C H A P T E R IV

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T H E A T T I C M O D E L

CHAPTER IV

English Plays on the Attic Model

1. Introduction:

The influence of Seneca on English tragedy long preceded any distinct effect produced by Greek classical tragedy. The classical stimuli acting upon English Renaissance tragedy were not the Greeks but Seneca, as we have already noted. The reasons for the neglect of Greek drama, were, first, the extreme difficulty of its thought and language; second, the superior attraction of the flashier Seneca; third, the existence of handy Latin translation.[1]

Very few English versions of Greek plays were made during the Renaissance. George Peele (1558-98) is said to have translated one of the Euripidean plays on Iphigenia but the same is lost. The only published translation was Jocasta which purports to be a rendering of the Phoenissae of Euripides, but is, in truth, a rearrangement of the Greek tragedy by the Italian Lodovico Dolce.

John Pikeryng in The History of Horestes (1567-68), Thomas Heywood in The Iron Age (about 1613) and Dekker in Orestes Furious (1599), however, treated of the Orestes story.

The last one is lost. The other two plays are badly handicapped by the authors' ignorance of the Greek originals. Thomas Goffe's academic tragedy Orestes (1623) presents the Orestes story, taken from Seneca. Goffe's play is full of horrors and bloody incidents and is devoid of the Greek spirit. The Samson Agonistes (1671) of John Milton was the first tragedy in English to be confessedly written on the model of classical Greek tragedy.

Milton believed that tragedy was, and always had been, "the gravest, moralest and most profitable of all other poems".[2] He was critical of "the modern 'tragi-comic' error of intermixing comic stuff with tragic sadness and gravity".[3] In his puritanical way he thought that the English stage had become immoral, and that Shakespeare and the other great dramatists of his generation had been wrong in not following classical models. Milton believed that the perfect drama was the Greek drama. He observes, "... Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, the three tragic poets unequalled yet by any, and the best rule to all who endeavour to write tragedy".[4] He was thinking highly of the achievement of the ancient Greeks in the field of tragedy when he wrote;

"Athens, the eye of Greece, mother of Arts ...
Thence what the lofty grave tragedians taught
In chorus or Iambic, teachers best
Of moral prudence, with delight receiv'd
In brief sententious precepts, while they treat
Of fate, and chance, and change in human life,
High actions, and high passions, best describing".[5]

Milton was not only a serious student of Greek drama ; Gilbert Highet considers him to be the only poet in England who "knew and assimilated all the three Greek tragedians".[6] Because of his life-long saturation in Greek classics and his own artistic and religious temper he was very naturally led to write a tragedy in the Attic style.

P.B. Shelley (1792-1822) was not primarily a dramatist. But he was equally interested in Attic tragedy. During his stay in Italy (1818-1819) the Greek tragedians were his "most familiar companions".[7] Gilbert Highet observes, "Like Milton, Shelley read and re-read the classics, until phrases, images, ideas, characters, scenes, entire conceptions from them became part of his own thought".[8] Mrs. Shelley holds a similar view: "In reading Shelley's poetry we often find similar verses, resembling, but not imitating the Greek ... for, though he adopted the style, he gifted it with that originality of form and colouring which sprung from his own genius".[9] In the Preface

to Hellas Shelley wrote, "We are all Greeks. Our laws, our literature, our religion, our arts have their root in Greece".[10] His great love for Greece is also manifest in what he said in his Discourse on the Manners of the Ancients. The heritage of Greek art and thought was a spiritual reality to Shelley. Of his feelings towards the Greeks of antiguity, Shelley wrote to Peacock, "I am too jealous of the honour of the Greeks, our masters and creators, the Gods when we should worship".[11]

Shelley had a great reverence for Aeschylus. "The sublime majesty of Aeschylus filled him with wonder and delight",[12] Mrs. Shelley notes. She further observes, "... the interest on which he [Aeschylus] founds his dramas is often elevated above human vicissitudes into the mighty passions and throes of gods and demi-gods; such fascinated the abstract imagination of Shelley".[13] Shelley was also drawn by the romantic daring of Aeschylus. Being pre-classical, Aeschylus had less restraint and his passions and emotions found outlet in his dramas. In his Prometheus we have the daring of an age that has not yet been frightened. In the time of Aeschylus people were still looking forward to the powers of the human intellect, to reason and free enguiry, as the great emancipators. No wonder that the author of The Necessity of Atheism was so attracted to his daring spirit.

Shelley admired Aeschylus' eloquence — the complex rhythms of his choruses, the profound spiritual meaning underlying his tragedies, his long bravura descriptions, the skill with which he forms new words and phrases to express almost inexpressible and the grand imagination which produced vast plots and super-human characters. In The Wandering Jew, which Shelley and Medwin wrote when they were boys, the epigraph to the fourth canto was Aeschylus' the Eumenides (146f). Shelley translated Prometheus Bound of Aeschylus to Byron in 1816 and to Medwin in 1820-21.

According to Mrs. Shelley[14], Sophocles was Shelley's great master in the species of imagery. Shelley liked the Oedipus dramas, which he specially mentions in his preface to The Cenci, and Antigone, whose heroine resembles Beatrice, the heroine of The Cenci.

For Euripides, Shelley cared less, but he translated his Cyclops, the only complete satyr-play in existence.

Shelley was an enthusiastic admirer of the Attic dramatists, especially of Aeschylus, but he had no intention to naturalise Greek tragedy in English in the manner of Milton. His Hellas (1822) is modelled upon the Persae of Aeschylus, but it is, in the main, a lyrical drama and a fragment. In

Prometheus Unbound (1820) Shelley wrote his own version of what happened when Prometheus was unbound. It is Shelley's response in terms of modern revolutionary idealism to Aeschylus' grim tragedy of Prometheus in chains.

Matthew Arnold is less dogmatic than Milton but his motives are not dissimilar when he wrote Merope (1858) on the Attic model. He himself has stated why he tried to reproduce in his language the form of classical Greek tragedy : "I have long had the strongest desire ... to try to obtain through the medium of a living, familiar language a fuller and more intense feeling of that beauty, which, even when apprehended through the medium of a dead language, so powerfully affected me".[15] In his essay, 'The Choice of subjects in Poetry', Arnold points out why he gives greater value to Greek art: "With them [The Greek Poets] the poetical character or action in itself was the first consideration; with us, attention is fixed mainly on the value of the separate thoughts and images ... they regarded the whole; we regard the parts. With them the action predominates over the expression of it; with us, the expression predominates over the action... They are the highest models of expression, the unapproached masters of the grand style; but their expression is so excellent because it is so admirably kept in its right degree of prominence; because it is so simple and subordinated; because it draws its force directly from the

pregnancy of the matter which it conveys".[16] In his Preface to 1853 Volume of Poems Arnold boldly asserted the importance of the Greek heritage. Shelley and Keats, he felt, were mere style and form seekers. Both of them had exuberance of expression, the charm, the richness of images, which, in his opinion, did not constitute great poetry. He, therefore, developed a pattern, a passion for the architectonics. He affirmed 'the all-depends-upon-the subject' theory.

As the Preface to Merope shows Arnold desired to try how much of the effectiveness of the form of the Greek tragedies he could retain in an English poem constructed under the conditions of that form. He knew fully well that what he aspired to reproduce derived its characteristics and drew its inspiration and nutrient from a past world which could not be recalled, yet he believed in the permanence of the Beautiful, whether expressing itself in form or in idea.

A.C. Swinburne wrote two plays on the Greek model, Atalanta in Calydon (1865) and Erechtheus (1876). In his case the reasons for imitating Greek tragedies were something different from those working behind Arnold. In them he admired "a loveliness and a dignity"[17] which were less common in contemporary life. In these works of "noble gestures and

princely words"[18], he felt at home and from them he derived much that was best in his poetry. He sought " in essential poetry, an indefinable essence"[19]. Swinburne had a profound knowledge of the Greek stage, and the plays of Aeschylus and Sophocles. He liked the Greeks as a people; he loved their civilisation and accepted ancient Greece as his true spiritual home.

Swinburne had an unbounded admiration particularly for Aeschylus and knew most of his plays by heart. He thought the Oresteia, on the whole, to be "the greatest spiritual work of men"[20]. With his intense and profuse gusto for the Greek classics, he was deeply immersed in the poetry of the ancients. In a letter to W. M. Rossetti on August 21, 1875, Swinburne wrote that all Greek subjects, historic and mythical, national or spiritual were of universal and lasting import in a sense and to a degree in which this could be said of no others, ancient or modern.

In the tragic plays of Aeschylus and Sophocles, Swinburne found the greatest truths about life and the world, about man's fate and the nature of the gods and the universe, summed up once for all. He adored the way in which the defiant and dauntless heroes of the Aeschylean drama fought and met glorious death by accepting the tyrannical decrees of gods or fate with unfailing pride.

Swinburne was professedly Aeschylean and his admiration for Sophocles was hardly less great. But he disliked the Sophist Euripides, detesting his stoicism and scepticism as well as his realism. He wrote to a friend, "... it is easier to overtop Euripides by the head and shoulder than to come up to the waist of Sophocles or to the knee of Aeschylus"[21]. Yet he knew his plays well and liked parts of them. He also shared his ethical outlook.

Swinburne himself stated that his plan was to do something original in English which might in some degree reproduce for the English readers the likeness of a Greek tragedy with something of its true poetic life and charm. Swinburne did not think high of Arnold's Merope. In a letter to Lady Trevelyan on March 15, 1865, he wrote, "Shelley's Prometheus is magnificent and unrivalled, spoilt too, in my mind, by the infusion of philanthropic doctrinaire views and 'progress of the species'. As for Professor Arnold's Merope, the clothes are well enough but where has the body gone? So I thought, and still think, the field was clear for me".[22]

2. Samson Agonistes — Milton's Indebtedness to Greek tragedy.

A. Introduction:

Of all the English poets, John Milton (1608-1674) is one with steadfast will and purpose, of action and contemplation, of moral earnestness and defiant spirit. He is a poet who lived and thought consciously in a sublime atmosphere. Christian and Humanist, Protestant, patriot and heir to the golden ages of Greece and Rome, he faced what appeared to him to be the birth-pangs of a new and regenerate England with high excitement and idealistic optimism in the rule of Cromwell.

But the Restoration of Charles II to the throne of England in 1660 crushed Milton's vision of a reformed and regenerate England. All his labours and sacrifices for humanity were apparently wasted, as the first act of this very monarch was to set his foot upon his people's neck. The repudiation by the English people of their priceless chance to achieve national regeneration was for him a tragedy dark enough to overshadow all his later life, which saw the publication of his sole tragedy, Samson Agonistes (1671).

Samson Agonistes also expresses Milton's state of mind at the time of writing. Between 1664/1674 the story of Milton's life is highly tragic. During this period Milton not only wrote a tragedy, but also lived it. The suffering of more than one kind was in the store for him — political, domestic, physical and on top of that the anguish of his spirit. Totally blind and absolutely frustrated,

Milton faced the Restoration which only added to his sufferings. After 1660, he had the feeling of being surrounded on all sides by his erstwhile enemies, the Royalists, now in powers, crowing over his helplessness, abusing him and spreading in a very mean manner calumny about him. His domestic life was equally miserable. The attending ailments of age simply grew with the passing of years and added to his mental agonies. The poverty that overtook him after the Restoration and clung to him till his death was another of his burdens. He had during the period a certain amount of friction too with his daughters by his first wife, at whose mercy he was when he was blind.

There is a close parallel between the careers of Samson and Milton. Milton's blindness, his life of temperance and abstemiousness, characteristics of a Puritan, his unhappy marriage, his championship of the Puritan cause, his hopes crushed and his faculties drooping — all are referred to in the character of Samson. Such resemblances, at times, heighten the poignancy of the drama. Milton's choice of the tragic form was, therefore, deliberate. "The writing of a tragedy", observes R.B. Sewall, "is the artist's way of taking action, of defying destiny, and this is why in the great tragedies there is a sense of the artist's own involvement, and immediacy".[1] Milton as a classicist tries to write objectively, but he is revealed even to a superficial observer. Nevertheless, Milton's play far transcends personal and particular facts. Its living power is in its direct and searching treatment of human

experience, the hard struggle of humility, integrity and faith against pride, sin, misery and despair.

The last works of Milton show a greater fusion of the Hellenic and the Hebraic and the Renaissance and Reformation elements. It was the presence of the Hellenic element that made him the very opposite of the narrow-minded Puritan fanatics of his day. Milton's poetry, which is marked by sublimity of thought and of style, has justly been said to be the best substitute in English for the masterpieces of classical poetry. He alone, among the English poets, has the perfect art and the classical spirit of the ancient Greek masters. His very egoism takes a high classical turn. In his blindness he compares himself with

> "Blind Thamyris and blind Maeonides
> And Tiresias and Phineus, prophets old"
>
> (Paradise Lost, Bk.iii, Ll35-36)

Milton's classical bent is evident in (1) his choice of classical and semi-classical forms — such as the epic, the Greek tragedy, and the pastoral; (2) the elaborate descriptions and enormous similes in Paradise Lost; (3) the fondness for classical allusions which runs riot through all the poetry; (4) the dignity of style, and its precision and care.

Milton's Comus does not profess to be a tragedy or to follow any Greek model. It is a 'Mask'. But it is the work of one, deeply versed in Greek drama, especially in the Hippolytus of Euripides. Milton was very much drawn to the stichomythia of

Greek tragedy — the sequence of single lines exchanged between speakers. This is imitated in Comus, as in the following lines:

> "Comus. What chance good Lady hath bereft you thus?
> Lady. Dim darkness, and this leavy Labyrinth.
> Comus. Could that divide you from near-ushering guides?
> Lady. They left me weary on a grassie terf".[2]

Critics mostly agree on the point that Samson Agonistes is a pure re-creation of Greek tragedy. Milton shows complete mastery of form made possible by the firmness of his tragic design and the perfect assimilation of the matter of The Book of Judges.

B. Milton's Subject: How far Hellenic?

In the title of his drama, Milton follows Greek examples, such as those of Aeschylus in his Prometheus Vinctus and of Sophocles in Oedipus at Colonus. Samson Agonistes, in particular, recalls these two plays in so far as the hero is concerned. In both Samson Agonistes and Oedipus at Colonus, the heroes are blind, remain seated against a leafy background, and leave the stage to meet their end. Samson's torture and immense woe suggest Prometheus Vinctus by Aeschylus. The weakness that impairs Samson through a woman parallels the experience of Heracles in the Trachiniae of Sophocles.

As for the theme, Milton took his story from the great religious tradition of his race. The plot of Samson Agonistes, in outline, is this:

Samson, in the prison at Gaza, is visited by friends of his tribe, who form the chorus, and seek to comfort him; then by his old father, Manoa, who holds out the hope of securing his release, then by his wife Dalila, who seeks pardon and reconciliation, but being repudiated shows herself a manifest serpent in the end; then by Harapha, a strong man of Gath, who taunts Samson. He is finally summoned to provide amusement by feats of strength for the Philistine Lords who are celebrating a feast to Dagon. He goes, and presently a messenger brings news of their destruction and the death of Samson, by his pulling down of the pillars supporting the roof of the palace wherein they were.

The incidents of Milton's drama are based upon the 13th, 14th, 15th and 16th chapters of the Book of Judges. The story of Samson, as told in Judges, is consistent with the tone of the Greek Tragedy. W.R. Parker says that Samson has an 'Athenian stamp'[3]; his behaviour reminds us at times of Hercules or the aged Oedipus but his background is 'Jewish'.[4] R.C. Jebb, in unambiguous terms, comments that Samson Agonistes has the form of a Greek tragedy, but its inspiration, like its subject, is "far more Hebraic than Hellenic".[5] He indicates that as Milton was, by temperament, a puritan of the higher type, the Hellenic cannot be said to have determined the pervading spirit of his work; that is rather Hebraic, or when it is not Hebraic, Latin.[6] J.A.K. Thomson also comments that though the style of Samson Agonistes is truly Greek, it should be distinguished from the spirit or sentiment of the play, which is often Hebraic and still more often simply Miltonic.[7]

It is to be noted that in Samson Agonistes, the Biblical story is taken in a truly Hellenic way. Parker, however, admits that it is difficult to say what the Hebraic spirit or the Hellenic spirit is. In analysing the tonal values of Greek tragedy Parker[8] mentions the more important marks which are seriousness, thoughtfulness, didactic quality and sublimity or elevation. He argues that these characteristics are present in Samson Agonistes, and therefore its Hellenism cannot be questioned.

Parker[9] further argues that even the Attic poets used to create really dramatic situation by spiritualising the old legend. Milton does not allow anything irrelevant to the central issue. He omits the details about Samson's birth. Another notable omission is the detail of Dalila's three attempts upon Samson's strength as it is ridiculous for a tragic hero. The Bible shows a Samson praying for strength, for revenge, but Milton makes him pray in silence keeping in mind the spiritual development of the protagonist. But the major change Milton works out in Samson is in the final act of the drama. Here Samson is God's champion — not a private individual to seek revenge. Aristotle leaves one in no doubt as to his preference for hamartia over mochtheria. But, by the very nature of the Biblical legend, Samson's tragedy is due to mochtheria rather than hamartia. Keenly aware of this inherent difficulty, Milton sets out, deliberately and consciously, to scale down Samson's moral failings and treat them as if his tragedy is due to a failure of judgement on his part in marrying the Philistine

women. The change in the Hebraic matter may better be explained in terms of Hellenic principles than personal poetic emotions as his self-identification with the hero plays a part in the ennobling of the hero.

Milton is true to the manner of Greek tragedy in beginning the play at a late stage in the history of Samson's life, when the temptation to pride and blame God has already been overcome. The plot, Parker very justifiably observes, is "Aeschylean in its freedom from elaboration, in its comparative paucity of action".[10]

William Brewer[11] in an article on Samson Agonistes goes so far as to say that Milton took his plot almost entirely from the Prometheus Bound of Aeschylus, and the Oedipus at Colonus of Sophocles. He argues that in composing Samson Agonistes, Milton took from the Bible only his chief characters and his catastrophe;

> the events which Milton presents before and after his catastrophe do not appear in the Bible, and none of them follow necessarily from anything narrated there. However, the fact is that though Milton took his story from the great religious tradition of his race, he allowed, in deference to the needs of Hellenic tragedy, his Puritanism to be tempered by his classical scholarship and taste.

C. The Hero and the Catharsis

Samson possesses the essential characteristics of the hero of a tragedy, as laid down by Aristotle. He is a good man but not

perfectly virtuous. Neither is he deliberately vicious. But while possessing heroic virtues, he is, at the same time, subject to human frailty (his yielding to Dalila). The hamartia or tragic flaw in his character is pride as well as uxoriousness. Presented to us in a fallen state, blinded, enslaved, in chains, ragged, unwashed, unshorn, his physical sufferings awaken the same kind of poetry that we feel for Philoctetes, when he appears in front of his cave in the wilderness, banished from society, suffering from an incurable wound, in which condition he has dragged a solitary existence for ten long years. Samson may not have an exalted rank and position but his spiritual loftiness makes him exalted and exceptional. He has been a Nazarite from birth, the consecrated deliverer of his people, a judge in Israel for twenty years, and single-handed, the scourge and terror of the hosts of Philistines. Samson also resembles Sophocles' Oedipus not only in character, but also in fate.

The many references to the hero's glorious past that we find in Milton's play are means to provoke our pity, and most of the last portion of the play is a conscious attempt to arouse fear. The chorus goes through these two emotions, and since the chorus approximates to our point of view as readers, we are further prompted to pity and fear. That Milton is later striving for a purgation of these emotions which he tried to stimulate is apparent from the two closing speeches. Manoa speaks of 'what may quiet us in a death so noble'. Then the final chorus rounds off with 'calm

of mind all passion spent'. These lines are more than expressions of the very doctrine of catharsis; they are the very instruments of it. Dramatically appropriate in their context, they produce a calming effect. If we have been stirred by what has preceded, these two speeches, coming after the long narrative of the messenger and the choral ode of triumph, beautifully and quietly bring us down to earth. This kind of ending is characteristic of Milton. In most of the tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, there is a similar relaxing of the tension. We leave the play with our minds in repose. The passions which had been aroused by the action of the play are turned down and a mood of quiet acceptance and resignation is induced. The play is truly cathartic; it soothes, consoles and strengthens in the tradition of the noblest Greek tragedy.

We pass through the storm of tragedy only to escape at the end into a sense of soothing serenity. The rest, we feel, is silence and peace. Milton who in the preface of his drama gives an accurate exposition of Aristotle's notion of catharsis sums it down neatly and beautifully in the last two lines of the play:

> "With peace and consolation hath dismist
> And calm of mind all passion spent ..."[12]

D. <u>The Formal Mould</u>:

<u>Samson Agonistes</u> can be analysed in a way which corresponds closely to Greek precedents:

Lines 1-114 constitute the Prologs. As in a Greek tragedy, this portion, in Milton's drama, is a part of the action of the play.

Lines 115-175 constitute the Parodos (or the first ode) sung by the chorus as they enter, and advance towards the orchestra.

Lines 176-292 are the first Epeisodion which consists of dialogue between two choral odes.

Lines 293-325 are the first Stasimon, sung by the chorus standing in its proper place in the orchestra.

Lines 326-651 are the second Epeisodion, of which Ll 326-331 announce, according to the custom of Greek tragedy, the approach of a personage on the scene.

Lines 652-709 are the second stasimon.

Lines 710-1009 are the third Epeisodion, of which Ll 710-731 announce a personage.

Lines 1010-1060 constitute the third stasimon.

Lines 1061-1267 are the fourth Epeisodion in which Ll 1061-1075 announce a personage.

Lines 1268-1300 constitute the fourth Stasimon.

Lines 1301-1426 are the fifth Epeisodion in which Ll 1301-1307 announce a personage.

Lines 1427-1440 constitute the fifth stasimon. Lines 1441 to the end constitute the Exodus or that part which has no choral ode after it, and which includes the Kommos (Ll 1660-1707) or the General Lamentation of the Chorus and the actors together.

Milton, therefore, in concluding the Exodus with a choral ode (Ll 1445 sq), and confining the dirge to the chorus, follows the example of Greek Tragedy.

Although Milton's Samson Agonistes has not the marvellous construction and subtle symmetry of Oedipus Tyrannus, the action of Milton's play, as shown by K.R.S. Iyengar[13], runs parallel to that of Sophocles' play.

The action in a Greek tragedy is complete in itself with a distinct beginning, middle and end. Dr. Johnson could not appreciate the action of Samson Agonistes as it seemed to him to be defective in as much as it had a beginning and an end but wanted a middle, since nothing passes between the first act and the last, that either hastens or delays the death of Samson (The Rambler, iii, 139). The reply to this criticism was furnished by Cumberland, (The Observer, iv, iii) who pointed out three passages (Ll 434-437; 468-71; 1250-52) that supply the requisite 'middle' — the first by announcing the festival in honour of Dagon, the second by prophesying the impending overthrow of this idol, and the confusion of his warriors, and the third by supplying an immediate motive for the catastophe in Harapha's malice. Thus the drama develops an 'entire' action.

W.P. Ker in his essay on Samson Agonistes says that the action of the drama between the beginning and the end is the passion of Samson. The action is in the changes of mind leading

on to the final victory. Ellis-Fermor, who deals with the Aristotelian middle of this play in greater detail in her The Frontiers of Drama, finds the action of the play in a profound psychological content.

But both the critics seem to miss the full significance of the 'middle'. The middle is the tension of a conflict caused by Dalila and Harapha. The conflict is, by no means, merely psychological; it gives rise to a tension of suspense on the external plane of action, for we feel that the insolence of Samson will not go unpunished. It is, in a sense, an allegory of temptation and purification, and its impact on the drama is tremendous. Both Dalila and Harapha are a mockery of Samson's unwise past; both of them are temptations to lure him back to his old weakness. Both the temptations are on the plane of the senses, and the conquest, which is purification, makes him fit for the last great fight for the cause of God.

Greek tragedy insists on the symmetry of action and frugality of expression. Some critics hold that in Samson Agoniestes, the third Epeisodion — Samson meeting with Dalila — is a violation of the principle of Greek tragedy. But this view is not correct. It materially contributes to the action of the drama. It reveals another Samson — a Samson, who is not going to be charmed by a woman's physical allurements. In fact, this is one of the most important episodes in the play as it awakens Samson from lethargy and prepares him for the final catastrophe. Besides, Milton laid

stress on the unity of action by subordinating characters to the central character. Concentration upon a single figure is, as Parker points out, thoroughly Aeschylean.[14]

The remarkable symmetry of the plot, as pointed out by Percival[15], is noticeable in the very Argument which falls into four parts : Samson as the sufferer bemoaning his lot : visits from friends (the Chorus and Manoah) who comfort him, and towards whom his manner and words are full of self-accusation and penitence: then visits from foes (Dalila and Harapha), who come to tempt and to insult him, and towards whom his manner changes into anger and defiance; lastly, Samson, as Agonistes, triumphing over his foes and dying.

The action of Samson Agonistes is great in a two-fold sense. The physical greatness of the action, i.e. the performance of deeds, is apparent in the action of the play. The moral greatness in the action consists in the sacrifice of one's own self for the sake of others. This ranks the drama with the action of Aeschylus' Prometheus Vinctus. In the case of Samson, the sacrifice is that of life itself, for the sake of God and country — religion and patriotism; in the case of Prometheus, it consists in the endurance of unutterable torment for the sake of the whole human race, universal philanthropy.

Percival[16] points out that the action of Samson Agonistes is probable. The deeds of Samson were recorded in scripture. Beside this absolute probability, there is relative probability

which requires that the action should be such as the circumstances of the case, and the characters of the chief personages would lead us to expect. The development of the plot in Samson Agonistes shows how well this requirement has been met.

Dr. Johnson points out (Rambler, iii, 139) that there is little action in Samson Agonistes, and action, as Aristotle insists, is the very soul of a drama. Action and progression there is, and in plenty, but the action is internal and not external, spiritual and not physical. It consists in Samson's conquest of various kinds of temptations which are offered to him, in his gradual movement towards regeneration and redemption through suffering. The interior action moves onward from Samson's fall through pride and temptation, to his consequent spiritual suffering and anguish, which ultimately results in his spiritual regeneration as shown by his absolute submission to the will of God.

In Samson Agonistes, the outer conflict is not so much in evidence as the inner conflict. As long as Samson doubts, as long as he questions, as long as he is out of harmony with God's will, he is not a fitting instrument of God's purpose. The spiritual conflict starts with the 23rd line of the prologue, and it is not over — until his calm dignified speech to the Philistine officer (Ll 1413-26); but his last in the play. Then his doubt is overcome; his arrogance and anger are past.

'Freedom within and Necessity without' are the two governing principles in the action of a Greek tragedy. They operate in

Samson Agonistes also. In the unconquerable spirit of Samson we recognise the freedom of the mind while the Necessity or Fate operates with inexorable uniformity upon God as upon the wicked.

Following in the foot-steps of the Greek masters, Milton has substituted the actual representation of the catastrophe by the narration of the messenger. Milton has avoided the actual representation of the catastrophe not only because the Greeks had done so, but because verisimilitude, dignity and the desire to focus attention not on the sensational event but on its dramatic significance, demanded it.

As for the unity of time and unity of place, Milton refers to the unity of time in his preface which beers an explanation and defence of the Greek tragedy by him. In Samson Agonistes, all the events occur within a day, i.e. a single circuit of the sun, as Aristotle insists. Though Aristotle does not mention the unity of place in The Poetics, it is strictly observed in Milton's drama, every scene being placed before the prison at Gaza; the catastrophe takes place outside in conformity with the principle of Greek tragedy that the enactment of violent deeds on the stage is prohibited.

The true conformity also lies in Milton's use of the chorus in Samson Agonistes. And, indeed, Milton was the first to introduce the true spirit of the classical Greek chorus in English literature.

As only the last phase of Samson's career is chosen for tragic treatment, the chorus in Milton's drama is used for

explaining the past, commenting on the present and speculating on the future course of action. The chorus, again, is a device for interpreting character and for conveying the feelings and ideas of an entire community. The chorus in Milton's drama is also a way of providing a running commentary on the drama itself quite in the Greek fashion. Serving as a link between the characters and the audience, it appears in the role of 'the idealised spectator', helping others in understanding the wisdom of the play. Then again, the chorus becomes the voice of the dramatist and sometimes generalizes the idea or emotion, indicated in a given situation. It also functions in different ways for facilitating the projection of the dramatist's vision of life on the play and in presenting the play itself on the stage.

In the Parsos, the chorus comments on Samson's state and contrasts it with his previous heroic exploits for his people:

> "Can this be he,
> That heroic, that renowned
> Irresistible Samson?"[17]

when Samson, in the bitterness of his mind, almost suggests that it is God's fault for having endowed him with more strength than wisdom, the chorus then plays the part of the reproving superior, admonishing him:

> "Tax not divine disposal".[18]

In the first stasimon, the Chorus breaks into its well-known vindication of God's justice:

"Just are the ways of God,
And justifiable to men".[19]

Here the chorus speaks as the impersonal mouthpiece of some of the general moral ideas in the play. This double function of the Chorus is common enough in Greek drama.

When Samson refuses the proposals of ransom made by Manoa, the Chorus seeks to cheer him and consoles him by pointing out that the hand of God has often rested heavily upon the chosen instruments of his glory.

In the fourth Stasimon, the Chorus hails Samson's reviving spirit, depicts him as the triumphant deliverer of the oppressed, and notes that Samson is one of those whom patience finally must crown.

When the officer comes to demand Samson's presence at the feast of Dagon, the Chorus tries to persuade Samson to obey the civil power. When, at last, Samson departs, its fervent prayer for his safety accompanies him:

"Go, and the Holy one
of Israel be thy guide ..."[20]

When the catastrophe is announced, the chorus points out that Samson at his death has fulfilled the task to which his life had been consecrated and shows how unexpectedly this fulfilment has been brought about. The play concludes with the chorus echoing the moral in the following lines:

"All is best, though we oft doubt
What the unsearchable dispose
Of Highest wisdom brings about,
And ever best found in the close".[21]

Thus, the Chorus in Samson Agonistes, serves the purpose at once of interpreting the emotions appropriate to the successive moments in the action, of classifying the larger significance of the whole, and of rounding off the story by an illusion to Samson's part. Like the Greek chorus, it voices, indeed, the poet's commentary upon the tragic happenings of the stage. It acts as the delegate of the poet, and the mouthpiece of his philosophy of life.

In one respect, however, the chorus in Milton does not appear to be above criticism. In the Ode (L 1010-1060), the chorus utters a series of invectives against women, reminiscent of Euripides. The sentiments of misogyny are put not in the mouth of the injured Samson alone, but in that of the chorus as well, whose utterances are expected to be the expression of dispassionate judgement. That is why an Indian critic, Brijraj Singh, in his book, Milton : An Introduction, has noted how the play, Samson Agonistes, contains not only the education of Samson, but the education of the Chorus as well. He says, "I do not hold with those who believe that the chorus in Samson is like the chorus in some Greek tragedies, where it knows the truth and responds to the situations rightly from the start".[22]

It is also to be noted that in Samson Agonistes, Milton leaves out the traditional threefold division of the chorus into

the strophe, the anti-strophe, and the epode. This division has no meaning unless the chorus is sung and danced. As Milton did not write for the stage, he found it pointless to maintain the division.

Critics have also noted that for the chorus Milton's inspiration was not wholly Greek; it was Italian to a great extent. In his Preface to the play, Milton writes, "In the modelling therefore of this poem, with good reason, the Ancients and Italians are rather followed, as of much more authority and fame".[23] Taking the obvious hint in this statement by Milton himself, recent scholars have taken pains to compare the choruses of Samson with those of a great number of Italian plays, and discovered that Milton's great quarry of examples for his rhythms was in Italy.

The construction of Milton's play is also sustained by an effective use of the Peripeteia or reversal of fortune. The essence of the ...t is that all the actions lead where they are not expected to lead. Thus, Samson's rejection of his father's offer of ransom, his rejection of Dalila's offers, his fierce defiance of Harapha, his defiance of the Philistine lords through their messenger, all presage further ignominy for Samson, but contrary to expectation they lead to his final triumph. Similarly, there is peripeteia in the case of the Philistines as well. They have expected to complete the process of Samson's ignominy and their glory by calling him to the feast of Dagon, but the result is contrary to their expectations. It leads to their destruction and the final triumph of Samson.

As in a Sophoclean drama, in Milton's drama too, there is an abundant use of the dramatic ironies. K.R.S. Iyenger[24] explains the use of dramatic ironies in Samson Agonistes by saying that actions and words are edged, as well as double edged: words *mean something other than what they are intended to mean: men* accomplish precisely the opposite of what they set out to do. Manoa comes to ransom his son, Samson, but in the end, he can only fetch the dead body hence to the parental house. The dialogue between Samson and Manoa is an effective piece of a dramatic irony. Trying to cozen Samson, Dalila only succeeds in infuriating Samson. Harapha's insolent words, instead of snubbing or humiliating Samson, open *his eyes to his new* found strength and urgency of mission. However, in the creation of dramatic irony, Milton differs from Sophocles in one respect. Tragic irony arises in Sophocles from the characters' ignorance of the protagonist's fate; it arises in Milton from an ignorance or misunderstanding of the rationally comprehensible ways of God.

The pattern of dialogue in Samson Agonistes is also very largely reminiscent of the Greek tragedies. Milton employs, though sparingly, 'stichomythia' and he makes use of the riddling question and answer, characteristic of the Greek tragic dialogue. In the substitution between the portions of the play in iambic pentameter and those in lyric measures, he is also in accord with the classic usage. The bitter reflection on the errors brought on mankind by woman are Euripidean. So also is the formula "all

is best" at the close . The great utterings in which Samson and the chorus recite the tale of human suffering are repetition with strong accent of individuality of similar generalisations which pervade Greek drama.

Samson Agonistes resembles rather the earlier Greek tragedies where the lyrical element predominates, while the plot and the persons who act its story play a comparatively subordinate part. In lyrical flow, it is more like Aeschylus' Persians and and Prometheus Bound than Sophocles' Oresteian trilogy. Besides, Milton's language seems to draw after it the attendant powers of music and the dance. In certain passages the fusion is as complete as it must have been in the choral lyrics of Aeschylus.

E. The Spirit

The Greek spirit in Samson Agonistes is seen in the poet's constant brooding over the folly of man and the uncertainty and sadness of human life. The drama can strike home to energetic thoughtful and patient readers who will face, what George Steiner[25] in The Death of Tragedy calls, "a terrible, stark insight into human life". The play is uniformly serious; thoughtful in a speculative and philosophical fashion. In fact, because of its profound and earnest thoughtfulness the play may be called Milton's philosophical testament. A sense of the dark mystery of existence pervades the drama. The Chorus says, "Tax not divine disposal"[26] and Samson says, "Appoint not heavenly disposal".[27] The choral ode

beginning with "Many are the sayings of the wise", suggests to a dark interrogation of divine justice, found only in the Greek tragedy. The message of Samson is that God works in mysterious ways, always overcoming evil with good. The play closes in the manner of a Greek tragedy with a brief choral song extolling the nigh wisdom of God and obedience to His Will. It is also like the Greek tragedies in the solemn music of its utterance, in its deep sense of the gravity of the issues on which human life hangs. The plot is marked by "a seriousness which is related to the point of view of the Attic dramatists".[28] With its magnificent concentration upon a single figure, its comparative freedom from the spectacular, its bare dramatic conflict, scarcity of characters, the plot sweeping forward to a conclusion and the action moving in one unswerving and impressive course, Samson Agonistes reminds us of Greek tragedy. The prophetic fervour, the passion for the righteousness, the loftiness of pathos, the opening soliloquy, the pervasive strain of philosophic ratiocination and the characterization of Dalila remind us of Euripides. In that lower order of pathos that physical suffering excites, as in its tone of bitter misogyny, it brings to mind similar traits in Euripides. But in the conduct of his chorus, and in the justness of their remarks eminently suited to their character and to the occasion, Milton is superior to Euripides whose choruses indulge in sententious maxims and wordy declamation, too often irrelevant. In exquisite art and symmetry of construction, in complexity of plot, in skilful disposition of incidents, so as to lead up to the catastrophe, in

skilful concealment of this arrangement till the very last, in the constant use of dramatic irony, in the treatment of the chorus and the denouement and in the subjecting of the hero's will to a series of tests, Milton's drama bears a close resemblance to the dramas of Sophocles. The dignity, the sanity, the just subordination of detail, the due adaptation of means to ends, the high respect of the craftsman for his craft and for himself, which ennoble Virgil and the Great Greeks, are all to be found in Milton.

So far about the form but what is about the spirit? Samson Agonistes may be called a drama of temptation and its conquest. F.T. Prince has observed in this connection, "In Samson Agonistes the hero's life and death include both Fall and Redemption; and recemption comes, as in Paradise Regained, through temptations overcome".[29] The said temptation is of two kinds: (a) Pride and the consequent temptation to blame God for his blindness and slavery; and (b) temptation provided by the sensual charms of Dalila. The first temptation has been thoroughly overcome by the time the action of the play begins. In the opening soliloquy Samson tells us, "Let me not rashly call in doubt Divine Prediction"[30]; it might have been fulfilled but for his own fault. With the entrance of Manoa, Samson is again faced with the temptation to blaspheme God. In Samson's eyes, God is to be blamed for (1) he married under divine impulsion, but the marriage is unfortunate; (ii) God should not have permitted such abject humiliation and dishonour, for the sake of his former glories; (iii) man is frail, and God should not have chosen such a frail creature as His

instrument; and (iv) now that he has fallen so low he is to be disgraced further by being called upon to appear at the feast of Dagon. But Samson is now proof to all such temptations; he blames only himself. (c) Further temptation is offered in the form of a comfortable life at home, affectionately watched over by his father. A hope of recovery of eye-sight is then held out, but Samson bravely prefers the life of drudgery and humiliation, he is leading and says:

> "My race of glory run, and race of shame,
> And I shall shortly be with them that rest".[31]

Dalila is introduced to arouse Samson from his dejection, to tempt him with her sensual charms, with offers of love and comforts of home in exchange for the prison. But Samson prefers life in prison to a life of dependence on her at home.

Samson not only conquers price and sensuality, he also overcomes despair. In the Fourth Act his responses to the taunts of the Philistine giant record a new and fearless confidence born of inward victory and peace.

Samson, thus, attains self-knowledge, self-control, spiritual illumination and regeneration. He is a different man altogether. He suffered heroically for his sin, but in the end his regeneration is complete.

As the phoenix renews itself, Samson is also renewed by the grace of God and finally fulfils his mission as God's champion.

In the very significant speech of the chorus, we learn that though God's purposes may not be immediately obvious, they are just and can be rationally comprehended. Samson seemed at the outset to have betrayed God's trust and thus to be forsaken by Him. But in actual fact, his sufferings, which he brought upon himself through disobedience, were the necessary purgatory that he had to go through before he could fulfil God's will. Thus, God turned Samson's very disobedience into an instrument for his greatest triumph.

Thus, it is "the moral triumph, the survival of faith which is the true subject of Samson".[32] F.T. Prince[33] asserts that the religion of the Old Testament moves powerfully throughout the poem. The Book of Job had been present to Milton's mind in writing Paradise Regained; but the story of Samson, as Milton interprets it, is even closer to Job's trials and affirmations. Milton's mind is steeped not only in the faith of the Old Testament but in the Jewish history and archaelogy. He feels intensely the fierce austerity of Hebrew religion, its hatred of the idolatrous cults which surround it. In Samson Agonistes we find the Hebraic element in various ways. The fierce Hebraic spirit is seen in Manoa's cool gloating over the destruction of the Philistines. There is not a word of grief, but joy at the thought that they have been avenged over their enemies and Samson's death has brought immortal glory to his house. The Hebraic spirit is again seen in an assured faith in the Divine Providence and Divine Deliverance in place of malignant Greek Fate driving the hero to its doom. These religious

implications mean that, while Milton looked to Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides for the form of the drama, he did not try to write a tragedy of human life as the Greeks saw it. F.T. Prince comes to the conclusion that "Milton had plainly asserted the superiority of Christian and Hebrew religion over Greek thought in Paradise Regained, and he believed, of course, that his own religion must give him an advantage even when he sought to follow the Greek poetic achievements".[34] In support of his contention, the critic quotes Milton. Milton wrote in 1641 of his hope that "what the greatest and choycest wits of Athens... did for their country, I in my proportion with this over and above of being a Christian, might doe for mine".[35] R.C. Jebb is also of the opinion that its [the drama's] inspiration, like its subject, is "far more Hebraic than Hellenic".[36] To Jebb, Milton's drama, although its form is Greek, is hardly Greek in spirit. To Jebb, again the most important characteristic of Hellenic tragedy is an ideal grandeur of agony depending on a real grandeur of contrast between man and fate, between free will and destiny. He thinks that Samson Agonistes is a great poem; it is also a noble drama. But neither as poem nor as drama, it is Hellenic in spirit. Nicholas Jose, however, writes, "Milton adapted a Greek style to a Hebraic story".[37]

Some critics are of the view that a Greek tragedy imparts imaginative pleasure by producing a sense of the heroic in man, and on the other hand, of a superhuman controlling power, against whom the hero struggles hopelessly and is utterly destroyed.

Relentless, merciless Fate broods over the hero and drives him to doom, despite all his heroism and nobility. He is shown throughout as a subject to a malignant Fate, never acting as a free man, a man more capable of free will and free action.

Critics assert that this is not at all the case with Samson Agonistes. Samson is throughout a free man, and his misfortunes are the result of his own folly. God is still on his side and his death is a patriotic triumph, and not the final proof of the malignity of Fate.

There are others who hold that it is difficult to see how a writer of tragedy be a Christian, since if there is redemption at the end, there can be no tragedy. For tragedy, in their view, at least since the Renaissance, is a vision not of divine justice, but of divine injustice. It is a cry of protest.

In this sense, Samson Agonistes is not a tragedy. Its hero recovers and does God's work. That he dies in the process cannot be tragic to a Christian who believes that a noble death as that of Samson is but a prelude to greater and eternal glory. The moral law remains above all characters, firm and clear. There is no disproportion between sin and punishment, no temporary dislocation of the universal order, no sense of waste. Tragedy involves a certain element of injustice, of disproportion of slight defect, hamartia, turning everything to corruption until a whole cycle of human woe has been completed. But where God, all just powerful and merciful,

is in control, no injustice and disproportion can exist.

But one should not forget to note that the fact that Samson is free and that his God is his friend does not prevent his feeling just in the Greek way — that God's ways are inscrutable, past man's finding out, and far above out of the reach of his control. It does not prevent his being helpless, as well as heroic, fully conscious that all his strength leaves him still a weak child at the absolute disposal of incomprehensible omnipotence, so that the whole atmosphere of the play, as well as its formal mould will always recall the Greek tragedies.

The fact is that there are two planes of experience in Samson Agonistes. The religious experience appears on the plane of the community, the tragic experience is confined mainly to the plane of the individual. As an individual, Samson has suffered; as the champion of community, he has triumphed. The suffering of Samson is a tragic experience that raises pity and fear and the tragic purgation is stimulated by the religious experience. It is difficult to agree with Ellis-Fermor when she says (in The Frontiers of Drama) that by justifying the ways of God to men, Milton leaves no room for tragic ecstasy. The death of Samson serves as the means of integrating the two planes of experience, for it is death, so noble, and it is followed by calm of mind, all passion spent. A truly tragic impression is analogous to a religious experience, and it is possible to combine and integrate the two in the sense of the mystery of life.

It is not that death only can make a play tragic. Sophocles' Electra ends in a note of triumph and fulfilment. Technically the end of Samson Agonistes is similar to that of the Eumenides in which the issue is made clear when the design comes to be completed. The past is kept very much alive in the tragic pattern of the play and Samson's recollections form an agony which makes the hero so movingly tragic.

According to Goethe, "Samson Agonistes has more of the antique spirit than any production of any other modern poet".[38] To the modern critic, Parker, this spirit is the truly Greek spirit. He says very justifiably, "The simple truth is that by much study of the great Greek masters, Milton so caught the spirit behind the rule that he leaves us almost unaware of his true conformity".[39] Ellis-Fermor is of opinion that Samson Agonistes is a truly classical drama in English. It is a drama of inward struggle giving us "a steady psychological progression from despair through heroic conflicts upwards to exultations and the final assumption into beautitude".[40] Douglas Bush holds that though Samson Agonistes could not be purely Greek, ... we still feel ourselves in the atmosphere of ancient rather than of modern romantic tragedy. For the catharsis is attained not only through the triumph of character over circumstance; there is also, as in Aeschylus and Sophocles, a vindication of divine law and justice.[41] Even J.A.K. Thomson, in whose opinion, Samson Agonistes fails as a drama, says, the dying fall is exactly Greek .[42] Apart from the interest of its subject and treatment, one may obtain from this drama a better

idea of what great tragedy was among the Greeks than from any other work in English:

> "Nothing is here for tears, nothing to wail
> Or knock the breast; no weakness, no contempt,
> Dispraise or blame; nothing but well and fair,
> And what may quiet us in a death so noble".[43]

George Steiner has the same thing to say when he writes, "It is through Sansom, Aeschylus, more readily perhaps than through archaeology and classical scholarship that we glimpse the lost totality of Greek drama".[44]

3. Shelley's Response to Greek Tragic Myth and Dramatic Form: Prometheus Unbound and Hellas.

A. Introduction:

It is generally assumed that Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) was little interested in dramatic representations. And there are perhaps reasons to argue that his romantic spirit was too subtle, too inward, too subjective, too idealistic and too lyrical to find a complete, or even a satisfactory expression through the most objective literary form of drama. And yet the period between 1819 and 1822 saw the publication of six of his dramatic writings : The Cenci (1819), Prometheus Unbound (1820), Oedipus Tyrannus, or, Swell-foot the Tyrant (1820), Hellas (1822), Charles the First (1822) and Fragments of an Unfinished Drama (1822). Among the six, the first and the last two have nothing to do with the Greek myth and the Greek dramatic form.

The Cenci is the only stage-play Shelley wrote. The plot is based on an Italian tale in which a terrific clash of wills is shown between the psychotic Count Francesco and his daughter, Beatrice. In order to dominate his family the Count violates the modesty of his daughter. The gentle girl is driven to desperation, conspires with her brother and step-mother to kill the Count. For this deed they are condemned to death by the Count's friend, the Pope. Shelley's skill as a dramatist

and his insight into the workings of human soul are best illustrated in the success he achieves in unfolding the spiritual history of Beatrice through the frame-work of some dramatic incidents.

Desmond King-Hele is of the opinion that Shelley "was eking out the little he knew of theatrical technique by borrowing from the Elizabethan dramatists, and sometimes from the Greek dramatists".[1] Shelley has, however, borrowed nothing significant from the Greek drama. Long speeches and few characters on stage which are the marks of the Aeschylean drama are found in Shelley's play. Shelley excludes some of the bolder horrors of the original plot. He also uses irony to give the facts more bite. Some of the actions are reported in The Cenci. Cardinal Camillo performs the function of the Greek chorus in the last act by doing what any decent man would do in the circumstances and by mediating between the prisoners and the Pope. The action of the play is mostly internal and psychological the sordid realistic backgrops, not withstanding. This is due to the influence of Aeschylus' early plays. Lastly, the play swerves as little from its main action and has as little of what is called comic relief and in this sense it has some affinity with the Greek classical tragedy.

The last impression, that the play leaves, is not that of the Greek fatalism; instead, we have the sense that the mind is above the fate. Beatrice, when she is led off to die, has somehow an advantage over death.

In Oedipus Tyrannus or Swellfoot the Tyrant (1820) we have a dramatic satire modelled on the satiric comedies of Aristophanes whose prose it recalls by its chorus of Pigs. As a dramatist Shelley fails to be strictly objective in his play. The play abounds in extravagant speeches, outrageous characters and revolting setting. In Charles the First Shelley "has risen to a modern view of tragedy".[2] Its depiction of misery is living and realistic. With the Fragments of an unfinished drama, Shelley seems to go back to the unrealistic and romantic setting of Prometheus Unbound.

B. Prometheus Unbound : Shelley's response to Prometheus Bound

(i) Introduction:

Shelley wrote in a note to Queen Mab in 1813 : "The story of Prometheus is one, likewise which, although universally admitted to be allegorical, has never been satisfactorily explained .... Prometheus (who represents the human race) effected some great change in the condition of his nature, and

applied fire to the culinary purposes".[3] By 1819 Shelley was a fluent reader of Greek and the plays of Aeschylus began to be felt as "a major stimulant to Shelley's literary imagination".[4] The next year saw the publication of Shelley's Prometheus Unbound.

Prometheus Unbound is not an attempt to naturalise Greek tragedy in English. It was rather written in "an unspoken challenge".[5] Aeschylus wrote two plays on the Prometheus-theme, namely, Prometheus Bound and Prometheus Unbound, and possibly a third, Prometheus the Fire Giver. Of these, the first one is the extant. The second exists only in fragments. Shelley was not only well acquainted with the first play, he appears to have been influenced by the fragment of the opening scene of Prometheus Unbound, in which the Aeschylean hero reaches a compromise with Zeus — the idea which was repugnent to Shelley. And he wrote his own version of what happened when Prometheus was unbound.

(ii) The Myth of Prometheus: Aeschylus and Shelley

In the pages of Aeschylus, Prometheus appeared as a humanist. He defied the order of Zeus and gave man fire, taught them how to make tools, helped them build houses, taught them arithmetic and language, gave them the power of understanding

and reason and supplied many other things. He knew full well that the defiance of Zeus' order would bring him untold suffering. Still he was determined to help man. It is very natural that the myth of Prometheus would appeal to the romantic rebel and reformer in Shelley especially when he expresses his intention in the Preface : "I have ... 'a passion for reforming the world' "[6], and as, to the utmost depth of his heart, he was against tyranny in any form. The Promethean myth, no doubt, offered a typically Shelleyan situation — an ideal hero confronting a tyrant with limitless personality or rank. In the myth of Prometheus, Shelley, therefore, found a poetic symbol that could be typical and yet cosmic and universal. The real attraction of the myth of Prometheus for Shelley lay in finding in Prometheus, what John Bailey pointed out, "a sort of a saviour of mankind ... [who] represents love as opposed to tyranny, hope substituted for fear, all the arts and abundance of life taking the place of ignorance, poverty and misery".[7] Shelley's study of Aeschylus' Prometheus Bound convinced him of the comprehensive significance to which the myth of Prometheus could be put. For Shelley Prometheus was one of those "poetical abstractions"[8] which are "beautiful and new".[9] Shelley describes him also as "the type of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature, impelled by the purest and the truest motives to the best and noblest ends".[10]

Shelley's Prometheus Unbound is, in the form of a single poetic drama, a compressed trilogy on a new Promethean myth — a myth that depicts the fall of tyranny and the triumph of the spirit of progress. In Prometheus Bound Zeus is shown as a tyrant, but it is emphasised that his rule is new. Prometheus is a noble rebel, but he is also presented as rash and proud. The confrontation is thus not between good and evil. In Prometheus Unbound Aeschylus presented the case of Zeus and, evidently in the third play of the Prometheia, Zeus abandoned force and won the friendship of Prometheus. Shelley rejects the Aeschylean formula of reconciliation, which is based on a synthesis of power and wisdom in the interest of security and justice in the universe. To Shelley, who wanted to familiarise the highly refined imagination of the more select classes of critical readers with beautiful idealisms of moral excellence, the catastrophe of the play seemed absurd. And so he writes in the preface, "... in truth I was averse from a catastrophe so feeble as that of reconciling the champion with the Oppressor of Mankind".[11]

As Shelley changes the concluding part of the theme to suit his own taste and purpose, only Act I of Prometheus Unbound can bear direct comparison with the existing play of Aeschylus. The service that Prometheus rendered to man, Zeus' revenge, and fore-knowledge of Prometheus about the future of

Zeus, the temptation of Prometheus by Mercury, Prometheus' invocation of the elements, the catastrophic effects, wrought on the natural work by Prometheus' defiance, the struggle between Zeus and Prometheus, that we find in Aeschylus, we find in Shelley too. In Act I of Shelley's drama, the topography comes straight from Prometheus Bound. The conversation between Prometheus and Mercury in Shelley's drama closely follows the Greek model. In Aeschylus' drama Prometheus himself describes his own doings and sufferings. In Shelley's drama, Asia gives Demogorgon a long list of the gifts of Prometheus to mankind. Again, the wanderings of Io and her questioning of Prometheus, as we find in the Greek play, may have influenced Shelley while describing the wanderings of Asia and her questioning of Demogorgon.

But Shelley brought some changes, modifications and additions in the Prometheus myth, as used by Aeschylus. Carlos Baker[12] finds three major and meaningful changes.

First, Shelley conforms to the Aeschylean plan in making Jupiter the successor to his father Saturn. Shelley's Prometheus is said to give wisdom which is strength to Jupiter. There is no justification in Aeschylus for this assertion.

Shelley's second change, as we have already noted, is an explicit rejection of the denouement of the *Prometheia*. In the last play of the trilogy, *Prometheus Unbound*, Zeus and Prometheus were, in effect, reconciled and Prometheus set free. It is the symbolic reconciliation of the two virtues of justice and compassion. For Shelley, however, Jupiter represents a force making for evil, as Prometheus represents a force making for good. Carlos Baker, therefore, comes to the easy conclusion: "Where Aeschylus was seeking some means of reconciling two cardinal virtues, Shelley was seeking to avoid the reconciliation of a cardinal virtue with a cardinal vice. Thus the whole device is precisely the contrary of that of his Greek source".[13]

Thirdly, Shelley invented a catastrophe in a new connection. In Aeschylean version Prometheus warned Jupiter not to consummate his marriage with Thetis, because out of that union a son would be born who would destroy the father. Jupiter, accordingly, married Thetis to Peleus and rewarded Prometheus by having Hercules release him from the rock. Shelley retains the Jupiter-Thetis marriage motif. Otherwise follow the Aeschylean pattern. In Act III, the marriage and the consummation both have taken place, and Jupiter supposes that the son, he has begotten upon Thetis, will utterly destroy the defiance of Prometheus, and thus enslave him for ever. He also hopes that the son (Demogorgon) will tread out the unextinguished

fire which originates in man. But instead of doing that, Demogorgon casts Jupiter into the abyss saying,

"We must dwell together
Henceforth in darkness"[14]

The general conformity to the Aeschylean scheme is, no doubt, what led J.A.-S. Thomson to remark that Shelley's Demogorgon, in this particular connection, is "imaginatively right".[15] Shelley may have been trying to suggest that evil contains the seeds of its own destruction.

It is, therefore, evident that Shelley has completely reoriented the myth as he derived it from Aeschylus. He not only gives it a moral twist quite foreign to Aeschylus, but also introduces from Boccaccio the figure of Demogorgon, substitutes that figure for the fateful son of Jupiter, avoids the reconciliation of Jupiter and Prometheus by causing the 'son' to overthrow Jupiter, leaving Prometheus, gentle, just and dreadless as the monarch of the world.

There are some minor changes or modifications effected by Shelley.[16] Occasionally it is found that Shelley reassigns an Aeschylean passage. For example, Hephaestus explains to Aeschylus' Prometheus that each relief from pain will be but another torment in an endless cycle. Shelley reassigns this

speech to Prometheus so that what in the Greek play is simply a threat to the Titan of endless pain, becomes the Titan's own triumphant stoic defiance of pain through faith in the inevitable workings of necessity. Again, whereas Aeschylus' play deals with the original binding of Prometheus, Shelley adapts all the events of the myth to a much later moment in time so as to apply them to Prometheus' eventful unbinding.

(iii) Prometheus and the other characters: Shelley's indebtedness to Aeschylus.

The very character of Prometheus in Shelley's play, in spite of certain major changes, truly resembles Aeschylean hero. Equally great in his imagination, fortitude and defiance, he towers over his own misfortune.

But one major change in Shelley's Prometheus is that his hatred has been displaced by pity. Aeschylus' Prometheus growls that all the gods he hates, who, being themselves in bliss, torture him. To Shelley, Prometheus is "exempt from the taints of ambition, envy, revenge, and a desire for personal aggrandisement".[17] He, as a critic says, "stands for the desire in human soul to create harmony through reason and love".[18]

The Prometheus of Shelley pities Jupiter, repents his own curse, and "wishes no living thing to suffer pain".[19] He declares,

> " ... for I hate no more
> As then ere misery made me wise".[20]

There is a certain inflexibility of purpose in Shelley's Prometheus; as Jupiter is Evil. He must go. This we vainly search for in Aeschylus. Prometheus, in the Greek play, wavers between his desire to see Jupiter punished and his hankering after personal freedom.

For Aeschylus, Prometheus' sin was not only defiance of Zeus' sovereignty but also an excessive love of mankind that led him to transfer powers beyond their due. Shelley, with his modern outlook, finds no fault in Prometheus. That which was his (Prometheus') crime to the hierarchy of Aeschylus, was to Shelley glory.

In Aeschylus, Prometheus is eventually delivered because he reveals a secret, known to him alone. Shelley disdains the idea that Prometheus should ever come to terms with Jupiter and ingeniously makes Prometheus refuse to divulge his secret. He does not allow Prometheus to be humble to Jupiter. In making this change, Shelley gives a new shape and meaning to his myth consonant with his own moral ideas.

There is another distinct sign of development in Shelley's Prometheus. He is not the Prometheus of Aeschylus gloating over the picture of Jupiter's fall. He does not feel joy to think of the day when he will be in a position to trample down Jupiter. Rather he pities him when he thinks that Jupiter's soul will suffer hellish torture. This sense of pity in Prometheus makes him a mightier personality than Aeschylus' hero who only sustains himself with the idea of Zeus' expected fall. Shelley's Prometheus has purged his system of the hatred for Jupiter and the other young gods which Aeschylus' Prometheus is unable to do.

Shelley's Prometheus, however, is a more poetic character, losing the ferocity of pride of the earlier type. The moment he has the chance, he starts enjoying life as an ordinary mortal. All the time he is suffering. He has a nostalgia for the romantic cave. It is his pride and self-love and not his ideology and love for man that has been sustaining him against Jupiter. Aeschylus would have spurned the idea. In Shelley and the Unromantics (pp.197-202) C.M. Campbell describes Shelley's Prometheus as a mellowed and ennobled development from the Aeschylean Titan, the giant of resentment, impatience and contempt. What the critic suggests is that Shelley is more humanein his treatment of the Titan. Critics, by and large, have identified Shelley's Prometheus with human

life. Prometheus is "the Mind of Man"[21], according to W.M. Rossetti. To John Cochunter, he is "the genius of Humanity".[22] Miss Vida Scudder calls him "Humanity".[23] H.S. Salt identifies him with the "Human Mind".[24] Allen K. Benham makes the Titan represent the "Soul of Man".[25] Even Newman I. White, who objects to the allegorical interpretation of the poem, recognises that the drama represents "the struggle of humanity against repression".[26] One should remember in this connection that Shelley's Prometheus, unlike Aeschylus', is not a real person —— but symbolises a great abstract idea.

Shelley has taken care to chart the gradual purgation of the mind of Prometheus. The process of purgation is found to be complete when Prometheus says,

"I wish no living thing to suffer pain".[27]

Prometheus begins to repent the curse because the same was the climax of hatred and vengeance. He has also recanted pride and is on the path of self-enlightenment which, while enduring all the tortures, gains a triumphant victory over the self. Instead of hate, he has love; instead of pride, he has humanity; and, instead of disdain, he has sympathy.

An indifferent judge of Mankind, Shelley has shown a total absence of the sense of understanding, an inherent

incongruity in the central figure. His Prometheus, a great sufferer, full of uncompromising fighting spirit, is transformed into ease-loving Prometheus of the bower, a projection of the lover in Shelley.

In Aeschylus' drama Zeus appears as a harsh and unjust tyrant but we are told that he is expected to soften. In Shelley's drama Jupiter represents the brutal forces in human nature which obstruct and prosecute its noble desires. Miss Scudder's reading of this character in her edition of Prometheus Unbound shows that he stands for all those institutions, civil and religious, which were once the truest expression of the will of men, but which, as the centuries have passed, are still powerful with an innate tendency to repress progress. Shelley believed that "mankind had only to will that there should be no evil and there would be none".[28] So Jupiter is a mere shadow waiting to be booed away.

The Mercury of Shelley apparently differs from his original. Mercury in Aeschylus' drama jokes cruelly at the expense of Prometheus hopelessly bound to the rock. Shelley's Mercury is not the taunting, cruel messenger of Jupiter. He comes to Prometheus most unwilling to execute a doom of new revenge. He wishes that he were spared the unhappy part of inflicting pain on Prometheus. This difference is there because

Shelley has blended Aeschylus' Oceanus and Hephaistos with his Mercury. Shelley's Mercury, chaining the Furies reminds us of Apollo chaining the Furies in Aeschylus' The Eumenides, while they are haunting poor Orestes.

Hephaistos also truly regrets the part he has to play in shackling the great Titan to the rock. This part is played by Oceanus in Aeschylus. Oceanus tries to persuade Prometheus to adopt a compromising spirit. Mercury's talk in Shelley's drama reminds us of the same dialogue but, of course, Mercury here is sincere and the underlying spirit is wholly different. However, when we take Shelley's Mercury as also representing these two characters, the apparent difference disappears.

The son who overthrows Jupiter in Shelley's Prometheus Unbound is Demogorgon. This character is alien to the Greek myth. He may be thought of as the principle of Reason or the spirit of Fire, as Maurice Bowra[29] recognises it. Thetis represents the pomp of false glory. Asia is the spirit of divine love. She is the wife of Prometheus in the original myth. Shelley has sublimated her and she represents, in Shelley's version, the Intellectual Beauty.

less solidly drawn than their Greek prototypes, the characters in Prometheus Unbound are replicas of pagan gods, cosmic characters aesthetically contemplated not as objects of hatred, fear or worship as the Greeks did, but as symbols that evoke imagination.

(iv) The Chorus and the Furies in Shelley's Play

In Aeschylus' drama, Prometheus Bound, the chorus of ocean-nymphs comforts Prometheus. Throughout the play the chorus remains unshaken in their loyalty towards Zeus. But the suffering of Prometheus has aroused their pity and Love. In Shelley's Prometheus Unbound the oceanides, Asia, Panthea and Love with all their grace, loveliness, sympathy and devotion derive their being from the Aeschylean chorus. The Earth, the Sun and Moon, the spirits of Thought and Time, Ocean and Apollo and the Echoes can do no more than comfort Prometheus in Shelley's version as in the Greek play. The chorus of the gentle guides and guardians of mankind, with its measures gradually prolonged and solemnised, shows a command of lyrical orchestration. Instead of a whole group of oceanides, we see only two, Panthea and Ione. The musical part has been allotted to others, spirits of different type. Sympathisings and comments have been reserved for Panthea and Ione. They can do nothing more just as the chorus in Aeschylus' Prometheus Bound cannot.

In the Jupiter-Demogorgon episode, gods and goddesses can be regarded as another form of chorus, though they are without any choric song. The chorus changes with the change of scenes in Prometheus Unbound. This jettisoning of the Greek convention of unchanging chorus made it possible for Shelley to shift the venue of different scenes.

Ione and Panthea comment on the action like a Greek chorus in Act III. In Act IV Ione and Panthea continue as commentators.

Shelley has used the Furies in his play. We do not find the Furies in Aeschylus' Prometheus Bound, but in Choephoroe of the Eumenides, they play a very important role. In Prometheus Unbound, Shelley's Fiend-Furies who feel such a fierce joy in torturing the victim, suggest the Greek conception of Erinyes with snaky locks. Shelley's Furies possibly cannot impart the feeling of horror. Shelley has taken the Erinyes in the literal sense of the word, 'the fury of the mind'. Prometheus on the rock is mentally tortured by the Furies. The spiritual sufferings inflicted by them are transposed into vivid organic imagery:

> "What we will be unsaid thought beneath thy brain,
> And foul desire round thine astonished heart,
> And blood within thy labyrinthine veins
> Crawling like agony?"[30]

The Furies which represent, both in Aeschylus and to a great extent in Shelley, wild, mad and tormenting thoughts, are followed by thoughts of hope, high prophecies and deep imagining, "the subtle and fair spirits".[31]

(v) The Unities in Shelley's Play

In Prometheus Unbound Aeschylus took the task of turning a long series of events into drama without the help of action. Kitto writes in this connection, "Aeschylus in fact dramatizes the emotions and not the events".[32] Further he writes, "it cannot be drama except in the spirit of lyrical drama, whose essence is not movement and action but dramatic emotion and intensification. The real dramatic movement here is one which takes place in the mind of the immovable Prometheus".[33] There is little action in Shelley's Prometheus Unbound too. Of course, as Oliver Elton observes[34], more happens in Prometheus Unbound than in Prometheus Bound. "The Greek sufferer", in the critic's opinion, "merely defies, listens, and is stricken down, the true action being kept for the sequel which is lost to us".[35] That is not exactly the case with Shelley's Prometheus. Whatever action is there in Shelley's drama is outside Prometheus and he has nothing to do with it except for the fact that he enjoys the result. Admittedly, Shelley fails to exploit the terrific conflict between Prometheus and Jupiter. The dramatic action only consists in the suffering of Prometheus.

The main action comes in the last part of the Act II and in Act III of the play when Asia penetrates into the den of Demogorgon followed by Jupiter with happiness restored everywhere.

There are descriptions, sometimes obscure, of natural scenes which are the products of Shelley's lofty and unrestrained poetic flight and can only be imagined, and not to be shown. The cumulative effects of the drama, it should be admitted, does not come from the action but from the emotion while the characters and the plot are a mere machinery for expression.

Originally Shelley planned the first three acts of his drama representing the Aristotelian idea of beginning, middle and end. But the development of action in the play is, by no means, convincing. Act IV of the drama has little dramatic necessity. But it is not a superfluity. It is the fulfilment of the artistic and spiritual unity of the play.

Indeed Prometheus Unbound is so much a drama of ideas that it has no very great place for action. It presents 'a vision', not real events or concrete facts as the Greeks thought them to be.

In Prometheus Unbound Shelley cared not ... for the unities of time and place. There is a peculiar sense of eternity clinging to the entire design so that the unity of time is hardly of any importance. The unity of time, however, is followed by Shelley as the duration of the action is from a little before dawn to sunrise. Shelley could have observed the unity of place making his poetry a little more compact and dramatic. But he cared more for the variety of the changing scenes.

(vi) The style and spirit — how far Greek?

In spite of his habitual reading of Greek tragedy, Shelley shows little sense of drama in the mechanics of Prometheus Unbound. It has only three external features of drama and is completely devoid of dramatic excitement. There is no plot in the conventional sense of the term and the spoken parts are too lyrical. It is about three times as long as a normal Greek tragedy.

Shelley calls Prometheus Unbound "a lyrical drama"[36], and, indeed, the lyrical part in it predominates. So it does in Aeschylus' drama. But as Thomson observes, "... the lyrical parts in Shelley's drama overflow their bounds and may almost be said to drown the whole poem in eddying song..."[37] This is contrary to the spirit and tradition of classical art which

would, on no account, permit one kind of writing to encroach upon another. Shelley's lyrical abandon is also contradictory to the very spirit of the classical Greek drama, i.e. severity, calm, repose and sublimity. Again, we seldom find colour in Greek poetry, but there is too much of it in Shelley's play. The very plain iron chains of the Greek drama are transformed into vast and glittering glaciers which bind the Titan to the rock in Shelley's. In Shelley's drama we also experience a kaleidoscopic change of scenery which is foreign to Greek drama.

In certain respects, however, Shelley follows Aeschylus. If we count Panthea and Ione as parts of the chorus, we do not find more than two persons on the stage in Shelley's drama, a convention which Aeschylus followed. Only once we have more than two characters together; it is when Hercules releases Prometheus in the presence of Asia.

Although Prometheus Unbound has its affinity with the Aeschylean model, its ideas are, by no means, Aeschylean. The whole spirit of Shelley's play has been modernised. Certain things like the unchangeable gods and the gross and purely physical character of the punishments that we find in Aeschylus cannot be appreciated by the modern world. They are equally unacceptable to Shelley. Shelley's modern instinct has led him

to make most material alterations in the old fable, not only by increasing the obstacles of physical torments with a number that are purely spiritual but also by defying the character of Prometheus in the catastrophe of the play with that enormous motive of forgiveness which seems to be the largest outcome of the developed personality. Truly when Shelley's Prometheus describes his own suffering, he lays more stress on solitude, scorn and despair than Aeschylus' hero does. Another modern note, noticeable in Shelley's play, is the very idea of the bond between the soul of man and the spirit of Nature. The sublime doctrines of love, that we find in Shelley's play, were foreign to Aeschylus. They are largely Platonic. In the Preface Shelley remarks, "Let not the advocates of injustice and superstition flatter themselves that I should take Aeschylus rather than Plato as my model".[38]

Shelley's representation of Titanism in Prometheus Unbound is not in the Greek way. Shelley believes in the unconquerable nature of love and so makes the salvation of Prometheus come through a revolution, a destruction of the tyrant. Man with the help of love and determination is able to control his destiny. He is necessarily a rebel against tyrannous authority. Aeschylus could only hint at the rebellion but was not ready to go to the logical length. The idea that evil is self-sown is not to be found in Aeschylus.

Of course Shelley has his own idea of Fatalism, which runs in the choral lyric in Act I, sc. ii (ll. 41-63) of the play. Man believes that his wills move him, whereas it is Demogorgon's Law which actually moves him. Unlike Aeschylus' arbitrary foreknowing Necessity which is superior to Zeus and is determined by the Fates and Furies (ll. 514-18) Shelley has substituted the inherent necessity whereby an effect follows regularly from a given cause.

The love for grandeur in Nature, we find in Aeschylus as well as in Shelley. Aeschylus animates Nature. In Shelley's Prometheus Unbound, the landscape described in Act II reminds us of the Greek version. So does the rock on which Prometheus is bound. The great heights of the desolate Caucasus in the unneighboured hill of Aeschylus is 'this wall of eagle baffling mountain, black wintry, dead, unmeasured'[39] in Shelley. The storm-rent chasms, earth-quake fiends, whirlwind in Prometheus' first speech are all reminiscent of Aeschylus. In the first speech, there is an invocation to the Earth, and to the Heaven, asking the ii Mountains Sun and Sea have not heard his agony. It is almost a literal translation of lines 89-92 of Aeschylus' drama. There are parallel passages in Prometheus Unbound in plenty and images and ideas have also been used, perhaps unconsciously by the romantic poet. T.J. Hughes[40], in his edition of Shelley's poem, has shown the parallel passages in details.

C. Shelley's Response to Greek Dramatic Form : Hellas

(i) Introduction:

By the end of October, 1821, Shelley finished the drama, "if drama it must be called"[41], of Hellas, and he dedicated it to Prince Alexander Mavrocordato and took part in the contemporary Greek war of liberation which inspired Shelley to write Hellas and afforded him a parallel to Aeschylus' play, Persae. But the limitation of the event could not permit it to follow its model completely. Shelley himself explains his limitation in the preface : "The Persae of Aeschylus afforded me the first model of my conception although the decision of the glorious contest now waging in Greece being yet suspended forbids a catastrophe parallel to the return of Xerxes and the desolation of the Persians. I have, therefore, contented myself with exhibiting a series of lyric pictures, and with having wrought upon the curtain of futurity, which falls upon the unfinished scene, such figures of indistinct and visionary delineation as suggest the final triumph of the Greek cause as a portion of the cause of the civilisation and social improvement".[42] Shelley's objective in this play was "to weave songs of Greece's ancient glories into the fabric of current events — a fabric which failed to materialize, because the war had not really started and news of it was sporadic and garbled".[43] However, critics like Amiah Cowie think that it is "a serious lyrical play"[44]

and "has much more of the form of a Greek tragedy than the Prometheus".[45]

(ii) The Action:

With an eye on the model, Shelley duly sets his scene in Constantinople. But Shelley's problem is to describe in detail battles yet untought. As a result there is little action in the plot. The play begins with the description of the Turkish Sultan Mahmud asleep, oblivious of the subversive choruses being chanted by Greek slave women. Then Mahmud wakes from a troubled dream, and his servant Hassan tells him that if he wants it explained he should consult an old Jew, who knows the secrets of the present and the past and the future. The Jew is Ahasuerus. After arranging for an encounter with him, Hassan gives his master a detailed history of the war against the Greeks. Four messengers bring worse news. Ahasuerus delivers a strange prophetic discourse and hypnotizes Mahmud so that he can relieve his dream. In his trance Mahmud sees the phantom of Mahomet the second who predicts the end of the Empire he created. Shouts off-stage break his trance and scare away the phantom. The shouting signals a Turkish victory but Mahmud now knows victories are hollow:

> "Weak lightning before dark men: poor faint smile of dying Islam".[46]

The action ends here.

Shelley wrote to one of his friends, "Hellas was a sort of imitation of the Persae of Aeschylus".[47] Aeschylus' Persae is distinguished by splendid descriptions of battle; it also offers opportunities for effective pageantry. And it is what a critic calls a "symphony".[48] Shelley's drama is nothing of the kind. However, the imitation is perceptible in a number of scenes. The excessive gloom of Mahmud derives in part from the consistently gloomy moods of Atossa, Xerxes' mother, of the chorus and at the end, of Xerxes himself. Secondly, the announcement in Hellas of the routing of the Turks on land and sea has a parallel in the Persian messenger's account of the Greek victory at Salamis and the consequent Persian defeat on land in Aeschylus' drama. And finally, the calling up of the spirit of Mahomet resembles the calling up of the spirit of Darius, who gave a similarly gloomy message.

It is alleged by the critics that Hellas has no unifying theme and no dramatic form. Gerald M. Nieve, for example, calls it "a Greek poem".[49] Desmond King-Hele observes, "Hellas is an imperfect monument of Shelley's intense sympathy for the Greek cause. Marks of hurry are written all over it. Very little happens and that little is enfeebled by being reported .... Shelley too often relies on the atmospheric imagery, he handles so deftly, or on mere enthusiasm, to carry the verse through patches where the material is woefully

thin ... The poem is too episodic to deserve the name of drama. It has dramatic tension and lacks too the chronicle-play's driving grace of factual interest".[50] Shelley himself says in the Preface to Hellas that he has contented himself with exhibiting a series of lyric pictures.

(iii) The Structure:

But it should not be thought that Hellas has no dramatic structure. The structure bases itself on the central purpose, namely rallying the English public opinion behind the Greeks and the announcements of the betrayals by the great powers. However, it is on a small scale and the subject has not the finality of events. But it is a genuine compound of choral lyric and drama, a peculiar product of the Greek theatre. In its representation of events and people, it conforms to Aristotelian definition of tragedy. With its stricter form, Hellas is as amenable to the Attic stage as the Persae. Shelley set himself the limit of Aeschylean form of drama and faithfully reproduced its effect on two or three characters interacting with the chorus.

The finest part of Hellas is the chorus which punctuates the action. In Aeschylus' drama, Persae, the chorus is the main figure. The drama is named after them and the dramatist is primarily concerned with them. The chorus in Aeschylus'

drama is made up of the surviving manhood of Persia and the Persian women. Shelley's chorus in Hellas consists of the captive Greek women. In his note on the chorus Shelley explains that his chorus has been allowed to represent "the popular notions of Christianity ... as true in their relation to the worship they superseded [Greek polytheism] and that which in all probability they will supersede [Islam], without considering their merit in a relation more universal".[51] The choruses, as Mrs. Shelley[52] notes, are singularly imaginative, and melodious in their versification.

The first and the third of the choruses recall the great days of Greece. The second chorus is specifically Christian. The human soul travels in a chariot through the dust and blight of life from birth to death.

These choruses lead up to the well-known finale expressing the spirit of the poem. The finale combines Shelley's hopes for Greece's and men's future:

> "The world's great age begins anew,
> The golden years return,
> The earth doth like a snake renew
> Her winter weeds outworn:"[53]

In Persae there is but one of the few who escapes from the disaster and successively unfolds the greatness of the catastrophe, but, Shelley, in addition to Aeschylus, brings messengers, one after another, each announcing fresh disaster. Each messenger is a fresh fulfilment of the Sultan's foreboding. Ahasuerus also brings the visionaries and this is, no doubt, influenced by the phantom in Persae.

The characters in Hellas are not well-drawn. The only character worth the name is Mahmud, the gloomy Turk, who is, at times, as hesitant as Hamlet and as eager for supernatural solicitings as Macbeth. The other figures are all puppets.

(iv) The Spirit:

Hellas is the last of Shelley's major political poems. Its aims are three. The first is fundamentally political : to celebrate the Greek war against the Turks as a portion of the cause of civilisation and moral improvement. The second is ethical : to hold up, as an example for the modern world, the wonderful achievement of Athens in the fifth century B.C. and to describe a new Athens symbolising liberty and dedicated to the spread of brotherly love. The third is metaphysical : to assert that thought is the sole reality and that all else in the world is a shadow and a dream.

Whatever may be the aim of the poem, it has an abstract appeal. As has been pointed out by Cameron, "... the vision of Hellas revolves ... around the passing of the 'winter of the world', and the coming of the 'Spring' of a new society. It anticipates 'a period of regeneration and happiness" [54] In the new society, equality and human brotherhood (love) will rule, for it constitutes a finer basis for morality and philosophy than either Christianity, or the religion of Greece or other religions. Such abstract vision is not found in the Greek drama. As Shelley heralds the emergence of an ideal era, he departs from his model. The message of the Sultan in his meeting with Ahasuerus has nothing to do with Hellenic ideas:

> "Sultan ! talk no more
> Of thee and me, the future and the past
> But look on that which cannot change
> ——— the one,
> The unborn and the undying".[55]

This thought is absolutely Shelleyan. To Shelley that which has true life is not subject to destruction and the fragment of Greece will "build themselves again impregnably in a divine clime".[56]

Shelley's drama, unlike the Persae, is a prophecy (upon the title page of Hellas is written : "I am prophet of

conflicts and shall be crowned with victory").[57] The drama has more affinity with the literature of Revelation than with Hellenism. This has prompted critics like Rutland to comment that the book is near the author of "The Second Isaiah".[58] But Shelley's vision must not be misinterpreted as religious spirit. He depicts the rise of liberty and the fall of tyranny. rise of Greece, and fall of Islam, but he depicts it with the truly Hellenic love of liberty.

4. **Merope** : Arnold's Tragedy on the Attic model.

A. **Introduction:**

Temperamentally Matthew Arnold (1822-1888) was a Greek in Victorian England. Opposed to all sorts of romantic vagaries and extravagances Arnold sought to bring about radical reforms. His design was to tone down what was excessive and to supply what was deficit. In Arnold's age the spasmodists like Bailey, Dobell and Alexander Smith had their vogue. Arnold broke into the Victorian stronghold of romanticism. Not a believer in unbridled imagination and emotional exuberance, he chose to trust intellect and a critical spirit. Like Benjamin Jonson (1572-1637) his mind was deeply impregnated with all the teaching of ancient art. Under the direct influence of Hellenism, he formed an ideal of sober and pure simplicity, and made it the constant model of his style. He became a staunch champion of proportion, lucidity, restraint and balance.

We note in the first volume of poems 1849 the predominantly Greek inspiration of its contents, both in matter and in style. The poem, **The Strayed Reveller**, is itself Greek in both subject and form, its rhymeless and irregular metre being an attempt to reproduce the effect of the choric odes of Attic tragedy. The subject of **Sohrab and Rustum** appeals, like the themes of classical tragedy, to the great primary human affections which are independent of time. The end of the poem leads us to the sublime acquiescence in

the course of fate. The subject is treated with a clearness and sustained elevation of style so closely approximating the Greek manner. The Fragment of Antigone, Mycerinus, The New Sirens, The Sick King in Bokhara are all Greek either in subject or in source, or in the manner of treatment. His Preface to 1853 Volume of Poems was the manifesto of classicism in an age of subjectivism and individualism in poetry. In the advertisement to the Second Edition of his Poems, in the inaugural lecture at Oxford entitled, The Modern Element in Literature, in To A Friend and in many of his poems, he paid glowing tribute to Homer and Sophocles. His dramatic poem, Empedocles on Etna is a verse drama on a classical theme. But here Arnold has not modelled his play on the ancient Greek tragedies. The songs of Callicles, a young harp-player in the play, have, however, all the calm grace of Greek poetry. The play is one of Arnold's most ambitious efforts to represent 'situations' after the manner of ancient Greek tragedians.

Arnold felt that in England there was "a wide though an ill-informed curiosity on the subject of the so-called classical school".[1] Partly to satisfy that curiosity, partly also "to enrich with what, in the forms of the most perfectly-formed literature in the world, is most perfect, our noble English literature"[2], Arnold wrote Merope and published it in 1858. Arnold's Note-Book[3] shows how strenuously he had devoted most of his time to the study of classical literature so that his proposed work might be artistically faultless.

B. Preface to Merope : Arnold's Apologia for his Tragedy

In his preface to Merope Arnold observes that to read Greek is best, but that in his own times a large literate class does not care to read Greek and that accordingly for this class he writes this play.

Arnold felt the deficiency of his predecessors who made experiments in classical drama. He attempted to write a play and retain the severest and most definite expression, and make an exact reproduction of a Sophoclean tragedy. Arnold wanted to write a drama that would be classical in structure, form, theme, sentiment and style. Churton Collins understands that in this drama Matthew Arnold has had the courage to reproduce without the smallest modification the exact counterpart of Attic tragedy in its most perfect shape, — in the shape, that is to say, which it assumed in the maturest work of Sophocles. The critic maintains, "Knowing well that what he [Arnold] aspired to reproduce derived its characteristics and drew its inspiration and nutrient from a world which had long passed away and which could not be recalled, he yet believed in the effectiveness and permanence of the Beautiful, whether expressing itself in form or in conception".[4]

As the Preface to Merope shows, Arnold was powerfully affected by the effectiveness of the form and the intense feeling of the beauty of the Greek tragedies. In his words, "I have long had the strongest desire to attempt... to come to closer quarters with the form which produces such grand effects in the hands of the Greek masters; to try to obtain, through the medium of a living

familiar language, a fuller and more intense feeling of that beauty, which when apprehended through the medium of a dead language, so powerfully affected me .... I desired to try, therefore, how much of the effectiveness of the Greek poetical forms I could retain in an English poem constructed under the conditions of those forms; of those forms, too, in their severest and most definite expression, in their application to dramatic poetry".[5]

Arnold first thought of obtaining the feeling of the beauty of the Greek tragedy in English by a translation of one of the great works of Aeschylus or Sophocles. But he abandoned the idea because "a translation is a work inferior to the original by the whole difference of talent between the first composer and his translator".[6]

He then thought of treating some subject independently, on which there is extant work by one of the great Greek masters. But, as he says, "their treatment by the ancient masters is so overwhelmingly great and powerful that one can henceforth conceive them only as they are treated; an independent conception of them has become impossible for us".[7] So he gave up the idea, too.

It now remained for him "to select a subject from among those which had been considered to possess the true requisites of good tragic subjects, on which great works had been composed, but had not survived to chill emulation by their grandeur. Of such subjects, there is fortunately no lack".[8]

Arnold continues, "Among these subjects, presented in the collection of Hyginus — there is one which has long attracted

my interest, from the testimony of the ancients to its excellence, and from the results which that testimony has called forth from the emulation of the moderns. The subject is the story of Merope".[9]

The story of Merope was celebrated in tragedy by more than one poet. However, the story is untold in any extant Greek play, though used by Maffeei and Alfieri in Italian, by Voltaire and several others in French, and by Jeffreys and Aaron Hill in English. A tragedy upon it produced by Euripides existed in antiquity.

As Arnold observes, "a mistake, a grave mistake in the treatment of their subject is common to .... Voltaire and Alfieri. They have abandoned the tradition where they better have followed it; they have followed it where they better have abandoned it".[10]

Arnold has criticized the treatment of the story by his predecessors with much insight and acumen. He has been successful in showing as well as illustrating in his own treatment of it how much more effectively it could be treated by a closer adherence to Greek tradition.

Arnold's intention was to give his readers "a specimen of the world created by the Greek imagination"[11], in Merope. In a letter to his sister on February 3, 1858 (Letters, vol. I, pp. 68-69) Arnold spoke highly of the power, grandeur and dignity of the Greek imagination and stated how it is hard for us to appreciate, even to understand it.

In his apologia for his tragedy, Arnold is quite bare-faced; it aims to present a tragedy which might conceivably be "a long-

lost work recovered by a happy chance and transposed into English".[12] The work is to have the composite face of a Greek tragedy as a whole, to be after neither Aeschylus, nor Sophocles, nor Euripides, but essentially and wholly Greek. But as Anniah Gowda writes, "Arnold's own sensibilities place him nearest to Sophocles, since he is equally lacking in Aeschylus' impassioned fire and Euripides' psychological and caustical subtlety, but at least approaches the gravity, tenderness and serenity of the ripest of the ancient dramatists".[13] Churton Collins speaks highly of Arnold's success in his experiment : "... he has produced a poem which is not only the nearest approach possible in any modern language to Sophoclean tragedy, but he has illustrated, as effectively as Sophocles himself could have done, had he written in English, all that can be achieved in impression by dramatic art working under the conditions imposed on it by the Greeks".[14]

C. The Subject of Merope

Arnold modelled Merope very closely on Sophocles' Electra. In both the tragedies, the action is of a son's return in disguise to exact vengeance for a father's death many years earlier.

The action of Merope opens at the day break on the morning of the twentieth anniversary of the murder of Cresphontes. Aepytus and his uncle Laias, Merope's brother, have just arrived in disguise from Arcadia at Stenyclaros, the purpose of Aepytus being to make his way into the royal palace that he may announce his own death, while Laias is to mingle with the people and ascertain whether any

of them still remember their old king lovingly and are hostile to the present king who murdered him and occupies his place. Twenty years have passed since Aepytus, then a baby, had been rescued from the fate of his father and two brothers, and placed by a faithful servant, Arcas, under the protection of his maternal grand-father Cypselus, the reigning king of Arcadia. There he had grown up to manhood. With his mother, Merope, he kept up a regular communication through Arcas, who visited her every year at Stenyclaros. She would pine for her son's return and restoration to his father's throne. Aepytus, on the other hand, is bent on taking revenge.

Polyphontes, the present king, belongs to the family of Hercules. He establishes himself as a good ruler. He has for his wife Merope against her will. He explains his bloody and unconstitutional act as just because Cresphontes' liberal views were hampering the public good. He thinks he has saved the realm.

But Merope thinks otherwise. She argues that the wisdom of her husband's desire to unite conqueror and conquered "into one puissant folk"[15] is the only practical way to a safe supremacy. Polyphontes can be fearfully convincing:

> "Dizzy the path and perilous the way
> Which in a deed like mine a just man treads,
> But it is sometimes trodden, oh, believe it.
> Yet how canst thou believe it? therefore thou
> Hast all impunity..."[16]

Merope has meanwhile been moved by Polyphontes' kindness and consideration. She tells her son of his serious statecraft and calm rule. But her son is committed to his father and cannot understand her.

Aeptyus' identity is kept secret. He reports to the king that the prince is dead. The king orders him to be hospitably entertained, intending to enquire further of him. He, being very tired, goes to sleep.

Polyphontes implores Merope to marry him and forget the past since he thinks, all possibility of revenge has now gone. Merope cannot divulge her son's plot. She only urges Polyphontes to fly : "Cut short thy triumph, seeming at its height".[17] He thinks she must be mad.

Arcas, acting as a channel between the mother and the son, now arrives in tears. He brings the news that Merope's son has disappeared from his protector's house and is slain. Hearing this Merope suspects the sleeping stranger to be the murderer of her son and comes into the guest-chamber with an axe and is about to kill her own son unknowingly. Arcas recognises him, and prevents Merope from killing him. Polyphontes, delighting at the supposed death of Aepytus, celebrates a sacrifice, Aepytus, being the guest, pretends to strike the sacrificial victim, kills the king and gets back his father's kingdom.

The choric interludes have been steadily rising, reinforcing the dramatic power, and at the approach of the climax, they reach a climax of triumph. Polyphontes' body is brought in, Merope meditates on the 'inscrutable' face still bearing its aspect of majestic care' :

"What meantest thou, O Polyphontes what
Desired'st thou, what truly spurr'd thee on?"[18]

Is it a policy of state or merely an ambition in Polyphontes? Merope can neither triumph nor mourn over one who had in him both 'worth' and 'badness'. No man has a fixed condition; a two-fold colour rings in all. All she can do is to pray that her son may make 'the one-colour' prevail.

The best kind of plot, according to Aristotle, is the complex plot, where both 'recognition' and 'reversal' accompany the turn of fortune simultaneously. In Sophocles' Electra, we have the combination of the two in the scene where Electra recognizes Orestes. In Merope also we have an excellent example of the complex plot. In the scene in which Merope comes to know the true identity of her son, we have in combination 'the turn of fortune', for she passes from fortune to good, from misery to contentment; recognition, for there is a change from ignorance to knowledge, from hatred to love; reversal, for the very opposite effect to the effect anticipated and intended is the result.

Arnold follows Sophocles also in his treatment of Destiny in this play. In the Electra Destiny and the Destiny-element are

kept altogether in the background. In Merope they are, likewise, scarcely perceptible and in no way operative. Sophocles has minimised their powers as agents. In the Electra retribution comes as the moral result of crime deliberately done and aggravated. In Merope, Aepytus is, indeed, the Destiny-led stranger, but the Destiny which leads him is little more than the impersonation of the moral law.

D. The Text: Adaptation of Speeches

Arnold has an appropriate classical story, untold in any extant Greek play. He borrows from a large number of classical plays, never allowing his indebtedness, however, to become so obvious as to become offensive. Critics[19] have pointed out how some of the speeches in Arnold's play are adaptations of those in Greek plays. In the opening scene, the speech of Laias, as well as that of Aepytus (Ll 1-75), is modelled on the speech of Sophocles' Electra (Ll 1-85), with Aepytus and Laias in place of Orestes and his servant. The speech of Aepytus (Ll 51-8) is an adaptation of Aeschylus' Choephoroe (Ll 10-18). Some of the lines in the play have striking resemblances to lines in Aeschylus' and Sophocles' plays. The whole of the Kommos (Ll 385-544) in Arnold's play is modelled closely on that in Sophocles' Electra between Electra and the Chorus (Electra 121-250). The speech of the Chorus in lines 389-91 in Merope is suggested by Aeschylus' Choephoroe. The first line of Merope's speech (Ll 477-486) is an echo of Sophocles' Antigone (L 858). The speech of Merope (Ll 478-

86) is suggested by Aeschylus' Choephoroe (Ll 345-53). The choral ode (Ll 478-91) is suggested by the description of Agamemnon's death in Electra (Ll 193-6). Lines 526-27 of Merope

"But Zeus, who accounteth thy quarrel his own,
Still rules, still watches, and numb'reth the hours" [20]

are adopted from lines 173-5 of Sophocles' Electra,

"Courage, O daughter, courage : still
High Zeus in heaven is king.
Who sees and governs all". [21]

The speech of Merope (Ll 571-8) is an adaptation of Sophocles' Ajax (Ll 895-9). Lines 589-90 of Merope is another echo from the Ajax (Ll 550-1). Line 857 of Merope,

'So dies the last shoot of our royal tree! ' [22]

is echoed in Lines 598-99 of Sophocles' Antigone,

"Even now a smiling light
was spreading to our sight
O'er one last fibre of a blasted tree-" [23]

The stasimon in lines 890-913 of Merope resembles the stasima introduced by Sophocles just before calamity and ruin is about to fall as in lines 692-717 of Ajax, 1086-1109 of Oedipus Rex and 205-24 of Trachiniae. It was also suggested by and borrowed from, as Arnold himself indicates in the Preface, by the choral address to Peace in a surviving fragment of Euripides' Cresphontes. In the following lines (Ll 1054-55) of Merope,

"No, something must be dared, and great, as erst
Our dastard patience, be our daring now!"[24]

we get an echo of Electra's determination to have vengeance in her own hands when she hears of the reported death of Orestes in Sophocles' Electra (L 947 ff). Lines 1102-52 of Merope constitute a Kommos closely on the model of those in the Electra. Merope's speech in lines 1251-52

"From the first-wrought vengeance is born
A long succession of crimes".[25]

may be compared with lines 758-60 of Aeschylus' Agamemnon which may be translated thus : "A deed of impiety begetteth many others like unto their family". With the messenger's account of the murder of Polyphontes may be compared the account given of that of Neoptolemus in Euripides' Andromache (Ll 1085-1165), on which it may have been modelled.

Apart from these adaptations and resemblances, there are some commonplaces, borrowed from Greek tragedies in Merope. The Chorus consoles Merope by saying,

"Not to thee only hath come
Sorrow, O Queen, of mankind".[26]

It is a stock commonplace in Greek tragedy and imitated directly from Sophocles' Electra :

"To thee, thee single in the world,
Daughter, no grief has come".[27]

In line 585 of Arnold's play Hermes is invoked

"My Hermes, herald of the dead, convey
My words below to thee, and make thee hear"[28]

An invocation to Hermes opens the Choephoroe, too.

Bad news is generally conveyed in a brief way in Sophoclean drama. In Merope Aepytus himself, in disguise, reports his fictitious death to Polyphontes in a sentence,

"Aepytus, the Messenian prince, is dead".[29]

This is an imitation of the way, in which the death of Orestes in Electra, of Jocasta in Oedipus Rex, of Oedipus in Oedipus at Colonous and of Antigone and Haeman in Antigone are announced.

The fictitious account of the death of Aepytus (Ll 721-856) corresponds to the fictitious account of Orestes' death in Sophocles' Electra (Ll 680-763). These fictitious narratives are vifid, detailed and elaborate and they form a distinct and peculiar feature in Greek tragedy.

E. Characters — How far Hellenic?

Most of the characters of the play are drawn with bold strokes but there is doubt how many of them have the genuine Hellenic stamp on them. The characters are, however, not wooden, as many adverse critics have suggested. They are neither lifeless ghosts nor merely puppets, wire-pulled by the author, but aglow with human passion. The characterisation is thoroughly Grecian in spirit. It indicates "a range of mental power in the author far

above the average".[30]

In a Greek tragedy the sufferer is neither a perfectly good, nor a perfectly bad man but an intermediate personage, like ourselves. What involves him in ruin must not be deliberate and repulsive wickedness, but some great error; he must be a person who is highly renowned and, if faulty and frail, with eminent virtues. All these characteristics are illustrated in the character of Polyphontes. He belongs to the family of Hercules. A man of illustrious lineage, he had played a great part in the history of Messenia. His crime was a terrible one, but it had been prompted by no mean motive. He had led the rival faction to that which supported Cresphontes, and which was in deadly feud with him. With the help of that faction, i.e., the Dorian, he had murdered Cresphontes and ascended the throne. Though he had forced Merope, the murdered king's widow, to marry him, he had been her husband only in name, and has behaved with her with the utmost respect and delicacy, as she herself gratefully acknowledges. Standing over his corpse she says,

"... I triumph not
Over thy corpse — triumph not, neither mourn, —
For I find worth in thee, and kindness, too".[31]

In Sophocles' Electra, the subject is the character of Electra. In this play (Electra) Kitto writes, "... the heroine is on the stage continuously always at the centre of things, placed in sharp juxtaposition with some other character, and in situations

that are constantly changing".[32] T.B.L. Webster, likewise, holds, "The whole arrangement of the plot ... is designed to give Electra's motives the greatest possible scope, so that we can see her in turn, gloomy, scornful, elated, desperate, purposeful, sorrowful, joyful and triumphant".[33] Jebb is of the same opinion: "The interest depends primarily on the portraiture of human character".[34] Such is not the scope and purpose of Arnold in Merope. Arnold's heroine has a Christian outlook in an age of paganism. Merope, being a little introspective, has a touch of modernism about her. She cannot forgive Polyphontes for the murder of her husband. She strongly believes in the policy of her dead husband to unite the conqueror and the conquered. But she is not guided by the spirit of revenge. She is not blind to the goodness of Polyphontes. She is moved by Polyphontes' kindness and consideration. She tells her son of his serious statecraft and calm rule. When Polyphontes is murdered by her son, she can neither triumph nor mourn over one who had in him both 'worth' and 'badness'.

In Sophocles' Electra, the heroine, from the beginning, is a harsh and unlovely woman. Being under the impact of her brother's death, she is determined to avenge the death of her father. Later Orestes, her brother, reveals himself and kills his mother. As Electra hears the cries of her dying mother, she is not moved to pity. She is, on the other hand, in a mood of exultation.

Now, Electra's behaviour is not only grotesque but also repulsive to the modern mind. What to Orestes and Electra, to Aepytus and Merope was the most sacred of duties, to the modern

mind is a crime, shocking and reprehensible. In the following lines Churton Collins makes an analysis of the contrasting feelings: "To Electra the heart of an ancient Greek would go out in admiring an unmingled sympathy, for he would see in her loathing and contempt for her mother and in her tense tenacity to her murderous purpose all that a father's loving and dutiful daughter ought to be. But how mangled are the feelings which she excites in us, how painful the impression left on us as we leave her exulting in her ghostly triumph".[35] Arnold is well aware of the repulsion created in our times by the spectacle of a woman tempered like Electra. In depicting his heroine, Arnold has made his one concession to modern sentiment. Averse to bloodshed, Merope has no desire to take the life of the murderer of her husband and two of her children. She does all in her power to save him. She would limit her vengeance to his deposition and the restoration of her son.

All the characters of Arnold's play act with the chaste decorum which marks the characters of Attic tragedies. Indeed the decorum proved a little too much for some critics. Merope's exclamation when she comes to murder a young man with an axe appears to be that of an Oxford woman. It can be safely said that as a dramatic personoe neither Merope nor Polyphontes nor Aepytus excites our interest. In his Preface to Merope, Arnold argues against the handling of Polyphontes by Maffei and Voltaire, saying that they did not make Polyphontes tragic and his relationship with Merope intelligible. But in his own case, Polyphontes and the

situation centred on him are refracted through an entirely un-Greek modern sensibility which is concerned with the movements of a modern moral consciousness and the battle between absolutism and pragmatism.

F. The Formal Mould:

The structure of Merope follows a Greek pattern. It is as follows:

Prologos, Lines 1-384

Kommos, Lines 385-544

Epeisodion I Lines 545-621

Stasimon I Lines 622-702

Epeisodion II Lines 703-889

Stasimon II Lines 890-913

Epeisodion III Lines 914-1595

Stasimon III Lines 1596-1683

Epeisodion IV Lines 1684-1793

Stasimon IV Lines 1794-1882

Exodus Lines 1883 to the end.

In Merope, the choruses are remarkably Greek in tone and cadence. Arnold follows Sophocles in his use of the Chorus. In Sophocles the Chorus associates itself with the action of the drama but in no way controls or affects the action. It stands as the symbol of sympathetic and reflective humanity. It gives lyrical expressions to the sufferings and offers consolations. Arnold himself notes, "To combine, to harmonize, to deepen for the spectator the feelings, naturally excited in him by the sight of what was

passing upon the stage — this is the one grand effect produced by the Chorus in the Greek tragedy".[36] Again he writes, "After tragic situations of the greatest intensity, a desire for relief and relaxation is, no doubt, natural both to the poet and to the spectator, but the finer feeling of the Greeks found this relief, not in buffoonery but in lyrical song".[37]

In Merope, the chorus consists of a group of Messenian women, "sad-chanting maidens clad in mourning robes, with pitchers in their hands and fresh pull'd flowers".[38] They accompany Merope most of the time. They make their first appearance in line 384 of the play.

The chorus appears as a symbol of reflective and sympathetic humanity. It shares the feelings of Merope. Merope acknowledges, "Thou touchest the worst of my ills".[39] With Merope, the chorus pays tribute to the memory of the murdered king,

"A king, a king was he while he lived",[40]

Later it consoles Merope by saying

"Not to thee only hath come
Sorrow, O Queen, of mankind.
Had not Electra to haunt
A palace defiled by a death unavenged,
For years, in silence, devouring her heart?"[41]

And then it rises to spiritual speculation:

"Give not thy heart to despair.
No lamentation can loose
Prisoners of death from the grave;

But Zeus, who accounteth thy quarrel his own,
Still rules, still watches and numb'reth the hours
Till the sinner, the vengeance, be ripe".[42]

When Merope seeks peace and gives up the thought of revenge, the chorus at once feels at one with her:

"O Queen, for an avenger to appear,
Thinking that so I pray'd aright, I pray'd;
If I pray'd wrongly, I revoke the prayer".[43]

In the first choral ode (ll 622-702) the chorus gives vent to a universal thought:

"But more than all unplumb'd,
Unscaled, untrodden, is the heart of man
More than all secrets hid, the way it keeps".[44]

The heart of man is obscure and motives are many. It is perhaps right that the best man should carve his way by force provided that it is really done for the public good; and yet who can never claim with assurance to be the elect of God? The chorus comes to the conclusion that Zeus condemns a self-asserting violence in the guise of "Heaven's destined arm".[45]

When Polyphontes hears the news of the supposed death of Aepytus, he exclaims,

"A private loss here founds a nation's peace".[46]

The protagonist's feelings are echoed by the chorus:

"Peace, who tarriest too long;
Peace, with delight in thy train;
Come, come back to our prayer!"[47].

The chorus thus associates itself with the action. It also helps the movement of the action. When Merope hears of the supposed death of her son and mourns her lot, the chorus directs her attention to the young guest who brings the sad news to the palace and expresses its suspicion:

"He in the guest-chamber now,
Faithlessly murder'd his friend".[48]

Merope decides to kill the young guest, the supposed murderer of her son. The chorus then participates in the action by bringing the axe. The choric interludes thus reinforce the dramatic power.

The choric interlude (Ll 1596-1683) is highly significant. Both in substance and style this is one of the most successful of Arnold's imitations of a Greek choric song. Its parallelism is almost perfect.

The play ends with the speech of the chorus which ushers in a feeling of repose and rest:

"Son of Cresphontes, past what perils
Com'st thou, guided safe, to thy home!
What things daring! what enduring!
And all this by the will of the Gods".[49]

The choral songs are chosen with great happiness and they produce in English verse perhaps as nearly as possible the same effect on the ears and feelings as the rhythms of Greek choir poetry. The chorus that tells of Arcas and Callisto was characterised as "a model of noble form and colour".[50] Arnold himself claimed the superiority of the lyrical element of the choruses to

the buffoonery of Shakespeare. Resenting this piece of iconoclasm, the reviewer of Athenaeum, January, 1858, characterised Arnold's choruses as "pages of interjections, or strophes of prosaic and most moral grief".[51] He also criticised the tediousness of the choruses. A.H. Clough held the same view. To Lowell he wrote; "The Choruses seem to me indiscreetly long and tedious even to the classical amateur".[53] However, the views of these critics cannot be entertained. Arnold manages the chorus with considerable judgement.

Sophocles was careful to secure the unity and symmetry of his plays as a whole by corresponding unity and symmetry in the structure of the chorus, so that each chorus, each choric expression of the lyrical element, produces in itself the same harmonious effect as the drama in totality produces. Thus by the systematic employment of 'strophe', 'anti-strophe' and 'epode', "a regular correspondence of part with part, a balanced antithesis of thought to thought, of emotion to emotion, is effected while in an independent final stanza — 'the epode' — the balance of the whole is struck".[53] Arnold follows in the footsteps of Sophocles in this respect. We can cite an example of how strophes and anti-strophes are arranged by Arnold in the Kommos in lines 385-544 of the play:

The Chorus : Ll 385-391 Strophe

The Chorus : Ll 392-399 anti-Strophe

The Speech of Merope : Ll 400-407 Strophe 1

The Chorus : Ll 408-416 Strophe 2

The Speech of Merope : Ll 417-424 anti-strophe 1

The Chorus : Ll 425-433 anti-strophe 2

The Speech of Merope : Ll 434-453 Strophe 3

The Speech of Merope : Ll 454-468 anti-strophe 3

The Chorus : Ll 469-476 Strophe 4

The Speech of Merope : Ll 477-486 Strophe 5

The Chorus : Ll 487-494 anti-strophe 4

The Speech of Merope : Ll 495-504 anti-strophe 5

The Chorus : LL 505-515 Strophe 6

The Speech of Merope : LL 516-522 Strophe 7

The Chorus : Ll 523-533 anti-strophe 6

The Speech of Merope : LL 534-540 anti-strophe 7

The Chorus : L 541 Strophe 8

The Speech of Merope : L 542 Strophe 9

The Chorus : L 543 anti-strophe 8

The Speech of Merope : L 544 anti-strophe 9

The poetry of Arnold's drama is unmistakable. Never attaining Miltonic grandeur or Shelleyan strains, the poetic element of Merope has an appeal of its own. As regards the style and diction of the play, Thomson writes, "Merope is well written in a subdued and low-toned way designed to reproduce the quiet concentration of the pure Attic style".[54] There are, unoubtedly, passages full of great beauty and of considerable force but it is to be admitted that in a work like Merope, Arnold's poetic faculty could not be thrown into full play. Arnold's passion for the classical model, no doubt, hinders the poetical flow. It is rightly pointed out that Arnold had to face insuperable difficulty while conforming to certain hide-bound rules; his poetry could not be the spontaneous

overflow of powerful feelings. There are some critics who hold a different view. Roscoe, for example, thought that Arnold was rich in poetic instincts while writing this play.[55] The reviewer of March, 1858,
The Dublin University Magazine, in an article "Poetry — Matthew Arnold and MacCarthy" agreed that Arnold's work belonged to a higher class of poetry than that of MacCarthy.[56] The reviewer characterised the description of the hunt of Aepytus as a grand and stirring piece of writing almost reminiscent of Homer. The January, 1868 as for
reviewer of The Christian Remembrance, in an article, entitled, "The Neo-classical Drama", put on record his high appreciation in the following words, "...
of the poetry in Arnold's drama, its language and poetry ... are sustained and noble".[57] However, we must admit that as in a Greek tragedy, imagery and lyricism have been subordinated to action in Arnold's play.

The beauty and simplicity of the language of Merope drew high applause from the critics. And indeed, Arnold's diction apart from his rhythm — for his rhythm is Sophoclean — recalls much more nearly the ordinary diction of Euripides. The forcible and clear style is unmistakably Greek. In many of the lines admirable terseness is in evidence. However, one takes exception to the recurrence of antique ejaculations like 'Ah !''Ah me !', and the frequent use of unnecessary expletives. Thomson's observation[58] on the style of Merope is worth mentioning. The critic holds, as for the style of Merope, it does make an attempt, by no means, entirely unsuccessful, to recapture the severe beauty of Attic verse. But even here, Arnold is attempting the impossible. The English language,

is so full of colourless mono-syllables and out-worn metaphors that we simply cannot afford to sacrifice the advantages derived from the pictorial imagination in which the English poets have been so strong. The difference between English poetry and the Greek is like the difference between English painting and sculpture, as he says. He then elaborates his view-point by saying that the sculptor gets his best efforts by mere purity of form; the painter cannot depend on that alone. One reason why Arnold succeeds better in his lyrics than in the blank verse of Merope is that the odes of Greek tragedy have a much more figurative and coloured diction than the iambics used in dramatic conversation, and such a diction is natural to an English poet. And in the Greek tragic poets, even the non-lyrical passages are effective poetically in proportion as they are effective dramatically. For dramatic poetry, according to the critic, is meant to be spoken, and unless it has the qualities of spoken poetry, it will not make itself felt on the stage. Neither Tennyson, nor Browning, neither Arnold, nor Swinburne, in his view, seems to have appreciated this.

Sophoclean tragedy is rich in tragic irony. In Electra, as in other of his tragedies, irony reveals itself in circumstance as well as in speech. We have the irony of circumstance when Electra mourns her lot with the supposed ashes of her brother in her hands. In Arnold's play, we have an irony of circumstance in the scene where Merope is bending over her sleeping son, thinking that he is the murderer of that son, and when Polyphontes, with his hand upon the steer whose blood is, so he imagines, to cement the bond of

peace and security, is about, by the shedding of his own blood, to secure peace in a very different sense than the sense intended by him. Of irony of speech, when unconscious, we have examples in Polyphontes' speeches (Ll 868-883 and 885-889) just after he has heard the report of the prince's death, as well as in the chorus which follows. Of irony of speech, when conscious, we have examples in the last dialogue between Merope and Polyphontes (Ll 1793-1837). The irony of speech is very strong in Merope. Here, its centre is Polyphontes' pining desire for 'peace', a peace which is to be brought about, though he little knows it, by his own death.

Polyphontes implores Merope to become reconciled to him by saying, "Peace, peace is what I seek, and public calm".[59]

When he hears the news of the supposed death of Aepytus, he exclaims:

"A private loss here founds a nation's peace".[60]

(L 889)

His last words, just before the axe crashes into his skull, are: "And grant henceforth to the Messenians peace !"[61] The fine irony of the scene (Ll 1758-79) may be compared with that scene in Oedipus Rex (Ll 945-1075) in which Oedipus is pushing his inquiry with Jocasta standing by, the secret now known to her.

The unities of time and place are also observed in Arnold's play. In Sophocles' Electra the scene of action never changes from the precincts of the palace of the Pelopidae. In Merope the place of action also never changes from the precincts of the palace at

Stenyclaros. The action of Electra takes place between the early morning and noon of the same day and the action of Merope occupies exactly the same time.

Thus, minutely antique in form, Merope is characterised as much by the simplicity of structure as by the simplicity of diction. Roscoe dallied on through pages on Arnold's sense of the beauty of form and finish of execution and harmony of proportion. In a well-written review on Arnold's tragedy, Merope, Roscoe dwelt at length on Arnold's "exquisite taste", "nice sense of fitness and proportion", and in all that goes "to furnish beauty and finish of execution".[62]

The conclusion of Arnold's play is also characteristic of the Greek tragedies. Sophocles' and Euripides' plays end flatly and abruptly with or without a moral tag. When the play is over, there is an impression that the last words are of no consequence. Arnold's conclusion is plainly imitated from the conclusion of Sophocles' Electra, but the last line is almost identical with the conclusion of the Trachiniae. The end, no doubt, evokes the feeling of rest and repose. J.H. Shorthouse is of the opinion that "the feeling of repose and rest which comes over the mind after reading Arnold's Merope... is delicious. The freshness and simplicity of the allusions and descriptions, the fewness of the incidents and the intensity of feeling produced by the few strongly defined passions on which the drama depends, all lead to an admirably calm and quiet frame of mind".[63]

G. Merope : The Effectiveness of the Form

Critics are not all in agreement in their views about Arnold's success as a dramatist. Douglas Bush holds Merope to be "the most complete reproduction in English of the form and conventions of Sophoclean tragedy".[64] Anniah Gowda writes, "In almost every important respect his [Arnold's] play conforms with some usage of classical tragedy".[65] In his view no earlier neo-classical play in English presumably comes so close to the Greek originals. The reviewer of The Leader, January, 1858, complimented Arnold as one, who without any modification or compromise, had tried to reproduce the Greek form "in all its niceties and characteristics".[66] Coventry Patmore unhesitatingly declared in his article, "Modern British Drama" in his Courage in Politics that "with the exception of Sampson [sic] Agonistes, it [Merope] is by far the most faithful, poetical and learned revival of the Greek drama of which the English language can boast".[67] But, side by side, there were critics who could not greet Arnold's innovation of a drama on the Attic model. The reviewer of The Christian Remembrance, January, 1858, in a twenty-two-page long article called "The Neo-Classical Drama" said, "... as a result of slavish imitation, the play was a school-exercise, a copy made to order".[68] W.P. Ker said that Merope "falls into the cold empty space, where nothing lives, but vacuity, the pithless phantoms of mere form".[69]

So far as the dramatic interest is concerned, critics all agree that Arnold's drama fails to move us. Swinburne, as is already noted, wrote to Lady Trevelyan on March 15, 1865 :"As for Professor Arnold's

Merope, the clothes are well enough, but where has the body gone?"[70] Anniah Gowda, likewise, observes, "As a poet Arnold obviously lacks the higher order of inspiration. He is blest with the form rather than with the view; the spirit descends upon him with a mantle, not a flame".[71] J.A.K. Thomson holds an identical view when he writes, "Much indeed can be said in commendation of Merope. But what is the use of a drama, if it is totally undramatic?"[72] Most of the critics hold that the thought of the play is not Greek. In the sober reserve of its ethical judgements the play becomes astonishingly British. G. Wilson Knight's opinion in this regard is worth quoting. He writes, "[In Merope] the form is classic, ... the tone and spirit of Greek drama were never better revivified; but the thought is modern".[73]

In his Preface Arnold praises Sophocles by saying, "Sophocles does not produce the sentiment of repose, of acquiescence by inculcating it, by avoiding agitating circumstances; he produces it by exhibiting to us the most agitating matter under conditions of the severest form".[74] But in Arnold's own case the picture is different. Its matter is not the most agitating. It has neither philosophical nor emotional weight. It is admitted on all hands that Arnold's subject completely fails to thrill us. Arnold is unable to construct situations either out of external action or psychological penetration so as to rouse high emotional pulsations. J.A.K. Thomson observes in this connection, "He [Arnold] had not learned perhaps, he had not even studied, the dramatic technique in which the general voice of antiquity declared Euripides to be

supreme. It is not a little extraordinary that a man who believed that in poetry 'all depends on the subject', should not have thought it necessary to add 'and on how the dramatist uses that subject'. A subject will not act itself. Perhaps Arnold's choice was not so happy as he thought. The modern reader is not familiar with the story of Merope, and so the modern poet cannot use the method of tragic irony in the Greek way".[75] He is right. Indeed, the story hangs upon a mother's failure to recognise a long-absent son so largely that it appears almost trivial. And there is melodramatic theatricality in the action of the mother's just-prevented murder of the youth. "Despite the sanction of Euripides, Maffei, Voltaire, and Alfieri, despite Aristotle and Lessing", Trilling observes, "the story of Merope is one of incident merely, and of rather pointless incident at that. From so inferior a fable no profound emotion can issue, inevitably after admiring Arnold's exposition of severest form, one recalls Roy Campbell's couplet:

> 'They use the bridle, and the bit all right
> But where's the bloody horse?'

One cannot make a school-horse into a stallion by bridle and bit; the attempt is bound to be ridiculous, as Merope is ridiculous with its paraphernalia of classical tragedy — the long and complicated geneological history of which the audience needs to be reminded by carefully casual references, but which, in this case, it could know only by memorizing the author's long synopsis".[76] Roscoe felt that Arnold was "deficient in the higher power of conception"[77] which accounts for great poetry. Pure in language

and clear in verse, Merope tends to be a melodrama. It has no unity of action and of interest. Aristotle in his Poetics insists on a single unhappy issue. Arnold, after the recognition scene, protracted the play, and in this case, the quality of interest is a blemish. After developing the crisis with great dramatic skill, Arnold climbed down and dealt with the fate of Polyphontes, with the inevitable result that the interest of the audience must flag.

It is also to be admitted that the slavish adherence to rules has been the bane of Merope. At times, it is distinctly mechanical. Especially in the earlier sections, "a certain deliberate, doctrinaire and highly artificial dryness prevails".[78] The animating spirit that should inform the whole, the passion that is the soul of Greek tragedy is lamentably lacking. Besides, Arnold makes no attempt to imitate the subtle elaboration of Sophocles' style, his studied artificiality of expression, the pregnant suggestiveness with which by a nice discrimination in the use of words and by delicacies of collocation, Sophocles conveys so much more than he formally and definitely presents.

5. Swinburne's *Atalanta in Calydon* and *Erechtheus* : "Likeness of a Greek tragedy".

A. Introduction:

Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837-1909), of all the nineteenth century poets, set himself to dramatic writing with the greatest seriousness of purpose, profoundest zeal and amplest application. He had an extremely resilient mind, and was susceptible to various influences. At the initial stage, he was very much drawn to the Pre-Raphaelite Movement. Always interested in the past, he listened to the enchanting whisperings of the sentiments of the Middle Ages. But soon he outgrew this influence and turned to the ancient Greek tragedians, the Bible and the Elizabethans.

While at Oxford, Swinburne was literally enraptured, feasted and fed in classical lore. And yet, he did not seem to be a Hellenist. In *Undergraduate Papers* (December, 1857), he wrote an article, 'Modern Hellenism' to criticise Matthew Arnold for his Hellenic bias and to champion the cause of the Elizabethan drama. But his anti-Hellenic spirit did not long persist. Swinburne came under the influence of Benjamin Jowett, a Greek scholar at Oxford, and became a "nineteenth century Hellene"[1], as A.R. Rutland called him in the title of his book on Swinburne.

Both at Eton and Oxford, Swinburne got himself familiar with Greek literature. His *Atalanta in Calydon*, modelled on Greek tragedy, was published in 1865. *Erechtheus* was also written on the

Greek model and was published in 1876. Like the Greek masters, Swinburne managed to give his tragedies a religious and serious character and was not prevented from uttering the clearest truths about man's predicament in the mysterious universe.

Apart from the tragedies, Swinburne wrote poems, like Itylus, which are unmistakably inspired by Greek subjects.

To the reading public, Atalanta in Calydon's success was immediate. The Athenaeum for April 1, 1865, wrote : "Atalanta in Calydon *is the work of a poet ... Let our readers say whether they* can often meet with pictures lovelier in themselves or more truly Greek than those in the ... invocation to Artemis".[2] The reviewer in The Spectator for 15 April, 1865, waxed eloquent about Swinburne's play: "The passion of Althea is much the finest part of the play. The naturalism of maternal instinct struggling with the feeling of what is due to the shade of her mother and her brothers, goes far beyond the struggle in Antigone or Orestes".[3] The Reader for 22 April, 1865, wrote : "The choruses are so good that it is difficult to praise them enough ... Mr. Swinburne has lived with the great Athenian dramatists till his tone of thought has somewhat assimilated to theirs".[4] The Saturday Review[5] for 6 May, 1865, wrote in a discerning article that Swinburne is original in the sense that the matter is thrown with great cleverness into a mould which almost leads us to forget the present author and to imagine that we are listening to one of the great contemporaries of Euripides. There were critics and reviewers, however, who wrote on the failure of

all attempts to reproduce the classical style in Atalanta in Calydon. John Morley in an article in The Saturday Review for 4 August, 1866, wrote, "Their [of the Greeks] most remarkable distinction is their scrupulous moderation and sobriety in colour. Mr. Swinburne riots in the profusion of colour of the most garish and heated kind".[6] The Saturday Review for 30 May, 1868, wrote : "Swinburne's attempt to recreate a Greek play ... lacks complete success only because the incompatibility of the modern temper with antique forms and attitudes makes any such success impossible".[7] Swinburne, however, was confident of his success in Atalanta in Calydon. He wrote, "I think it is pure Greek and the first poem of the sort in modern times, combining lyric and dramatic work on the old principle".[8]

Erechtheus is one of the maturest plays of Swinburne. He considered it to be his best play. In the year 1875 Swinburne visited Benjamin Jowett, Professor of Greek at the University of Oxford, at Pitlochry and under his instruction made an intensive study of Aeschylus so that the Greek dramatist's manner was thoroughly absorbed and digested. He paid another visit to Jowett at West Malvern when he sketched the plot of Erechtheus. He finished the play in November, 1875, and issued it on the New year's Day, 1876. Swinburne wrote a long letter to his friend, William Rossetti, on August 21, 1875, in which he recorded the working of his mind at the time of writing this drama : "I am now on a three weeks' visit to Jowett and at work on a companion poem to Atalanta which I hope will turn out a more perfect original example of Greek tragedy than

that was. It is very simple in structure, and deals only with two elementary passions — that of child and parent, and that of patriotism. I wish to make (the lyrical part) conform rigidly to the musical rule of Greek tragedy, which I know I certainly neglected when writing Atalanta but which I now see to be perfectly in harmony with the natural genius of the English language, and capable (in right hands) of the finest and fewest effects in lyric verse. Jowett approves my scheme highly, and has helped me with some valuable hints from the classical or scholarly point of view. Arnold's Merope, as Jowett says with perfect justice, is too much a direct imitation of extant Greek examples to be a genuine poetic reproduction of the Greek type. Now I mean my Erechtheus to be equally impeccable, while by avoiding any imitation of any Greek play or dramatist now existing ... I hope to keep my work quite as fresh and free, in appearance as well as in fact, as ... I am trying to infuse throughout a broader undernote of general and world-wide interest based on the immortality of Greece..."[9]

Swinburne held a higher view of Erechtheus than Atalanta. He wrote, "I am now writing a Greek tragedy which I mean to be more purely Hellenic and perhaps more universal in its relation to human thought and emotion than was Atalanta".[10]

Let us now see how far these two plays conform to the form and capture the spirit of Greek tragedy.

B. Atalanta in Calydon

(i) The Meleager Legend : Swinburne's handling:

Swinburne had a wide acquaintance with classical literature. He drew substantially upon various sources of Greek and Roman legends and mythology, while writing Atalanta in Calydon. Phrynichus (512-476 B.C.) was the first among the Greek poets who dramatised the Meleager legend in The Pleuronian Women. Aeschylus has referred to the Meleager legend in Choephoroi. Both Sophocles and Euripides had a play each called Meleager. The plays of Phrynichus and Sophocles on the subject are non-extant. Euripides wrote of Atalanta in details in his play. Only a small fragment of the play exists. Euripides gave prominence to the love-episode of Meleager and Atalanta, as the record shows.

Swinburne came across a book containing the fragment of Euripides' Meleager. He needed also to read the chorus of Choephoroi, in which there was a distinct reference to Atalanta in Calydon.

Thus the story of the Calydonian boar-hunt and the doom of Meleager was a splendid choice for Swinburne's tragedy. It was not hampered by the Greek writers' treatment of it. However, Swinburne was indebted at least to three for his ideas. C.M. Bowra has noted Swinburne's indebtedness to the Greek masters in the following lines : "He [Swinburne] derived his ideas from a few lines in the Libation-Bearers of Aeschylus, from the speech of Phoenix in Book IX of the Iliad, and ... from some three hundred lines in Book VIII of the Metamorphoses

[of Ovid][11] Swinburne, however, adds, alters and expands and in writing his tragedy he passes beyond the Roman adaptation to something like a Greek original.

The dramatic story of Atalanta in Calydon may be summarised in a few words. Artemis in her rage against Calydon, sends Atalanta, the virgin of Arcadia, to participate in the tragic boar hunt. Meleager, the king's son, falls in love with Atalanta, quarrels on her account with his mother's brothers and kills them. Althea, Meleager's mother, honours her love for her brothers by placing upon the fire the magic brand on which Meleager's life depends. As it is consumed, so Meleager dies.

An analysis of the plot of Atalanta in Calydon shows that it (the plot) is tragic in the Sophoclean sense. Artemis, insulted by Oeneus' neglect of her, sends the Calydonian boar to ravage his lands; to hunt the boar comes Atalanta and Meleager falls in love with her. So the tragic situation rises with its elements of conflict and infatuation. Meleager kills his uncles when they affront Atalanta and from this comes the tragic choice. Althea has to choose between her love for her son and her love for her brothers. In such a choice any decision brings disaster. Althea decides to kill her son and this means not only his death but her own, since after his death, she cannot endure to live.

The choice Althea makes reminds us of the similar situation, Deianeira, in The Women of Trachis, faces when she has to choose between accepting a rival in her home and using illicit magic to

win back her husband. She chooses the second and kills both him and herself. The plot of Swinburne's play is equally final, equally tragic. Again, in The Women of Trachis, Heracles' love for Iole leads to a hideous disaster. Likewise, in Atalanta in Calydon Meleager's love for Atalanta breaks the harmony of life and leads to his doom. Like the Greeks Swinburne regards love as a dangerous power that often breaks the harmony and order of life.

The subject of Swinburne's play is one and entire and that satisfies the condition laid down by Aristotle. But it is to be admitted that the subject is not great. The tragic crisis turns on the jealousy of Meleager's shadowy uncles over the honours of the chase, and on the clash of the sisterly and maternal feelings in Althea. But the story is none the greater for the poet's enormous cascade of glittering and rushing language. Again, according to Aristotle, a tragedy should occur between the nearest and the dearest. In Swinburne's play the tragedy occurs between the mother and the son, and no relation can be closer.

The nature of the plot of Atalanta in Calydon is such that it requires neither peripeteia nor anagnorisis. The play, by its very nature, is a 'calamity play'. The primary object of the play is to arouse pity and fear and this Atalanta in Calydon has succeeded in achieving in a large measure. The emotions of the reader stirred and loosened culminate in acute tension between the impulse of pity and impulse of terror. With the solution of the crisis through the co-ordinating poet's imagination comes intense emotional relief or catharsis.

(ii) The Formal Mould:

Aristotle has not set store by characters. With him plot is the soul of a tragedy. Greek tragedy was not primarily concerned with characters. Atalanta in Calydon is also not concerned with characters.

Meleager is the hero of the play. eminently good and noble, he kills his uncles not only for self-defence but also for the vindication of the honour of his beloved. He has neither 'hamartia' nor 'mochtheria'. He is never betrayed by his passions or what is false within him. He becomes a helpless victim of Fate and accepts the destiny with passive fatalism.

In the Aristotelian sense, Meleager is, therefore, not a truly tragic character. Althea better answers that description. She dominates the stage. Swinburne has taken infinite pains to represent her as a devoted, almost a doting mother, religiously observant of law and order. She is also extremely devoted to her brothers whose death, at the hands of her own son, plunges her into a frenzy of grief. Her early speeches prelude the tragedy, which the later scenes confirm. Mistrustful of the gods, and of Atalanta, above all, distrustful of love, her one aim centres in the maternal love and her desire to protect her son from passion and from divine vengeance. She, however, displays greater love for the brothers than for her son. She is, no doubt, torn in a bitter conflict, and ultimately the loyalty to the brothers is triumphant. After all this is said, we must agree that Althea is not an

active agent. Once she begins to kindle the fatal brand and so to bring death to her son, she sees the full horror of her action. But she does not relent. She is the victim of doom. The Fates have worked their will on her.

Atalanta is an unwomanly women by Greek standards. "Her cult of virginity", writes C.M. Bowra, "her lack of common ties and affections, her avoidance of wedlock and of motherhood, and her participation in activities properly reserved to men, put her outside the ordinary ranks of women and suggest that she is consumed by a reckless pride".[12] "In Swinburne's tragic scheme", the same critic maintains, "Atalanta is the instrument of doom because she pursues her own will against the rules of men".[13] Mario Pratz in Romantic Agony confirms this view and describes Atalanta as a frigid virgin — a kind of fatal woman. She is, no doubt, a bright and lovely creation of Greek legend but she reminds us of some heroines of medieval romances.

Swinburne did not adhere to the form of Greek tragedy with any servile pedantry. He did follow the old masters in respect of the stichomythia and in the use of the messenger's speeches. All the three unities are, however, rightly observed. The unity of action has been secured by the scrupulous avoidance of all digressions, while the unity of impression has been brought about by maintaining throughout a note of gravity and seriousness. The unity of place has been observed by representing the entire action in one particular place. The action takes place in Calydon in some open place,

before the palace of King Oeneus. The unity of time has also been rigidly observed.

So far as the construction of the play is concerned Swinburne follows the Greek model as rigidly as possible. Atalanta in Calydon conforms to the Aristotelian guideline in the following way:

The Huntsman's Prologue - Lines 1-64
Parode - Lines 65-120
The First Episode — Lines 121-313
The First Stasimon - Lines 314-361
The Second Episode — Lines 362-718
The Second Stasimon — Lines 719-806
The Third Episode — Lines 807-1037
The Third Stasimon — Lines 1038-1204
The Fourth Episode — Lines 1205-1373
The Fourth Stasimon — Lines 1374-1468
The Fifth Episode — Lines 1469-1618
The Fifth Stasimon — Lines 1619-1865
The Six Episode — Lines 1866-1957
Commos Lines 1958-2191
The Exodos - Lines 2192-2317

The opening speech of the huntsman resembles the usually less poetical Euripidean prologue and reminds us of more realistic watchman at the beginning of Agamemnon. The play, however, is

half as long again as the longest Greek play. Swinburne's exuberance needed a wider scope than an ancient tragedian was allowed, and he rightly took it. It should also be noted at the same time that though the play is of a greater length than a normal Greek tragedy, it sustains the interest of the readers and spectators. Swinburne, however, made some significant departures from the Greek masters so far as some of the devices and conventions of Greek tragedy are concerned. Towards the close of the tragedy, Swinburne, in contravention of the Greek practice, allowed four characters and the chorus on the stage for lamenting the death of Meleager. And, secondly, in his use and construction of the chorus, he did not always follow the Greek practice.

In a typical Greek tragedy the chorus is an idealised spectator. In Atalanta in Calydon, the choral songs are not always the expressions of the idealised spectator. At times they state the dramatist's views. The chorus in Greek tragedy is mostly impersonal, but in Atalanta in Calydon, it is degraded to the personal plane. And yet the choric songs are an imitation of those of Aeschylus.

The first chorus, consisting of the fifteen Aetolian virgins, advance after the invocation to Aurora by the chief huntsman. It is a rapturous paean — an expression of intense joy at the invigorating force of Nature. The second chorus begins with the words, 'Before the beginning of years'. The theme of the song

is the greatness and littleness of man. The third chorus beginning with the words, "We have seen thee, O Love", is a hymn to Aphrodite. Althea tries to warn her son against the unsexed Arcadian virgin. Meleager is mentally very much disturbed. The chorus breaks out into their curse of Venus at this psychological moment. The chorus anticipates that the love of Meleager and Atalanta will not be consummated. Atalanta enters and greets Artemis, her protector. Meleager's intervention in her favour causes the uncles' resentment. It is then the fourth chorus begins a fulmination against Fate and God. Such invectives seem incongruous in the mouth of a group of girls. Besides, this invective is out of keeping with the traditional role of the chorus and it bears no relation to what any of the participants would have actually been feeling. At the end the chorus have deeply pessimistic reflections on the Gods and Fate:

"Who shall contend with his lords
Or cross them or do them wrong?"[14]

All the choruses are antitheistic but the third and fourth choruses are foam bubbling with gall and rancour in their vitriolic denunciation of God. The third chorus denounces God as evil:

"All we are against thee, against thee, O God most high".[15]

In the fourth chorus there is the more resounding denunciation. "Yea, with thine hate, O God, thou hast covered us".[16]

Greek tragedy provices no justification for such outbursts from the impersonal chorus. Swinburne has used the chorus to state views which are his own and not justified by Greek example. However, these outbursts are few in the play and they have no real relation to the plan of the poem.

The most vulnerable point which many critics find in respect of the form of Atalanta in Calycon, is the structure of its chorus. Swinburne himself refers to this issue in the Dedicatory Epistle to the collected edition of his poems. "Atalanta", he says, "was perhaps too exuberant and effusive, in its dialogue, as it certainly was too irregular in the licence of its choral verse to accomplish the design or achieve the success which its author aimed at".[17] Of course these choruses are not built upon the triple structure of the choruses of Aeschylus and Sophocles. If we take the most rigid formal standpoint, justification of a monostrophic chorus is to be found in Euripides. It is this authority which Milton invoked to justify the choruses in his Samson Agonistes. The vital point is whether the choruses are altogether formless or whether they possess any kind of internal structure that may reasonably claim to have a form of their own. We think that the choruses of Atalanta in Calydon have a form of their own and are appropriate to the genius of English language. These choruses play the part which their counterparts do in Aeschylus and Sophocles, and which Aristotle says to be the only correct one. In Atalanta in Calycon, they fully enter the dialogue, as for example, in episodes 5 and 6 where they

play much the same part as the chorus, in, say, the Oedipus Rex. But, it was, of course, more from Aeschylus that Swinburne derived his conception of choral drama than from Euripides.

It cannot be gainsaid that the success and popularity of Atalanta in Calydon were due to its choruses. Unlike Milton and Arnold, Swinburne adopted rhyme and introduced a new music into English poetry. Through the use of rhyme Swinburne conveys some of the variety and sprightliness which are possible in Greek quantitative verse. The Greek chorus was certainly a vehicle of lyric poetry, and Swinburne utilized the scope of the formal element to the maximum extent.

In Greek tragedy there is an imaginative unity effected by a perfect blending of idea with the whole texture of the work. This imaginative unity is also found in Atalanta in Calydon. There is also the interweaving of the lyric pattern as in the Greek dramas which are lyrical in manner. The unity in Aeschylean drama may be said to be akin to the unity of the lyric stanzas. And Swinburne, a master lyricist, gives a superb lyric unity to his stanzas. His lyric vision attains an expression, most suited to embody its richness and intensity of idea in a great design. The lyrics unite the thought and idea of the play and bring into cohesion the chain of events into a unifying imaginative whole.

(iii) The Spirit

Swinburne had so absorbed the Greek outlook that he was able to reproduce the spirit of Greek tragedy in Atalanta in Calydon. In Sophocles' Antigone, Antigone recognises that she would have broken the existing law not for a son or a husband but for a brother. This denotes that the Greeks the identity of blood through common parents was a closer bond than marriage or motherhood. Swinburne made an appropriate use of this in displaying Althea's anguish and her choice. Her decision in preferring her brothers to her son is Greek in spirit. Secondly, the Greek poets often dwell on the incalculable, reckless and pitiless power of love. Swinburne is found to agree with them. Althea speaks of it to the chorus and warns Meleager of its consequences. Meleager is infatuated by his love for Atalanta. Just as in the Women of Trachis, Heracles' love for Iole leads to a hideous disaster, so in Swinburne's play Meleager's love for Atalanta breaks the harmony of life and leads to his doom. Thirdly, the spirit and purpose of the great lamentations that come towards the close of the play are undeniably Greek. They create a musical effect like that at the end of The Persians or The Eumenides. Fourthly, Althea lays down the rules when she tells Meleager that if man obeys the laws of the gods, all will be as well as can be expected in this life:

"Be man at one with equal minded gods".[18]

But the observance of the law is violated both by Atalanta and Meleager. Hence arises the tragic crisis. At the close end the chorus says,

"The gods guard over us
With sword and with rod;
Weaving shadow to cover us,
Heaping the rod,
That law may fulfil herself wholly, to darken man's face before God".[19]

The idea of the gods guarding over us is a perfectly Greek idea. Added to these is Swinburne's sense of Fatalism which unmistakably echoes that of the ancient Greeks. In the epilogue of Swinburne's play the chorus emphasises the dominance of destiny which is the characteristic feature of the Greek tragedy. The deepeneing and lengthening shadow of Fate pervades the whole play. In Atalanta in Calydon the expression of Fatalism surpasses even that of Aeschylus' . There is a complete negation of free will. Even the gods find it difficult to cope with inexorable destiny. The choral virgins sing of the hopelessness of all struggle and exult over vain defiance. There is no equity and no method in the fate of the mortals:

"The Gods love not justice more than fate
And smite the righteous and the violent mouth".[20]

As we know, Greek tragedy raises some questions about man's relation with the gods and gods are active in the action. In Atalanta in Calydon gods cast their shadows on the action. There are moments in Greek tragedy when the characters break into denunciation of divine indifference. In Swinburne's play, Althea, after proclaiming the need of obedience to the gods, show no very high opinion of their morality:

"But the gods love not justice more than fate,
And smite the righteous and the violent mouth,
And mix with insolent blood the reverent man's
And bruise the holier as the lying lips".[21]

This is no more than what some characters in Euripides say, and not much more than what Sophocles' Jocasta and Philoctetes say in the hours of agony or anguish. But Swinburne goes one step further. He uses the chorus to state views which are undoubtedly his own.

Critics like A.E. Rutland[22] think Atalanta in Calydon has probably more affinities with Euripides than with Aeschylus in the ethical outlook. A dominant spirit of Euripides is found to pervade the play especially in the part that shows the emotional reaction to human suffering. The chorus moralising on Althea:

"Hard things have fallen upon us from harsh gods,
Whom let worse hap rebuke we not for these".[23]

is not far from the chorus that laments over Hecuba. Throughout Swinburne's play, there is an anti-religion and rebellious spirit,

which is unmistakably Euripidean. There is a striking similarity between Euripides' Hippolytus and Swinburne's play. The dying hero in that play of Euripides is carried like Meleager, and forgives his father, as Meleager forgives his mother.

The spirit of Euripides is also perceptible in the real tragic action which consists not in the slaying of the Boar and the evaporation of Meleager, but precisely in the struggle with theological tyranny which drives his chorus to lift its voices in despair and revolt. The Euripidean traits in Atalanta in Calydon may have impelled contemporary criticism[24] in its appreciation of the drama to recall Euripides. Indeed Swinburne is closer to Euripides than to any other Greek dramatist in his ethical outlook.

Swinburne's analysis of human helplessness, as outlined in his play, is the same as enunciated in Greek tragedy. Mark Siegchrist's observation in this connection is worth quoting. He writes, 'As is usually the case in Greek tragedies, the disaster which unfolds as the play progresses is out of all reasonable proportion to the original human error or transgression which in this case was Oeneus's having "forgotten" to honor Artemis in his sacrifices. ... The master-stroke of Artemis's revenge is simply to have arranged the presence of Atalanta in Calydon — all that follows, impelled by the destructiveness of love, unrolls with the inevitability of Greek tragedy'.[25]

Swinburne agreed with Aeschylus on the tragic contrast between human aspiration and divine law. But he refused to share with Aeschylus his passionate search for the principles of righteousness working behind the sorry spectacle of man's martyrdom to divine malevolence. He did not follow Aeschylus' groping towards a compromise between the absolute, inner and inexorable external necessity. He presents the tragic qualm in the blackest possible form arising as ideas from the discrepancy between our sense of fate, as illustrated in the incidents of a tragic life, and our conceptions of justice and right reason without bothering in the least, like Aeschylus, to palliate the situation by offering some material solution. Nevertheless, the influence of Aeschylus was dominant on him.

(iv) The Style:

Structurally Atalanta in Calydon is Hellenic, but the style is not. J.A.K. Thomson[26] is right to say that the extraordinary vehemence and self propagating character of his inspiration, carried Swinburne too often beyond the bounds of a justly proportioned and duly concentrated work of art. As he says, Swinburne's sense of form never leaves him, nor his purity of diction, and so far he is classical. But his inability to control his inspiration is the very oposite of classical.

There is, besides, an apparent incongruity in the combinations in tion of the conceptions of the ancient and the modern sensibili-/

Atalanta in Calydon. Althea thinks of her own son, the great hero Meleager, as a child and remembers not his present prowess but his childhood days (Ll 667-70). She also recollects what her brothers did for her when she was a child (Ll 1564-72). These sentiments about childhood are modern, domestic sensibilities. T.E. Welby[27] finds in Althea's exceptional tenderness of memory Swinburne's dramatic ability to conquer the apparent difficulty of the tragedy, the reconciliation of Althea's love of her son with her horrible vengeance on him as the slayer of her brothers. Althea's speech is full of eloquence when she, torn between love of her son and of her brothers, stricken at heart by agonised regrets, says,

> "O my son,
> O child, for thine head's sake, mine eyes wax thick
> Turning toward thee, so goodly a weaponed man,
> So glorious; and for love of thine own eyes
> They are darkened, and tears burn them, fierce as fire"[28]

The great lamentations which come towards the close of the play, when four characters and the chorus are on the stage together, do not conform to the Greek canon which allows no more than three characters on the stage.

Some critics say that Atalanta in Calydon has the Greek body while the heart is modern. Ifor Evans, for example, says that the play assumes "the likeness of Greek tragedy but combines with it a romantic profession of lyrical verse, and from that combination creates a new form".[29] Indeed, Swinburne, being predominantly a romantic poet, could not exercise restraint upon his heart and could not hold the rein of inordinate lyrical flight. This is why,

despite himself, his drama, though structurally classical, has a modern spirit. Swinburne adopted one of the most romantic stories of late Homeric Greece, making improvements, in his choral drama, but keeping very close to the outlines of the old tale. In the Greek version, Meleager has a wife named Cleopatra. But Swinburne makes Meleager the wild hunter of the woods, who has never yielded to the charm of the woman till he is smitten by the eyes and hair of Atalanta. That this new episode of Meleager's love for Atalanta and the main outline of the drama comes from Ovid has been shown by Maurice Bowra.[30]

Sophocles throws his full imaginative power into the creation of Ajax who defies Athene. Swinburne also does his best to make his characters enjoy all the poetry which he can give them. The deep call of Althea's blood while preferring her brothers to her son is presented in noble and beautiful words. Bowra gives a higher place to this poetry in Swinburne than his admiration for the Greeks in the following words: "The poetry of Atalanta is as good as it is because the story appealed to something deeper in Swinburne than his admiration for the Greek tragedians. That is why Atalanta is not an imitation but stands in its own right as a true work of art".[31]

Swinburne had to cope with the stiff conventions of Greek tragedy. To give a full poetry to the stiffness of the conventions, he had to keep his language unusually lively and exhilarating. His language provokes unexpected shocks. Swinburne means us to startle, to make us look with fresh eyes. The huntsman thus addresses the dawn:

"O fair-faced sun, killing the stars and dews
And dreams and desolation of the night".[32]

Stars, dews, dreams and desolation do not belong to a single order of things, and their combination is startling.

Swinburne had a lively fancy and profusion of expression which accorded ill with the solemn and severe stateliness of Attic tragedy. He had an intense sympathy with the Greek dramatists and a full perception of their grandeur and purity as well as of the exquisite finish of their workmanship. He had, besides, a strong sense of beauty. And yet his mind was cast not like the Greeks. His metaphors, images and allusions are heaped upon one another in a wide prodigal way, which reminds us of Shelley and Browning more than of ancient poets. He lays on strokes after strokes of colour till the last obliterates the first, and the readers are bewildered among thick-coming sensations. His profusion of expression becomes at times prolixity. His lyrical exuberance has also been criticised. J.A.K. Thomson, for example, writes, "The poet's lyrical impulse carries everything before it, so that even the spoken parts are not much more than lyrics in blank verse. And he has even less than Shelley the power of presenting or controlling a dramatic situation".[33]

Swinburne was unsparing in the use of the most violent colours and the most intoxicated ideas and images. The music in Atalanta in Calydon is, in fact, a trick of words and letters. There is hardly any artistic moderation. The Greek poets, even in

their most impetuous moods, never allowed themselves to be carried on by the swing of words. In short, Swinburne displayed lavishly his bountifulness of imagination, mastery of the music of verse, but at the same time thinness of contemplation and poverty of genuinely impassioned thought. One of the unclassical things of the play relates to the five choral song upon the dealings of the gods with men, the pious or impious parts of which would have been equally impossible for a Greek dramatist.

But in spite of all that is said we have to admit that in Atalanta in Calydon, we have to deal, not with a Greek imitation, but with a Greek imagination. The fullest and most ardent poetic expression shows itself compatible with the antique majesty.

C. Erechtheus

(i) Swinburne's handling of the Plot:

The dramatic emotion of Erechtheus, as Swinburne himself has said, is built upon "the two elementary passions — that of child and parent and that of patriotism".[34] The first elementary passion, that of child and parent, is woven with the second to rouse pity and terror as we experience in an Aeschylean drama. The dramatic story of Erechtheus may be summarised as follows. Erechtheus was the son of Pandion I, King of Athens. He had three sons — Cecrops II, Merion and Pandorus, and four daughters — Creusa, Orithya, Procris, and Othonia or Chthonia. Athens is attacked by the Thracians. The king and his queen Praxithea fear the destruction of the city. The oracle says that the city will be saved if their daughter is sacrified. The next movement of the drama is largely the study of the minds of Praxithea and her daughter, Chthonia, once faced with the tragic doom. Chthonia accepts her doom:

> "This my doom that seals me deathless till the springs of time run dry".[35]

and considers the sacrifice of her life as a privilege:

> "That I may give this poor girl's blood of mine
> Scarce yet sun warmed with summer, this thin life
> Still green with flowerless growth of seedling days
> To build again my city ..."[36]

Chthonia dies, and there is the announcement of the herald of Athens' triumph. Erechtheus also dies. Praxithea is left alone at the close, who, in spite of the terrible tragedy into which the Gods have plunged her, does not lose the nobility of her soul by blaming the gods.

This sacrifice of the maiden Chthonia which reminds one of the sacrifices of the Virgin Iphigenia of Euripides,[37] led a contemporary reviewer to remark that Erechtheus was a translation from Euripides. This remark raised Swinburne's anger which he expressed in a letter to a friend (January 2, 1876) in the following words: "Translations from Euripides indeed : why, a fourth form boy can perceive that, as far as Erechtheus can be said to be framed after anybody, it is modelled throughout on the earlier style of Aeschylus ...".[38]

Of course, Swinburne in this letter refers to Euripides' fragment. But nothing of the Greek dramatist was incorporated. As it is evident from one of his letters, Swinburne knew the speech of Praxithea, one of the few extant fragments of Euripides' Erechtheus. The story of Erechtheus was told by the Greek orator Lycurgus, the source to which Swinburne was indebted.

It might be that Swinburne had Aeschylus' Seven Against Thebes in mind while writing this play. In Seven Against Thebes as in Erechtheus the readers are in a beleaguered city; our hearts flutter with the emotions of its inhabitants; we share in the tumult of its defence, and we hear it after the angry tide of war that comes

rushing towards the gates. The openings of the two plays have much in common. Both present to us the solitary heroic figure of the captain who must take his vassal through the gathering storm.

Erechtheus, as a play on the Greek model, is more regular than Atalanta in Calydon and, indeed, the theme of the drama is more Hellenic than that of Atalanta in Calydon. It combines a tender and thrilling treatment of emotion with an appeal to civic patriotism in the truest sense of antiquity. Edmund Gosse considers it to be "the most Greek of all the compositions of Swinburne"[39], because "it follows with the great success, closely, yet vividly, the exact classical models".[40] Better to say, Erechtheus is passionately Athenian and Athens is considered the living symbol of the virtue of citizenship. Swinburne wrote to William Michael Rossetti in a letter[41] that he was trying to unfuse throughout a broader undernote of general and world-wide interest based on the immortality of Greece as the everlasting and universal mother country of thought, art and acting the exemplar, to all times and nations for all patriots and poets.

Harold Nicolson is of the opinion that there "is the lack of concentration in the dramatic interest of the story; it is never wholly clear whether Athens is to be destroyed by the Thracians or by the sea; it is never wholly clear whether the central theme is the sacrifice of Chthonia or the heroism of her mother; and the final holocaust of Erechtheus and his remaining daughter is treated

in a manner wholly unconvincing and almost incidental". This criticism does not hold good while we remember that the theme of play is patriotism. The fact is that Athens is going to be destroyed and it is immaterial if it is not clear whether it is to be destroyed by the Thracians or by the sea, so long as we know that to save this Athens in danger, Chthonia, out of her noble patriotic fervour, sacrifices her life. The other deaths in this drama are meant to raise the passion of patriotism. The play should be regarded as an evocation of the ideal Republic. Carrying Nicolson's argument a little further, we may say that Erechtheus stirs our modern sensibility by its appeal to deep patriotic emotion.

(ii) Pattern of Construction:

One of the blemishes of Erechtheus is its insufficient individualisation of character. It is said that there is no single character with red-blood corpuscle which can draw our attention. Swinburne has been unable to delineate a character on the scale of Antigone, nor has he been successful in producing that subtle interplay of different characters which enables Euripides to retain our interest in the less exalted atmosphere of the Iphigenia. But this criticism overlooks the fact that Swinburne's Erechtheus is built upon the model of the early plays of Aeschylus. In the three early plays of Aeschylus, which Swinburne had in his mind while composing his play, there is little or no action and no real conflict involved in the presentation of the character. Similarly

in Erechtheus, Swinburne is not intent upon character-delineation; he is concerned, like the early Aeschylus, with the majestic conception of his dramatic emotion and idea, and investing the bare plot that there is, with a treatment full of grandeur.

The entirely Greek form of the play gives, on analysis, the following parts of its construction:

Prologue : The prayer of Erechtheus

(1st chorus) Parode : "Sun that has lightened and loosed the night..."

(Strophe I of chorus I) Stasimon: "A noise that has arisen against us of water ..."

Episode I : Erechtheus, Praxithea and chorus

(2nd chorus) Stasimon 2: "He hath uttered too purely his worth not obscurely ..."

Episode 2 : Chthonia, Praxithea and chorus

(3rd chorus) Stasimon 3 : "Out of the north wind grief came forth .. "

Episode 3 : Herald of Eumolpus, chorus and Erechtheus.

(4th chorus) Stasimon 4 : "Who shall put a bridle in the mourner's lips to chasten them ...."

First Commos : Chthonia, Praxithea and chorus.

Episode 4 : Chthonia, Praxithea and chorus

Second Commos : Chthonia and chorus

(5th chorus) Stasimon 5 : "Many loves of many a mood and may a king".

Episode 5 : Messenger — choral interlude, Messenger.

Stasimon 6 : "Ill thoughts breed fear, and fear ill words..."

Episode 6 : Athenian Herald, chorus and Praxithea

Stasimon 7 : "From the cup of my heart
I pour through my lips along ..."

Episode 7 : Athenia and Praxithea.

Exode : "From the depth of the springs of my spirit ..."

The play's most interesting structural feature is the construction of its choruses. Swinburne adopted the antiphonal form used in chorus by the Greek tragic writers and in non-dramatic poetry notably by Pindar and Bacchylide. The choruses of Erechtheus are English poems showing what can be done in this language by the adoption o the Greek antiphonal structure. As Swinburne himself says in the Deidicatory Epistle[43] that the Greek form with its regular arrangement of turn is not to be imitated because it is Greek, but to be adopted, because it is the best, the very best as a rule, that could be imagined for lyrical expression of the thing conceived, lyrical aspiration towards the aim imagined. To the criticism that Erechtheus is "colder and more specialized and less inspired",[44] we can say that Swinburne, the lyricist, was able to produce in the English speech a music that fully rosembles the might harmonies of Aeschylus; it is a music different from the romantic ehtereal verse.

We may compare the choruses of Erechtheus with those of Seven Against Thebes. The choruses in the former are the striving

songs of men, while those in the latter are the frightened cries of women. Both come as interludes in the stresses of epic conflict. The heroes in both the dramas share the same unconquerable spirit. Edmund Gosse has very rightly said that the choruses of Erechtheus "display to the full of the poet's spirit of splendour and they present as well a reserve and purity of language, a cool beauty which he rarely attains".[45]

That Swinburne has used the chorus in the Greek manner with more success in this play than in Atalanta in Calydon is seen while we compare the fourth stasimon of the play with "who hath given man speech" in Atalanta. The lines in the choir chanting on the Acropolis from Strophe I to Antistrophe 4 have a dignity of soul more worthy of man, walking "by the light of stars and fire". The display is possibly of a cosmic conception that was not that of the Greek tragedies in general, but of Sophocles in particular, who more nobly kept his lips from over-speech. And we wonder why Swinburne owes his debt only to Aeschylus, and not to Sophocles.[46]

(iii) The Spirit:

According to Bruno Herlet, "Erechtheus is altogether too fatalistic and inhuman. The altogether too great insistence upon fatalistic principle is perhaps the reason why Erechtheus, despite its wonderful beauty, leaves us cold".[47] But Herlet's opinion sounds weightless. A play of Sophocles does not leave us cold. And if it does not, then the question also does not arise in case of Swinburne.

Again, that destiny should play such a part is absolutely essential to the poet's purpose; otherwise, the heroism of his men and women becomes motiveless, and they lose much of their greatness which shines so resplendently against the sombre background of merciless Necessity.

The Athenaeum for January 1, 1876, commented that Erechtheus was not a translation from Euripides and found the narrative of Praxithea singularly fine and impressive, and the rhapsody concerning Athens splendidly eloquent — a magnificent outburst of chorus. T.E. Welby also does not find Erechtheus cold. He writes, "Erechtheus is full of passion, or a white heat passion for something remote from the minds of most men, and its body of verse is evenly magnificent, and never allowing readers' attention to get deflected from the single, central theme. That is why the serious tone of the drama is interpreted as 'cold'. But sublimity and high seriousness are simply the general features of a Greek drama. And to condemn Erechtheus for its pervading intellect is to miss the sustained loftiness of emotion, the grave ardour in expression, the unfaltering speed with which the action is conducted, the exactitude with which the whole material is organised, the continuity of all the themes to the central relation of the play. The chorus who tells of the North Wind's wild wooing of the Oreithyia gives out a magnificent lyrical brilliance, put to order, effusive exuberance, highly disciplined".[48]

Rutland has referred to Kratislaw who thinks, "Erechtheus contains some of his finest writing, and yet to me it seemsto be

devoid of proper poetic feeling. It is full of splendid rhetoric, and yet it is productive of no emotion but pain — the play has never seemed to me anything but fierce and barren and intolerable".[49] But the present researcher does not agree with the critic that Swinburne's play is devoid of emotion and barren, fierce and intolerable. He would rather support Rutland's view as follows: "One suspects that this critic would have all these feelings accentuated were he to read Attic drama as written by the Attic dramatists instead of written by Swinburne. If he said that such death of Polyxena produced no emotion but pain, that such a play as the Hecuba, or the Medea was intolerable, one could understand him. But would he find the Oedipus Rex or the Orestiea or the Electra of Sophocles less intolerable than Erechtheus? Would he think that Antigone is fierce and barren and devoid of proper poetic feeling? ..... Erechtheus is to be judged as Greek drama; if one does not like Greek dramas, very naturally one will not like Erechtheus".[50]

In this play Swinburne never crossed the limits of self-control. In fact, he achieved sustained control of emotion in Erechtheus. Some critics have praised Chthonia for her self-sacrifice. They felt that she has rendered an inestimable service to the state.

The play is remarkable for its technical flawlessness. In fact its impeccable art has appealed to some critics too banal to be the final appeal of the drama. Humphrey Hare has said, "Planned under Jowett's eye,

with a too-conscious regard to exact conformity with the principles of the Aeschylean drama, with a too-disciplined, a too-impeccably Hellenic symmetry, the play moves in a serene, remote empyrean, in an atmosphere too rarefied for the breath of human tragedy or the quickening of the heart's beat".[51]

The reviewer of Erechtheus in The Edinburgh Review, July, 1876 began his praise of the drama by saying, "It would be hard indeed, to find another theme that could be brought into more perfect harmony with the Greek tragic genius... So it is that Mr. Swinburne seems to have arisen far above a simple imitation like Mr. Browning's Balaustion, and to have achieved the difficult feat of casting a genuine Greek tragedy, in the more cumbrous moulds of modern English diction".[52] And then this anonymous reviewer makes further remarks. He admits that human sacrifice is intensely repugnant to modern feelings, but points out that Swinburne's treatment is, in itself, far less revolting while sternly powerful, than the representation that often held the Athenians spell bound. He compares Erechtheus with the Eumenides which might be characterised in the language of our modern criticism as offensively sensational. In fact, the drama of Erechtheus is cast with a high purpose. One may discover its counterpart in the sacred Hebrew history, and say that it resembles the great crowning sacrifice which is the keynote of the entire scheme of the quieter Christian dispensation. Chthonia dies for her country like the daughter of Jephtha, but her death is the deliberate seal of a reverent submission to supernatural behests instead of the redemption of a reckless vow.

Compared to Atalanta in Calydon, Erechtheus has more breadth and stateliness of action and a more perfect Hellenic repose. It has less sweetness but more majesty with no frantic declaration against the Gods. What it loses in graceful juvenility it gains in maturity of self-control. Rutland[53] is of the view that the true grandeur of Erechtheus lies not in its relation to the past, but in its relation to the perennial aspiration of Humanity. Erechtheus is not only great but noble because it expresses love which makes life a worth living.

The implication of the sacrifice depicted in Erechtheus can be properly understood if we have a knowledge of the ancient traditions and beliefs constituting the folk culture of Greece. Subtle emanation of bloodshed in a proper sacrifice was regarded as necessary for a noble cause, for averting or overcoming some calamity, for helping people in any practical respect. It links the idea that there is always, at the basis or foundation of any importance, a sacrifice. And even in the present day the idea is active in the folk-mind in many parts of the world.

Edmund Gosse[54] said that Erechtheus is the most organic of Swinburne's writings. That, indeed, is the appeal of the drama to us. Erechtheus may rightly be regarded as the work in which Swinburne was most completely master of all his resources and most resolutely bent on securing through them a single effect.

6. Conclusion

In the foregoing sections of this chapter, an attempt has been made to assess the impact of Greek tragedy on some of their English counterparts. An attempt may now be made to summarise the observations made in this connection.

Milton's Samson Agonistes is decidedly the best among the attempts to naturalise Greek tragedy in English. Milton has reproduced with great fidelity the form of Greek tragedy. Milton's complete mastery of form is made possible by the firmness of his tragic design and the perfect assimilation of the matter of the Book of Judges. Milton has reproduced the simple grandeur and austerity of the Greek tragedy. Characters are few and no situation presents more than two characters on the stage, which is occupied always only by the chorus. The unities are strictly observed. Milton's drama specializes in 'peripeteia'. The end is quick, sudden and total reversal — a reversal for Manoa, Samson and Philistines. Samson Agonistes also bears the moral effect of Greek tragedy. But the spirit of the drama is Hebraic. It also lacks the tension of Greek tragedy. The conflicts in the drama are less urgent and the subordinate characters are more shadowy than in Aeschylus' 'Prometheus Vinctus'. The real beauty in Milton's drama lies in the full yet bare statement of a noble theme. The form of classical Greek tragedy was the right choice for something Milton wanted to say.

Shelley in Prometheus Unbound, Arnold in Merope and Swinburne in Atalanta in Calydon and Erechtheus enjoy an advantage over Milton. They find it certainly easier to make their plays Greek, as the themes of their plays are Greek, although one may certainly question their success. Shelley, however, did not cast Prometheus Unbound on Greek tragic form. This is expected of Shelley as he was never an ardent imitator by the nature of his temperament. He sought to recreate Aeschylus' Prometheus Unbound (which is lost) within the framework of a new idealism, presenting a new myth and a new ritual of faith, struggle and fulfilment. This he does in his own manner and the way of Shelley is certainly not the Aeschylean way. Shelley's play strikes one as like what the Periclean drama might have become in the hands of a great lyrical poet. Hellas, however, is on the lines of Aeschylus' Persians and it has much more of the form and style of Greek tragedy than the Prometheus Unbound. The influence and inspiration of Greek drama on Shelley's plays are undeniable.

Arnold's Merope is more than an imitation; it is a replica of Sophoclean tragedy. It captures the Aeschylean foreboding and irony. The Greek elements in the play are the gnomic chorus, the unities, the tirade and relief of stichomythia. Arnold's tragedy is written in a subdued and low-toned way designed to reproduce the quiet concentration of the pure Attic style. But Arnold completely fails to thrill us with the story which has neither philosophical nor emotional weight. He could not use the method of tragic irony in the Greek way as the modern

reader is not familiar with the story of Merope. And secondly, Arnold wanted to dismiss a romantic subjectivism by turning away from it to its seemingly opposite classical objectivity. What was needed was to minimise the romantic mood by the comprehension of that mood itself in a severe form and in action.

Swinburne's Atalanta in Calydon and Erechtheus have the likeness of a Greek tragedy. The Greek form was imitated not because it was Greek, but because it was the best. Again imitation was the self-imposed rule, although his singular poetic gift made at least Atalanta in Calydon, in his justified words, more of true poetic life and charm than Merope. The Greek form afforded Swinburne the opportunity for full employment of his highest and more natural faculty of lyric utterance and song. In the choruses, where Arnold failed, Swinburne succeeded because he saw by a true intuition that to equal the effect of the Greek chorus full English lyric with rhyme and musical sweep was required. In its poetry, Atalanta in Calydon is Aeschylean; in its thought and characterisation it is Euripidean. The philosophy of life as presented in this play is a negative one. Caught within the trap of a hostile deity man himself becomes ungracious, a sacrificial victim to the essentially inhuman orgies of existence. Swinburne presents this sense of life in a mould so self-consciously antique as Greek tragedy and thus conveys a suggestion of the perennial nature of this dilemma. Erechtheus also presents a world in which men fight against the sombre background of merciless destiny. But the play is planned with a too-conscious regard to exact conformity with Greek tragedy.

It goes without saying that no great work of art is possible by mere imitation. Every work of art and an Attic tragedy as such, is living and follows the rules of its own being. Any attempt to write tragedy on the model of a particular Greek tragedy is, therefore, bound to meet failure.

There are other factors, too, to be considered in connection with the question : is it possible to naturalise Greek tragedy in English? The form of a play is determined by its own vital idea and by the limits fixed by the conditions of performance. The Greek dramatists were conscious citizens. They found a perfect form in tragedy to express their national spirit. The Greek tragedies were, in a sense, responses to the culture which sustained the Greek people. In their characters, language and action they gave articular form to the submerged communal desires of the Greek people. There is another side of the picture. In ancient Greece, tragedy concerned not only the great artists but the entire people as well, who felt the appeal of the tragedy to such a degree that they would gather in a large number to see a performance. Then again, Greek tragedy achieved a synthesis between form and content. The form serves its restraining and equilibrating function by interposing at every critical turn the comments of the chorus.

The form of Greek tragedy is an archaic art. The concept of tragedy has also greatly changed since the days of the Greeks. With the rapid growth of civilisation, the political, social, economic and theological values have usurped the place of gods

of Greek tragedy. Man is no longer a victim of cruel Destiny but a victim of the economic necessities. He is a creature of reflexes and complexes. He is sometimes presented as a slave to the unconscious. The old ground of religious faith is gone.

The English poets well knew that Greek tragedy was the characteristic product of social and political conditions and of all that such conditions involve and imply which have no analogy in modern times and that, consequently, its reproduction in exact counterpart must necessarily be an anachronism in art. Yet they believed in the effectiveness and permanence of the form of Greek tragedy. Milton thought the Greek tragic form to be the best rule to all who endeavour to write tragedy. And he has reproduced it in his drama. But what vitalizes his drama is his theme which unfolds Samson's position and destiny and in which Milton realized a tragedy analogous to the tragedy of his own life. Shelley modifies his models to such an extent that he can scarcely be called an imitator. Swinburne's plays are in structure closer to Greek prototypes, but nothing could be more un-Greek than all that constitutes their attractiveness. Arnold was equally affected by the power of Greek poetry and of the consummate form of Greek tragedy. In his Merope he reproduced without the smallest modification the exact counterpart of Attic tragedy in its most perfect shape. In the art which had cast its spell over him he would confide. But how could he confide in the spectators of his day who were unfamiliar with the story of the Greek myth?

There is yet another vital consideration. Greek tragedy was conditioned by the nature of the Greek theatre which was designed to accommodate the bulk of the town's citizenry. In such theatre grand style was natural. With the accompaniment of dance and music Greek chorus made possible grand operatic effects that one can scarcely appreciate in reading and never reproduce exactly since Greek music and choreography have been lost. Greek drama had always a vital meaning for the contemporary audience. The Greek dramatists wrote for the stage; public performance was a must, otherwise the drama would have lost its total meaning and effect.

The English plays under discussion, on the contrary, were not written with an avid eye to the stage. Milton's Samson Agonistes was written for the study and not for the theatre. Shelley owned that a drama must be for the stage and not for the closet. Prometheus Unbound, however, is more a dramatic poem than a drama. It is Shelley's testament of faith in man. Both Arnold and Swinburne put poetry into dramatic form without any effort on their part to give it a test of the theatre. Swinburne wanted a stage of antiquated time.

It appears then that none of the English plays on the Attic model have been successful in producing the effect of the Greek tragedy or in evoking its spirit. But it will be wrong to assume that the imitation of the Attic model have rendered these plays dull and ineffective. All that vitalizes Milton's drama is

what is implicit in its theme and in what its theme presents in symbol. It is Shelley's own version of man's suffering and success in Prometheus Unbound and his superb lyricism which constitute the impressiveness of his play. Arnold's Merope is a tragedy sincere, moving and honest in such feeling as it evokes, Swinburne's Atalanta in Calydon stands in its own right as a true work of art.

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