

## Beatrice Cenci and Shelley's Vision of Moral Responsibility

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THE supposed moral disintegration of Beatrice after she is violated by her father has become the central source of dismay among scholars who analyze Shelley's gothic drama, *The Cenci* (1820). Despite Shelley's prefatory attempt to elevate his heroine to angelical stature, labelling Beatrice "a most gentle and amiable being . . . one of those rare persons in whom energy and gentleness dwell together without destroying one another . . .,"<sup>1</sup> scholars insist that after the rape in Act III Beatrice becomes a calculating demon whose actions and insensitivities rival the atrocities of her sadistic father. Bertrand Evans links her to Lady Macbeth, while Robert Whitman insists that despite her pathetic and hopeless plight, Beatrice commits a "pernicious mistake" in becoming a self-appointed executor of God's will and is consequently driven by a "fanatical need for self-justification after the murder of the Count. . . ." <sup>2</sup> Earl Wasserman argues that in shifting the responsibility for her parricide to God, Beatrice echoes her father's abdication of culpability and approaches the depths of his iniquity; and according to Carlos Baker " . . . the tragic flaw in Beatrice . . . was the crack in the armor of her righteousness"; the transformation of Shelley's heroine, from a " . . . devout, chaste, dutiful, forgiving, and altruistic . . ." angel in Act I to an "ignoble liar" in Act V who denies her part in the Count's murder though she knows such denial results in the torture of her accomplices, displays the " . . . inevitable corruption of human saintliness."<sup>3</sup> Those few scholars who come to Beatrice's defence do so on the grounds that her father morally deserves the

fate which she devises for him. Newman I. White argues that "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."<sup>4</sup> Stuart Curran labels Beatrice a "good angel," "a mythic figure of the Italian consciousness, a symbol of the human spirit in revolt against all that is unjust and oppressive."<sup>5</sup>

The fundamental cause of the scholarly dilemma concerning Beatrice is that in her actions she violates principles dramatically portrayed in *Prometheus Unbound*, which Shelley wrote simultaneously with *The Cenci*. Prometheus demonstrates that moral liberation is achieved only by renouncing the principles of hatred and revenge embodied in Jupiter and passively submitting oneself to the spirit of love which forms the core of our being.<sup>6</sup> Man is, Shelley writes in "Ode to Liberty," ". . . a willing slave;/He has enthroned the oppression and the oppressor" (ll. 244-245). Central to Shelley's ethical thought, according to Mary Shelley, is the conviction "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" (p. 271). With the Reign of Terror in the background, Shelley saw that in meeting tyranny and cruelty with their own weapons the oppressed became indistinguishable from the oppressor. Hence Shelley wrote in his preface to *The Cenci*: "Undoubtedly . . . the fit return to make to the most enormous injuries is kindness and forbearance, and a resolution to convert the injurer from his dark passions by peace and love. Revenge, retaliation, atonement, are pernicious mistakes" (p. 276).

But in *Prometheus Unbound* Shelley, by his own admission, portrays an ideal world; in *The Cenci* he turns to the problem of evil in the real world. In the dedication to Leigh Hunt he says: "Those writings which I have hitherto published, have been little else than visions which

impersonate my own apprehensions of the beautiful and the just. . . . they are dreams of what ought to be, or may be. The drama which I now present to you is a sad reality" (pp. 274-75). Though ideally one — like Christ — opposes hatred and tyranny with love and forgiveness, in the real world such response is rendered ineffectual when confronted with evil on the scale of the Count, or of the *Ancien Regime*.

A large segment of Shelley's poetry is governed by a Manichean vision of the world in which evil and good are polar opposites having substantial existence. The Woman — ". . . fair as one flower adorning/An icy wilderness" (I, 11. 264-65) — encountered by the poet in *The Revolt of Islam* informs him that "Two Powers o'er mortal things dominion hold/Ruling the world with a divided lot,/ Immortal, all-pervading, manifold,/Twin Genii, equal Gods — when life and thought/Sprang forth, they burst the womb of inessential Nought" (I, 347-351). In his essay, "On the Devil, and Devils," Shelley grants the Manichean vision considerable validity: "The Manichean philosophy respecting the origin and government of the world, if not true, is at least an hypothesis conformable to the experience of actual facts."<sup>7</sup> An incident from the poet's youth, reported by Dowden, suggests that Shelley had long been fascinated by demonology, and believed in the existence of a supernatural force of darkness:

One day Mr. Bethell, suspecting from strange noises overhead that his pupil was engaged in nefarious scientific pursuits, suddenly appeared in Shelley's room; to his consternation he found the culprit apparently half enveloped in a blue flame. "What on earth are you doing, Shelley?" "Please sir," came the answer in the quietest tone, "I am raising the devil."<sup>8</sup>

The fortunate irony of evil — in Shelley's Manichean view of the world — is that it contains the seeds of its own destruction; the tyrant by his own example provides the oppressed with tools which they eventually turn back upon him. He is a devil who is exorcised by his own nature reflected in the oppressed masses who imitate his

actions. If, as in the Reign of Terror, the oppressed continue to wear the mask of their fallen tyrant, then no revolution has been effected, no demon exorcised. But if, as in the case of Beatrice Cenci, the masses can return to a state of love and benevolence, they can assume the nature Shelley claims to be inherent in man. Then a revolution has indeed occurred and the mass is vindicated; in the final analysis they were only a catalyst by means of which evil destroyed itself by its own nature. This is the sense in which "mankind had only to will that there should be no evil, and there would be none."

For the most part Shelley presents the violent war between the forces of light and the forces of darkness as an inevitable natural occurrence, similar to ". . . the rushing of a wind that sweeps/Earth and the ocean" (*The Revolt of Islam*, I, 145-46). In language and imagery foreshadowing the later "Ode to the West Wind," Shelley in *The Revolt of Islam* tells of "the irresistible storm" which "had cloven/That fearful darkness, the blue sky was seen/Fretted with many a fair cloud interwoven/Most delicately . . ." (I, 154-58); eventually ". . . the vast clouds fled,/Countless and swift as leaves on autumn's tempest shed." Such a process is always violent and frequently filled with bloodshed:

Such is this conflict — when mankind doth strive  
 With its oppressors in a strife of blood,  
 Or when free thoughts, like lightnings, are alive,  
 And in each bosom of the multitude  
 Justice and truth with Custom's hydra brood  
 Wage silent war; when Priests and Kings dissemble  
 In smiles or frowns their fierce disquietude,  
 When round pure hearts a host of hopes assemble,  
 The Snake and Eagle meet — the world's foundations  
 tremble! (I, 415-23)

Though he theoretically abhors violence and bloodshed, Shelley can thus greet the violent revolutionary activity sweeping Europe during the period 1776-1822 as signalling the approach of the millenium.<sup>9</sup> David Perkins has called attention to the political overtones in Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" — published in 1820 with *Prometheus*

*Unbound* — overtones which clarify Shelley's attitude toward revolutionary activity. In "Ode to the West Wind," Perkins writes, "Shelley allies himself with a numinous violence which in creating a new golden age brings death and destruction into the old world."<sup>10</sup> "Destroyer and preserver," the West Wind is an "unseen presence" who "didst waken from his summer dreams/The blue Mediterranean." The "blue Mediterranean" calls to mind Greece and Italy, centers of old regimes holding men in subjection; its "old palaces and towers" quiver "within the wave's intenser day," and its "sapless foliage . . . suddenly grow gray with fear,/And tremble and despoil themselves" (pp. 577-78) — the characteristic response, as Perkins points out, of tyrants to the violent revolution. A militant and powerful force, "the wind symbolizes the destruction and regeneration which are twin aspects of any sudden revolution."<sup>11</sup>

Most of Shelley's poetry presents man as passive to momentary visitations of a transcendent realm which inform his vision and propel him on an unrealizable quest to bring his mortal self in harmony with the ideal. Perkins writes: "For social revolution and utopian order will result from the descent of numinous force into human life, and, in this context as in others, man is passive to the sudden visitations of transcendence."<sup>12</sup> In the vision or dream of the ideal, mortal man loses his identity and is possessed by the spirit of intellectual beauty. Visited while asleep by a "veiled maid" whose "voice was like the voice of his own soul," Alastor surrenders his own melancholy nature to fold "his frame in her dissolving arms" (11. 187). In "Epipsychidion" the poet seeks "All that is insupportable in thee/Of light, and love, and immortality" which he locates in his angelic sister-soul. "Veiling beneath that radiant form of Woman"; possessing a "glory of . . . being" which "stains the dead, blank, cold air with a warm shade/Of unentangled intermixture, made/By love, of light and motion . . ." the sister lures the poet

to surrender his nature, a process Shelley depicts in erotic language:

. . . and our lips  
 With other eloquence than words, eclipse  
 The soul that burns between them, and the wells  
 Which boil under our being's inmost cells,  
 The fountains of our deepest life, shall be  
 Confused in Passion's golden purity,  
 As mountain-springs under the morning sun.  
 We shall become the same, we shall be one  
 Spirit within two frames . . . (ll. 566-574)

The incestuous union of the poet with his sister-soul in "Epipsychidion" is prototypical of the process by which man becomes infused with the nature of divinity. Significantly, however, in *The Cenci* this process is reversed. The innocent, angelic Beatrice is "visited" by the embodiment of absolute evil, and through the incestuous union loses her own nature to assume the tyrannical aspect of her father. The key to understanding *The Cenci* lies in the extent to which we hold Beatrice responsible for her actions. If we accept her own account of the ordeal, then we must realize that she merely served as a catalyst by means of which the Count unconsciously effected his perverse will to self-destruction, an impulse revealed in his desire to destroy all his possessions at his death and to blot out all his heirs; the destruction of Beatrice, the Count reveals, ". . . shall soon extinguish all/For me" (II, ii, 188-89). The central symbol suggesting the validity of Beatrice's defense is the act of incest, occurring at the structural heart of the play.<sup>13</sup> Incest is richly appropriate for Shelley's drama not just because it is ". . . like many other *incorrect* things a very poetical circumstance. It may be the excess of love or of hate."<sup>14</sup> Nor is it employed primarily, as Wasserman suggests, because it epitomizes the extremity to which tyranny can manifest itself, ". . . the radical expression of sadism inherent in every form of oppression."<sup>15</sup> Rather the incestuous act serves as the symbolic and literal moment at which the Count's demonism is implanted in the daughter. At this moment Beatrice becomes an unwilling vessel for the spirit

of absolute evil. Subsequently possessed by the devil, she can only let the spirit exorcise itself by destroying its progenitor.

Shelley presents a Manichean vision in which the Count and Beatrice clearly embody the poles of evil and goodness. The Count is worse than "Hell's most abandoned fiend" (I, i, 117); he envisions himself as "a fiend appointed to chastise/The offences of some unremembered world" (IV, i, 161-62); his abode, Giacomo informs Orsino, ". . . was hell/And to that hell will I return no more . . ." (III, i, 330-31); the act of parricide, Beatrice tells her stepmother, "Will but dislodge a spirit of deep hell/Out of a human form" (IV, ii, 7-8). Asserting that, ". . . 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" (I, i, 81-85), Shelley's Count is an "unnatural man," a sadist whose malignity transcends human motivation. Beatrice on the other hand is angelic. Lucretia, her stepmother, praises her as the force of goodness keeping the powers of darkness in check: "Until this hour thus you have ever stood/Between us and your father's moody wrath/Like a protecting presence; your firm mind/Has been our only refuge and defence" (II, i, 46-49). The Count labels her "a fallen angel" after her violation; Giacomo says that Beatrice "Stands like God's angel ministered upon/By fiends" (V, i, 44-45). Camillo thinks that "her sweet looks . . . might kill the fiend within" the Count (I, i, 44-45). Recognizing in Beatrice a "bright loveliness" which "Was kindled to illumine this dark world," (IV, i, 121-22), the Count looses "this devil/Which sprung from me as from a hell" (IV, i, 119-120) in an attempt to destroy the soul of his natural enemy "Whose sight infects and poisons" him (IV, i, 119).

The means chosen by the Count to effect the destruction of Beatrice's soul is incest. As in *Prometheus Unbound* the central act of the drama is sexual, only in *The Cenci* the protagonist is infused with and transformed by

a demon wholly different from the power of love manifested in Asia. Stuart Curran has called attention to the pattern of imagery in *The Cenci* which adumbrates the polar dichotomy drawn by Shelley in his portrayal of the Count and Beatrice.<sup>16</sup> The father is linked imagistically to blood and darkness; he is described as "dark and bloody" (II, i, 55), a man who in his youth was "dark and fiery" (I, i, 49). Beatrice on the other hand is characterized in images of light and vision; she is a "bright form" who possesses an "awe-inspiring gaze,/Whose beams anatomize [Orsino] nerve by nerve/And lay [him] bare" (I, ii, 83-86). Through the incestuous rape the Count hopes to blot out the light of Beatrice's soul and wrap her in a ". . . bewildering mist/Of horror" (II, i, 184-85): ". . . if there be a sun in heaven/She shall not dare to look upon its beams;/Nor feel its warmth . . ." (II, i, 185-87).

And indeed the Count is successful. Immediately after the rape, after he has introduced the demon into Beatrice, she stands transformed — possessed by an alien spirit that clouds her vision. Act III opens as Beatrice staggers into Lucretia's room after the rape: "My eyes are full of blood; just wipe them for me . . . /I see but indistinctly" (III, i, 3-4). She is obsessed with an image — blood — previously applied to her father, exclaiming, "The beautiful blue heaven is flecked with blood!" (III, i, 13). Curran contends that Shelley uses blood as "a euphemism for her father's semen."<sup>17</sup> This is appropriate, for Beatrice describes the incestuous act in highly sexual language, indicating that she had been invaded and enveloped by a demon:

. . . 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!  
(III, i, 16-23)



Possessed by an alien force — her “eyes shoot forth/A wandering and strange spirit” (III, i, 81-82) — Beatrice hopes that she might be a catalyst through which the demonic blood effects its own demise: “. . . O blood, which art my father’s blood,/Circling through these contaminated veins,/If thou, poured forth on the polluted earth,/Could wash away the crime, and punishment/By which I suffer . . . ” (III, i, 95-99).

Her body a “foul den” (III, i, 130), Beatrice maintains a firm belief that as God’s agent she can exorcise the demon possessing her; the agent driving her to parricide, she tells Savella, was “Not hate, ’twas more than hate” (IV, iv. 103). Her father’s death “. . . will be/But as a change of sin-chastising dreams,/A dark continuance of the Hell within him,/Which God extinguish” (IV, ii, 32-35); hence “. . . it is a high and holy deed.” Harrassed by a superhuman force, Beatrice cannot depend on the existing institutional framework to free her: “. . . In this mortal world/There is no vindication and no law/Which can adjudge and execute the doom/Of that through which I suffer” (III, i, 134-37). Rather she must allow her father’s own demon — “a dark continuance of the Hell within him” — to circle through her passive veins in accomplishing its self-destruction. Once the demonic spirit has run its course and the tyrant is destroyed, Beatrice is free. Immediately she is conscious of a change within her; she is purified:

. . . Even whilst  
That doubt is passing through your mind, the world  
Is conscious of a change. Darkness and Hell  
Have swallowed up the vapour they sent forth  
To blacken the sweet light of life. My breath  
Comes, methinks, lighter, and the jellied blood  
Runs freely through my veins. . . . (IV, iii, 38-44)

In the next line Beatrice learns that her father — the demon — is dead. And her regeneration is complete: “I am as universal as the light;/Free as the earth-surrounding air; as firm/As the world’s centre . . . ” (IV, iv, 48-50).

We can now, I trust, understand Beatrice’s protestations of innocence as the drama moves toward its conclusion.

She is indeed innocent, as she in no way encouraged the demon to enter her body, and she can hardly be held responsible for the process by which the demon is exorcised. To admit her guilt would be to admit no difference between the forces of darkness and the forces of light. She will "overbear" accusations of her guilt "with such guiltless pride,/As murderers cannot feign" (IV, iv, 45-46). The implication here is that Beatrice realizes that she is no murderer. ". . . 'Tis most false," Beatrice exclaims, "That I am guilty of foul parricide,/Although I must rejoice, for justest cause,/That other hands have sent my father's soul/To ask the mercy he denied to me" (IV, iv, 145-49). Protected by her innocence, she is willing to go with Lucretia to face trial in Rome, for ". . . There as here/Our innocence is as an armed heel/To trample accusation. God is there/As here, and with His shadow ever clothes/The innocent, the injured and the weak;/And such are we" (IV, iv, 158-63). Beatrice has no reason to deceive anyone in these scenes; in the presence of only the sympathetic Lucretia, she has no cause to act the Lady Macbeth critics have accused her of becoming.

Once on trial in Rome, Beatrice is so persuasive in her denial of guilt that she even convinces the men who carried out her orders; Marzio dies a martyr to Beatrice, utterly transformed by her goodness and purity: ". . . As soon as we/Had bound him on the wheel, he smiled on us,/As one baffles a deep adversary;/And holding his breath, died" (V, ii, 180-83). Beatrice's defence, and a convincing one, is that she is not to be held responsible for her actions:

. . . I, alas!

Have lived but on this earth a few sad years,  
 And so my lot was ordered, that a father  
 First turned the moments of awakening life  
 To drops, each poisoning youth's sweet hope; and then  
 Stabbed with one blow my everlasting soul;  
 And my untainted fame; and even that peace  
 Which sleeps within the core of the heart's heart;  
 But the wound was not mortal; so my hate  
 Became the only worship I could lift

To our great father, who in pity and love,  
 Armed thee, as thou dost say, to cut him off.  
 (V, ii, 118-129)

Steadfastly convinced of her innocence, Beatrice does not become an "ignoble liar" to save her life, as Baker asserts; indeed she is willing to die, to be tortured, rather than utter what she knows is untrue — that she is responsible for the crime:

Brother, lie down with me upon the rack  
 And let us each be silent as a corpse,  
 It will be as soft as any grave.  
 'Tis but the falsehood it can wring from fear  
 Makes the rack cruel. (V, iii, 47-52)

*The Cenci* is a tragedy not of character — as most critics read it — but of the cosmos. Carlos Baker asserts that "if Shelley were really to write a tragedy, it was unthinkable to invent a denouement in which Beatrice succeeded in converting the injurer 'from his dark passions' by the exercise of peace and love;" and he goes on to suggest that the tragedy is the breaking of the heroine's character, her willingness to cast off "the armor of her righteousness" to assume "the cloak of a murderess,"<sup>18</sup> But this, I argue, Beatrice never does.

The scholarly tendency to read *The Cenci* as a tragedy of character receives support from Shelley's prefatory assertion that "the fit return to make to the most enormous injuries is kindness and forbearance, and a resolution to convert the injurer from his dark passions by peace and love." Had Beatrice acted according to this principle, however, "she would never have been a tragic character." Shelley clearly implies that Beatrice is a tragic heroine because her character breaks; consequently she commits "pernicious mistakes." But Shelley seems to protest too much. The extended preface with its insistence on Beatrice's tragic fall camouflages the drama's weakness as a portrayal of character disintegration. Shelley wanted to write a tragedy but in fact did not; hence he attempts to remedy his failure with a didactic preface. If Shelley's drama portrayed what the author in his preface claims

it does, the reader might rightly expect more soul-searching on Beatrice's part, more awareness of the two opposing courses of action, and more evidence of conscious choice. Such elements are essential to tragedy: Claudius in *Hamlet* becomes tragic as we see him agonizing at prayer, aware of two courses of action and consciously forgoing repentance in favour of his love for his queen and crown; Hamlet's tragedy is heightened by his agonizing awareness of his inability — by nature — to pursue the course of action he knows he should follow without delay; Melville's Ahab achieves tragic stature in *Moby-Dick* during quiet moments on ship when he is tempted to forgo revenge and turn back in his quest for the white whale, only to realize that he is too "far gone on the dark side of this earth." As if aware of this element of tragedy, Shelley in the preface asserts that Beatrice, "after long and vain attempts to escape [her] contamination," plots "with her mother-in-law and brother to murder their common tyrant." But unfortunately the facts of the play belie Shelley's claim of "long and vain attempts"; Beatrice clearly knows her course of action immediately after the rape, ridiculing Orsino's suggestion that she "endure" with the assertion, "All must be suddenly resolved and done" (II, i, 169). In last analysis Beatrice is not tragic; she seems too often the victim of forces over which she has no control. Furthermore, her actions claim too strong a hold on the reader's sympathies to render Shelley's moralizing about her "pernicious mistakes" very plausible. Hamlet may err in delaying his revenge; Claudius clearly chooses wrongly in preferring Gertrude and his crown to repentance; Ahab should have turned back from his fatal quest. But should Beatrice have allowed her father to continue his ruthless and demonic tyranny without opposition? Beatrice — and the dilemma facing her — are simply not sufficiently complex to qualify *The Cenci* as a tragedy of character.

The real tragedy of *The Cenci* is similar to that in *Alastor* or the "Epipsychidion" — that all too acute aware-

ness that mortality obliterates the few glimpses we have of the good and the beautiful. Though the demon has been exorcised, Beatrice painfully discovers that the world has not been transformed; the spirit of tyranny embodied in her father persists in the figures of the Pope and the judge presiding over her trial.<sup>19</sup> For a brief moment this leads Beatrice to despair. When Lucretia tells Beatrice to "Trust in God's sweet love," the heroine mourns in despair that the "sweet love" seems nowhere evident in the mortal world:

How tedious, false and cold seem all things. I  
 Have met with much injustice in this world;  
 No difference has been made by God or man,  
 Or any power moulding my wretched lot,  
 'Twixt good and evil, as regarded me.  
 I am cut off from the only world I know,  
 From light, and life, and love, in youth's sweet prime.  
 You do well telling me to trust in God,  
 I hope I do trust in Him. In whom else  
 Can any trust? And yet my heart is cold. (V, vi, 80-89)

But such despair is momentary; Beatrice realizes the tragic fact that the kingdom of light is not of this earth: ". . . No, Mother, we must die:/Since such is the reward of innocent lives;/Such the alleviation of worst wrongs./And whilst our murderers live, and hard, cold men,/Smiling and slow, walk through a world of tears/To death as to life's sleep; 'twere just the grave/Were some strange joy for us" (V, iv, 109-115). Beatrice, the ". . . perfect mirror of pure innocence," realizes and becomes reconciled to the fact that only in an immortal realm can she find rest from the demon which pursues her: ". . . my Lord,/We are quite ready. Well, 'tis very well" (V, iv, 164-165).

"Well, 'tis very well" — Beatrice's last words are hardly those of a nihilist, as some — like Curran — portray her.<sup>20</sup> Rather she resembles Edgar in *King Lear*, who after witnessing the inexplicable demise of innocence in a world out-of-joint can nevertheless assert that "The gods are just" (V, iii, 170). Likewise, Beatrice knows that "Ill must come of ill" (I, iii, 151). Matured by her experience,

Beatrice comes to the tragic awareness of "sad reality"; the ideal portrayed by Shelley in *Prometheus Unbound* is attainable only in a realm radically different from the mortal world we inhabit.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup>"Preface" to *The Cenci* in Shelley's *Poetical Works*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson, rev. G. M. Matthews (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1970), pp. 275, 278. All subsequent references to Shelley's works are to this edition, unless noted otherwise.
- <sup>2</sup>Evans, *Gothic Drama from Walpole to Shelley* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1947), pp. 230-31; Whitman, "Beatrice's 'Pernicious Mistake' in *The Cenci*," PMLA, 74 (1959), 249-53.
- <sup>3</sup>Wasserman, *Shelley: A Critical Reading* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1971), pp. 81-89; Baker, *Shelley's Major Poetry: The Fabric of a Vision* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1948), pp. 147-8.
- <sup>4</sup>Newman I. White, *Shelley* (New York: Knopf, 1940), II, 139.
- <sup>5</sup>*Shelley's Cenci: Scorpions Ringed with Fire* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1970), vi-xii. For Curran, Beatrice "is another Shelleyan 'Spirit that strove/for truth, and like the Preacher found it not'" (p. 130).
- <sup>6</sup>Wasserman, pp. 257-61.
- <sup>7</sup>*The Complete Works of Shelley*, eds. Roger Ingpen and Walter Peck (New York: Scribner's, 1965), VII, 87.
- <sup>8</sup>*The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1887), I, 30.
- <sup>9</sup>See Carl Woodring, *Politics in English Romantic Poetry* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1970), pp. 317-19.
- <sup>10</sup>*The Quest for Permanence: The Symbolism of Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1959), p. 166.
- <sup>11</sup>*Quest for Permanence*, p. 165.
- <sup>12</sup>*Quest for Permanence*, p. 163.
- <sup>13</sup>Curran points out that Shelley clearly wanted to highlight the incestuous rape of Beatrice. In adapting his source material for the play Shelley carefully deleted the Count's three convictions for sodomy so as not to offend the delicate sympathies of potential theatregoers. But he took an "originally questionable incest" and made it the crux of the tragedy (p. 43).
- <sup>14</sup>Letter to Maria Gisborne, 16 Nov. 1819 (*The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. F. L. Jones, London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1964, II, 154).
- <sup>15</sup>*Shelley: A Critical Reading*, p. 85. Peter Thorslev argues that the Count's incestuous rape symbolizes his attempt to re-

capture his fleeting youth ("Incest as Romantic Symbol," *Comparative Literature Studies*, 11, 1965, 47).

<sup>16</sup>*Shelley's Cenci*, pp. 106-07.

<sup>17</sup>*Shelley's Cenci*, p. 116. Curran demonstrates too that Shelley "draws on the physiological symptoms of syphilis for imagery" in describing the rape and its aftermath (p. 92).

<sup>18</sup>*Shelley's Major Poetry*, p. 142; pp. 147-48.

<sup>19</sup>Curran, p. 43.

<sup>20</sup>*Shelley's Cenci*, p. 90.

## Truce

We have come at last to terms  
 Like futility, despair,  
 And do what you want to,  
     I don't care —  
 The sun shines in the windows,  
     unaware.

We are finally reconciled  
 To loss of love, a career  
 Of guilt, frustration, horror,  
     choking fear —  
 The moon strikes through the windows,  
     fresh and clear.

We have an understanding,  
 Balance time on how to share  
 Light within this cozy room,  
     sit and stare —  
 As answers cloud the windows  
     of the air.

David Lieberman