

Fallen Beatrice: De-idealization in Shelley's The Cenci

Nijibayashi, Kei
Graduate School of Letters, Kyushu University : Doctoral Program

<https://doi.org/10.15017/6788767>

出版情報：九大英文学．40，pp.49-68，1997．九州大学大学院英語学・英文学研究会
バージョン：
権利関係：



Fallen Beatrice : De-idealization in Shelley's *The Cenci*

Kei Nijibayashi

i. The Setting

Shelley started working on *The Cenci* in May 1819. In the spring of the same year, he composed the first three acts of *Prometheus Unbound*, which is an optimistic version of the same theme treated in *Julian and Maddalo* in 1818. These three works can be considered a series addressing the same subject. *The Cenci* is essentially a dramatic version of *Julian and Maddalo*. The Maniac, Promethean protagonist of the latter poem, is betrayed and becomes mad ; his “aspiring theories” culminate in a miserable fate. Expelled from his homeland, he goes into exile and is ultimately confined in a madhouse. Beatrice, the heroine of *The Cenci*, is also confined in the Cenci house by her devilish father, Francesco Cenci, is regarded as disobedient by society and is consigned to a tragic death, failing in her revolutionary act against him. *Prometheus Unbound* seems to be quite opposite in its intentions, but we can observe characterizations which parallel those in *The Cenci*. Beatrice is given qualities of Prometheus and Asia, while Cenci resembles the relentless Jupiter. Prometheus is expelled by the gods for his beneficial acts and revolutionary ideas on behalf of human beings ; this is similar to what happens to Beatrice in her struggle with society. It is almost impossible to separate the three works ; they represent the dual aspects of Shelley's revolutionary idealism : the optimistic and pessimistic. He chooses a form accord-

ing to his intention, but the underlying ideas remain constant : “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.”¹

One of the reasons why Shelley composed *The Cenci* seems to lie in his appreciation of the drama as a popular form.² *Prometheus Unbound* is an epical drama and is for “the more select classes of poetical readers” (135), and *Julian and Maddalo* is composed in sophisticated couplets with many personal references. The dramatic form of *The Cenci* here is seen as the most appropriate vehicle for conveying Shelley’s idealism to a general audience, both its positive impulse and its negative consequences in reality. Conscious of the form and its demands, he modifies tone and language to describe a possible reality which would appeal more to the public : “. . . I have written more carelessly ; that is, without an over-fastidious and learned choice of words. . . . it must be the real language of men in general and not that of any particular class to whose society the writer happens to belong” (241-2). In the dedication to Leigh Hunt, Shelley writes :

The drama which I now present to you is a sad reality. I lay aside the presumptuous attitude of an instructor, and am content to paint, with such colours as my own heart furnishes, that which has been. (237)

In the particular choice of dramatic form, Shelley aimed at achieving popularity not for its own sake, but for the sake of his poetic ideals. His emphasis on reality or sadness in the tragedy springs from the necessity of teaching his readers what he sees as wrong, and his underlying purpose is always to endorse the possibility of moral and political meliorism among people.³ Shelley’s heroes are often revolutionaries or radical

poets, and Beatrice conforms to this pattern in *The Cenci*. Her action against a tyrannical society could be allegorically interpreted as an act typical of such poets or idealists. We shall discuss the play with respect to two interrelated issues : the Promethean impulse which is questioned in terms of its effects on society and of Shelley's poetic message in its political context.

ii. The Opposition

Possessed of great political and economic power, Cenci is the malicious tyrant ruling over his families. Like Jupiter in *Prometheus Unbound*, the principle guiding his action is the conviction that he can exercise controlling power in what is represented as an uncontrollable world. He is, in fact, a sadist who finds pleasure in tormenting and killing his inferiors ; he continually relishes the mental and physical pain of others. Ultimately, as the drama makes clear, it is the absence of feeling which lies behind this principle ; Cenci is ruled by a belief which denies the existence of human beings. His nihilistic impulses and his sadistic pleasures spring from an evil self-centredness which determines how his power will be wielded. He is virtually a composite of everything negative and destructive in the human psyche : "I do not feel as if I were a man, / But like a fiend appointed to chastise / The offences of some unremembered world" (277) .

But I delight in nothing else. I love
 The sight of agony, and the sense of joy,
 When this shall be another's, and that mine.
 And I have no remorse and little fear,
 Which are, I think, the checks of other men. (245)

Cenci's philosophy is in diametrical opposition to the sympathetic love which Shelley speaks of in *A Defence of Poetry* : "A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively ; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others ; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own" (487-8) . Cenci's self-centredness is a key to understanding his character . He exploits his social position to put his beliefs in practice . Cenci, a count, possesses high social rank and wields great economic power . His power and these privileges, which are linked to his patriarchal authority, initially obscure the evil of his acts . He seems to uphold established order, and his social status is supported by his political and religious relationship with the Pope . But the Pope, whatever he represents in terms of faith and order, is simply another version of Cenci : he, too, embodies an oppressively patriarchal, tyrannical society ; his guiding principles are self-preservation and material acquisition . He agrees to say nothing about Cenci's evil deeds in exchange for his properties : "That matter of the murder is hushed up / If you consent to yield his Holiness / Your fief that lies beyond the Pincian gate" (243) . Self-love is seen as the underlying principle of the Catholic system and Catholicism here represents little more than a desire for monopoly of power and authority . The Pope is seen as an evil, but he, too, is simply a link in a chain ; the larger evil is God, or Shelley's version of god here, who has insight into Cenci's wicked thoughts and wishes . God represents supreme patriarchal power and is ultimately equated with darkness itself by Cenci : "if her [Beatrice's] bright loveliness / Was kindled to illumine this dark world . . . I pray thee [God] for my sake, / As thou the common God and Father art / Of her, and me, and all ; reverse that doom!" (276) Cenci obeys the Pope, and the Pope and Cenci obey God . Cenci is a sincere Catholic because he is certain that his power and authority rooted in class, money, name, patriarchy and his own being, are given by God and the Pope . He never

disobeys his superiors because this would deprive him of these powers. We can see three dimensions of tyranny in the drama : the world ruled by God, the society by the Pope and the house of Cenci by Francesco Cenci.

Beatrice's opposition to Cenci is naturally directed against tyrannical society and against the principle of self-love. Her motivation for rebellion springs largely from her desire to protect other family members. She acts quite unselfishly :

Nor will I leave this home of misery
 Whilst my poor Barnard, and that gentle lady [Lucretia]
 To whom I owe life, and these virtuous thoughts,
 Must suffer what I still have strength to share. (247)

She is a typical philanthropic Shelleyan heroine who fights for the people and those who have been wronged. She, of course, represents the positive impulses within human existence : love and sympathy. Unlike Giacomo, her brother, who could not sacrifice himself because of his own family and could not remain true to his philosophical principles, she is a revolutionary Promethean. She also possesses qualities like those of Asia in *Prometheus Unbound*. Referred to by Lucretia as “a protecting presence” (254) and by Bernardo as “Thee, light of life” (300), she is represented as both innocent and heroic, amiable and brave, honest and thoughtful, tender and defiant. Given the two good qualities of Prometheus and Asia, she displays a complex ambivalence throughout the drama. Her willingness to undertake defensive action suggests a Promethean character : her entreaty to the guests and her petition to the Pope concerning Cenci's crimes. Like Asia, she sympathetically consoles fellow family members. Her sense of justice is based on unselfish love and a belief in the superiority of human will. In this, she represents the

principal threat to Cenci : “Fair and yet terrible!” (253) Human will is the one thing which neither Jupiter nor Cenci can conquer :

All else has been subdued to me [Jupiter] — alone
The soul of man, like unextinguished fire,
Yet burns towards Heaven with fierce reproach and doubt
And lamentation and reluctant prayer,
Hurling up insurrection, which might make
Our antique empire insecure, though built
On eldest faith, and Hell’s coeval, fear. (180)

In a suppressed condition under tyranny, human will becomes the sole key to revolution. Prometheus and Asia have gone through a mental transmutation before achieving the earthly paradise. In a domestic setting, Beatrice must submit to a trial set by Cenci as Prometheus did to that set by Jupiter. She has to prove the power of human will, overcome hardship and obtain social acknowledgement. Cenci is afraid of this will power, and in order to humiliate and debase her in her own eyes, he decides to rape her. This is the trial which tests her Promethean will and endurance.

iii. The Struggle

Beatrice’s reaction to Cenci’s rape marks the climax of the drama. It is the crisis which threatens her moral and philosophical integrity ; she experiences a loss of confidence and self-identity. She has believed in her own innocence and treasured virginity as one of its manifestations. Virginity — symbolizing purity or what is not possessed by others — is a principal attribute of character on which her sense of moral and political justice depends. Stuart M. Sperry’s comment is appropriate : “If

Beatrice Cenci possesses a tragic flaw, it is her virginity or, more exactly, her idealization of her virginity as the center of her moral nature. It is essential to her sense of her own integrity as a human being.”⁴ Like the Maniac in *Julian and Maddalo*, she has lost the most precious token of her self-image and, as Scrivener remarks, just two choices are left to her : to go mad or to take revenge.⁵ Immediately after the rape, she displays symptoms of derangement : “My God! I never knew what the mad felt / Before ; for I am mad beyond all doubt!” (262) But her Promethean agony interestingly reveals the depth of her commitment to self-preservation. Asked by Lucretia, she never actually speaks about the rape fearing that words will historicize or make inexcusably real the incident.

Yet speak it not :

For then if this be truth, that other too
Must be a truth, a firm enduring truth,
Linked with each lasting circumstance of life,
Never to change, never to pass away. (263)

Cenci has acutely grasped Beatrice’s weak point ; what he aims to accomplish by raping his own daughter is irreparable damage to her sense of self-esteem and thus her capability for action. He contemplates her strength in Act IV : “No, ’tis her stubborn will / Which by its own consent shall stoop as low / As that which drags it down” (273). His stratagem is effective ; and now Beatrice has to transform her experiences in her mind in a way which supports her idealized sense of self.⁶ At the court in Act V, she now defends her own innocence in front of the judges, seeking to justify her act of parricide and to gain acquittal for herself. She needs firm conviction in her innocence to reintegrate herself, and anything which destroys it must be denied ; resorting to a psychologi-

cal defence, she really does not regard wrongs to her and her own wrongs as real :

What 'tis to blot with infamy and blood
All that which shows like innocence, and is,
Hear me, great God! I swear, most innocent,
So that the world lose all discrimination
Between the sly, fierce, wild regard for guilt,
And that which now compels thee to reply
To what I ask. . . . (292)

Here we observe both Beatrice's weakness and strength. She appears as a brave and powerful figure before her family, but her pride also underlies her fragility. Cenci takes advantage of her character to bolster his tyranny. Perhaps, the best example of both her weakness and strength is her power of insight. Beatrice has the ability to "read minds" or to prompt others to realize their innermost thoughts. She reveals the compromising and selfish weakness of Orsino, an important minor character ; he is both a subtle prelate and the victim of and a flatterer of tyrants. Her comment is impromptu but to the point : "You have a sly, equivocating vein / That suits me not" (247). Orsino fears this power of disclosing the darker sides of the human mind.

Her subtle mind, her awe-inspiring gaze,
Whose beams anatomize me nerve by nerve
And lay me bare, and make me blush to see
My hidden thoughts. (248)

This insight helps Beatrice to understand social relationships, but, ironically, it does not serve her own interests. She cannot anatomize her own

mind or see into its dark or most dangerous recesses. When she faces the public, she displays strength, eloquence and keen insight. But when she turns her eye inwards, she is blind. She lacks self-knowledge and self-understanding, which is one of the points made when Asia visits to the Demogorgon's cave in *Prometheus Unbound*. Her analysis of others reflects the working of her own mind and this puts her at risk, as Orsino remarks the frailty of self-anatomy in his dialogue with Giacomo.

It fortunately serves my close designs
 That 'tis a trick of this same family
 To analyse their own and other minds.
 Such self-anatomy shall teach the will
 Dangerous secrets : for it tempts our powers,
 Knowing what must be thought, and may be done,
 Into the depth of darkest purposes (260)

Orsino here points out that by her or Giacomo's self-disclosure in self-anatomy, he is instructed to be reconciled with his dark intention rather than with his more positive aspirations. Unlike true self-recognition, such observation can lead the observed to negative compromise. Wasserman explains : "Self-anatomy, on the contrary, is the introversion of the individual mind in order to examine all that is deposited there by experience, and it results in the mind's becoming adjusted and reconciled to what it finds."⁷ Orsino's case questions whether Beatrice can control her ability ; if not, it could become an abuse. She proudly believes in her moral goodness, and this is the source of both her power and fragility. This consciousness "may be the source of fear that others can read us like a book, but it is also, Beatrice's words imply, a possible refuge from others."⁸

Beatrice does not notice her own dual nature even after the rape, the

murder and the trial. Her belief in herself is adamant, and this self-perception is reinforced by changing circumstances. Although she initially has faith in authorities like the Pope and prays to God, the brutality of the Catholic system and her hopeless situation compel her to disown these superior powers. In Act V, in the trial, she is disillusioned by “the small justice shown by Heaven and Earth” (295). Her tragic situation finally renders her philosophic aspirations futile. Her idealism becomes a form of bigotry after the ordeal, and her principle of self-sacrifice becomes little more than the tricky solipsism to which she has recourse to defend her honour and name. She has lost a proper sense of justice ; she misinterprets her half-selfish parricide as righteous revenge. At this point, Beatrice encourages or rather reproaches Lucretia and Giacomo who are being tortured in prison. There is no sympathy in her speech, but only cold abstract expression of principle :

Ignoble hearts!

For some brief spasms of pain, which are at least
As mortal as the limbs through which they pass,
Are centuries of high splendour laid in dust?
And that eternal honour which should live
Sunlike, above the reek of mortal fame,
Changed to a mockery and a bye-word? (294)

Her reaction to the rape gradually discloses her hidden selfishness. She is too young to suppress self-consciousness and to cope with a monolithic evil system and its ideology. Shelley describes the revengeful Beatrice as transmuted into a self-righteous girl like Beatrice in *The Changeling* who commits adultery and murder for love's sake and believes in the justness of her act. In murdering her father, Beatrice cannot distinguish between crime and lawful punishment. She simply takes satisfaction in Cenci's

death and never doubts her act or motives :

The deed is done,
And what may follow now regards not me.
I am as universal as the light ;
Free as the earth-surrounding air ; as firm
As the world's centre. Consequence, to me,
Is as the wind which strikes the solid rock
But shakes it not. (282-3)

Beatrice is indifferent to consequences and this does not suggest her wickedness but her innocence, which is asserted with fanatic blindness ; ever more self-deceived, she believes in her righteousness.⁹ Whatever her attitude is, it is indisputable that her principle now becomes that of self-love and self-preservation. This is a tragic irony which sustains the power of the play and leads us to question the morality and justness of her position. We might call her innocent in the sense that she really does not know what she has done. But, in reality, she now appears as a terror-inspiring figure resorting to violence as a right. She is transformed “from a Prometheus directed by love into a Jupiter motivated by hate.”¹⁰ When the selfish principle of Cenci takes over the Promethean ideal of Beatrice, there is no longer any difference between the two : “In the world of *The Cenci* evil is the only force. Good can exist as a principle, even, like Beatrice, as a presence ; but good, transferred into action, into force, as a deterrent to evil, becomes evil.”¹¹ We discover evidence for this in Beatrice's eloquence at the court. She tries to protect her honour, righteousness, innocence and virginity, and she symbolically connects them to her own name. Her name should represent something glorious ; she wants to see herself as a revolutionary hero ; public approval is the only justice, other than that she bestows upon herself,

which Beatrice can expect. She constantly emphasizes the purity of her name, but, ironically, her self-encapsulated idea of herself is itself greatly influenced by patriarchal ideology, to which she should object.¹² She protests at the court to the judges.

You are the judge and executioner
Of that which is the life of life : the breath
Of accusation kills an innocent name,
And leaves for lame acquittal the poor life
Which is a mask without it. 'Tis most false
That I am guilty of foul parricide (285)

The father Cenci understands the meaning of Beatrice's name very well and predicts that her degradation will be revealed as name in front of the public. He premeditates how to cause Beatrice suffering even after his own death :

What sufferings? I will drag her, step by step,
Through infamies unheard of among men :
She shall stand shelterless in the broad noon
Of public scorn, for acts blazoned abroad,
One among which shall be . . . What? Canst thou guess?
She shall become (for what she most abhors
Shall have a fascination to entrap
Her loathing will), to her own conscious self
All she appears to others ; and when dead,
As she shall die unshrived and unforgiven,
A rebel to her father and her God,
Her corpse shall be abandoned to the hounds ;
Her name shall be the terror of the earth ;

Her spirit shall approach the throne of God
 Plague-spotted with my curses. I will make
 Body and soul a monstrous lump of ruin. (275)

Cenci's words prove true and Beatrice is sentenced to death. Convinced of her own moral rectitude, she cannot understand that her crime appears more hideous than her father's in the eyes of the public. In the end, she is condemned by the society she has sought to defend and Cenci in his evil patriarchalism ironically wins out after his own death. Her self-love brings her to this ironical end : she has supported the abhorrent principle of Cenci by herself. She cannot overcome the problem of self-consciousness because she cannot attain self-knowledge. Beatrice's defeat is contrasted with Prometheus's victory : "Yet am I king over myself, and rule / The torturing and conflicting throngs within. . ." (151). She thinks of social welfare but she cannot prevent selfish emotions and thoughts. Her speech finally concludes with the following : "Can it be possible I have / To die so suddenly?" (298) Beatrice as a poet is going to be subdued not by social but by her own unconscious inner evil. Shelley seems to present this tragedy to allude to a literary scene in English society. A revolutionist could be a supporter of tyranny, as the French Revolution shows us.¹³ In a way, Beatrice is more like the protagonist in Shelley's *Zastrozzi* than Prometheus or the Maniac.

Zastrozzi, an atheist and a villain, helps (but in fact manipulates) Matilda to seduce Verezzi, the conventionally good hero, away from his love Julia. In the end, he lets Verezzi kill himself and Matilda kill Julia making the incident appear like a murder and a suicide of passion. Zastrozzi is called to the court together with Matilda, and there he first reveals his dark intention to take a revenge on Verezzi and his father for his mother's sake. He willingly admits his own role in the conspiracy and defies God and law, because he believes in his own justice as realized in

his own act of revenge. His attitude at the court is very similar to Beatrice's, and we might guess that Shelley could have had the scene in mind for the play.

"I am a murderer," exclaimed Zastrozzi ; "I deny it not : I buried my dagger in the heart of him who injured me ; but the motives which led me to be an assassin were at once excellent and meritorious : for I swore, at a loved mother's death-bed, to avenge her betrayer's falsehood."

"Think you that whilst I perpetrated the deed I feared the punishment? or whilst I revenged a parent's cause, that the futile torments which I am doomed to suffer here, had any weight in my determination? No — no. If the vile deceiver, who brought my spotless mother to a tomb of misery, fell beneath the dagger of one who swore to revenge her — if I sent him to another world, who destroyed the peace of one I loved more than myself in this, am I to be blamed?"¹⁴

This again demonstrates how Beatrice's defence of her own deed is morally unjustifiable. Beatrice's case is different but the principle and justification of murder is the same as Zastrozzi's. Her innocence is feebly grounded as well as his. Beatrice's idealism ends with the gross reality : she appears as an angel and disappears as a grotesque. Even if she is philosophically correct, society does not accept her abuse of idealism to justify murder.

iv. The Transformation

Shelley expresses the corrupting interaction between Beatrice and Cenci in terms of images of light and darkness. Cenci is symbolized by darkness and Beatrice by light. Shelley represents the process of her

corruption displaying the two contrasting images. When she suffers at the hands of Cenci, darkness overshadows her. Her psychological bewilderment at the moment of rape is expressed by the image of invading darkness. Her hope turns into despair and her life into death. Her agony can be compared to that of Prometheus and the Maniac, but given her youth and sensibility, she cannot reconcile herself to a process necessary for realizing the ideal :

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! (262)

We can look at this as simply a dualistic fight between good and evil. But this relation changes into something more complex at the trial in Act V. Initially, Beatrice feels a kind of darkness as the fatherly shadow comes to haunt her. But, now at the end of her life, the darkness comes not only externally from Cenci but also internally from within herself. First, it emerges as the unconscious force of selfishness. She might subliminally know that Cenci and she are morally the same in their actions. Cenci killed to assert the supreme power of self ; Beatrice murdered for the sake of her virginity and innocence. Both commit crimes but try to justify them for selfish reasons. Second, the darkness indicates the despair to

which she succumbs in the course of the trial, the petition to Pope and prayers to God. Inner despair is the most formidable foe for an optimistic idealist like Beatrice. She never recognizes her fault in efforts to understand her act, but the sense of despair, which unconsciously influences her being, is equated with darkness.

Sweet Heaven, forgive weak thoughts! If there should be
No God, no Heaven, no Earth in the void world ;
The wide, grey, lampless, deep, unpeopled world!
If all things then should be . . . my father's spirit
His eye, his voice, his touch surrounding me ;
The atmosphere and breath of my dead life!
If sometimes, as a shape more like himself,
Even the form which tortured me on earth,
Masked in grey hairs and wrinkles, he should come
And wind me in his hellish arms, and fix
His eyes on mine, and drag me down, down, down!
For was he not alone omnipotent
On Earth, and ever present? Even though dead,
Does not his spirit live in all that breathe,
And work for me and mine still the same ruin,
Scorn, pain, despair? Who ever yet returned
To teach the laws of death's untrodden realm? (298)

This is not Cenci's shadow or curse. It can be interpreted as the psychological torment experienced by a conscience grieving the loss of idealism in practice. Beatrice failed in her revolution because she concludes her life in a state of despair : "Worse than despair, / Worse than the bitterness of death, is hope. . ." (299) . Her failure is largely her own rather than Cenci's : Beatrice, too, had the potentiality to produce darkness

like Cenci, and she could not perceive it as her own problem.¹⁵ Deploying the images of light and darkness, Shelley finely depicts how human nature is progressively degraded under the forces of tyranny, violence and self-love.

Indeed Shelley succeeds well in describing the “sad reality” of a revolutionary in society. The whole play is dark not only because of the relentless and grotesque deeds and scenes which it depicts, but because it also portrays Beatrice’s unconscious succumbing to despair, apathy and indifference. What we find in Beatrice at the end, is a tragic figure transformed into a Zastrozzi, a failed Promethean. Her hope climaxes in despair.

Shelley aimed at making his idealism realistic in this dramatic setting to appeal to the public. The dramatic might be the most popular and understandable form for conveying these themes to a general audience ; the tragic subject of the socially condemned girl also seems to be contemporary with and critical of his age. Earl R. Wasserman is right in pointing out that “Only the very few with highly refined imaginations will be drawn to beautiful idealisms, Shelley acknowledges ; the way to the masses is through the sad realities that will make them know themselves. . . .”¹⁶ But is his “reality” effectively transmitted to the public as an antithesis of his idealism? Does he succeed in provoking “sympathy”? The answer seems to be negative when we compare the work with Shelley’s highly idealistic poems like *Prometheus Unbound* or “Ode to the West Wind.” Moreover, it is ironical that Shelley had to describe Beatrice as being transformed from an innocent young woman to a bigot of self-belief. Though he insists on upholding an idealist stance in the play, it is thoroughly enfeebled in an ironical process. Contrary to Shelley’s own claims, a pessimistic presentation of Shelleyan idealism does not succeed in evoking the reader’s sympathy : “Our sympathy in tragic fiction depends on this principle ; tragedy delights by affording a

shadow of the pleasure which exists in pain" (501). We understand Beatrice's inner purity, as Curran says, but we cannot fully feel sympathy towards her in spite of her strenuous effort to achieve a vision rooted in idealist principles. The audience abhors not only the social wrong but also her stubborn self-righteousness. If the dramatic form demands reality, this form would seem unsuited as a vehicle for Shelley's defence of his idealism and of the cause of the exiled poets. To solve this contradiction, he needs a new form which unifies idealism and realism : lyrical and dramatic. It seems, in the end, to be the "lyrical drama" (i.e. *Prometheus Unbound*) in which he could synthesize his ideas in all their contradictions into a vast creative myth. The socially excluded poet can be redeemed only by unceasing re-creation of the myth or an everlasting spiritual transformation of self : not through actual deed or revolution.

¹ Donald H. Reiman and Sharon B. Powers, eds, *Shelley's Poetry and Prose* (New York: Norton, 1977) 240. Hereafter, all quotations from the text are indicated parenthetically after the cited passage.

² See Ronald Tetreault, *The Poetry of Life: Shelley and Literary Form* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987) 122. Tetreault argues that Shelley regarded dramatic form as more communicative to the public: "Because dramatic form allows for the communication of a 'vital force' while decentering the powers of the poet's subjectivity, it makes possible the dissemination of an 'aesthetic life' in which the reader or spectator participates as an equal. In dramatic form, Shelley transcends himself and thus achieves the only sort of transcendence that is authentic, a transcendence toward others engaged in a cooperative social life."

³ See Michael Henry Scrivener. *Radical Shelley* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982) 189. "Despite Shelley's protestations to the contrary, *The Cenci* is a didactic work — not only a 'sad reality', but a tragedy whose unfolding, by both the characters and the audience, teaches a series of lessons. Since none of these is stated formulaically, they only exist as they are discovered by each

spectator.” Hereafter quoted as Scrivener.

- ⁴ Stuart M. Sperry, *Shelley's Major Verse* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1988) 135. Hereafter quoted as Sperry.
- ⁵ See Scrivener 195-6. “She has, really, two options: a madness in which she alternates between denying everything and accepting guilt and moral corruption; and a revenge in which God’s justice will be done, the good father driving out the bad and reestablishing the good name of patriarchy.”
- ⁶ Cf. Michael Worton, “Speech and Silence in *The Cenci*” in *Essays on Shelley*, Miriam Allot, ed., (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1982) 109. Worton sees her refusal to admit the rape as a defensive act against reality, which hinders the expression of her idealism, and protects her from psychological torment.
- ⁷ Earl R. Wasserman, *Shelley: A Critical Reading* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971) 111. Hereafter quoted as Wasserman.
- ⁸ Michael O’Neill, *The Human Mind’s Imaginings* (OUP, 1989) 83.
- ⁹ See Alan M. Weinburg, *Shelley’s Italian Experience* (London: Macmillan, 1991) 97. “The experience of freedom from tyranny has, for Beatrice, become a Paradise, a ‘Paradise’ one might truly say of ‘exiles’, since a sense of alienation from ‘this ill world where none are true’ becomes increasingly pronounced as the play draws to a close.”
- ¹⁰ Charles E. Robinson, *Shelley and Byron: The Snake and Eagle Wreathed in Fight* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976) 155-6.
- ¹¹ Stuart Curran, *Shelley’s Cenci: Scorpions Ringed with Fire* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1970) 137.
- ¹² See Scrivener 193. “With Giacomo, but especially Beatrice, the play illustrates how the patriarchal principle is reproduced in those very characters who have the least to gain from it.”
- ¹³ *The Revolt of Islam* is Shelleyan poetical compensation for the terrific failure of the French Revolution. Wasserman stresses that the point of the drama lies in its psychological description: “*The Cenci* probes deeply into the roots of our actual impatience, revenge, and self-contempt — in effect, into the psychological roots of the failure of the French Revolution.” See Wasserman 128.
- ¹⁴ Stephen C. Behrendt, ed., *Percy Bysshe Shelley: Zastrozzi and St Irvyne* (OUP, 1986) 101.
- ¹⁵ Sperry’s view of Beatrice’s hope is worth mentioning here: “Hope alone can

provide the resolution necessary to await the promised hour when the tide of evil ultimately must reverse itself — the expectation that gives man the courage to outlast the term of his ordeal. Brutalized by anguish and repeated disappointment, however, Beatrice has come to see hope as not simply fruitless but as ‘the only ill,’ ‘worse than despair.’ If it serves only to draw out endlessly the period of human suffering, hope is nothing more than unpardonable self-deception. What we witness is something more terrible even than the extinction of the Promethean spark — the conversion, or perversion, of hope into its moral opposite. It is this more dreadful kind of capitulation, or derangement, that Shelley asks us both to judge and to understand in his drama.” See Sperry 140-1.

¹⁶ Wasserman 101-2.