

SAMSON AGONISTES AND PROMETHEUS BOUND
A COMPARISON

English: M. A. Thesis

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Two thousand years elapsed from the time that AEschylus in democratic Attica wrote his great Promethian trilogy till the age of England's recreation from the Puritan regime when Milton wrote Samson Agonistes as his last contribution to literature. Men of letters looked back over those years to the era when the Athens of Pericles held supremacy over the Greek world and hailed it as the Golden Age of literature. As yet Englishmen had not presumed to the direct imitation of the ancients which resulted in the pseudo-classical school of poetry but the enlightened scholars and writers studied the classics assiduously, admired them intensely and emulated them to the best of their ability. Francis Bacon's classical learning is reflected in his prose; Peele and Green borrowed extensively from Senecan dramas; Daniel, Cowley, Marlowe and Jonson reverted to the precepts of the classical masters again and again. But none of these nor any of the preceding English writers had the comprehension nor the affinity for the Classics that John Milton possessed. Nor in all those years did the master of any language achieve a purity and granduer so reminiscent of the Attic poetry to equal that of Milton's verse.

Coleridge remarked on one occasion that Samson Agonistes was "the finest imitation of the ancient Greek drama that ever

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had or ever would be written". In the Preface to the drama there is indication that to such an end Milton deliberately designed the poem.

"They only will best judge who are ~~not~~ acquainted with ^{MA} ?
Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, the three tragic
poets unequalled yet by any, and the best rule to all
who endeavor to write Tragedy." *

That he himself applied this rule to excellent effect has been attested by a succession of critics from Dryden to those of the present day.

Such a judgment does not remain a chance dictum of a critic. By a happy circumstance, the classical nature of the dramas may be gauged by reference to a Grecian play of the best period, the Prometheus Bound of Aeschylus, first mentioned of the three unequalled tragic poets. To this play Samson Agonistes is comparable in three ways; in the matter of structure which admits analysis, in the matter of style which defies it and in the matter of superficial likeness which serves to illumine the comparison.

As a final measure, the two may be examined not only in their relation to each other but also in their relation to the demands of classical tragedy as they are recognized by the best masters. For this purpose the plays will be regarded as comprised of various elements of a certain

* Milton: Of that sort of Dramatic Poem called Tragedy.

excellence necessary to tragic composition. According to Baum these are Plot, Character, Thought, Diction, Song and Spectacle.* The last two may be dismissed from this study since they play neither a deliberate nor important part in the composition of either play. Samson Agonistes was written primarily to be read, not to be enacted, so that the employment of an appeal to the senses was precluded; in Prometheus Bound, Spectacle and Song were necessarily limited to those regularly employed in the early Greek theatre which in turn were limited by the primitive nature of stage mechanics. Of the remaining four, Plot and Character will require some preliminary study under other masters.

Plot, which defined in simplest terms in the sequence of incidents in the story, is the prima mobile of literary effort. From earliest times a human interest in the story, leading to an exceptional event has inspired epic, elegy and drama in primitive or elaborated forms. The exploitation of this psychological fact by artists, who consciously colored their explanatory matter to have the greatest appeal, is the process of the growth of technical Plot. Aristotle, more than any other, studied this in the old masters of literature and formulated the most comprehensive technique of

* Baum: Samson Agonistes again.

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dramatic and tragic plot. His theory supplies the necessary standards by which to judge classical tragedy.

In Aristotle's conception, "tragedy is a form of drama exciting the emotions of pity and fear. It's action should be single and complete, presenting a reversal of fortune, involving persons renowned and of superior attainments, and it should be written in poetry embellished with every kind of artistic expression."* The injunction dealing with the requirements of the plot may be enlarged upon a little. The action must present a reversal of fortune, a complete change of fortune for the hero. It should be "single and complete", that is dealing exclusively with the events leading to the final catastrophe. The plan of presenting the events may be simple or complex, that is, it may or may not be complicated by a sub-plot. Aristotle inclines towards the superiority of the complex plot but admires the excellence of the simple plot in the hands of AEschylus. But whatever the plan of presentation, the episodes themselves must be relevant to the action and must follow with probably or necessary sequence.

sp.

When we consider the compliance of the two plays to Aristotelian rules, it is observed that the understanding which the authors had of the first demand contributes a great deal toward the excellence of the dramas. Both Samson and Prometheus suffer a twofold reversal of fortune, changes in

with

* Thorndike: Tragedy.

both their material and spiritual conditions. The reversals of their material fortunes are only partially described in the plays; but the reversals of their spiritual fortunes are completely represented in the action and are actually the main interests.

Outwardly there is little change in the condition of Samson, enslaved and blinded at Gaza and Samson lying dead among the ruins of Dagon's temple. It is of little matter whether Prometheus is bound to the rock in Scythia or chained in Tartarus. But there is a vast difference in the spiritual temper of the two hapless heroes in the scenes in which they are last seen from those in which they first appeared. Samson, in the beginning of the play was "made captive, blind and now in the prison at Gaza, there to labor as in a common workhouse." He says that he "scarce freely draws the air, imprisoned also, close and damp, unwholesome draught." * With unrelieved despair he recites the calamities which have overtaken him.

Promise was that I

Should Israel from Philistian yoke deliver:

Ask for this great deliverer now, and find him

Eyeless, in Gaza, at the mill, with slaves,

Himself in bonds under Philistian yoke.

Yet stay, let me not rashly call in doubt

Divine prediction; what if all foretold

Had been fulfilled but through mine own default? †

* Samson Agonistes: The Argument.

† Samson Agonistes: ll. 7 - 9.

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Whom have I to complain of but myself?
Who this high gift of strength committed to me,
In what part lodged, how easily bereft me,
Under the seal of silence could not keep,
But weakly to a woman must reveal it,
O'ercome with importunity and tears. *

There is not even outburst against fate to vary the blank
despair. And the Chorus takes up the theme.

This, this is he; _ _ _ _

_ _ _ _ _

O change beyond report, thought, or belief!
See how he lies at random, carelessly diffused,
With languished head unpropt,
As one past hope, abandoned,
And by himself given over;
In slavish habit, ill-fitted weeds
O'er-worn and soiled.
Or do my eyes misrepresent? Can this be he,
That heroic, that renowned,
Irresistible Samson? whom unarmed
No strength of man, or fiercest wild beast, could withstand;
Who tore the lion as the lion tears the kid;
Ran on embattled armies clad in iron,
And weaponless himself,

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Made arms ridiculous. - - -
- - - - - - -
Thou art become (O worse imprisonment!)
The dungeon of thyself; thy soul
- - - - - - -
Imprisoned now indeed,
In real darkness of the body dwells,
Shut up from outward light
To incorporate with gloomy night;
For inward light, alas !
Puts forth no visual beam. ✱

Æschylus' hero, Prometheus, is in a no less helpless state. He is led on by Might, Force and Hephaestus and during the first scene he does not even raise his voice in despair as Samson does. Yet the harsh words and the ringing blows of his gaolers, as Prometheus, in silent agony, is fettered by Jove's unalterable decree, leave an even deeper sense of unrelieved despair.

Might: Here,
Just guerdon of his sins shall find him; here
Let his pride learn to bow to Jove supreme.

Heph: Ye twain, rude Might and Force, have done your work
To the perfect end; but I - my heart shrinks back
From the harsh task to nail a kindred god
To this storm-battered crag.

✱ Samson Agonistes: 11. 115 - 163.

— — — — —
Might: Enough of words and tears.

This god, whom all the gods detest, wilt though
Not hate, thou, whom his impious larceny
Did chiefly injure?

— — — — —
Heph: The irons here are ready.

Might: Take them and strike
Stout blows with the hammer; nail him to the rock.

— — — — — Strike! Strike!
With ring and clamp and wedge make sure the work.

— — — — —
Heph: He's fettered limb and thew.

Might: There lie, and feed thy pride on this bare rock,
Filching gods' gifts for mortal men. What man
Shall free thee from these woes? *

Yet when we last see Prometheus he cries:
I am ready. Let him wreathe
Curis of scorching flame around me;
Let him fret the air with thunder,
And the savage-blustering winds!
Let the deep abysmal tempest
Wrench the firm roots of the Earth!
Let the sea upheave her billows,
Mingling the fierce rush of waters *

— — — — —
I will bear: but cannot die.

At the end of Samson Agonistes Manoa exclaims:

Come, come; no time for lamentation now,
Nor much more cause; Samson hath quit himself
Like Samson, and heroically hath finished
A life heroic, on his enemies
Fully avenged. *

This change by which Samson is lifted from degrading inertia to such a state of self-realization that he is able to fulfill his divine destiny represents a complete reversal of his spiritual condition. Little by little this is accomplished. One by one his visitors produce reactions in his mind that eventually he is impelled to make the supreme effort which rids the Israelites of their Philistine overlords.

The final effort of Prometheus is lost to us by reason of the fact that the drama, as it is now known, is probably the middle section of a trilogy. This, however, does not prevent the completion of the inner action during the presentation of this part of the story. By supreme artistry the representation of the final reversal of fortune is achieved through the medium of prophecy. Prometheus, being a god, is omniscient and during the visits of Oceanus, Io and Hermes he is stirred to foretell his deliverance and the downfall of Jove even though he knows

* Samson Agonistes: ll. 1708 - 1712.

such an action will incur Jove's fury. But there is this difference to Samson. Prometheus hurls defiance from the beginning of his bondage, unlike Samson, who undergoes a change in order to do so. Prometheus' struggle is not to gather strength to meet the final test but to maintain his unyielding position in the face of the catastrophe which his actions inevitably bring nearer and nearer. Through his gift of prophecy he makes it clear that he is finally triumphant over Jove in spite of the disaster which overtakes him.

Thus, in the observance of Aristotle's first rule, a striking similarity between the two plays appears. If the outer action ~~alone~~ were considered, neither is a true tragedy in that no complete reversal of fortune is accomplished. But both AEschylus and Milton have cleverly centred the interest on the inner conflict, the struggle of mind and will in Samson and Prometheus, and it is this final triumph and self-assertion in the midst of material disaster that the real reversal occurs.

Before considering the unity of action, with which Aristotle's second rule is concerned, it may be noted that Milton observed the unities of time and place as they were observed in the Greek theatre and that he employed the Athenian structure without acts but with a chorus, and with its limitation to three actors on the stage at once. The time of the action of Samson Agonistes begins at sunrise:

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But here I feel amends,

The breath of heaven fresh-blowing, pure and sweet,

With day-spring born.

and ends at noon:

The feast and noon grew high. — —

Immediately

Was Samson as a public servant brought.*

Hence Milton uses but seven or eight hours of the twenty-four permitted by ancient usage. There is no indication of the length of time consumed by the episodes of Prometheus Bound but it maybe to be taken for granted that it would not exceed the twenty-four hours. In support of this view is the fact that no mention is made of the changes from day to night or night to day which Hephaestus says Prometheus will mark so well.

Thou

When moltley-mantled Night hath hid the day,

Shalt greet the darkness with how short a joy!

For the morn's sun the nightly dew shall scatter,

And thou be pierced again with the same pricks

Of endless woe. †

The unity of place is observed no less strictly in Samson Agonistes than in Prometheus Bound. The scene of the one is laid throughout before the Prison in Gaza, of the other before the rock in Scythia to which Prometheus is bound. In Samson Agonistes the catastrophe takes place at a distance and is reported by a messenger - a familiar figure in Greek tragedy. In Prometheus Bound

* Samson Agonistes: ll. 9 - 11, 1612 - 1615.

† Prometheus Bound.

it takes place before our eyes. The use of the Chorus can be discussed best when the unfolding of the action is thoroughly understood.

It has already been noted that the centre of interest in either play is in the character of the hero. The action, then, will be closely related to the psychological developments and the episodes will delineate them. The unity of action in each case will be found to depend upon the dominance of the principal character. Not only is he the instrument of his own disaster but the climax and denouement are absolutely dependent on the type of man he is and on his reactions to the incidents leading to the solution. The dramatic incidents portraying this inner action are really interviews which interpret the character of the hero to us and prepare him for the test which is to come. They are logically arranged for the revelation of character at which each play aims and they succeed one another in an orderly fashion without any complication whatsoever. No plot could be more simple. Such absolute concentration on a crisis in the behaviour of one person is a basis on which it is extremely difficult to build dramatic action. Yet the onward march to the inevitable denouement is grim tragedy which makes excellent drama.

Had Milton not followed the Athenian models and constructed Samson Agonistes without acts, the play would have consisted of five acts - as he himself remarks - each of the first four acts corresponding to an interview and the last consisting of the an-

nouncement of Samson's death. Likewise, Prometheus Bound might be divided into five divisions, the first being the scene wherein Prometheus is chained to the rock and the last four being interviews with the Oceanides, Oceanus, Io and Hermes. These provisional divisions will be used in considering the development of the action.

The first act of Samson Agonistes ends with the entrance of Manoah. By that time the purpose of the opening act has been accomplished. Samson's condition is fully explained. It is true that no incident is introduced to give a hint of future action or out of which future action might come. Samson is led on the stage and by means of reminiscence discloses his career and his present deplorable state. No complication could possibly arise from anything in this scene. But the stage is set for the inner action. Samson is caught in a moment of comparative quiescence caused by extreme despair. The contrast between his former power and his present state of servitude shows the potentiality of Samson's nature. And the strength which was the scourge of Israel's enemies is still his.

Why was my breeding ordered and prescribed
 As of a person separate to God,
 Designed for great exploits, if I must die
 Betrayed, captivated, and both my eyes put out,
 Made of my enemies the scorn and gaze,
 To grind in brazed fetters under task
 With this heaven-gifted strength? *

By this we are somewhat prepared for the denouement.

The first division of Prometheus Bound ends with the entrance of the Chorus and it is just as devoid of material for a complication. Prometheus is chained to the rock by Jove's unalterable decree; his gaolers depart; in a monologue he reveals to us his force of character. It is evident that some great development will take place in a mind so proud and yet so deeply humiliated. We wait for the gradual subjection or the emancipation of this fettered soul.

The second act of Samson Agonistes is the interview with Manoa. This scene introduces what Baum calls a "complicating moment", what Cumberland calls an "incident of provocation". Almost at once Manoa discloses an occasion or opportunity for the catastrophe.

This day the Philistines a popular feast
Here celebrate in Gaza, and proclaim
Great pomp, and sacrifice, and praises loud,
To Dagon, as their god who hath delivered
Thee, Samson, bound and blind, into their hands.*

But this occasion would mean little were it not that Samson shows some signs of rousing from the state of apathy in which the first act finds him. As soon as the Chorus announces the arrival of his father, Samson exclaims:

Ay me! another inward grief, awaked
With mention of that name, renews the assault. †

* Samson Agonistes: ll. 434 - 438.

† Samson Agonistes: ll. 330 - 331.

And after his father has commiserated him upon his wretchedness, he unburdens his heart of all the distress of mea culpa. Roused to such a pitch he achieves a hopeful reaction to the news of the feast of Dagon.

This only hope relieves me, that the strife

With me hath end: all the contest is now

'Twixt God and Dagon. *

Samson, and with him the audience, anticipates a manifestation of the might of God, Who surely cannot allow this proposed heathen celebration. This is the first definite premonition of disaster.

The second division of Prometheus Bound might also be called an "incident of provocation", for in it Prometheus' behaviour is such that it must surely provoke a more terrible fate for him.

Even now the hour is ripening,

When this haughty lord of Heaven

Shall embrace my knees, beseeching

Me to unveil the new-forged counsels

That shall hurl him from his throne.

But no honey-tongued persuasion,

No smooth words of artful charming

No stout threats shall loose my tongue,

Till he loose these bonds of insult,

And himself make just attonement

For injustices done to me. +

* Samson Agonistes: ll. 460 - 461

+ Prometheus Bound.

The conviction grows that some dreadful consequence will follow the punishment of him who "only of the gods thwarted his will", when Jove wished to blot man's memory from the earth. He is deliberately heightening his independence and pride of mighty intellect which has wreaked woe for him and weal for man in the past so that it may consummate a definite purpose in the future.

During the third act of Samson Agonistes the altercation with Dalila occurs. Intensely interesting though it is to see Samson confronted by the source of all his woe, nevertheless the scene increases the expectation of disaster by only one fact; that Samson is past temptation and feels such a degree of self-contempt that some relief from misery must be obtained. With all her wiles Dalila seeks to betray Samson into a semblance of his former adoration. She assumes humility and approaches falteringly:

With doubtful feet and wavering resolution
 I came, still dreading thy displeasure, Samson,
 Which to have merited, without excuse,
 I cannot but acknowledge. *

But Samson will not tolerate her presence:

Out, out, hyaena! these are thy wonted arts,
 And arts of every woman false like thee,
 To break all faith, all vows, deceive, betray;
 Then as repentant, to submit, beseech,

* Samson Agonistes: ll. 732 - 735.

And reconciliation move with feigned remorse
Confess, and promise wonders in her change-
Not truly penitent, but chief to try
Her husband, how far urged his patience bears. *

In vain she tries to extenuate her offence and to maintain
that "love hath oft, well meaning, wrought much woe."

Samson replies:

How cunningly the sorceress displays
Her own transgressions, brought thee hither
By this appears. †

And later he bids her go

lest fierce remembrance wake

My sudden rage to tear thee joint by joint. †

The fact that he is able to banish successfully Dalila, by
whom he had been enthralled, is a premonstration of the return
of his former strength.

As Dalila aggravates the rising temper of Samson,
so Oceanus increases the defiance of Prometheus in the third
division of Prometheus Bound. Ocean comes to warn his Titan
relative, to urge him to be resigned to his fate and as Ocean
is a deity of the first order, his warning does not lack im-
pressiveness. Yet Prometheus is not to be persuaded even though
he sees in a continuation of his attitude.

* Samson Agonistes: ll. 748 - 755.

† Samson Agonistes: ll. 819 - 822.

‡ Samson Agonistes: ll. 952 - 953.

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Most bootless toil and folly most inane. *

So, finally, Ocean realizes that his journey has been futile.

Thy reckless words, reluctant, send me home. *

Delila leaves Samson roused to righteous and introspective wrath; Harapha, in the succeeding act, goads him to passionate fury against the whole tribe of the Philistines. The scene is intensely dramatic, First of all, the contrast of the characters of the two giants and the war of words between them is vivid and absorbing.

Sams. The way to know were to see, but taste.

Har. Dost thou already single me? I thought Gyves and the mill had tamed thee. - -

That honour

Certain to have won by mortal duel from thee,
I lose, prevented by thy eyes put out.

Sams. Boast not of what thou would'st have done, but do.

- - - - -

If Dagon be thy god,
Go to his temple, invoke his aid
With solemnest devotion, spread before him
How highly it concerns his glory now
To frustrate and dissolve these magic spells,
Which I to be the power of Israel's God
Avow, and challenge Dagon to the test,
Offering to combat thee, his champion bold,
With the utmost of his godhead seconded.

Har.

No worthy match

For valour to assail, nor by the sword
Of noble warrior, so to stain his honour,
But by the barber's razor best subdued.

Sams. Go, baffled coward, lest thou run upon thee,
Though in these chains, bulk without spirit vast,
And with one buffet lay structure low,
Or swing thee in the air, then dash thee down,
To the hazard of thy brains and shattered sides. *

What nobler depths has Samson, captive and blind though he is, than Harapha, the bullying heathen warrior! Then, the expectation of disaster rises to a fever pitch of excitement. Samson is "exulcerated" beyond endurance. He is ready to face the host of enemies and has the courage to declare:

Happen what may, of me expect to hear
Nothing dishonourable, impure, unworthy
Our God, our law, my nation, or myself. †

Lastly, Harapha is so enraged that he causes ^{to} that Samson [^] be summoned to the feast, a circumstance which leads directly to the final goal of Samson's revenge and death. As he is led away, Samson [^] himself feels that the climax in his affairs is near and he faces it calmly.

The last of me or no I cannot warrant. †

* Samson Agonistes: ll. 1091-1241.

† Samson Agonistes: ll. 1423-1425.

‡ Samson Agonistes: ll. 1426.

As ^{the} the fourth act of Samson Agonistes the excitement and apprehension is greatly increased in this scene. Io is violent, almost maniacal. She presents a fine contrast to the Titan with his self-possession and Spartan endurance. And both contrive to throw Jove, the fate against which Prometheus is struggling, in a most unfavorable light.

The fifth act supplies the catastrophe and the solution. In Samson Agonistes this act also is intensely dramatic. The noise of ruin reaches the ears of Manoa and the Chorus, who are left in distracted suspense for some little time, daring to hope, with tragic irony, that all is well with Samson. Then comes the Messenger with his unhappy tidings: Samson has been revenged but in taking his revenge he has met with a tragic death. The feeling of the actors changes. Samson's final requital with honor resigns them and leaves their souls free from distress.

Chor. All is best, though we oft doubt

What the unsearchable dispose

Of Highest Wisdom brings about,

And ever best found in the close.

— — — — —
His servants, he, with new acquist

Of true experience from this great event,

With peace and consolation hath dismissed,

And calm of mind, all passion spent. *

Hermes, messenger of Zeus, is the immediate forerunner

of disaster in Prometheus Bound. He brings his master's terrible threats and exhorts Prometheus with passionate eloquence. But the Titan god has pursued his course of independence and defiance too long to "reveal the hand that hurls him from his tyrant's throne". And suddenly Jove's threats become reality. Amid the roar of contending elements the rebellious Prometheus descends to the Tartarean pit. But he is still the victor in that he has not bowed to Jove's will and he retains his calm self-possession, secure in the knowledge of his final triumph.

Now his threats walk forth in action,
And the firm Earth quakes indeed.

- - - - -
Doubtless now the tyrant gathers
All his hoarded wrath to overwhelm me.
Mighty Mother, worshipped Themis,
Circling Ether that diffusest
Light, a common joy to all,
Thou beholdest these my wrongs! *

Another brief analysis will bring out the likeness which has been shown by this comparison of the various portions of the plays. The framework of any drama consists of three parts: a beginning which prepares the way and which does not follow anything itself, though it must lead to something; then, a middle, which is the entanglement or complication; and last,

* Prometheus Bound.

an end, which is the catastrophe and solution. The beginning of Samson Agonistes is the first act. It must lead to something, not because of the occurrences of that act but because of the contrast between the possibilities of Samson's nature and his present degradation. The entanglement consists of the interviews with Manca, Dalila and Harpha which arouse in Samson a defiance and sense of purpose at odds with his position of enslavement. And lastly comes the solution which consummates the pre-eminent interest of the play, Samson's revenge on the Philistines. In Prometheus Bound the first scene prepares the way by showing the discrepancy between the real power of the Titan and the impotence which has been forced upon him. The interviews, in which Prometheus refuses to submit to Jove's will and reveals a growing purpose, comprises the entanglement. The solution is achieved when, in the face of disaster, Prometheus reveals by his gift of prophecy his final triumph over the omnipotence of Zeus. The methods of dramatizing a single incident in the hero's history, by making the predominant theme the conflict of the hero with the fate of his own making, are identical. That the incidents representing the conflict are very different is but proof of the variety with which each was able to embellish his drama.

The structure of the early Greek drama contained one element which is not found elsewhere. This is the Chorus, which played an important part in Greek tragedy. Originally

it was the group of singers and dancers who "alone went through the dramatic exhibition; afterwards, Thespis, to give rest to the Chorus, added one actor, ^{distinct from} the singers; Aeschylus added a second, and Sophocles a third, which gave tragedy its complete development."* Throughout these changes the Chorus occupied positions of varying degrees of importance and fulfilled several different purposes. In Aeschylus' dramas, Prometheus Bound is exceptional in that its Chorus occupies a less prominent place than the dialogue. In this it is allied more closely with the dramas of Sophocles and Euripides than with other Aeschylean tragedies. Of the Chorus of Samson Agonistes Verity says:

"Perhaps nothing in Samson Agonistes displays more strikingly his complete mastry of the mechanism of Greek tragedy than the address - the inspiration - with which he makes the Chorus play precisely the part which had been assigned to it by the author of Oedipus Rex." †

The Chorus of Prometheus Bound has a twofold purpose. First, it supplies the lyrical element and offers a medium for philosophical speculation:

Wise was the man, most wise,
 Who in deep-thoughted mood conceived, and first
 In pictured speech and pregnant phrase declared
 That marriage, if the Fates shall bless the bond,
 Must be of like with like;
 And that the daughters of a humble house

* Diogenes Laertius: Vit. Philos. III. 34.

† Verity: Samson Agonistes: Introduction.

Shun tempting union with the pomp of wealth

And with the pride of birth. *

And then it follows the precept of Aristotle in that it may be "regarded as one of the actors and a part of the whole, and as joining in the action." It is the Chorus who draw from Prometheus in the story of his crime:

Chorus. Speak now, and let us know the whole offence

Jove charges thee withal. *

and the prophecy of his vengeance:

Chorus. If thou hast more to speak to her, speak on

Or aught omitted to supply, supply it; *

When Oceanus abandons Prometheus, it is the Chorus who interpret his sad state; and it is the Chorus who, by their more subserviant attitude toward Jove, emphasize the defiance of the Titan.

Never, O never may Jove,

Who in Olympus reigns omnipotent lord,

Plant his high will against my weak opinion!

Let me approach the gods

With blood of oxen and with holy feasts,

By father Ocean's quenchless stream, and pay

No backward **vows**. *

The Chorus remains with Prometheus during the large part of the action and waits upon his every word, echoing, emphasizing, and finally encouraging his various speeches and moods. Without it the structure would not hold, some of the most inter-

esting dialogue would be spoiled, and much of the mythology which explains the action would be omitted.

The Chorus of Samson Agonistes fills a very similar position. It supplies the lyrical element in the drama and its relation to the action is such that without it the structure would fall to pieces. In the very beginning it is the Chorus who helps to set the stage for the action by completing the retrospect of Samson's past life and depicting his former greatness. During the unfolding of the action, they continually illustrate the character of Samson by sharing in his feelings:

Chorus. (After Dalila has left.) She's gone -
a manifest serpent by her sting

Discovered in the end, till now concealed. *

by contrast of their more cautious nature to his returning fierceness:

Sams. Can they think me so broken, so debased
With corporal servitude, that my mind ever
Will condescend to such absurd commands?

-- -- -- -- --
Chorus. Consider, Samson; matters now are strained
Up to the highth, whether to hold or break:
He's gone, and who knows how he may report
Thy words by adding fuel to the flame? †

or by repeating and extending his thought:

O, how comely it is, and how reviving

* Samson Agonistes: l l. 997 - 998.
† Samson Agonistes: l l. 1335 - 1351.

To the spirits of just men long oppressed,
 When God into the hands of their deliverer
 Puts invincible might,
 To quell the mighty of the earth, the oppressor,
 The brute and boisterous force of violent men,
 Hardy and industrious to support
 Tyrannic power, but raging to pursue
 The righteous, and all such as honour truth! *

Finally it is the Chorus who help to sustain the interest after the hero himself has left the stage, and after the catastrophe has taken place, "to exemplify the mission of tragedy in purifying and calming." The Chorus of Samson Agonistes, like that of Prometheus Bound, fulfill Aristotle's precept of being "a part of the whole."

There is one thing particularly noticeable about the Chorus of Prometheus Bound which is not true of that of Samson Agonistes. The friends of Samson, who are members of the Chorus, are "men of Dan". They are men like Samson and Manca, having a similar appearance and speaking the same language. The Chorus of Prometheus Bound, however, is composed of creatures who form a particularly fine contrast to the other characters. The Oceanides, the fair daughters of Oceanus, are an excellent foil for Aeschylus' delicately lyrical talents and his power of depicting the fragile and lovely. The fairness of the Oceanides beside the rugged Titan gives an intricate effect of light and shade

* Samson Agonistes: l l. 1268 - 1276.

which proves the touch of a master hand.

Closely allied to the kind of plot used in the method of characterization. There are two main ways of depicting character: by analysis and by the representation of action, pure analysis being forbidden to the dramatist and not advised to the novelist. But the sparsity of action resulting from the series of interviews in Samson Agonistes and Prometheus Bound made it necessary to use a highly analytic method of characterization. Yet the normal consequences, such as a certain tediousness, do not appear. This might seem strange were it not that the reason for a certain fascination for the characters is not hard to find. The heroes, as they are reviewed in the plays, were in such a tense and passionate state that its portrayal is all-absorbing. Outer action might only have taken from this central interest. Besides this, there is a comparatively small number of actors to describe and not all of these require a complete study. Each of the two plays has five characters besides the chorus. The greater part of our knowledge of Prometheus and Samson is gathered from long monologues. A good deal about Dalila and Io, the two female characters, is given in the same way, but both of these are presented at highly revealing moments. Of Harpha we catch only a glimpse in a particularly offensive mood. Manoa shows his character under two very trying circumstances. The characters of Oceanus and Hermes were so well known to an audience of AEschylus' time that

his study of them had only to comply in the main to an idea already conceived.

Prometheus is of really heroic fame. In ancient mythology he is among the most important gods who took part in the earliest wars which decided the fate of heaven and earth. He was a Titan, one of the giant race who were the first rulers of the world. He, however, unlike his brothers, allied himself with Jove in the mighty struggle which made the Olympian Thunderer supreme. But Prometheus was not content in helping Jove. He must usurp the god's power and tamper with his disposition of mankind. And because he defied the will of Zeus he was punished by everlasting captivity. A later legend tells of his release through the aid of Hercules.

It is with the fallen god that Prometheus Bound is concerned, the proud Titan in the period of his deepest humiliation.

As the drama begins, Prometheus is led on by Might and Force and immediately the same impression of a gigantic figure is given as when Milton says of Satan in Paradise Lost:

His spear - to equal which the tallest pine
Hewn on Norwegian hills, to be the mast
Of some great admiral, were but a wand -
He walkt with. *

The iron chains and bands, the bolts of adamant, the rock which holds him, together produce this image of physical magnitude. Yet the words of his gaolers are eloquent only of the wit of the god -

* Paradise Lost: Book I. ll. 293 - 295.

High-counselled son of Themis,

He hath a subtle wit - *

and of his reckless gift to men. This impression of his physical grandeur, his mighty intellect and his daring benevolence sets the key-note on which the characterization continues.

The first trait of character to be noticed is his stoical endurance. Throughout the scene in which he is chained to the rock Prometheus does not utter a word of pain or reproach. His silence betrays a tragic dignity worthy of a deity. Even when he speaks, it is in the same vein of dignified acceptance of the situation:

O divine ether, and swift-winged winds,
And river-foundations, and of ocean waves
The multitudinous laughter, and thou Earth
Boon mother to us all, and thou bright round
Of the all-seeing Sun, you I invoke! *

A more passionate temper is discernible once or twice:

Ah! me! present woes and future
I bemoan. O! when, O! when
Shall the just redemption dawn. *

But very soon he regains his more usual command of himself;

Yet why thus prate? I know what ills await me.

No unexpected torture can surprise

My soul prophetic; and with quiet mind

* Prometheus Bound.

We all must bear our portioned fate, nor idly
Court battle with a strong necessity. *

Prometheus' more dominant traits, however are his
pride and haughtiness. These have been the cause of his down-
fall, for he usurped the place of Jove himself and gave fire,
the cherished possession of the gods, to mortal man. He is still
proud of his feat even though it has brought him to this pass.

Hear me yet farther; and in hearing marvel
What arts and curious shifts my wit devised.

- - - - -

None but a fool,

A prating fool will stint me of this praise.
And thus, with one short word to sum the tale,
Prometheus taught all arts to mortal men. *

He is much too proud to take Oceanus' advice:

Prom. And for thy kind intent and friendly feeling
Have my best thanks. But do not, I beseech thee,
Waste labour upon me. If thou wilt labour,
Seek a more hopeful subject.

- - - - -

Ocean. Be it so; but yet 'tis sometimes well, believe me,
That a wise man should seem to be a fool.

Prom. Seem fool, seem wise, I in the end, am blamed. *

And the appearance of Hermes fills him with contemptuous hauteur:

This solemn mouthing, this proud pomp of phrase
Beseems the lackey of the gods. *

* Prometheus Bound.

— — — — —
The insolent thus with insolence I repay.

Hermes. Yet Time that teaches all leaves thee untaught.

Prom. Untaught in sooth, thus parlaying with a slave.

Prometheus is god-like. He is strong and proud and generous and unrelenting. His is no short-witted weakness but the weakness which lies in an excess of self-reliance. The characterization is lofty and powerful and is in good keeping with the superhuman grandeur of the subject.

Milton had less tragic stuff with which to work. The blinded giant has much less of the quality of the classical heroes who were gods and demi-gods than has Prometheus. Yet Milton has created a character whose distinction has earned him the name of a "Hebrew Prometheus". By the simple means of regarding Samson as the receptacle of divine strength he elevated him into a sphere of importance worthy to be treated in the highly classical manner.

Samson, like Prometheus, is a fallen hero. He was the champion of the Israelites, chosen by God to free his people from subjection to the Philistines. By his own fault, his yielding to the seductress, Dalila, he was made captive by the enemy, blinded and made to work at the mill in Gaza as an ordinary bond-slave. There the first scene finds him. But he exhibits none of the enduring pride of the fire-god. He is exhausted and hopeless. His despair is pitiful:

Scarce half I seem to live, dead more than half.

O dark, dark, dark, amid the blaze of noon,

Irrevocably dark, total eclipse

Without all hope of day! *

But with the arrival of the Israelites, Samson assumes a little more of the spirit of Prometheus. After a little conversation he speaks of his former deeds and the glory which they brought him, betraying a returning pride and occasionally a little resentment which is quickly dismissed.

On their whole host I flew
Unarmed, and with a trivial weapon felled
Their choicest youth; they only lived who fled.

- - - - -
But what more oft in nations grown corrupt,
And by their vices brought to servitude,
Than to love bondage more than liberty,
Bondage with ease than strenuous liberty;
And to despise, or envy, or suspect,
Whom God hath of his special favour raised
As their deliverer? If he aught begin,
How frequent to desert him, and at last
To heap engravitude on worthiest deeds! †

His contempt of Harapha is almost as great as Prometheus of Hermes and is much more passionate:

Thou oft shalt wish thyself at Gath, to boast
Again in safety what thou would'st have done
To Samson, but shalt never see Gath more.

* Samson Agonistes: ll. 80 - 83.

† Samson Agonistes: ll. 262 - 276.

- - - - -
Tongue-doughty giant, how dost thou prove me these?

- - - - -
Come neazrer, part not hence so slight informed;
But take good heed my hand survey not thee.*

The aspects of character which are most important are his sense of responsibility to God and his confidence in the ultimate victory of God's cause. His guilt in his betrayal of God's trust is the theme to which his thought returns again and again.

If aught seem vile,
As vile hath been my folly, who have profaned
The mystery of God. †

And again to Manca:

But I God's counsel have not kept, his holy secret
Presumptuouously have published, impiously,
Weakly at least, and shamefully. †

And even to Harapha:

All these indignities, - - -
- - - these evils I deserve and more,
Acknowledge them from God inflicted on me
Justly. ‡

The suffering is only what he has merited; his deepest suffering is for his failure to hold sacred the responsibility placed on him by God.

The only ray of light in the gloom of Samson's existence

* Samson Agonistes: ll. 1127 - 1129, 1181, 1229 - 1230.
† Samson Agonistes: ll. 376 - 378.
‡ Samson Agonistes: ll. 497 - 499.
‡ Samson Agonistes: ll. 1168 - 1171.

is his belief in the ultimate vindication of God's righteousness.

He, be sure,

Will not connive, or linger, thus provoked,
But will arise, and his great name assert:
Dagon must stoop, and shall ere long receive
Such a discomfit as shall quite despoil him
Of all these boasted trophies won on me,
And with confusion blank his worshippers? *

he says to Manoa, when Manoa tells him of the feast to Dagon.
And his conviction is strong enough to fire Manoa with hope:

Man. With cause this hope relieves thee, and these words
I as a prophecy receive. †

It is this belief which enables him to meet Harapha's insults
with a dignity reminiscent of his former greatness -

My trust is in the Living God, who gave me,
At my nativity this strength. - ‡

and sends him to the scene of his death and revenge full of the
"rousing motions" which presage in his mind

— that he may dispense with me, or thee,
Present in temples at idolatrous rites
For some important cause, thou need'st not doubt. †

There seems little enough reason for the impression
of likeness which almost forces itself into the consciousness

* Samson Agonistes: ll. 465 - 471.
† Samson Agonistes: ll. 472 - 473.
‡ Samson Agonistes: ll. 1377 - 1379.
‡ Samson Agonistes: ll. 1140 - 1141.

when Samson and Prometheus are brought to mind. Their dominant traits are very different and similar characteristics are comparatively unimportant so that some other bond must exist between them. The great attribute in common is the fallen greatness of two such mighty giants brought so low, and it is probably not by accident but by deliberate imitation on the part of Milton, who was thoroughly cognizant of the best points of AEschylus' style, that Samson possesses "all the terrific majesty of Prometheus chained." This imitation is of the repeated image or rather sustained image of the hero, contrasting his past and his present in such a way as to wrack the emotions most. From the beginning of Samson Agonistes almost to the end of the fourth act Samson occupies the centre of the stage. The actors about him change but he remains the same, bound, helpless, abandoned and over-powered by a sense of loneliness and blighting remorse. The pathos of the picture is sustained yet the renown of the central figure is brought forward afresh by the words of each newcomer.

Chor. In slavish habit, ill-fitted weeds
 O'er-worn and soiled, _ _ _
 _ _ _ _ _ Can this be he,
 That heroic, that renowned,
 Irresistible Samson?

Man. O miserable change! Is this the man,

That invincible Samson?

— — — — —
Del. I may fetch thee
From forth this loathsome prison-house.

— — — — —
Har. (He) hath permitted them
To put out both thine eyes, and fettered send thee
Into the common prison, there to grind
Among the slaves and asses. *

In Prometheus Bound from beginning to end Prometheus occupies the centre of the stage, he, too, bound, helpless, abandoned but overpowered by a sense of loneliness and injustice and ingratitude. He, too, is remarked by each newcomer.

Chor. I look, Prometheus; and a tearful cloud
My woeful sight bedims,
To see thy goodliest form with insult chained,
In adamantine bonds,
To this bare crag, where pinching airs shall blast thee.

— — — — —
Ocean. Thus, to know thy griefs, Prometheus,
And to grieve with thee I come.

— — — — —
Io. Who art thou,
Rock-bound with these wintry fetters,
And for what crime tortured thus?

* Samson Agonistes: 11. 122 - 126, 340 - 341, 921 - 922,
1159 - 1162.

Hermes. This haughty tone hath been thy sin before;
Thy pride will stand thee on a worsers woe. *

Prometheus, then, was Samson's great prototype in several ways but the conception of his character did not intrude upon Samson's in any way to lessen the individuality of Milton's hero. A comparison of the other characters is interesting by force of contrast rather than similitude.

The character of Dalila is indicative of Milton's masterly execution in the portrayal of female characters even though he was not a lover of women. The expert psychological insight to the subtleties of the feminine mind, that goes into the creation of Dalila, makes the study very impressive.

This surprising knowledge of Milton's accounts even for the introduction of the scene with Dalila into the play. The motive for her visit to her former husband is a tendency peculiar to the mind of such a woman, the urge to test her power over a man whose very downfall she has effected. Not content in having brought him to these dire straits, she goes to have him remove all blame from her and take it upon himself. She betrays herself at once in all her flaunting callousness:

First granting, as I do, it was a weakness
In me, but incident to all our sex,

Was it not weakness also to make known

* Prometheus Bound.

For importunity, that is for naught,
Wherein consisted all thy strength and safety?
To what I did thou show'dst me first the way.

— — — — —
Ere I to thee, thou to thyself wast cruel. *

Her guilt is flagrant and is unrelieved by the saving
grace of remorse.

Why do I humble thus myself, and, suing
For peace, reap nothing but repulse and hate?

— — — — —
But in my country, where I most desire,
In Ecron, Gaza, Asdod, and in Gath,
I shall be named among the famoussest
Of women. †

She does not even recognize the need for remorse. Having admitted her feat of cunning, she does not regard it as inexcusable but finds all manner of justification for it upon civic and religious grounds to persuade her own exculpation.

Her debased character is all the more revolting in contrast to her loveliness of form:

Chor. Is it for that such outward ornament
Was lavished on their sex, that inward gifts
Were left for haste unfinished? ‡

For Dalila won Samson's secret by means of Circean fairness

* Samson Agonistes. ll. 773 - 784.

† Samson Agonistes. ll. 965 - 983.

‡ Samson Agonistes. ll. 1025 - 1027.

and persuasive grace. Her beauty was extraordinary among a tribe of beautiful women. The description of her approach to Samson is one of the few pictures in Samson Agonistes. It is exquisitely wrought:

Chor. An amber scent of odorous perfume
Her harbinger, a damsel train behind;
Some rich Philistian matron she may seem;
And now, at nearer view, no other certain
Than Dalila thy wife.

- - - - -
Yet on she moves; now stands and eyes thee fixed,
About to have spoke; but now, with head declined,
Like a fair flower surcharged with dew, she weeps,
And words addressed seem into tears dissolved,
Wetting the borders of her silken veil:

But now again she makes address to speak. *

And then her words dispell all the illusion of lovely womanhood.

Not the weapon of disaster, but the victim of a cruel fate is Io, Prometheus' third visitor. She does not enter the scene "sailing like a stately ship with all her bravery on and tackle trim". She runs wildly where her feet have borne her, "stung by the god-sent brize". Her words are the harsh cries of one who is tortured unendingly, very different from the suave arguments and soft, barbed taunts of the self-confident Dalila.

* Samson Agonistes: ll. 721 - 731.

She has now no beauty since Hera's jealousy transformed her into the likeness of a cow.

Io has none of Dalila's ease and presence. She was an Inachian maid who was terrified by her dreams into seeking her father's counsel as to the portent of these visions of Jove's attentions. Harrased by the oracle's warning, she was driven into exile, unable to withstand in any way the horrors imposed on her by "Heaven's relentless Queen". Her "wit was frenzied", she is fretted into restless distraction and can do nothing but bewail her fate, the end of which is revealed only by Prometheus.

In truth, Io cannot be called a character. She is an apparition, the spirit of woe and lamentation personified. She contributes to the drama only artificially by throwing the character of the majestic Titan into high relief and by supplying a reason for dwelling upon certain aspects of the myth involved.

Manoa's presence in the drama is both naturally and artificially effective. He introduces a little dramatic irony by his hope for ransoming his son on the eve of Samson's death and by his failure to discern that only in death lies deliverance for Samson from his self-reproach. Besides this, his presence is justified in the interest he creates. The sorrowing father, intent upon recovering his son from slavery, aware of his blameful weakness yet feeling every anxiety for his comfort, adds materially to the poignancy of the drama. Manoa is no type

character; he is the father of the ages:

I, however,

Must not omit a father's timely care

To prosecute the means of thy deliverance. *

No pathos could be deeper than that aroused by the picture of the white-haired old father, who a few minutes before has entertained hopes that his son

be dealing dole among his foes

And over heaps of slaughtered walk his way, †

learning that Samson now lies dead. No courage could be more admirable than that with which he receives the tidings, subdues his own grief and recites that

Samson hath quit himself

Like Samson, and heroically hath finished

A life heroic, on his enemies

Fully revenged. ‡

It is rather interesting that Oceanus, who performs somewhat the same function in Prometheus Bound as Manoa in Samson Agonistes may be described as having rather fatherly qualities. He is anxious for him and has shrewd advice which he imparts in a solicitous manner. But here his nobler impulses end. With self-interest characteristic of the ancient gods, Ocean retires lest he endanger his own security by too readily expressed sympathy for one out of sympathy with the king of heaven. How very

* Samson Agonistes: ll. 601 - 603.

† Samson Agonistes: ll. 1529 - 1530.

‡ Samson Agonistes: ll. 1709 - 1712.

different is he from the human characters of Samson Agonistes, the men of Dan and Manoa who wait upon Samson to the end of his existence!

Harapha is the fourth character of importance in Samson Agonistes. It is beside his repelling bluster that Samson's courage and faith stand out. His strength of body, "high built and proud", is not enough to cow the blinded giant, who remarks after he leaves:

His giantship is gone somewhat crest-fallen,
Stalking with less unconscionable strides,
And lower looks, but in a sultry chafe. *

His cowardly egotism is revealed when he regrets that he had not met Samson in the days of his prime but will deign to fight a blind man. Finally his cowardice gains the ascendancy as he retires rather precipitously before Samson's threats.

There is something about both Harapha and Hermes which calls forth the contempt of Samson and Prometheus. Hermes, too, has the bullying cruelty of one who has a sudden and unwonted advantage over a superior. The passages at arms are quite similar.

Har. Fair honour that thou dost thy God, in trusting
He will accept thee to defend his cause,
A murderer, a revolter and a robber!

Sams. Tongue-doughty giant, how dost thou prove me these?

— — — — —
Har. hadst thou not committed

* Samson Agonistes: ll. 1244 - 1246.

Notorious murder on those thirty men
At Ascalon, who never did thee harm,
Then, like a robber, stripp'd them of their robes?

- - - - -
Sams. I was to do my part from Heaven assigned,

- - - - -
Who now defies thee thrice to single fight.

- - - - -
Har. With thee, a man condemned, a slave enrolled?

- - - - -
Sams. Can'st thou for this, vain boaster?

- - - - -
Come nearer, part not hence so slight informed;
But take good heed my hand survey not thee.

Har. O Baal-zebub! can my ears unused
Hear these dishonours, and not render death?

Sams. No man withholds thee;

- - - - -
Har. This insolence other kind of answer fits.

Sams. Go baffled coward, lest I run upon thee,

- - - - -
Though in these chains, bulk without spirit vast,
And with one buffet lay thy structure low,

- - - - -
Har. By Astaroth, ere long thou shalt lament

These braveries, in irons loaden on thee.

- - - - -
Sams. His giantship is gone somewhat crest-fallen.*

Hermes. Thee, cunning sophist, dealing bitter words
Most bitterly against the gods - -

- - - - -
Thee, Father Jove commands to curb thy boasts.

- - - - -
Prom. This solemn mouthing, this proud pomp of phrase
Beseems the lackey of the gods.

- - - - -
For liefer would I lackey this bare rock
Than trip the messages of Father Jove.
The insolent thus with insolence I repay.

- - - - -
Hermes. Thou'rt mad, clean mad; thy wit's diseased, Prometheus.

- - - - -
Prosperity's too good for thee; thy temper
Could not endure it.

- - - - -
Prom. As Time grown old he teaches many things.

Hermes. Yet Time that teaches all leaves thee untaught.

Prom. Untaught in sooth, thus parleying with a slave!

- - - - -
* Samson Agonistes: ll. 1178 - 1244.

Hermes. Dost beard me like a boy? Beware.

Prom. Art not a boy and something yet more witless? *

Hermes, the messenger of the all-powerful Jove, is able to preserve much more dignity than Harapha at the end of his errand.

From this brief comparison of the leading characters, it becomes obvious that AEschylus was laboring under a limitation from which Milton was exempt. The old Greek writers were unable to give their genius free rein when it came to characterization because the drama was invariably concerned with characters whose natures had become a tradition. Oceanus, Hephaestus, Hermes were mythological personages quite familiar to the audience; the dramatist was not permitted too much license in portraying them. Io, the victim of Jove must personify the hopelessness of her condition. But even if the field was limited this did not prevent the Greek dramatist from employing his ability to the utmost where it was permitted. All the care that Milton lavished on "the persons" of Samson Agonistes AEschylus seems to have concentrated on Prometheus. Which condition of affairs appears to balance equally the excellence of the characterizations in the dramas.

The Thought of a drama, says Baum, is the third element to consider. But before reading out of either Samson Agonistes or Prometheus Bound any philosophical theories seemingly lodged there, the possibility of one of two erroneous impressions must be removed. One is that the poet had a definite theory to exem-

* Prometheus Bound.

plify by the play and the other that a certain philosophy so pervaded his thought that it tintured strongly all his writings. Neither one is strictly true. It is true that the perusal of the play will give rise to some profound moral or philosophical conviction but that is an incidental result and it is by accident that the same thought arises in the minds of both author and reader. In the same way, the philosophy of the personages in the drama is identical with that of the author only in so far as it would be so in real life. The dramatist must allow no subjectivity whatsoever to enter into the representation but must veil his own personality entirely for the creation of true-to-life characters.

In Samson Agonistes and Prometheus Bound there are philosophical doctrines which correspond with the convictions of the authors, philosophical doctrines which were peculiar to a certain age and philosophical doctrines which are akin to ideas expressed in the other play. Let us examine the latter first.

The theme of Samson Agonistes may be expressed in a very few words. Samson, destined to be a great deliverer of his people, falls captive to the enemy, is blinded and enslaved in the mill of the heathen tribe. In the midst of a feast to their gods he is able to vindicate the faith of his own god by bringing their heathen temple crashing down upon them. Even though he himself is destroyed along with the feasting Philistines, his great purpose has been fulfilled. In the words of the Chorus:

All is best though we oft doubt
What the unsearchable dispose
Of Highest Wisdom brings about,
And ever best found in the close,
Oft he seems to hide his face,
But unexpectedly returns,
And to his faithful champion hath in place
Bore witness gloriously, *

the final conclusion is the achievement of a sudden and awful victory, the assertion of Eternal Providence even though His means have been obscure and the road to victory devious.

In the philosophical thinking of AEschylus' age and AEschylus himself, as it is explained by classical scholars, there are five outstanding questions which are concerned with blood revenge, the curse of the gods placed on certain families, the fate of the souls of men, and the justice and omnipotence of Zeus. Prometheus Bound is not concerned with the first four of these. With the omnipotence of Zeus it is.

Prometheus, nailed to the rock in Scythia by Jove's decree still maintains his defiance and is hurled to Tartarus in punishment. The will of Zeus must not be defied. It is irresistible and his order is immutable and irrevocable. Hermes expresses the position of his master:

The mouth of Jove

Hath never known a lie, and speech with him

Is prophet of its deed.*

Between the two conclusions there is a real kinship. AEschylus, a pupil of Pythagorus, had more esoteric theology than any other Greek poet and this, together with his emphasis on the inviolable majesty of God, is the source of an Hebraic element in his writing. In Samson Agonistes Milton's usual Christian doctrines give place to something more primitive, a perception which was common to earlier civilizations, yet which reached its highest expression in early Hebraic religious passages. The Choric odes of Samson Agonistes resemble very much the bursts of eloquence in the Hebrew prophets. It is the dominance of the idea of the tangle of human life and the inscrutable course of Divine Providence which lends the same element of grim theology to both dramas.

Apart from this there is little likeness in the thought trends of the two dramas. Sixteen hundred Christian years separated them and ages and localities vastly different nourished them. Yet one thing the authors did have in common and that was a vast fund of idealism.

Milton's milieu was ever idealistic. Even his private life was modeled after an idea. He was seized by great passions, wholly approved by judgment, which he never repented. His sight and his health and the years of his life which might have been spent in poetical endeavor were sacrificed to the pursuit of a great ideal. And so far as his writings testify, they were never regretted.

* Prometheus Bound.

This tendency received great impetus from the condition of affairs in England during Milton's life. The Puritan movement, which in the beginning was purely religious and extremely idealistic, came to be, from the cult of a few spiritually minded, the dictator of a whole nation. It is the one case in history where a great surge of idealism suddenly and radically changed the whole structure of national life. The unity of English life was broken and a struggle waged between two forces in religious, social and political life and even in the individual conscience. The insouciance of an earlier period was gone; earnest and studied choice entered into each life.

In Milton's writings the ideal formed the base for construction. He began with an abstraction and embodied it with human conceits and foibles. His material consisted of all the banefulness by which man obscures the sublime in life and his own blind aspiration toward higher things. Yet the loftiness of the ideal shines out from all else, always characterized by an unceasing tendency from evil to good, a perpetual aspiration to moral greatness.

Hence Samson Agonistes is an expression of Milton's idea that life is a strife between good and evil in which the good ultimately triumphs. The forces of evil are represented by Dagon, Harapha, Dalila and their tribe; the good by the Israelites and Samson who are the chosen of God. There are some who profess to find an allegorical significance in the play. Samson, they say, represents the Puritans, the Philistines the Royalists and the

ending is a prophecy of justice to come. The allegory, however, cannot be traced in any detail and it is doubtful that Milton ever intended it to. There is a return to simplicity in the play which makes it unlikely. Dogma, which had run parallel to psychology in Milton's former work, is banished from Samson Agonistes. The religious theories which he had dwelt upon in former poems, of original sin, of Salvation through Christ, of the Trinity, are all omitted. No explanation is given for Dalila's innate wickedness, no prophecy of Christ is spoken and the conception of God is so vague that it might be said to verge on the Deistic or Pantheistic. All religious views are merged into a simple and lofty representation of strife between good and evil.

Our understanding of the philosophy in Prometheus Bound is hampered somewhat by the loss of the third part of the trilogy. To the casual reader Prometheus might appear as a sort of "protomartyr of liberty, bearing up with the strength of a god against the punishment unjustly inflicted on him by the celestial usurper and tyrant Jove".* But it is certain that AEschylus, the orthodox Athenian, could not so regard him. With the will of Zeus there is no arguing. The punishment of Prometheus is not unjust; he was worthy of it; neither is there any hope that Jove can modify in any way his right to extract the highest penalty from anyone who opposes his will. Yet Prometheus was the benefactor of mankind. He made it possible for man to lift himself from brutish degradation by giving him the secret of fire and of the arts. Such

* Blackie: Prometheus Bound: Introductory Remarks.

benevolence cannot but rouse the highest admiration. So the conclusion of Prometheus Bound leaves conflicting and clashing emotions, our sense of Jove's justice at war with the sense of approval for Prometheus and this might be taken as an expression of AEschylus' perplexity and hopelessness. But from evidence gathered from the other dramas and trilogies composed by the author, it is clear that such is not the case. In the Eumenides notably, the third part of the trilogy effects a reconciliation between the contending interests, the emotion of approval that Orestes avenged his father's death and emotion of horror aroused by his matricide. No doubt the tragic knot produced in the Prometheus Bound was unloosed in the succeeding play in a like manner. And in its solution it is certain that Prometheus will not lose any of his high position with which AEschylus invests him nor will Jove yield any of his supreme control.

To sum up the points of general likeness in the thought of the two poets, it may be said that, in so far as Samson Agonistes and Prometheus Bound are representative, both Milton and AEschylus were poets very religious, deeply contemplative, extremely idealistic, having an unshaken belief in the ultimate triumph of good or the reconciliation of apparently warring elements, and being extraordinarily free from any superstitions or bigotries peculiar to their particular ages and locales.

The structure and machinery, and the characterization of the ancient Greek drama very easily may be disvalued when placed in juxtaposition to the modern drama; the thought may be criticized

from many different standpoints; but the poetic content is unsurpassed by any other drama. Only a Goethe, a Shakespeare, a Dante and a Milton could achieve even an equal measure of beauty and profundity. A rich heritage of legendary tradition, a people of unusual intellectual culture and susceptibility, and geniuses like Sophocles, Euripides, Pindar, Bacchylides and AEschylus, whose cadences are still the delight of the discriminating ear, combined to make Greek tragedy a primary contribution to the literature of the world.

The genius of English literature proudly claims a close relationship with the Greek. In the vigorous and varied career of English poetry, the masters have not only drawn from native material but have also learned much from the achievements of other nations. And so English poetry not only has attained the superbripping and singing measures of lyricists and the vitality given it by the democracy and universality of the narrators and the dramatists but also it has maintained the loftiness and richness of content indicated by classical tradition.

In their respective spheres, AEschylus and Milton deserve first rank. AEschylus enjoyed a renown during his lifetime which is not always afforded great genius. The real genius of Milton, who owns no superior in the mastery of the English language save Shakespeare, was only recognized by a few scholars during his lifetime. Both poets were deaf to the promptings of all save the high calling of their art, a demand which bound them to an ever growing, ever widening concept of excellence,

readily traced in succeeding poems. In Samson Agonistes Milton reached his highest expression of the poignancy of human tragedy. Prometheus Bound is the most extensively popular work in such a lofty vein. The poetry of Samson Agonistes is not the best example of Milton's verse, just as Prometheus Bound is not the best example of AEschylus', but both are typical of certain stages of development and both are remarkable specimens of the poetry of their respective nations.

Milton chose for Samson Agonistes blank verse in iambic pentameter, a form which he used to perfection in Paradise Lost. In his last drama he allowed himself a freedom which only a master hand could venture. Thirty-eight percent of the lines are irregular, the irregularities occurring oftener in the Choric odes than in any other passages. The prevalence of weak endings is noticeable and is found to be particularly suitable to dramatic verse. The extra unaccented syllable at the end of a line serves to knit the passage together with a rapidity of movement akin to that of ordinary conversation. Paucity of rhyme is noticeable but there seems to be neither purpose nor effect of this which is easy to ascertain.

The effect of the irregularities to lend variety to the long passages is particularly good.

Irrevocably dark, total eclipse

Without all hope of day! *

* Samson Agonistes: ll. 81 - 82.

is the short utterance of utter hopelessness interjected in Samson's first long speech.

But made hereby obnoxious more
To all the miseries of life,
Life in captivity
Among inhuman foes, *

has all the spasmodic utterance of extreme misery. The short irregular lines of the Chorus are used mainly in passages which merely intensify the impression made by the last speaker. It has almost the effect of a chant which serves the purpose of echoing sentiments very well.

While their hearts were jocund and sublime,
Drunk with idolatry, drunk with wine,
And fat regorged bulls and goats,
Chaunting their idol, and preferring
Before our living Dread, who dwells
In Silo, his bright sanctuary,
Among them he a spirit of phrenzy sent,
Who hurt their minds,
And urged them on with mad desire
To call in haste for their destroyer. †

In the didactic passages and those full of sententious sayings, the Chorus lapses into regular iambic pentameter again:

Tax not divine disposal; wisest men
Have erred, and by bad women been deceived. ‡

* Samson Agonistes: ll. 106 - 109.
† Samson Agonistes: ll. 1669 - 1678.
‡ Samson Agonistes: ll. 210 - 211.

— — — — —
Yet beauty, though injurious, hath strange power,
After offence returning, to regain
Love once possessed. *

— — — — —
But patience is more oft the exercise
Of saints, the trial of their fortitude. †

Since the measures of the Greek and English languages are so very different, it is not wise to attempt any comparison with AEschylus' verse forms. Suffice it to say that AEschylus employed at least two of the same devices as Milton. He varied the length of lines widely and to express various emotions he changed the metre from one form to another. This is noticeable in the change first from iambic verse to Bacchic and then to anapaestic which marks increased agitation in Prometheus' mind when the Oceanides approach. It is comparable to the change in rhythm to express Samson's rising emotion after the visit of his father.

Milton's "organ voice" had a theme worthy of its magestic roll in the agony of Samson. Particularly in such passages as:

O dark, dark, amid the blaze of noon,
Irrevocably dark, total eclipse
Without all hope of day!
O first-created beam, and thou great Word,

* Samson Agonistes: ll. 1003 - 1005.
† Samson Agonistes: ll. 1287 - 1288.

"Let there be light, and light was over all,"

Why am I thus bereaved thy prime decree?

The Sun to me is dark

And silent as the Moon,

When she deserts the night,

Hid in her vacant interlunar cave, *

the depth of feeling expressed in the anguished words bespeaks the power of force and restraint which made Milton a "lord of language". This harmony of feeling and effect, this sheer verbal splendor of the blank verse is unsurpassed.

The Choric odes are of a different nature; they are of a lyrical character. Here, the light touch which made L'Allegro and Il Penseroso so utterly charming and which so distinguished Comus, might have lent some small part of its grace. The nature of the theme would exclude the linked sweetness of the former and the faery delicacy of the latter; the melody must be of a different kind and quality. Yet the strains should ring as true as other pieces of lyricism from the same pen. This, however, is not the case. A decided lack is apparent in such passages as:

It is not virtue, wisdom, valour, wit,

Strength, comeliness of shape, or amplest merit,

That woman's love can win, or long inherit;

* Samson Agonistes: ll. 80 - 89.

But what it is, hard is to say,

Harder to hit,

Which may soever men refer it. *

This is, of course, the worst example. But in almost all passages the balanced cadence of former years has become a little uncertain, the sense of the delicate charms of sound is not quite so keen. It is the sterner, sometimes harsh, verse in keeping with the didactic, ethical purpose, which attains to the superlative quality with which Milton was accustomed to imbue his poetry.

Æschylus, too, has a grandeur of phraseology which distinguishes his work. The bracing, vigorous tone is particularly in keeping with the awful majesty of Prometheus.

'Tis a light thing for him whose foot's unwarped
 By misadventure's meshes to advise
 And counsel the unfortunate. But I
 Foreknew my fate, and if I erred, I erred
 With conscious purpose, purchasing man's weal
 With mine own grief. I knew I should offend
 The Thunderer, though deeming not that he
 Would perch me thus to pine 'twixt Earth and Sky,
 Of this wild wintry waste sole habitant.

But cease to weep for ills that weeping mends not. †

The majesty with which Æschylus describes Jove is no less than that with which Milton describes Jehovah, God of Israel.

* Samson Agonistes: ll. 1010 - 1015.

† Prometheus Bound:

— — — — —
Our Living Dread, who dwells
In Silo, his bright sanctuary. *

And, like Milton, AEschylus has his lighter touch
which appears in the words of the fair Oceanides.

From our breeze-borne car descending,
With light foot we greet the ground.
Leaving ether chaste, smooth pathway
Of the gently-winnowing wing. †

All the lightness of the faery-like creatures is pictured here.
Each picture of Ocean's daughters is wrought with exquisite delicacy:

I weep, Prometheus.
From its soft founts distilled the flowing tear
My cheek bedashes. †

But AEschylus did not always have perfect balance and restraint. He had almost an Oriental figurativeness and habitually employed a profusion of metaphores, similes and epithets. At times he confused two ideas:

The bright-rayed fire,
Mother of arts, flower of thy potency. †

— — — — —
Along the coast of Rhea's bosomed sea
Thy steps were driven; thence with mazy course
Tossed hither. †

* Samson Agonistes: ll. 1673.
† Prometheus Bound.

At others he was guilty of grammatical obscurities which Milton could never have written. And lastly, he sketched a few passages of horror of which Milton was never capable. Indeed Hermes words to Prometheus:

For he will send his Eagle-messenger,
His winged hound, in crimson food delighting,
To tear thy rags of flesh with bloody beak,
And daily come an uninvited guest
To banquet on thy gory liver, *

are outstanding among other classical pictures of horror.

Milton's figurativeness in Samson Agonistes was, as always, rich and restrained.

Who tore the lion as the lion tears the kid. †

— — — — —
As with the force of winds and waters pent
When mountains tremble, those two massy pillars
With horrible convulsion to and fro
He tugged. ‡

He used a succession of epithets at times but they are always characterized by an admirable restraint.

Matchless in might,

The glory late of Israel, now the grief! ‡

Sometimes a single, well-chosen epithet makes a verse strongly emphatic:

* Prometheus Bound.
† Samson Agonistes: l. 128
‡ Samson Agonistes: ll. 1647 - 1650.
‡ Samson Agonistes: ll. 178 - 179.

Tongue-doughty giant! *

- - - -
Out, out, hyaena! †

Very frequently passages are noticeable for a certain terse quality, usually when Samson's anger or contempt have been aroused:

Chor. She's gone - a manifest serpent by her sting
Discovered in the end, till now concealed.

Sams. So let her go: God sent her to debase me,
And aggravate my folly, who committed
To such a viper his most sacred trust. ‡

But the tendency toward restraint is not sufficient to injure in any way the number of figures which are equal to any in former poems.

Restless thoughts, that, like a deadly swarm
Of hornets armed, no sooner found alone,
But rush upon me thronging, and present
Times past. †

- - - - -
But who is this? what thing of sea or land -
Female of sex it seems -
That, so bedecked, ornate, and gay,
Comes this way sailing,
Like a stately ship
Of Tarsus, bound for the isles

* Samson Agonistes: 1. 1181.
† Samson Agonistes: 1. 748.
‡ Samson Agonistes: 11. 999 - 1001.
‡ Samson Agonistes: 11. 19 - 22.

Of Javan or Gadire,
 With all her bravery on, and tackle trim,
 Sails filled, and streams waving,
 Courted by all the winds that hold them play.*

Lastly, something should be said of the few passages wherein Milton has deliberately imitated the words of the classics. His poetry is full of words used in the original Latin sense which help him to pack every line full of meaning and to enrich the expressive power of phrases by doubling their significance. Latin and Greek idioms translated into English are fewer and have not the same value.

O mirror of our fickle state,
 Since man on earth unparalleled! †

and

With studied argument, and much persuasion sought,
 Lenient of grief and anxious thought; ‡

are somewhat awkward and not nearly so effective as the short expressions: "silent moon", "limbs diffused", "seems a tune harsh, and of dissonant mood". Some of these echo phrases from Prometheus Bound.

Samson Agonistes. Chalybean-tempered steel. ‡

Prometheus Bound. The chalybs, workers in iron.

Samson Agonistes. Not willingly, but tangled in the fold of dire necessity. ‡

- * Samson Agonistes: ll. 710 - 719.
- † Samson Agonistes: ll. 164 - 165.
- ‡ Samson Agonistes: ll. 658 - 659.
- ‡ Samson Agonistes: l. 133.
- ‡ Samson Agonistes: ll. 1665-1666.

Prometheus Bound. We all must bear our portioned fate, nor idly court battle with a strong necessity. †

Samson Agonistes. A sin that Gentiles in their parables condemn to their Abyss and horrid pains confined. *

Prometheus Bound. Deep in death-receiving Hades
Had he bound me, had he whelmed me
In Tartarean pit, unfathomed,
Fettered with unyielding bonds! †

But the most striking case of what appears to be direct imitation is found in the passage:

God of our fathers! what is Man,
That thou towards him with hand so various -
Or might I say contrarious? -
Temper'st thy providence through his short course,
Not evenly as thou rul'st
The angelic orders, and inferior creatures mute,
Irrational and brute? †

The corresponding passage in Prometheus Bound is:

For what is man? behold!
Can he requite thy love - child of a day -
Or help thy extreme need? Hast thou not seen
The blind and aimless strivings,
The barren blank endeavor,
The pithless deeds, of the fleeting dreamlike race? †

* Samson Agonistes: ll. 499 - 501.

† Samson Agonistes: ll. 667 - 673.

‡ Prometheus Bound.

This completes a general survey and comparison of the two poems Samson Agonistes and Prometheus Bound. The results may be briefly summed up. AEschylus and Milton have used the form of the early Greek drama to a like degree of excellence, although Milton has departed a trifle from the traditional use of the Chorus; the characterization in Milton's drama is slightly more commendable than that of AEschylus', the superiority of the character of Prometheus being due to more heroic material as well as AEschylus' genius in handling it; the thought contents can hardly be compared but neither can one be extolled above the other; the versification of both is surpassing and can scarcely be criticized on any ground save ruggedness, which is, in view of the nature of the theme, a virtue.

But such an observation seems unimportant beside the delight afforded by the strange similarities in the plays and the characters; by the strange effect of rivalry in the two dramas, first one reaching a new peak of sublimity, then the other; and by the echoing sentiments of the Jewish Prometheus and the deified Samson. Withal the critics and lovers of both poets strike a balance in their praise. It devolves on us to agree first with Mr. Blackie that "the Prometheus Bound is felt throughout to be one of the most powerful productions of one of the most powerful minds that the history of literature knows"; and then with Dryden when he remarked "this fellow (Milton) cuts us all out and the ancients too".