

CHAPTER VIII

The Fragment of An Unfinished Drama

As soon as *Hellas* was completed, Shelley lost no time in taking up another dramatic venture, 'during the late winter of early spring of 1829'. Mrs. Shelley reports: ... a drama, undertaken for the amusement of the individuals who composed our intimate society, but left unfinished' ¹

This 'intimate society' obviously composed of William Trelawny, Byron and their Italian friends who all were staying at Pisa at that point of time.

A thin supernatural curtain hangs over the whole setting. Love is the central theme. *The Tempest* supplied an idea. The out line of the story as conceived is as follows:

A Pirate, a man of savage as well as of noble nature, after shipwrecks, was saved by an Enchantress, residing in one of the islands of the Indian Archipelago. She fell in love with the Pirate, who forgetting all about his mortal love, for a while, remained attracted to the Enchantress. But after some time, he remembered his previous beloved who still lamented her separation from him. He now escaped from the enchanted island to return to the Lady. However, he again went to the sea and the angry and vengeful Enchantress tossed up a magic tempest in order to bring him back to her island. In the meantime, a good spirit brought his Lady also to the Enchanted Island. An Indian youth who was in love with her was found to accompany her. But the Lady returned his passion only with a sisterly affection. The scene between the Lady and the youth in the fragment takes place after this arrival on the Isle.

The love entanglement involving these four characters has great dramatic interest. The mysterious Pirate has great dramatic potential, he being 'a man of blood and peril', 'awful', and 'beautiful'. *

Here is the germ of a conflict between mortal love represented by the gentle, innocent lady and supernatural passion expressed by the Enchantress. If the play was completed, this conflict would have much heightened the dramatic interest. The Indian youth and the Pirate are competitors. To the youth the Pirate 'was the winter of my peace' (line 12) Their relation could also have carried much dramatic significance. At the same time it must be admitted that the fragment is so lyrical in tone that it looks more like an unfinished poem than 'an unfinished drama.'

There are only two fragmentary scenes. The first fragment contains the soliloquy of the Enchantress who also invokes a spirit who gives the answer. Then there is the other fragmentary scene in which we find the conversation between the Lady and the Indian Youth. We may say that in this fragment of a drama there is also a kind of conflict between good and evil. The Enchantress stands for the evil spirit who tries to win over mankind, in whose nature we find the intermingling of good and evil. The Lady, 'innocent', 'true and kind.' symbolizes the essential goodness.

* 'Is it an idealized portrait of Trelawny', as Dowden ² says in his *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (p. 522)?

The Pirate, swinging back and forth between the Enchantress and the Lady, is the ordinary human being who has to put up with 'remorse and scorn and solitude'. *

In our opinion, Shelley and Jane Williams represent the Indian and the Lady more than the others. Then Jane had visited India, lived there for some time and later shifted to a 'realm of abandonment', that is, Italy, the 'Paradise of Exiles'.

To go back to the theme, Mary Shelley's outline of the plot arguing with what we have noted earlier, has been, however, questioned. Cameron's views, for example, cannot be brushed aside easily.

The Indian Youth had a previous love (32-35), a condition Mary assigned to the Pirate, and he refers to the Lady's encounters with her previous beloved (identified as the Pirate by Mary) in such a strange way (88-92) that he himself seems to be the previous beloved, through either a magic spell or reincarnation.

The Lady gives no indication of having known her beloved twice (as Mary stated) but seems to have left him when he was merely 'a boy'. Nor does he appear to have been a pirate, rather, he is a reviled youthful idealist, like 'Lionel'. Finally, Mary did not mention the mysterious plant, although it was going to play an important role in the play. Possibly,

* Interestingly, Williams noted in his journal that according to his guess Trelawny resembled the previous lover. Sylvia Norman, on the other hand, presumed that the previous lover is sketched after Shelley himself and the Lady 'Who plays on the double flute and delights in flowers' is very like Jane Williams.³

Shelley changed his plot-outline after talking to Mary, perhaps he misled her with regard to some aspects of it, or perhaps she saw more in it than she wished to disclose. ⁴ *

As the fragment shows, both good and evil forces here seem to be inherent and in constant conflict. Shelley's moral approach is evident here. We may note that love is the weapon with which the Lady hopes to win over the Pirate:

Methinks

This World of Love is fit for all the world.
And that for gentle hearts another name
Would speak of gentle thoughts than the world owns.

(The Fragment, ll. 41-44)

This love manifests when spring comes:

...When Spring indeed
Came to unswathe her infants, and the lilies
Peeped from their bright green masks wonder at
This shape of autumn couched in their recess
Then it dilated, and it grew until
One half lay floating on the fountain wave,

(Ibid. II. ll. 206-211)

* By the way, we may mention that the homeland referred to by both the Indian youth and the Lady is an idyllic place of great natural beauty (261-274) replete with the pleasure dome (289-293) located in the Himalayas, the source of many Indian rivers. This is obviously a reference to Kashmir, as we find in the beginning of *Prometheus Unbound*. Medwin tells us that Shelley wanted to go to India, but Peacock prevented it. ⁵

The growth of the plant enriched with flowers and fruits perhaps, symbolizes the growth of love and its mellow maturity in the heart of the Lady:

Day by day

I nursed the plant, and on the double flute

Played to it on the sunny winter days

Soft melodies as sweet as April rain

On silent leaves, and sang those words in which

Passion makes Echo taunt the sleeping strings;

(Ibid. II. ll. 179-184)

The description of the seeding and growth of the plant is so detailed that it becomes obvious that Shelley must have considered it of special importance. Perhaps it also represents some aspect of the good spirit.

As pointed out earlier, this fragmentary drama consists of only two fragmentary scenes — one of only 28 lines in which the enchantress laments her lost love, presumably the Pirate. She uses a spell that will bring him back to her. She is answered by a mysterious spirit who resides in the centre of the earth.

In the next scene of 216 lines the Lady and the Indian Youth are found on the strange land. They discuss her previous lover guessed to be the Pirate. When he was only a 'simple innocent boy' (line85) the Lady knew him. He left her in the 'Dawn' of life. In spite of his ill reputation, she wants to find him out and join him:

Some said he was a man of blood and peril,

And steeped in bitter infamy to the lips.

More need was there I should be innocent,

More need that I should be most true and kind,
And much more need that there should be found one
To share remorse and scorn and solitude,
And all the ill that wait on those who do
The tasks of ruin in the world of life.
He fled, and I have followed him.

(Ibid. II. ll. 112-120)

The Indian youth asks the Lady how she left India and came to the Island. She tells of a dream in which amidst the light of a glowing meteor, 'a spirit like a Child' placed 'something like melon seeds' in a vase. The next day she found a little plant sprouting in the vase. She took care of it and it grew to a large and beautiful plant, trailing outside her window through a garden and a lawn until its end began to float in a fountain. The fragment breaks off here. However, this plant somehow brought the Lady from India to the Island, the 'realm of abandonment' (line 99).

This fragmentary drama has long passages of superb lyrical beauty. There is no direct conflict or no complete delineation of personality. It seems that, even if completed, it would have remained a lyrical drama on love.

What, however, strikes us, is not the lyrical beauty of the play, or the descriptions of beauties of nature and women. Shelley's lifelong theory that love has a strong winning power, which ultimately gets over the obstacle put in its way by adverse circumstances of vengeful human nature, was to be manifested here also. Evil forces are already defeated before the play is completed and, as we have hinted earlier, if completed, it would have championed the causes of moral excellences in this play too.

REFERENCES

1. See *Shelley: Poetical Works*. OUP, Oxford, N.Y: 1988, P 482.
2. . *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*. Dowden P. 522.
3. *After Shelley: The Letters of Jefferson Hogg to Jane Williams*. Sylvia Norman. N. Y: 1938, p.p. XV-XVI.
4. *Shelley: The Golden Years*. K.N. Cameron. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts: 1974, p. 291.
5. See *Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*. ed. by. F.L. Jones. 2 Vols. Oxford: 1941, Letter 64 & Letter 676, II, 374.