who "falls senseless" on hearing who murdered her father, whilst Ulric leaves his father and mother, who are left desolate.

This is a melodramatic plot with plenty of incidents, mysteries and sudden climaxes. Running through it is the theme of a family curse, once Siegendorf has cursed Werner, his own son, then that curse must go on snowballing within the family. Byron is telling a story, but he does not construct a tragedy: Werner lacks form and unity for no complete impression is made by the mixture of melodramatic events. The speeches are mostly too long and overloaded; Byron does use dialogue well, especially when dealing with Idenstein, the Intendant of the castle, who almost emerges as a definite character with an extravagance of humour and quick wit -

"Sirrah! In the Prince's  
Absence, I am Sovereign, and the Baron is  
My intimate connection; - 'Cousin Idenstein!  
(Quoth he) you'll order out a dozen villains.'  
And so, you villains! troop - march - march, I say;  
And if a single dog's ear of this packet  
Be sprinkled by the Oder - look to it!  
For every page of paper, shall a hide  
Of yours be stretched as parchment on a drum,  
Like Ziska's skin, to beat alarm to all  
Refractory vassals, who can not effect  
Impossibilities. - Away, ye earth-worms! " 102.

But one character alone cannot give the play speed and interest, whilst the verse is uninspired and flat - "The versification at best is dull, at worst is execrable." 103.

102. I, i, 685-696.

103. Chew, p.144.

In regarding all Byron's plays the reader is left with a sense of regret: Byron came so close to writing great tragedy but was never completely successful. The genius to be found in his poetry is lying behind the plays, but unfortunately the dramatic form can never properly exhibit it. If we compare his plays with those being written by his contemporaries Byron's superiority is obvious: in spite of his dislike of performance he has a much better theatrical sense, his gift for writing dialogue is quite unequalled in this period and his poetic power shows itself in every play. Byron has provided the greatest number of good plays in this period, but for them, and Shelley's The Cenci, the blank verse tragedy of the period would be pitiful.

M.E. Prior, after examining some of Byron's plays and pointing to their various flaws, concludes :

"While all this is true, Byron appears large in stature alongside other nineteenth-century writers of verse drama. More than most of the others he faced the problem with a clear recognition of its difficulties. He also sought to break the tyranny of the currently respectable models. And he reached a measure of success .....The failure of Byron - for in the end no one of the plays shows a full co-ordination of the component elements nor any compelling formal excellence - is at least an impressive failure."

104.

104. M.E. Prior, The Language of Tragedy, New York, 1947, p.264.



CHAPTER IX

Thomas Lovell Beddoes.

(i) Dramatic theory

In many of his letters and prefaces Beddoes examines contemporary drama and works out the dramatic theories which he himself tried to put into practice. The predominant line of thought concerns the importance of Shakespeare in English dramatic tradition. In the Preface to Death's Jest Book,<sup>1</sup> Beddoes distinguishes the Greek from the English dramatic form, and says of the English -

"... be it here fearlessly pronounced once for all, that the Shakespearian form of the Drama, under such unimportant modifications as the circumstances of our times demand, is the best, nay, the only English one: and arduous as the task may be, the observation of his example is the only course which can ever insure to the dramatist any real popularity among his countrymen."

In the fragment of a new preface<sup>2</sup> to Death's Jest-Book, Beddoes again makes this distinction and condemns Byron for his adherence to the unities, noting particularly his preface to Marino Faliero and ridiculing him for reading Seneca as the preparation for writing Sardanapalus.<sup>3</sup> Byron failed to distinguish, according to Beddoes, between the Greek and English, i.e., Shakes-

1. 1828 with later additions.

p.535.

2. The Works of Thomas Lovell Beddoes, ed. H.W. Donner, 1935, (hereafter referred to as "Works").

3. cf. Byron's letters, V, 173.

pearian, forms.

In the fragment of another preface Beddoes provides a dramatic manifesto which is dependent upon Shakespeare :

"The only great law for the conduct of a tragedy, which the student of Shakespeare recognises - and he who has not studied that incarnation of nature, and read the sciences of the affections and passions in the living universe of that infinite mind, cannot be any more than contemptible in dramatic or poetical criticism: such may close this page and open another - in the opinion of him who has lived in Shakespeare methinks the only canon which has any right to regulate the distribution of this artificial or dramatic providence will run thus; - that from first to last the events shall arise from, or their good and evil consequences depend on the passions or passionate actions of the simulated beings - forming, actions on passions, incident on deed." 4

But, unlike so many of his contemporaries, Beddoes realised, in theory, that imitation either of Shakespeare himself or of the Elizabethan dramatists generally, could not be successful in early XIX century conditions. In a letter to Kelsall, Beddoes remarks :

"Suchghosts as Marloe, Webster, &c are better dramatists, better poets, I dare say, than any contemporary of ours - but they are ghosts - the worm is in their pages - & we want to see something our great-grandsires did not know. With the greatest reverence for all the antiquities of the drama, I still think we had better beget than revive - attempt to give the literature of this age an idiosyncrasy & spirit of its own, & only raise a ghost to gaze on, not to live with - just now the drama is a haunted ruin." 5

4. Works, p.529-530. Beddoes's reverence for Shakespeare is also found in his letters, e.g. Letter to B.W. Proctor, Works, p.581.
5. Works, p.595.

The contemporary play Beddoes most admired was The Cenci - "a tragedy inferior to none in our literature or any other - Shakespeare, be it observed, is always and everywhere an exception."<sup>6</sup> But he felt that Shelley had made a mistake in tending towards Greek models -

"....the only error of the Cenci is, that its splendid author seemed to have the Greeks, instead of Shakespeare, as his model in his mind's eye: if he had followed the latter, I see no reason why he should not have been the second English dramatist." <sup>7</sup>

Beddoes was also definite in his attitude to the stage -

"You are, I think, disinclined to the stage: now I confess that I think this is the highest aim of the dramatist, & I should be very desirous to get on it. To look down on it is a piece of impertinence as long as one chooses to write in the form of a play, and is generally the result of a consciousness of one's own inability to produce anything striking & affecting in that way." <sup>8</sup>

This insistence on the importance of the stage is bound to accompany any serious attempt to understand dramatic form. Dramatic writers who demote the stage to relative unimportance, as Byron does, and Milton, in Samson Agonistes, are not fully accepting their chosen form. Whilst admitting the importance of the stage, Beddoes himself did not write for it, neither The Brides' Tragedy nor Death's Jest-Book being intended for

6. Works, p. 542 - a review of Montezuma by St. John Dorset.

7. Letters to B.W. Procter, Works, p. 578.

8. Works, p. 640, Letter to T.F. Kelsall.

the stage.<sup>9</sup> Beddoes told Kelsall -

"I am convinced the man who is to awaken the drama must be a bold trampling fellow - no creeper into worm-holes - no reviser even - however good." 10

But, whilst he recognised the need, Beddoes himself could not satisfy it. He remains a lyrical poet and an amazing writer of blank verse, who idiosyncratically followed his own way, producing in Death's Jest-Book "a specimen of what might be called the florid Gothic in poetry."<sup>11</sup>

(ii) The Brides' Tragedy.

In his first complete play Beddoes is revealed as a poet, but not as a dramatist. Beddoes realised what the English stage required,<sup>12</sup> but he himself could not provide it. He is too much of a lyrical poet. Any dramatic power he achieves in The Brides' Tragedy tends to be derivative, relying strongly upon Shakespeare and the Elizabethans. As Dr. H.W. Donner points

9. cf. The Brides' Tragedy, Preface; Death's Jest-Book, Preface. L. Strachey in "The Last Elizabethan" (reprinted in Literary Essays, 1948, p.171-194) affirms that Beddoes "wrote his plays to be acted" (p.187) on the evidence of the letter to Kelsall quoted above. This belief does not pay sufficient attention to all Beddoes' letters where he shows a dislike of the contemporary theatre and a realistic acceptance of how his plays would be received. This does not prevent his admitting the supreme importance of the stage for the dramatist.

10. Works, p. 595.

11. Preface to Death's Jest-Book.

12. cf. supra p.400.

out, the very title has an Elizabethan flavour about it, whilst the action and characters continue in the same vein.<sup>13</sup>

The story of The Brides' Tragedy was suggested to Beddoes by an actual event recorded in The Midland Minstrel by Thomas Gillet, Oxford, 1822. He took this story, moved it into a vague sort of Illyrian setting and unfolded it with all the poetic power he had. Floribel - the first bride whose tragedy this is - is secretly married to Hesperus. Orlando, a noble lord, wants Hesperus to marry his sister, Olivia - the second bride of the tragedy. Orlando imprisons Lord Ernest, Hesperus's father, making his release conditional upon Hesperus's marrying Olivia. Hesperus is torn between two loyalties, but, after much turmoil, he murders Floribel before marrying Olivia to release his father. Floribel's buried body is found, along with the knife Hesperus had used to kill her. He is arrested after his wedding to Olivia. He is tried, condemned to death and only escapes the indignity of execution thanks to Lenora, Floribel's mother, who kills him by giving him poisoned flowers to smell: Beddoes has a footnote here, "The reader will recollect Massinger's 'Duke of Milan'." <sup>14</sup>

13. H.W. Donner, Thomas Lovell Beddoes, 1935, p.107. (Hereafter referred to as "Donner"). Throughout this chapter I am greatly indebted to Dr. Donner's study of Beddoes and to his edition of Beddoes' Works.

14. footnote to V, iv, 96.

The success of this plot depends upon a conspiracy of silence between the characters and gullibility from the reader. Each character accepts circumstances as inevitable: Floribel accepts a secret marriage and Hesperus's sudden change of feeling towards her; Hesperus accepts his father's position and its only remedy without any attempt to explain his reluctance to marry Olivia. As Donner points out "the play is academically built and planned with care"<sup>15</sup>: the first act of exposition propounds the problem facing Hesperus, the second act shows the conflict in Hesperus and its likely conclusion, the third act concerns the murder, the fourth the consequences and the fifth the catastrophe. But when the content of these acts is examined, we find that the action is really contained in the first three acts and the last two are more laments than necessary parts of the action. The characters inevitably suffer from this faulty construction; there are touches of genuine living characterisation, but for the most of the play the dramatis personae are obedient puppets who exist as mouth-pieces for Beddoes's poetry. Lytton Strachey, in discussing Beddoes, puts Beddoes into a category of English writers "who are great merely because of their art":<sup>16</sup>

15. Donner, p. 94.

16. Literary Essays, p.189.

"It would be vain to look, among such spectral imaginings as these /Strachey has been quoting from The Brides' Tragedy/ for guidance in practical affairs, or for illuminating views on men and things, or for a philosophy, or, in short, for anything which may be called a 'criticism of life.'" 17

Beddoes's dramatic weakness was recognised in his own age: a reviewer of the drama remarked of The Brides' Tragedy that it conjoins

"very striking poetical merits with what we consider the greatest dramatic faults. It is 'brimmed up and running over' with poetry of the wildest imagination and most beautiful fancy - but we have devoted great part of this article to prove that such writing is out of place in a play. The management of the plot is very inartificial and unskilful ...and the dialogue ... is nearly all entirely inappropriate, as regards the situation of the speaker; but regarded as poetry alone, it is .... of a degree of originality and beauty which even these most poetical days rarely present." 18

(iii) Death's Jest-Book, or, The Fool's Tragedy.

Beddoes' only other complete play is Death's Jest-Book. It was finished by 1829, but as Beddoes was discouraged from publishing he continued to make alterations, the most extensive being an enlarged Act I written between 1838 and 1844. In this play the weird fascination which death and the grave exercised

17. Literary Essays, p. 189.

18. The Album, May, 1823, p.28, "On Ancient and Modern Tragedy".

over Beddoes has found its fullest expression. Here also his Elizabethan outlook is at its most obvious :

"The mere title of this dramatic poem Death's Jest-Book recalls a play by Webster, or Cyril Tourneur, and its contents more vividly remind us of those great writers. But not as an imitation. He is a man of the most original genius.<sup>19</sup> Lawless and unrestrained are his flights of imagination, his outlines of character careless or extravagant, and a madman's dream not more violent or improbable than his ideas of a story or plot. Yet the book is a masterpiece of poetry."

20

The story concerns the sons of a deposed Duke of Münsterberg, Wolfram and Isbrand, who have sworn to avenge their father's deposition and murder. They enter the service of the usurper and murderer, Wolfram as a knight, Isbrand as the court fool. The character of Melferic, the new Duke, wins Wolfram's friendship and they become blood brothers. They go to the Crusades together. When the play opens, Wolfram is just preparing to embark in search of the Duke who has been captured - Wolfram had also been captured but had escaped. Isbrand remains at home, planning revenge. When Wolfram finds the Duke he discovers that Melferic has fallen in love with his chosen bride. The Duke kills Wolfram, and returns to find the state threatened by rebellion and even his own sons conspiring with Isbrand

19. As Lytton Strachey says of Beddoes "he was not even a 'reviver'; he was a reincarnation." (Literary Essays, p. 183).

20. The Examiner, 20.vii.1850, p.461.



against him. Disgusted with life, Melferic yearns for his former happiness, and Ziba, an Arab, undertakes to raise his dead wife. But instead Wolfram comes from her tomb, as part of Isbrand's macabre revenge was to change the remains of Wolfram and the Duke's wife. Retaliation begins: Melferic's two sons both love the same woman, one commits fratricide, and then, in the presence of his father, suicide. The revolt succeeds, and Isbrand becomes Duke, and swiftly develops into a new dictator. He is murdered by his disillusioned followers. The two women, innocent causes of so much suffering, die hoping to be re-united with their lovers in death. Wolfram's spectre appears and draws Melferic alive into the tomb.

The atmosphere of Death's Jest-Book is fantastic and suggestive of a side-chapel in a vast, gloomy Gothic cathedral where large family vaults may at any moment open to reveal the skeletons stirring into life. Beddoes has succeeded in mingling death with life until it is hard to remember which of the characters is a ghost and which a living being. The dramatic effect is not successful. Beddoes has used his lyrical gifts in such rich profusion that any dramatic framework is obscured and too easily forgotten, whilst the mingling of death and life<sup>21</sup> as I have pointed out, can lead to confusion. Yet underneath

21. cf. supra.

the lyrical richness there is a dramatic structure: the parallelism between the Duke's betrayal of Wolfram, and his sons' betraying him and turning to Isbrand. There is also the Elizabethan and Gothic revenge motif. Unlike most plays of this period, Death's Jest-Book also has a comic secondary plot in which Homunculus Mandrake, "zany to a mountebank" searches for a mixture to induce invisibility. His friends pretend he has found it and Mandrake is forced to haunt tombs and graveyards for peace.

In his letters Beddoes shows that he was concerned for the structure of Death's Jest-Book. Writing to Kelsall at the beginning of January, 1831, he suggests some alterations he has in mind and then continues to outline his ideas of dramatic structure -

"In the first [Act] the deed must be committed, [the murder of Wolfram], the consequences of which employ the following: in the second, a reaction attempted, and a second seed sown for ripening in the aftertime [the Duke is shown penitent, Wolfram's remains are removed, the Duke's sons plan rebellion]: in the third, which needs not be the most powerful as I once thought, the storm gathers, doubts rise, or the termination which appears to be at hand, is intercepted by some bold and unexpected invention; a new event, the development of a character hitherto obscure, a new resolve, &c gives a new turn to the aspect of the future [revolution plans ripen, but all is delayed by Ziba's emergence as a conjurer

to bring the dead to life/7: in the fourth all is consummated, the truth is cleared up, the final determination taken, the step of Nemesis is heard /Athulf's fratricide and revolution/7: and in the fifth the atonement follows /Athulf commits suicide, Isbrand is murdered, Melveric is drawn into the tomb./7 " .

22

In spite of Beddoes's concern for dramatic structure, Death's Jest-Book remains an ill-constructed play. The plot was originally built around the favourite Elizabethan theme of revenge. But this theme almost disappears, so overlaid is it by other things, particularly by Beddoes's concern with the mystery of life and how this mystery may be reconciled with, or resolved in, death, his "skeleton complex"; and by his abundant love of words for themselves so that characters enlarge upon their feelings with little or no reference to the play as a whole<sup>23</sup> but simply to dazzle with words.

In respect of the main theme - revenge - it is interesting to see how Beddoes has revealed his weaknesses in the enlarged Act I. Apparently because he is aware of how muted the revenge theme becomes, it is here underlined and the reasons for it enlarged -

"A father slain and plundered; a sister's love first worn in the bosom, then trampled in the dust..."

24

22. Works, p. 651.

23. cf. the comic scenes in II, i and ii.

24. Amended I, i, 195-6.

in the first version no mention was made of any sister. Then Beddoes' love for words overwhelms him into verbiage, which is so often unnecessary, yet at times produces a Romantic, lyrical image -

"Yet, my Sibylla, oft first love must perish;  
Like the poor snow-drop, boyish love of Spring,  
Born pale to die, and strew the path of triumph  
Before the imperial glowing of the rose,  
Whose passion conquers all."

25

As well as such poetry as this, there are additional lyrics and more comic nonsense, but they give nothing to the plot. There is no sense of dramatic progress - it is almost as if Shakespeare had mixed up Denmark, Illyria and East Cheap into one mammoth production. Blackwood's review said of it :

"Death's Jest-Book is a play of the most impossible construction...In this mad and plotless play there are finer passages than any living dramatist has composed. There is grandeur, tenderness, and a power of description totally unequalled by the second-hand Elizabethans."

26

Donner says of the plot -

"The plot is not allowed to grow organically but is by intellectual means subjected to a speculative unity. As soon as Beddoes tries to fill it out with realistic detail he is led astray."

27

Donner exemplifies this by the blood bond between Wolfram and Melveric; it is often mentioned, but when it is explained the

25. Amended I, ii, 166-170.

26. Blackwood's lxxx (October, 1856), 447-448.

27. Donner, p.223.

explanation is questionable<sup>28</sup> - obviously Beddoes wanted Wolfram and Melveric to be blood-brothers, but how or why they should be did not trouble him unduly.

The lasting impression of the play is not of a revenge tragedy, but of a mocking satire upon death. E.H.W. Meyerstein has commented upon Beddoes :

"he was impressed by the interchange, the swift succession, of life and death, as was his idol' Shelley, in the lines:

The babe is at peace within the womb,  
The corpse is at rest within the tomb:  
We begin with what we end.

Indeed, his posthumous five acts may be regarded as a set of variations, mainly in the minor, some maestoso, some scherzando, over that ground, a macabre passacaglia." 29

The satire relies upon Isbrand, who emerges as a believable character whose actions seem to arise naturally from his character. The other characters tend to come alive, more or less, as they reflect Beddoes's own thought and personality. They do not interact dramatically so much as make set speeches, more to the reader than to each other. The Duke particularly is made to act in an unsatisfactory manner: the incredible villainy he shows in Act I, iv, in killing Wolfram, does not seem to belong to the same man who returns to Grüssau.

28. II, iv, 46-50.

29. (English, iii (1940) 13.) "Thomas Lovell Beddoes,"

Beddoes' use of imagery serves to underline his interest in death. Sleep becomes "a warmer lighter death"<sup>30</sup> and death is preferred to sleep in the haunting dirge, "If thou wilt ease thine heart."<sup>31</sup> When Sibylla shows her preference for Wolfram before the Duke, he has an aside :

"Let them love;  
And let him be her love. She is a flower,  
Growing upon a grave." 32

Poisoned wine becomes -

"right metal  
For funeral bells." 33.

Throughout there is the same imagery we associate with Beddoes' lyrical poetry; flowers, insects, reptiles, all adding up to a sense of bright, living things, whose life, though vivid, is short, and, in a sense, could always be associated with the grave: flowers grow upon graves, insects visit the flowers or scuttle over the earth, whilst snakes are pictured as twining around skeletons, slithering through empty eye-sockets. Beddoes' intention was -

"of his Death's night  
His moony ghostliness and silent might  
To rob him, to un-cypress him I' the light  
To unmask all his secrets; make him play  
Momus o'er wine by torch-light is the way  
To conquer him and kill; and from the day  
Spurned hissed and hooted send him back again  
An unmasked braggart to his banquet den.  
For death is more 'a jest' than Life....." 34

30. I, ii, 31.

31. II, ii, 1-18.

32. I, ii, 215-217.

33. I, iii, 61-62.

34. Works, p.614-615. This is part of a letter to B.W.Procter, March, 1826, in which Beddoes describes his intention in Death's Jest-Book.

But, inevitably, death can never be fully satisfied, for always the skull remains leering at the satirist. So it is in Death's Jest-book. Beddoes has tried, through Wolfram, Isbrand and Mandrake to make us think of death as a fool with cap and bells. Yet Isbrand's last speech before he dies shows the futility of the attempt -

"I jest and sing, and yet alas! am he,  
Who is a wicked masque would play the Devil;  
But jealous Lucifer himself appeared,  
And bore him - whither? I shall know to-morrow,  
For now Death makes indeed a fool of me." 35

The conclusion of the play is unsatisfactory, because indeterminate, unless Beddoes has turned his satire from death on to men. Beddoes seems to conclude that nothing is fixed in this world, and if Death is a fool man is perhaps a greater for being fooled himself. The play ends with the Duke accompanying Wolfram back into the tomb -

"But thee, who daredst to call up into life,  
And the unholy world's forbidden sunlight,  
Out of his grave him who reposed softly,  
One of the ghosts doth summon, in like manner,  
Thee, still alive, into the world o' th' dead. 36

Exit with the DUKE into the sepulchre."

Such close commerce between death and life ends by being a weakness instead of a strength of the play.

Beddoes is rather a lyric than a dramatic writer -

35. V, iv, 281-285.

36. V, iv, 353-357.

"Death's Jest-Book is nominally a drama in five acts. All the rest of his work, except a few lyrics and occasional poems, is also nominally dramatic. But there never was anything less dramatic in substance than this mass of admirable poetry in dialogue. Beddoes' genius was essentially lyrical: he had imagination, the gift of style, the mastery of rhythm, a strange choiceness and curiosity of phrase. But of really dramatic power he had nothing. He could neither conceive a coherent plot, nor develop a credible situation. He had no grasp on human nature, he had no conception of what character might be in men and women, he had no faculty of expressing emotion convincingly. Constantly you find the most beautiful poetry where it is absolutely inappropriate, but never do you find one of these brief and memorable phrases - words from the heart - for which one would give much beautiful poetry..." 37

Beddoes' lyrical power emerges strongly in Death's Jest-Book. The amended Act I (1838-1844) is longer than the 1828 Act I largely because of the new lyrics. Thirty-one lines of Act I (1828) are replaced in the revised act by ninety-seven lines, eighty-seven of which are comprised of two lyrics. This amended act also contains Mandrake's two inconsequential nonsense songs - "Whoever has heard of St. Gingo"<sup>38</sup> and "wee, wee tailor."<sup>39</sup> They are good nonsense, but have no bearing upon Death's Jest-Book, unless, as I have suggested, Beddoes became more convinced that it was not death so much as man who had to be mocked.

37. A. Symons in The Academy, 15.viii.1891, p.129.

38. Amended I, iv, 19-48.

39. Amended I, iv, 74-121.



In this new act fishermen are introduced, forming a kind of chorus which sings three songs "from the Waters"<sup>40</sup> which act as a commentary upon the action. All the lyrics are invaluable for setting the atmosphere of the scenes in which they are found. Isbrand's songs throughout the play are rationally meaningless, but the words and their rhythms convey an irrational meaning which underlines the weird mixture of life and death and of a species of baffled despair at the thought that, no matter how one dislikes it, death ultimately remains a mystery.

Beddoes succeeds in his dramatic prose, which is reserved for Mandrake and his friends and, at the beginning, for Isbrand, but, as the play develops and Isbrand gains in importance, he speaks in blank verse. The prose shows the influence of Shakespeare -

"This is the mystery of humanity, drank I not wine  
I were a tailor tomorrow; next day, a dog, and in a week  
I should have less life than a witch's brookstick. Drink-  
ing hath been my education and my path of life. Small  
beer was my toothless infancy, the days of my childhood  
I passed in stout, porter comforted my years of Love,  
but my beard growing I took to sack, and now I quench  
the aspiration of my soul in these good wines of  
Hungary." 41.

The nonsense, the gaiety and the power of life are in Beddoes as in Shakespeare. A sailor remarks :

40. Amended I, iv, 136-147, 204-227, 259-272.

41. II, i, 20-27.

"my legs hate walking on this stupid dead earth.  
I'm born to roll through life, and if the world  
won't under me tumble and toss, why, I must e'en  
suck up a sort of marine motion out of the can."

42

The mystery of death was one towards which Beddoes was turning increasingly. One of his reasons for writing Death's Jest-Book had been to rid death of its fear by becoming familiar with it,<sup>43</sup> but latterly Beddoes looked to death to solve all the problems of this world.<sup>44</sup> This emerges towards the end of Death's Jest-Book -

"Lady. And therefore earth and all its ornaments,  
Which are the symbols of humanity  
In forms refined, and efforts uncompleted,  
All innocent and graceful, temper the heart,  
Of him who muses and compares them skilfully,  
To glad believe and tearful gratitude.  
This is the sacred source of poesy.

Sibylla. While we are young and free from care, we think  
so

But when old age or sorrow brings us nearer  
To spirits and their interests, we see  
Few features of mankind in outward nature;  
But rather signs inviting us to heaven.  
I love flowers too; not for a young girl's reason,  
But because these brief visitors to us  
Rise yearly from the neighbourhood of the dead,  
To show us how far fairer and more lovely  
Their world is; and return thither again  
Like parting friends that beckon us to follow,  
And lead the way silent and smilingly."

45

42. II, i, 40-43.

43. cf. Donner, pp. 192 ff.

44. cf. Donner, p. 209, 213, 214.

45. V, iii, 22-40.

Beddoes' admiration for the Elizabethans has led him into writing highly individual poetry in a quasi-dramatic form; his plays are not good theatre, but, unlike so many of his undramatic contemporaries, Beddoes does at least give us poetry. A poignant sweetness of thought and expression is presented to us in poetry which excites us because it can communicate Beddoes' own poetic vision of the world. This excitement is found far too rarely in the blank verse tragedy of this period. Though we must acknowledge however regretfully, that Beddoes never quite succeeded in blank verse tragedy, we can give him full praise for being a poet - more than many of the other writers we have considered could possibly claim to be.

Appendix I.

A Hand-list of English Blank Verse Tragedy written  
during the Years 1790-1825.

References in brackets after a play-title give details of the first known performance and of any subsequent London performance if the play was first acted in the Provinces. Dates outside the brackets are the dates of publication. The theatre abbreviations are those used by Allardyce Nicoll: C.G. for Covent Garden, D.L. for Drury Lane, H<sup>1</sup> for the King's Theatre, or Opera House, Haymarket, H<sup>2</sup> for the Theatre Royal, Haymarket. I am greatly indebted to Allardyce Nicoll's Hand-lists for the dates of performance, any supplementary information has its source indicated in a footnote.

- |                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| À COURT, W.                    | <u>Montalto</u> (D.L. 8.i.1821), 1821.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| AINSLIE, Dr.<br>Whitelaw.      | <u>Clemenza; or, The Tuscan Orphan</u> ,<br>(Bath, 1.vi.1822), 1823.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| ALDERSON, Miss,<br>(Mrs. OPIE) | <u>Adelaide</u> , (Plumptre's private theatre,<br>Norwich, i.1791).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| ALLEN, Robert.                 | <u>The Parricide</u> , (Bath, 12.v.1824), 1824, Bath.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| ASHE, Nicholas.                | <u>Panthea; or, The Susian Captive</u> , 1800, Dublin.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| ASHTON, Joseph.                | <u>Retributive Justice</u> , 1813, Manchester.<br><u>Conscience</u> , (Manchester, 10.ii.1815), 1815.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| BAILEY, William.               | <u>Grimaldi</u> , 1822.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| BAILLIE, Joanna.               | <u>A Series of Plays</u> , 1798. This collection<br>includes <u>Count Basil</u> and <u>De Montfort</u> ,<br>(D.L. 29.iv.1800).<br><u>A Series of Plays</u> , 1802. This collection<br>includes <u>Ethwald</u> , Parts I and II.<br><u>The Family Legend</u> (Edinburgh, 29.i.1810;<br>D.L. 29.iv.1815), 1810, Edinburgh.<br><u>A Series of Plays</u> , 1812. This collection<br>includes <u>Orra</u> . |
| BAIN, Donald.                  | <u>The Patriot; or, Wallace</u> , 1806, Edinburgh.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |

- BANIM, John. Turgesius, published with the following Damon and Pythias (C.G. 28.v.1821; this stage version was altered and revised by R.L. SHEIL), 1821.
- BARHAM,  
Thomas Foster. Abdallah; or, The Arabian Martyr, 1820.
- BARTHOLOMEW,  
John. The Fall of the French Monarchy, or Louis XVI, 1794.
- BAYLEY, Peter Orestes in Argos (C.G. 20.iv.1825), 1825.
- BEDDOES,  
Thomas Lovell. The Brides' Tragedy, 1822.  
Death's Jest-Book, or The Fool's Tragedy, 1850.
- BENNETT, William. Panthea, 1817.
- BIDLAKE, John. Virginia; or The Fall of the Decemvirs, 1800. A revised version of this play, Virginius; or The Fall of the Decemvirs, was acted D.L. 29.v.1820.
- BIRD, James. Cosmo, Duke of Tuscany, 1822.
- BIRRELL, Andrew. Henry and Almeria, 1802.
- BOYD, Henry. Poems, chiefly Dramatic and Lyric, 1793, Dublin. This contains: The Helots, The Rivals, The Temple of Vesta and The Royal Message.
- BRAND, Hannah. Plays and Poems, 1798, Norwich. This includes Huniades; or, The Siege of Belgrade (H<sup>1</sup> 18.i.1792). In an altered form, as Agmunda, at H<sup>1</sup> 2.ii.1792.
- BROWN, Robert. Henry, Lord Darnley, 1823, Edinburgh.  
John, Earl of Gowrie, 1825, Edinburgh.
- BUCKE, Charles. The Italians, or, The Fatal Accusation, (D.L.3.iv.1819), 1819.
- BUNN, Alfred. Conrad, the Usurper, 1818. Bunn is the emendator of this anonymous play which was printed together with The Kinsmen of Naples, both plays being "By the Author of Tancred."
- BURNABY,  
Edwyn Andrew. Agatha; or, The Convent of St. Bartholomew, 1821.
- BURNEY, Frances  
(Madame  
D'Arblay) Edwy and Elgiva (D.L.21.iii.1795), unpublished MS. Larpent, 28.5.

- BURNEY, Frances.<sup>1</sup> Tragic Dramas, 1818. This includes Fitzormond; or Cherished Resentment.
- BURRELL, Lady Sophia Raymond Theodora; or, The Spanish Daughter, 1800.
- BYRON, Lord George Gordon. Manfred, A Dramatic Poem (C.G.29.x.1834), 1817;  
Marino Faliero, Doge of Venice (D.L.25.iv.1821), 1821.  
Sardanapalus, (D.L.10.iv.1834);  
The Two Foscari, (C.G. 7.iv.1837);  
Cain, A Mystery; these three plays were first published in one volume, 1821.  
The Deformed Transformed, 1824.  
Heaven and Earth, A Mystery, 1824.  
Werner, (Bath, 10.ii.1830; D.L.15.xii.1830), 1823.
- CHARNOCK, John. Loyalty, or, Invasion Defeated, 1810.
- CHENEVIX, Richard. Leonora, 1802 (2nd edition).<sup>2</sup>  
Two Plays, 1812. One of these plays, Henry the Seventh, An Historical Tragedy, is in blank verse.
- COLERIDGE, Samuel Taylor. The Fall of Robespierre, 1794, Cambridge.  
Coleridge wrote Act I; R. SOUTHEY, Acts II and III.  
Osorio ... now first printed, 1873.  
Remorse (D.L. 23.i.1813), 1813. This is a revised version of Osorio, written in 1797 though not printed until 1873.
- CORNWALL, Barry, Bryan Waller PROCTER). Mirandole (C.G.9.i.1821), 1821.
- CROLY, Rev.George. Catiline, 1822.

1. A niece of Mme D'Arblay. Professor Allardyce Nicoll wrongly attributes Tragic Dramas to Frances Burney, Mme. D'Arblay (Nicoll, iv, 277). In her preface Miss F.Burney refers to her "Aunt, Madame D'Arblay).
2. Leonora is not listed by Professor Allardyce Nicoll.

- DALLAS,  
Robert Charles      Miscellaneous Writings, 1797. This includes  
                         Lucretia.  
                         Adrastus, 1823.
- DELAP,  
Rev. John.      Dramatic Poems, 1803. This includes  
                         Gunilda; The Usurper; Matilda; Abdalla.
- DEVERELL,  
Mrs. M.      Mary Queen of Scots, 1792.
- DEW, Dyer.      Harold; or, The English King, 1820.
- DILLON, John.      Retribution; or, The Chieftain's Daughter,  
                         (C.G. 1.1.1818), 1818.
- DOUBLEDAY,  
Thomas.      The Italian Wife (Newcastle, v.1823), 1823  
                         Edinburgh.  
                         Babington (Newcastle, 10.1.1826), 1825.
- EYRE,  
Edmund John.      The Maid of Normandy; or, The Death of the  
                         Queen of France, (Wolverhampton 1794), 1794.
- FITZBALL (or BALL)      Edwin (Norwich, 1817).  
Edward.      Bertha; or, The Assassins of Istria (Norwich,  
                         8.iii.1819).  
                         Antigone; or, The Theban Sister (Norwich,  
                         1821).
- FITZGERALD,  
Michael.      Elwina (Crow Street, Dublin, 29.iii.1792).
- FITZGERALD,  
Preston.      The Spaniard and Siorleamh, 1810.  
                         The Siege of Carthage, 1819.
- FRERE, B.      Olympia, 1821.
- GALLOWAY, George.      The Admirable Crichton, 1802.
- GALT, John.      Tragedies, 1812. Contains Maddalen;  
                         Agamemnon; Lady Macbeth; Antonia; Clytemnes-  
                         tra.  
                         The Original and Rejected Theatre, 1814. This  
                         includes, of J. Galt's, The Witness, The  
                         Prophetess.

- GALT, John,  
(ctd). The New British Theatre, volume iii, 1814.  
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second volume of the four volume series, The  
Original and Rejected Theatre, 1814). In-  
cludes, of J. Galt's, The Apostate; or  
Atlantis Destroyed; Hector, A Tragic Cento.  
The Witness was published in a slightly al-  
tered form as The Appeal (Edinburgh, 16.ii.  
1818), 1818, Edinburgh.
- GARDINER,  
William. The Sultana; or, The Jealous Queen, 1806,  
Gloucester.
- GLOVER, Richard. Jason, 1799.
- GODWIN, William. Antonio; or, The Soldier's Return (D.L.  
13.xii.1800), 1800.
- GRAHAME,  
Rev. James. Wallace, 1799, Edinburgh.  
Mary Stewart, Queen of Scots, 1801, Edinburgh.
- HAGGITT,  
Rev. John. The Count de Villeroi; or, The Fate of  
Patriotism, 1794.
- HAYLEY, William. Endora (C.G. 29.i.1790);  
The Viceroy;  
The Heroine of Cambria. All three plays  
were printed together, Three Plays, 1811  
Chichester.
- HAYNES, James. Conscience; or, The Bridal Night, (D.L.  
21.ii.1821), 1821.  
Durazzo (C.G. xi.1838), 1823.
- HEMANS, Mrs. The Vespers of Palermo (C.G. 12.xii.1823), 1823.  
Felicia Dorothea The Siege of Valencia, 1823.
- HEY, Richard. The Captive Monarch, 1794.
- HILL, Isabel. The Poet's Child, 1820.
- HOWARD, Frederic, The Step-Mother, 1800.  
Earl of Carlisle.
- HUNTER, George M. Louis and Antoinette, 1794.
- HURDIS, Dr. James. Panthea.  
Sir Thomas More, 1792.
- HYDE, George. Alphonsus, 1825.



~~IRELAND,~~

- Samuel William Henry. Vortigern (D.L. 2.iv.1796), 1799.  
Henry the Second, 1799.  
Mutius Scaevola; or, The Roman Patriot, 1801.
- JAMESON, Cadijeh; or, The Black Prince, 1825.  
Mrs. Anne.
- JEPHSON, Robert. Conspiracy (D.L.15.xi.1796), 1796, Dublin.
- JERNINGHAM, The Siege of Berwick (C.G.13.xi.1793), 1794.  
Edward.
- JONES, Sons; or, Family Feuds, 1809.  
Captain J.
- KEATS, John. Otho the Great, printed in Poems, 1883.
- KNOWLES, Virginius; or, The Liberation of Rome, (Glas-  
James Sheridan. gow, 1820; C.G.17.v.1820), 1820.  
Caius Gracchus (Belfast, 13.ii.1815; D.L.  
18.xi.1823), 1823, Glasgow.
- LAMB, Charles. John Woodvil, 1802.
- LANDOR, The Count Arezzi, 1824.  
Robert Eyres.
- LANDOR, Count Julian, 1812.  
Walter Savage.
- LEE, Francis. The Glorious Revolution of 1688, 1821.
- LEE, Sophie. Almeyda; Queen of Granada (D.L.20.iv.1796),  
1796.
- LEWIS, Alfonso, King of Castile (C.G.15.i.1802), 1801.  
Matthew Gregory. Adelgitha; or, The Fruits of a Single Error,  
(D.L.30.iv.1807), 1806.
- LLOYD, Charles The Duke d'Ormond, 1822.

- McDONALD, Thomas, Junr. Cornelia, 1823, (Dublin).
- MACLAURIN, John, Lord Dreghorn. Hampden, 1799.  
The Public, printed in Works, 1798, Edinburgh.
- MASON, James. The Natural Son, 1805, Liverpool.  
The Renown,  
Ninus, both these plays were printed in  
Literary Miscellanies, 1809, volume ii.  
(The Renown seems to be another title of  
The Natural Son<sup>3</sup>).
- MASTERTON, Charles. The Seducer, 1811.  
Bentivoglio, 1824.
- MATURIN, Charles Robert. Bertram; or, The Castle of St. Aldobrand,  
(D.L. 9.v.1816), 1816.  
Manuel (D.L. 8.iii.1817), 1817.  
Fredolfo (C.G. 12.v.1819), 1819.
- MAURICE, Thomas The Fall of the Mogul, 1806.
- MERRY, Robert Ambitious Vengeance (in Bell's British Album,  
1790)  
Lorenzo (C.G. 5.iv.1791), 1791.
- METCALFE, Catharine. Julia de Roubigné (Bath, 23.xii.1790)
- MILLAR, James. The Siege of Berwick, 1824.
- MILMAN, Rev. Henry Hart. Fazio (Surrey, 22.xii.1816 as The Italian  
Wife; Bath 6.i.1818;<sup>4</sup> C.G. 5.ii.1818), 1815  
Oxford.  
The Fall of Jerusalem, 1820.  
The Martyr of Antioch, 1822.  
Belshazzar, 1822.
- MITFORD, Mary Russell. Julian (C.G. 15.iii.1823), 1823.
- MONNEY, William. Caractacus, 1816.
- MONRO, Thomas Philoctetes in Lemnos, 1795.
- MOORE, Thomas Montba; or, The Buccaneers, 1804.

3. cf. Chapter III, p. 84.

4. Genest, viii, 670

- MORRIS,  
Captain Thomas. Phaedra.
- MUNRO,  
Lieutenant C.F. The Earl of Ross, 1823.
- MURPHY, Arthur. Arminius, 1798.
- MYLNE, James. Poems, 1790. This includes Darthula;  
The British Kings.
- NORVAL, James. The Generous Chief (Montrose, c.1792), 1792,  
Montrose.
- O'NEILL, Thomas. The Siege of Warsaw (Manchester 15.xii.1794).<sup>5</sup>
- PARLBY, Major  
Brooke Bridges. Revenge, or, The Novice of San Martino, 1818.
- PAYNE,  
John Howard. Brutus; or, The Fall of Tarquin (D.L.3.xii.  
1818), 1818.
- PAYNTER,  
David William. Eurypilus, King of Sicily, 1817, Manchester.  
King Stephen; or, The Battle of Lincoln, 1822,  
Manchester.
- PENN, John. The Battle of Eddington; or, British Liberty,  
(H<sup>2</sup>, 10.v.1797), 1792.
- PINKERTON, J. The Heiress of Strathearn (Edinburgh,  
24.iii.1813).
- PLUMPTRE, James Osway, 1795, Norwich.
- PORTAL, Abraham. Vortimer; or, The True Patriot, 1796.
- PORTER,  
Anna Maria. Switzerland (D.L.15.ii.1819).
- POWELL, Thomas,  
(pseudonym T. DE MONMOUTH).  
Edgar and Elfrida, c. 1792.

5. Professor Allardyce Nicoll lists this among unknown authors; the ms. with the author's name on it, does, however, exist in the British Museum.

- PRESTON,  
William. Offa and Ethelbert; or, The Saxon Princes,  
1791, Dublin.  
The Poetical Works of William Preston, 2 vols.  
1793, Dublin. Includes Messene Freed (Crow-  
street, Dublin, 12.i.1792).  
Rosimunda.  
Democratic Rage; or, Louis the Unfortunate  
(Crow-street, Dublin, vi.1793), 1793.  
The Siege of Ismail, 1794.
- PYE, Henry James The Siege of Meaux, (C.G.19.v.1794), 1794.  
Adelaide (D.L.1800), 1800.
- RHODES,  
George Ambrose. Dion, 1806.
- RICHARDSON,  
Mrs. Sarah. Ethelred, 1810.  
Gertrude, 1810.
- RICHARDSON,  
William. The Indians (Richmond c.1790), 1790.
- ROBINSON, Mary. The Sicilian Lover, 1796.
- ROBINSON-MORRIS,  
Matthew,  
Lord Rokeby. The Fall of Mortimer, 1806.
- ROBY, John The Duke of Mantua, 1823.
- ROCHE, Eugenius. William Tell, 1808.
- ROSCOE, Thomas Gonzalo, the Traitor, 1820.
- ROUGH, William. The Conspiracy of Gowrie, 1800.<sup>6</sup>
- SCOTT, Sir Walter Malidon Hill, 1822, Edinburgh.
- SERLE,  
Thomas James. Raffaella Cimaro, 1819.

6. This play is attributed to William Roscoe by Professor Allardyce Nicoll, iv, 609. The Conspiracy of Gowrie was reprinted in Poems, miscellaneous and fugitive... 1816, the copy of which, in the British Museum, has on the title-page the name of William Rough in manuscript immediately below the words: "Collected by the Author." See also G. Chandler, William Roscoe of Liverpool, p.324 (I am indebted to Miss M. Linton of the National Library of Scotland for help in this matter).

- SHEE, Sir  
Martin Archer. Alasco (Surrey, 5.iv.1824), 1824.
- SHEIL,  
Richard Lalor Adelaide; or, The Emigrants (Crow-street, Dublin, 19.ii.1814; C.G.23.v.1816), 1814, Dublin.  
The Apostate (C.G.3.v.1817), 1817.  
Bellamira; or, The Fall of Tunis (C.G. 22.iv.1818), 1818.  
Damon and Pythias (C.G.28.v.1821). This is an altered stage version of J. BANIM'S Damon and Pythias.
- SHELLEY,  
Percy Bysshe. The Cenci (private Shelley Society performance at the Grant Theatre, Islington, 7.v.1886), 1819.  
Prometheus Unbound, 1820.  
Hellas, 1886.
- SOANE, George. The Bohemian, 1817.
- SOTHEY,  
William. The Siege of Guasco, 1800.  
Julian and Agnes; or, The Monks of the Great St. Bernard (D.L.25.iv.1801), 1801.  
Orestes, 1802.  
Ivan, 1816.  
Ellen; or, The Confession, 1816. This is Julian and Agnes "altered and adapted for representation."
- SOUTHEY, Robert. Wat Tyler, 1817.
- STARKE, Mariana. The British Orphan (Mrs. Crespigny's private theatre at Camberwell, 7.iv.1790).
- STEPHENS, George,  
(Pseudonym "ST. JOHN DORSET")  
Montezuma, 1823.
- STREATFIELD,  
Rev. T. The Bridal of Armagnac, 1823.
- SYMONS,  
Rev. Charles. Inez, 1796.
- TASKER, William. Arviragus (Theatre Royal, Exeter, 1797), 1796. There was also a second, undated, edition, which is slightly altered for the stage. Both editions are duodecimo.

7. Professor Allardyce Nicoll, iii, 310, dates the acting of Arviragus "c.1795" and describes the 1796 edition as octavo; in the second edition the play is described as "performed at the Theatre Royal, Exeter, by desire of the Military, and of the High Sherriff, in March, 1797, with great APPLAUSE."

- TEMPLETON,  
James. The Shipwrecked Lovers, in Poems, 1801,  
Dublin.
- TERNANT,  
William. Cardinal Beaton, 1823, Edinburgh.
- THOMSON,  
William. Caledonia; or, The Clans of Yore, 1818,  
Perth.
- TROTTER, Dr.  
Thomas. The Noble Foundling; or, The Hermit of the  
Tweed, (Newcastle, i.1813). 8
- TWEDDEL, H.M. Aquilhar, 1820.
- TWISS, Horace. The Carib Chief, (D.L. 13.v.1819), 1819.
- WALKER, C.E., Wallace (C.G.14.x1.1820), 1820.
- WARRINGTON,  
Rev.William. Alphonso, King of Castile, 1813.
- WATERHOUSE,  
Benjamin. Annira; or, The Royal Sufferers, 1822,  
Sheffield.
- WATKINS,  
William. The Fall of Carthage (Whitby, c, 1801), 1802,  
Whitby.
- WATSON, George. England Preserved: An Historical Play, (C.G.  
21.ii.1795), 1795 9
- WELLS,  
Charles Jeremiah Joseph and his Brethren, 1824.
- WEST,  
Mrs. Jane. Edmund, surnamed Ironside, printed with  
Miscellaneous Poems, 1791, York.  
Poems and Plays, 4 vols, 1799-1805. This in-  
cludes Adela; The Minstrel; or, The Heir of  
Arundel.
- WEST,  
Rev.Matthew. Female Heroism (Dublin, 19.v.1804), 1803,  
Dublin.
- WESTON,  
Ferdinand Fullerton. St. Aubert; or, The Hour of Retribution and  
The Barrons of Ellenbergh in The Dramatic  
Appellant, 1808.

8. Professor Allardyce Nicoll records the date of performance,  
but there is no record of publication.
9. Professor Allardyce Nicoll dates the performance 26.ii.1795,  
but cf. Genest, vii, 209.

- WHALLEY, Rev.      The Castle of Montval, (D.L.23.iv.1799), 1799.  
Thomas Sedgwick.
- WILMOT,  
Mrs. Barbarina (afterwards BRAND, Baroness Dacre).  
Ina (D.L. 22.iv.1815), 1815
- WOLCOT,            The Fall of Portugal, 1808.  
Dr. John.
- WOODLEY,          Catherine de Medicis; James the Third,  
William.           1825.
- WORDSWORTH,  
William.          The Borderers, 1842.
- WRIGHT,      10  
Frances          Altorf, 1822.

UNKNOWN AUTHORS.

Almeyda; or, The Neapolitan Revenge, 1801.  
Asprand, (Salisbury, 20.iii.1805).

Bellamere, Earl of Carlisle, 1807.

The Carthusian Friar; or, The Age of Chivalry, 1793.  
Catherine de Medicis, 1820.

The Conquest of Granada (The New Theatre, 10.i.1811).

The Count of Tuscany, 1822.

The Duke of Lochford (Edinburgh, 1799).

Edward the Second...with Other Poems, By Thophilus Mac, of No.  
Temple, 1809.

The Fall of Portugal; or, The Royal Exiles, 1808 (Attributed to  
Dr. John Walcott "Peter Pindar").

10. Not listed by Professor Allardyce Nicoll.

Fingal; or, Erin Delivered (H<sup>1</sup> 3.vii.1813).

Gonsalvo, 1822.

The Heir of Innes, 1822.

Helga; or, The Rival Minstrels (Edinburgh, i.1812).

Henry I; or, The British and Norman Feuds (D.L.27.xii.1821).

Henry of Transtamare, (Edinburgh, 1.xi.1805).

Hezekiah, King of Judah; or, Invasion Repulsed and Peace Restored.<sup>11</sup> 1798, "By W.A.W."

Hortensia, 1815.

The Inquisition of 1650; or, Eugene and Maria (Glasgow, i.1816).

James the Third, King of Scotland, 1820 (By the author of Catherine de Medicis).

Moscow, 1819.

Mustapha, 1814.

Mystery; or, The Monks of St. Nicholas, 1815.

The Mystic Cavern; or, The Progress of Ambition (Norwich, 24.iii.1803).

Panthea, Queen of Susia, 1809.

The Patriot Prince, 1809, Calcutta.

Raymond, 1793.

Solyman, 1807.

The Sorceress, 1814. (The Original and Rejected Theatre, iii).

The Step-Mother; or, Fraternal Friendship (Edinburgh, 11.ii.1814).

Suliman, 1814 (The Original and Rejected Theatre, ii).

The Surrender of Calais, 1801, York.



Theodora, 1814. (The Original and Rejected Theatre, i).

Thermopylae; or, Repulsed Invasion, 1814. (The Original and Rejected Theatre, ii).

The Victim, (Edinburgh, 17.xii.1819).

Wallace, 1799, Edinburgh.

Zapphira, 1792.

Appendix II.

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