

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Strangely, Romantic drama has rarely been treated as an organic force. The studies, stray references, and dissertations have been mainly restricted to discussions of the sentimental Gothic and Elizabethan drama. The uncomplimentary nature of what little has been written is also not wholly justifiable and rather surprising. Romantic verse-drama has remained under-prized, even ignored. Allardyce Nicoll's standard work on the early nineteenth century poetic plays, *A History of Early Nineteenth Century English Drama* (1930), regards the attempts by the Romantic poets as an aberration. Fifteen years earlier than Nicoll's book, *The Dramas of Lord Byron* (1915) by Samuel C. Chew had mirrored the same attitudes. Bertrand Evans' pioneering work *Gothic Drama from Walpole to Shelley* (1947) does not differ much from Nicoll's and Chew's views. Admittedly, some fresh materials on some of the works of some Romantic playwrights, such as, the preface to *The Borderers* (1926), by de Selincourt, *Bulwer and Macready* (1958) edited by Charles H. Shattuck and above all, the four volumes of Coleridge's *Letters* (dating to 1819) edited by Earl L. Groggs produce an urge in us for reconsideration and re-evaluation of the merits of these plays.

In the present study of the dramatic works of Percy Bysshe Shelley as a Romantic writer, we have sought to go for a reappraisal of his works. While discussing his plays, we have tried to bring out certain questions that Shelley's plays pose, and those questions, though rooted in the contemporary political climate, nevertheless have haunted a sensitive rebel like Shelley since his salad days. Despite his missionary idealism, Shelley was also fully conscious of the reality around, and after the waning of the first flush of enthusiasm

with the illusory outcome of the French Revolution, he took no time to realize the potential force of evil.

Shelley's Romantic temperament led him to gravitate towards the world of drama. He gave shape to the intense and passionate feelings in and through his characters. Along with his sense of evil, its mystery and the problem as to how to encounter it had become the principal factors in his plays. He chose themes revealing his moral anxiety not only in his major dramatic works, but also while translating plays from various languages.

Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* is concerned not only with what *is*, but also with what *might be or ought to be*. The action of this play centres on the existence of the evil both in the external worlds and in the mind of the protagonist, Prometheus. He takes a noble revenge against his oppressor through love and forgiveness. He says that he speaks in grief, not in exultation, for he hates no more. At the same time, Demogorgon, the force which is active in the temporary elimination of the evil, warns at the end of the play that the moral order—infirm or whimsical—may release the serpent again. Thus, we find that Shelley was sure of the 'Spells', '...by which to resume/ An empire o'er the disentangled doom' (*Prometheus Unbound, Act-IV, ll. 568-569*) — but he was not so sure of how to generate these in the minds of the cruel and the ruthless. That man may be allured to commit sins in place of putting up with tyranny, which may ultimately bring the end of evil, has also been hinted at his later plays and dramatic works. In his play *The Cenci*, the heroine Beatrice submits herself to evil by taking revenge against her father who has committed a heinous crime: 'Death must be the punishment of crime...' (*The Cenci, Act III, Sc.i. l. 122*). She cannot love and forgive. In his dramatic poem *Hellas*, Shelley represents Greek war of independence against the Turks as an event prophesying a new era free from corruption, and ruled by equality, justice, and love. But the final picture is an impetuous return to earth from an escaping flight into a Romantic dream and a warning: 'Oh, cease! Must hate and death

return?"(*Hellas*, l. 1095). In his fragmentary play, *Charles the First*, Shelley represents Charles as a weak personality, unable to extricate himself from the evil influence of his villainous companions. His *Fragment of an Unfinished Drama* is based on the conflict between innocent love, evil, supernatural passion, and the importance of love for a corruption-free world. In his dramatic satire *Oedipus Tyrannus* or *Swellfoot the Tyrant*, against the background of the matrimonial affairs of King George with Queen Caroline, Shelley harps on sympathy for the people oppressed by the evil-minded men of power. Even his translations from the plays in other languages—in the *Cyclops*, the scenes from *Magico Prodigioso*, and the scenes from the *Faust*—Shelley deals with the conflict between good and evil in the mind of man who himself ought to choose between the two in the face of continuous provocation and temptation.

The aim of the present study is, therefore, to set forth a discussion of Shelley's moral concerns as reflected in these dramatic works. At the same time, we have to bear in mind that he was forced as a Romantic poet to cultivate closet-plays, willy-nilly, which sometimes served as a stronghold, and in which he perhaps felt secure for it was in these plays that he could keep up his dreams for a better and happier world.

However, perfection is a thing to be aimed at, and rarely to be achieved in this world of ours, and so we do not claim to have chalked out an ideal study. All that we can claim is that we have tried our best to make use of the available materials as well as to interpret his dramas rather than his poetry to focus on the moral concerns constituting the basic theme of his works in general and the dramas in particular.

Those who encouraged and helped me a lot to pursue this study are my supervisor Prof. G. N. Roy from the Department of English of the North Bengal University, my husband Shree Prabir Chakraborty, and my elder son Mitropam Chakraborty. I also admit that I owe

much to the guidance of Dr. Jibon Krishna Banerjee from the Visva-Bharati University who has stood by me like a guardian angel whenever I needed materials. I also remember my departed mother and my father-in-law who both hoped to enjoy my success, but could not do so on account of the interference of tragic destiny. My grateful thanks are also due to Prof. Niranjana Mahanty, Visva-Bharati University and Prof. Binoy Kumar Banerjee, North Bengal University for their good counsel during the assimilation of the materials for the study.

Lastly, I regret the occurrence of any typographical errors that might have unwittingly made their way into the corpus. If anything is to be blamed, it is my failing eyesight.