

THE EPIC AND TRAGEDY OF PARADISE LOST

Together with an

Appendix: Samson Agonistes, an Internal Tragedy

by

WILLIAM WAYNE DUMARESQ

B.A., University of British Columbia, 1953

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department
of
English

We accept this thesis as conforming to the
required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
September, 1956

ABSTRACT

Concerning literary theory, this thesis promotes the view that Milton acceded to the idea that in literature there exists a hierarchy of forms (ranging in order of value from the epic to the tragedy, from the tragedy to the comedy, and from the comedy to the lyric). The principal consideration throughout the work is whether the epic or the tragedy is the highest of all literary forms.

Milton's debt to Plato and Aristotle is discussed, and his disagreement or agreement with Aristotle's evaluation of tragedy as superior to the epic is debated. This argument gives rise to an even wider problem, that of the relative merits and influences of Platonism and Aristotelianism and how those two forces, sometimes complementary, sometimes opposed, influenced Milton and the sixteenth-century Italian critics whom Milton acknowledges as worthy critics for a poet to follow.

A further chapter is devoted to a fundamental point in literary theory which arises out of the previous considerations: the proper place of the concepts of the general and the particular in poetry and in art generally. Milton's own attitude to particularization and generalization is, of course, the object of the speculation. The argument of the thesis, following upon this lead, devotes itself for a chapter to the manner and result of Milton's attitude, as it is shown by the construction of Paradise Lost. The con-

sideration of his construction thence leads to what is probably the key to the understanding of the epic as a whole: the unequalled accomplishment of the most complete time-scheme found anywhere in poetry.

The core of the thesis is presented in the consideration of Book IX of Paradise Lost, which is recognized as the tragedy within the whole epic, self-contained, and offering therefore itself as the answer to those (like Aristotle) who object to the lack of concentration and the overly diffuse nature of epics in general.

The final chapter of the thesis points in a new direction. This question is asked: What is the value of Paradise Lost? And several of the emotional tests of value are considered.

Because of its integration with the thesis as a whole, there has been added a consideration of Samson Agonistes, with special reference to Aristotle, in the form of an Appendix.

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for an advanced degree at the University of British Columbia, I agree that the Library shall make it freely available for reference and study. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by the Head of my Department or by his representative. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Department of English

The University of British Columbia,
Vancouver 8, Canada.

Date September, 1956.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Acknowledgment is due to Prof.
Roy Daniells, Prof. Northrop Frye,
Prof. Leonard Grant, and Prof. Thorlief
Larsen for providing several of the
ideas expressed in this thesis.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter I:	Introduction.
Chapter II:	Milton and Aristotle (1)
Chapter III:	Milton and Aristotle (2)
Chapter IV:	Platonism and Aristotelianism.
Chapter V:	Milton and the Sixteenth-Century Italian Critics.
Chapter VI:	The General and the Particular.
Chapter VII:	The Construction of <u>Paradise Lost</u> .
Chapter VIII:	The Concept of Time.
Chapter IX:	Book IX and the Two Types of Tragedy.
Chapter X:	The Test of Emotional Value.
Appendix:	<u>Samson Agonistes</u> , an Internal Tragedy.

CHAPTER I : INTRODUCTION

Critics on the epic form. -- Unconscious to conscious form. -- The twofold intention. -- Intention of the theory. -- Intention of the principle. -- Critique of the approach. -- Fallacy of the critique. -- The meaning in form. -- Defence of the approach -- The example of the Oresteia. -- Three levels in a single work.

Critics have provided scholarship with a great volume of work on Milton's Paradise Lost; it is therefore surprising that there is little outstanding criticism of the real significance of the form of the epic poem. Although one can, for example, point with admiration, though not with full consent, to the group of essays Addison wrote for his paper,¹ there is only a very superficial or fragmentary consideration by the standard critics of the exegesis of the work in Milton's mind. The imaginative evolution, however, while being often closely linked with the formal aspect of artistic creation, is not what is here to be considered.

It is true that there is a considerable amount of work available on the successive steps Milton took in choosing the epic mode for his great life work. Among others, Hanford in his handbook² devotes an ample space to the gradual emergence of Paradise Lost in Milton's mind. However, Hanford's discussion

1 Joseph Addison, Criticism on Milton's Paradise Lost, ed., E. Arber, (The Spectator, 31 December 1711-May 3, 1712), Westminster, Constable & Co., 1898.

2 J. H. Hanford, A Milton Handbook, New York, Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1926, pp. 177 ff.; see also E. M. W. Tillyard, Milton, London, Chatto & Windus, 1946, pp. 257-88.

of form ends where perhaps it should more properly begin: that is, at the point where the subtle "deep well of unconscious cerebration"³ becomes an overt act; where the work of art assumes a material existence; in other words, at the point where the creativity of the artist becomes conscious rather than unconscious, and where that consciousness can either cause the germination or the permanent suppression or subversion of the young seedling. There is, other than of its mechanics, no really valuable study of the form of Paradise Lost and the significance of the success Milton attained.

The intention of this enquiry is to indicate both a theory and a related argument.⁴ The theory is that Milton attempted to overcome the objections that were apparently raised by Aristotle against the epic poem in favour of the tragedy, objections which indicated Aristotle's effort to decide which was the highest literary form. The argument which will be set forth concerns the idea that the epic poem is, in almost direct contradiction to Aristotle's belief, a form superior to the tragic because of length and the greater poetic capacity resulting from the existence of that length.⁵

3 Henry James, quoted by J. L. Lowes, The Road to Xanadu, (Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1927, p. 56.

4 That is, a theory and an argument, but not a proof. The thesis herein presented cannot be proved because the nature of the subject will bear only in part the restriction of scientific analysis.

5 For Aristotle's argument see the Poetics, XXVI, trans., S. H. Butcher in Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art, New York, Dover Publications, 1951, pp. 106-111.

In presenting the theory that Milton aimed at answering Aristotle's objections to the epic poem and at overcoming the classical preference for the tragedy, it is hoped that light will be cast upon the general construction of Paradise Lost and the construction of Book IX in particular. Since, moreover, Aristotle's chief objection to the epic appears to be on the grounds of unity, the chief consideration here will be Milton's answer to Aristotle's argument that "the concentrated effect is more pleasurable than one which is spread over a long time and so diluted."⁶ Although there are not, concerning the matter at hand, many direct references to Aristotle's ideas in Milton's works, I shall attempt to show that those few references at least indicate Milton's knowledge and understanding of the problems set forth by the Greek philosopher. At the most, it is hoped that Milton's knowledge of Aristotle will indicate an intrinsic, if not always conscious, attempt to succeed where Virgil perhaps failed, that is, Milton's attempt to answer Aristotle's objection to the lack of intensity which he thought was the essential weakness of the epic, and which, consequently, led him to prefer tragedy.

In presenting the argument, on the other hand, that whatever Milton consciously intended, his work actually does answer the objections Aristotle makes concerning the epic, it is hoped that we can consider a chief problem arising from it: the opposition of two of the emotional tests of value.⁷ Although

6 Aristotle, op. cit., XXVI, 5.

7 Discussed in Chapter X.

a discussion of the importance of intensity and steadiness, the two values to be here considered, often is of speculative interest only, and not of practical worth; nevertheless, for our purposes, the deepest meaning -- even the raison d'etre of art itself -- frequently comes into importance, and it is upon the tests of emotional value that its best intellectual defence rests. Thus, the theory that Milton knew and sought to improve upon Aristotle, and the argument that arises from this knowledge, will underlie the present work.

It may be at once objected that the treatment of the form of the epic poem is too far removed from the consideration of its content, and that each form of poetry, whether it is lyric, comedy, satire, tragedy, epic, or prophetic utterance, must be considered for its value within and not without its context.⁸

The fallacy of this critique lies in the fact that art is a part of life and not a separate extra-human activity. If the seeming liberality of the acceptance of a technically successful lyric on the same plane of value as the technically successful epic were acceptable, all the works the western world

⁸ The period from the Restoration to the present day has seen a curious denigration on the part of many critics concerning the evaluation of forms of literature. Saintsbury and Spingarn, to name only two recent spokesmen, consider, in their criticism of Renaissance theory, only the distortion of lesser Renaissance critics concerning the meaning of pure forms, the doctrine of which derives ultimately from Plato. The most persuasive argument in defence of formal evaluation lies in the consideration, not that the true type of epic, tragedy, or lyric can be minutely described in all its details, but that the true archetypal forms exist ideally in the "deep well" of the poetic mind and can, ultimately, be extracted from their obscurity to be exposed in all their purity.

has singled out as its most inspired, as its greatest monuments to experience, as its most enriching communications, would needs be radically devaluated. No one can prefer, for example, Meredith's concluding sonnet in the Modern Love sequence which, standing alone, has the perfection of a Sophoclean tragedy, to the larger capacity of Oedipus Rex:

Thus piteously Love closed what he begat:
The union of this ever-diverse pair!
These two were rapid falcons in a snare,
Condemned to do the flitting of the bat.
Lovers beneath the singing sky of May,
They wandered once; clear as the dew on flowers:
But they fed not on the advancing hours:
Their hearts held cravings for the buried day.
Then each applied to each that fatal knife,
Deep questioning, which probes to endless dole.
Ah, what a dusty answer gets the soul
When hot for certainty in this our life!-
In tragic hints here see what evermore
Moves dark as yonder midnight ocean's force,
Thundering like ramping hosts of warrior horse,
To throw that faint thin line upon the shore!⁹

Pity and fear are commingled in such a manner that they purge themselves in the Meredith poem, just as they do in the great tragedy, into a catharsis; and yet, although technically the sonnet is perhaps flawless,¹⁰ the greatness of it is more dependent upon the experience the reader brings to it than upon the experience contained within it. Similarly, Jonson's "Drink to me only" is considered a perfect lyric, and yet the saga of the love of Tristran and Iseult is, in comparison, much the

⁹ George Meredith, Modern Love, London, Macmillan, 1892, pp. 66-7.

¹⁰ The charge, however, of inconsistency in imagery is probably correct.

greater work because it is more than an ordinary romance, since it is a tragic romance which demands and depends therefore upon a much wider proportion than the Jonson lyric.

There is, however, a half-truth in the objection against the treatment of form, since form completely divorced from content is a shallow thing indeed. Nevertheless, once the fact of meaning in form is accepted, then there is no real obstacle to the formal approach. "Meaning in form" indicates that form and content are inextricable, that the structure of a poem finds its meaning in its themes. That is why to some degree one can say that certain themes are appropriate to certain forms, and vice versa. Romantic love finds its lyric and the lyric finds its love theme; the drama finds its tragedy and the tragedy its particular quantity; the really large, expansive story, such a story as that which tells the life and death of the world, finds its epic, and the expansiveness of the epic, in turn, finds its grand theme.

Perhaps the treatment of the significance of form is best defended by the consideration of quantity and the possibilities of that quantity. An epic or a novel or a tragedy can all contain within themselves three levels of reality: the naturalistic, the marchen, and the supernatural. The lyric, however, can represent only one level at a time, and, in rare cases of extreme artistic talent, perhaps two. The tragedy can contain two levels with some, often great, success. The only tragic work, however, which contains all three levels is more an epic-drama in style than a tragedy in the Aristotelian or the Elizabethan mode.

This work is Aeschylus' only extant trilogy.¹¹ Its uniqueness, however, does not preclude its discussion, because it is of great significance in any discussion of dramatic form. It is probably the best literary example of the technically successful stage presentation aspiring beyond its physical and quantitative limitations. Concerning the levels of reality, the Agamemnon, Choephoroe, and the Eumenides, considered as three acts of the whole drama of the house of Atreus, rise from the stark "everyday" realism of the first act, to the fantastic märchen of the second; thence, to the supernatural revelation of divine justice in the final act.¹²

Before Aeschylus, Homer, especially in the Iliad, had been the only poet to create naturalism, märchen, and supernaturalism within one work. Aeschylus, perhaps, improved upon the epic writer however in his tighter-knit form, although many objections may be raised on the point. Dante, Tolstoy, Emily Brontë, Dostoevsky, and Milton can be named as other poets who successfully included all three levels within a single work;

¹¹ Gilbert Murray, trans., The Oresteia, London, Allen & Unwin, 1946.

¹² E. T. Owen writes of the revelation of divine justice in the following passage: "The lesson (Aeschylus) teaches, if anything so tremendous and imaginative can be called a lesson (it is an experience rather), may be roughly, imperfectly expressed thus: the gracious and humane, but infinitely precarious, compromise of civilization, by which man has come to a working arrangement with the fierce primal instincts within him and the hostile forces without -- the whole blind antagonism of Nature, of anagke (necessity) -- is the outward and visible sign of the harmony which holds, and just holds, all the discordant elements of the universe together." (The Harmony of Aeschylus, Toronto, Clarke, Irwin, 1952, p. 128.)

and all of these writers required a form larger than that which Aristotelian tragedy afforded.

CHAPTER II : MILTON AND ARISTOTLE (1)

Milton's interest in Aristotle. -- His changing interest in Aristotle. -- His preference for Plato. -- Plato's doctrine of Love. -- The archetype of Eden. -- Life and Hope. -- The noble savage. -- The Archetype and the end of art. -- Joyce's theory of art. -- Depersonalization. -- The number of emotions treated. -- The frustrating emotions in Paradise Lost. -- The two kinds of poetry. -- Judgement and the successful poem. -- Hope as a natural duty. -- Active poetry. -- Static poetry.

That Milton derived many of his most important ideas from Plato is a well-known fact of scholarship.¹³ The ideals of chastity, of the perfect state, and of virtuous love are but several of the ideals which have a basis in, or at least a compatibility with, Platonic ideals. His debt to Aristotle, on the other hand, is not so frequently noted, not because it is any less profound, but rather because it is less obvious.

Not only was Aristotelian philosophy becoming unpopular at the time of Milton's student days at Christ's College, Cambridge,¹⁴ but it is important also to recognize that, temperamentally, the psychological naturalism of Aristotle is neither appealing nor convincing to the religious supernaturalism of the poetically inspired mind. Aristotelian ideas concerning fine art are essentially those of a psychologist, or of the empirical

¹³ For a thorough treatment of the subject, see Irene Samuel, Milton and Plato, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1947.

¹⁴ Masson writes that "it is enough to say that, as Milton in 1644 was one of those who advocated a radical reform in the system of the English Universities, and helped to bring the system as it existed into popular disrepute, so the dissatisfaction which then broke out so conspicuously, and not only then began, but was then manifested. In other words, Milton, while at Cambridge, was one of those younger spirits -- Ramists, Baconists,

observer of the phenomena of epic and tragedy, not the ideas of the practising poet, writing on the literary form.

There is a further reason, and perhaps the most important of all, why Milton found Aristotle to be a less pervasive influence than Plato. J. M. Harrison points it out in his discussion of Milton's debt to Platonic philosophy:

The most characteristic side of Milton's idealism, however, is revealed in his teaching of the doctrine of chastity as the purity of the soul. In the defence of his own life which he made in 'An Apology for Smectymnuus,' he acknowledges an important debt in his education to the teaching of Platonic philosophy.¹⁵

And Harrison, along with Miss Samuel, illustrates the fact by quoting Milton's own words concerning his Platonism:

Thus from the Laureat fraternity of Poets, riper yeares, and the ceaselesse round of study and reading led me to the shady spaces of philosophy, but chiefly to the divine volumes of Plato, and his equall Xenophon. Where if I should tell ye what I learnt, of chastity and love, I meane that which is truly so, whose charming cup is only vertue which she bears in her hand to those who are worthy. The rest are cheated with a thick intoxi-

Platonists, as they might be called collectively or distributively--who were at war with the methods of the place, and did not conceal that they were so." (David Masson, The Life of John Milton, Cambridge, Macmillan, 1859, Vol. 1, pp. 238-9.) Masson also informs us that "Aristotle was still in great authority in this hemisphere, or rather two-thirds of the sphere, of the academic world. Not only were his logical treatises and those of his commentators and expositors used as text-books, but the main part of the active intellectual discipline of the students consisted in the incessant practice, on all kinds of metaphysical and moral questions, of that art of dialectical disputation, which, under the name of the Aristotelian method, had been set up by the schoolmen as the means to universal truth." (Ibid., p. 230.)

¹⁵ J. M. Harrison, Platonism in English Poetry, New York, Columbia University Press, 1903, p. 47.

cating potion which a certaine Sorceresse the abuser of loves name carries about; and how the first and chieftest office of love, begins and ends in the soule, producing those happy twins of her divine generation knowledge and vertue, with such abstracted sublimities as these, it might be worth your listning, Readers, as I may one day hope to have ye in a still time, when there shall be no chiding....¹⁶

Miss Samuel is particularly interested in Milton's theory of love, and she traces its development and coincidence with Platonic thought. It is Plato, and not Aristotle, in whom Milton finds the basis for Christian Charity, and Milton surpasses, as it were, Plato in elevating Platonic love to the point where it becomes compatible with Christian love. An incidental effect of this elevation on Milton's part is the relegation of Plato's elevation of knowledge to a secondary position of value. Miss Samuel writes, concerning this condition of elevating love, in the following passage:

We now can see why Milton substituted love for knowledge as the mainspring of human joy, and how the theory of love which he learned from Plato led him to go beyond the Platonic scale of values. Since love is the moving impulse without which man rests content in his limited self, it becomes the source of every good, as it is the power which moves man to reach for the good that is not in him. And reason being the faculty that recognizes good, love is rational, beginning in the soul and desiring what will perfect it. Thus much Milton could learn from Diotima and Socrates: knowledge is the effect of love in action. But what precisely does love seek to possess and know? Plato had said that the object of love is an Idea, the perfect Beauty, the whole and complete Good. Christianity said that God alone is wholly good and perfectly beautiful; that is, Christianity identified God with the universals that Plato thought the ultimate

¹⁶ John Milton, An Apology, &c. in The Works of John Milton, New York, Columbia University Press, 1931, Vol. III, Part I, p. 305. - (Note: Henceforward, all references, except those to the poems, are to the Columbia Edition of Milton's Works.)

object of knowledge. If God, then, becomes the proper goal of Christian philosophy, knowledge cannot be the highest aim of humanity, and this for the good reason that God is unknowable.¹⁷

Plato represents, moreover, throughout his dialogues, and especially in the Republic, the ideal state to which man can assume. In Jungian language, that ideal state is the same as the psychological and universal search for the archetype of Eden.¹⁸ The condition of Eden is the condition of motionlessness, of a state in which time and action are arrested; in short, Eden is a state of perfect peace.¹⁹ It is "the still point of the turning world,"²⁰ a spot which is found not only within the religious nature of living man, but also within death, the natural end of man. That is, Paradise or Eden is the state towards which the frustration of life leads men. Death effects the catharsis, and the catharsis, in its turn, heralds the reign of an enduring and static peace.

Apart from its association with death, the archetype of Eden is, paradoxically, closely commingled with hope, the

17 Irene Samuel, op. cit., pp. 167-8.

18 See Maud Bodkin, Archetypal Patterns in Poetry, London, Oxford University Press, 1934; and C.G. Jung, The Integration of the Personality, New York, Farrar & Rinehart, 1939.

19 The psychological recurrence and historical omnipresence of the archetype of Eden is, incidentally, illustrated by the great quantity of Garden literature which has been given great attention by poets and mystics of every age, perhaps most of all Milton's. A typical contemporary example is Edith Sitwell's anthology, A Book of Flowers, London, Macmillan, 1952.

20 T.S. Eliot, Four Quartets, London, Faber & Faber, 1944, p. 9.

virtue which is fundamental in a Christian view of life. If it were not for this virtue, the world would certainly be, from a Christian point of view, a kind of living death in despair. In his analogical style, C. S. Lewis has argued with considerable conviction concerning the nature of this hope. Man, he says, recognizes in his own character numerous needs. When he is hungry, there is an answer to that need in food; when he is cold, the sources of warmth exist to overcome that indisposition. For all the essential needs there is likewise an answer. Life on earth is, at every turn, frustrating to men because everywhere there is imperfection, except in the ideal of man's own mind. Man feeds and fosters these ideals because it is exactly this means by which he lives.

The need for a peaceful or perfect place in which to live also has its answer, says Lewis, but that place is found nowhere in the world. There is, in the world, a universal search for a home; in one way and another, everybody travels his whole life searching for some mythical island, some ideal city, some undiscovered country. Lewis suggests that since there is an answer to all the essential physical needs, there is no reason to suppose that there is no answer to this very deep, this most intrinsic of spiritual needs. Without hope for the fulfillment of this need, man faces a life of despair, the conclusion of which is annihilation. For despair is the absence of hope, a condition which logically concludes in suicide. The opposite condition, in which hope abounds, logically and naturally concludes in fulfillment -- and ever-

lasting life. It is pertinent to recognize that these ideas are by no means incompatible with Milton's life and doctrine.²¹

One of the most important of Milton's beliefs lies in the equation of life and hope, which is, at least on the theological level, the basis of a justification of God. Hope is, in Milton's works, generally associated with fear in the earlier, and with faith in the later works. Typical perhaps of the fear-hope association is this passage from Comus:

Yet where an equall poise of hope and fear
Does arbitrate th' event, my nature is
That I encline to hope, rather than fear,
And gladly banish squint suspicion.²²

Satan's inversion of the same value of hope is possibly even more effective an illustration:

So farwel Hope, and with Hope farwel Fear,
Farwel Remorse: all Good to me is lost;
Evil be thou my Good; by thee at least
Divided Empire with Heav'ns King I hold
By three, and more then half perhaps will reigne;
As Man ere long, and this new World shall know.²³

Moreover, since hope generally is the antonym to despair, it is not unreasonable that the kind of mind which is Milton's, that is, the mind concerned with the dichotomy and reconciliation of the complement of light and darkness, of L'Allegro and

21 See C. S. Lewis, Mere Christianity, London, Geoffrey Bles, 1952, pp. 106-8.

22 John Milton, Comus: a Mask, in The Poetical Works of John Milton, ed., H. C. Beeching, London, Oxford U.P., 1908, ll. 410-3.

(Note: Henceforward, all references to Milton's poems are to the Oxford Edition of his poems.)

23 John Milton, Paradise Lost, Book IV, ll. 108-13.

Il Penseroso, should associate these opposites. In the poet's later life, however, hope is coupled with faith, and it is in that association that we find Samson proceeding from despair to faith, and from faith to hope. At the conclusion of De Doctrina Christiana, hope, along with faith, is to Milton that which men live by:

Hope differs from faith, [he writes,] as the effect from the cause; it differs from it likewise in its object: for the object of faith is the promise; that of hope, the thing promised.²⁴

Thus, faith and its sister, hope, along with love, or Charity, become for Milton the chief virtues, as well as the other "devout affections towards God."²⁵

Hope, moreover, in Paradise Lost, is the final, and perhaps the most valuable emotion the poet communicates, because it is closely associated with the highest humanistic value, the "life force" itself:

Som natural tears they drop'd, but wip'd them soon;
The World was all before them, where to choose
Thir place of rest, and Providence thir guide:
They hand in hand with wandring steps and slow,
Through Eden took thir solitarie way.²⁶

Here is implied the difference between Christianity and humanism: Christianity includes within itself the highest ideal of humanity,

²⁴ John Milton, De Doctrina Christiana, Vol. XV, p. 409.

²⁵ John Milton, Artis Logicae, Vol. XVII, p. 51.

²⁶ John Milton, Paradise Lost, Book XII, ll. 645-9.

the appreciation of life itself; but it is a greater director of life than any humanistic creed because it possesses an emotional joy which is even more profound than a humanistic or naturalistic appreciation of the élan vital. And that emotion is hope, hope for the fulfillment of our highest ideals.

Milton's view of Paradise must not be confused in our minds with other, less ideal examples afforded by modern literature. The ideal of "the noble savage," for example, as it is set forth by the "pre-Romantic" Rousseau, and as it is celebrated by various Romantic poets, and finally made practicable by Thoreau, finds in Paradise Lost a seemingly peculiar place in the life of mankind. It is not the Adam and Eve whom we first view in the blissful Garden who are the noble savages, since their life is primarily neither pantheistic nor naturalistic, but rather a life of singing God's praises through spontaneous prayer. Their life contains none of the amoral quality of the true noble savage, but rather instead a fulfilled moralistic modus vivendi. It is the action after the fall, between Book IX and the coming of St. Michael, which accurately describes what would be Milton's view of the noble savage. Adam and Eve have not yet been expelled from the Garden. They are still surrounded by the "blissful, happy state," but, being possessed by despair and other frustrating and stultifying emotions, they have only the faded glory of their origin left to them. Thus, it is then that the analogy to the condition of the seemingly unspoiled state of the noble savage exists.

Another means by which the archetype of Paradise is suggested is in the context of art itself. If the proper end of art is the achievement of catharsis, the state of peace which follows the purgatorial catharsis can easily be equated with that peace which forms the basis of Paradise. James Joyce, in his discussion of tragedy, recognizes the condition as symptomatic of the whole aesthetic of art:

The tragic emotion, in fact, is a face looking two ways, towards terror and towards pity, both of which are phases of it. You see I use the word arrest. I mean that the tragic emotion is static. Or rather the dramatic emotion is. The feelings excited by improper art are kinetic, desire or loathing. Desire urges us to possess, to go to something. The arts which excite them, pornographical or didactic, are therefore improper arts. The esthetic emotion (I use the general term) is therefore static. The mind is arrested and raised above desire and loathing.²⁷

This process of the purging of the emotions, while it is usually noted especially in relation to tragedy, is by no means peculiar to that literary form.²⁸ Indeed, it has been argued that the psychological phenomenon of catharsis, as critically originated by Aristotle, is common to every work of art.²⁹ Aristotle specifically states that the distinction of tragedy is in the emotions of pity and fear, that their successful mingling produces a catharsis. In the famous definition of tragedy he points out that it is through pity and fear that the poet effects "the

27 James Joyce, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, New York, Modern Library, 1928, p. 240.

28 S. H. Butcher, op. cit., pp. 242 ff.

29 See appendix for a discussion of the relation between purgation and depersonalization.

purgation of these emotions."³⁰ In other words, it is not the purgation itself which distinguishes tragedy from other forms of literature, but the use of the particular emotions of pity and fear to obtain it. In epic poetry, there is room for a great number of emotions other than those of pity and fear; nevertheless, as in tragedy, the end result is the same: the purgation of frustrating emotions.³¹

In Paradise Lost the emotions of pity and fear are pre-eminent, as in tragedy, within the tragic story which is told in Book IX. Later, in Chapter IX, the tragic construction of Book IX will be considered, but it is important at this point to indicate that although Milton uses a tragic story for the core of his epic, emotions of a painful and frustrating nature, such as shame and despair, are used, as well as pity and fear; and those emotions combined with the tragic intensity of Book IX contribute their share in the achievement of the depth of the catharsis at the conclusion of the poem.

In this connexion, it is profitable to consider a certain distinction concerning the nature of poetry generally. As a result of examining various poets and their work, it is plausible to suggest that there appear to exist two distinctly different kinds of poetry, one of which may be described as "static" and

³⁰ Aristotle, Poetics, in Butcher, trans., Ibid., VI. 2, p. 23.

³¹ Note, however, the relatively limited number of emotions treated in Paradise Lost.

the other as "active." By static poetry is meant successful³² verse which communicates an extended purgation, and has little to do with such frustrating emotions as pity and fear, horror, hate, or even perhaps with some definitions of hope.

Hope is a frustrating emotion if it is confused with expectation or desire. If a distinction is made between hope and desire, it will be found that hope belongs properly to static poetry. Hope can, moreover, be thought of as man's God-given right, as a quality which points man toward his natural duty on earth as the praiser of God's grandeur. Thus, the virtue is, unlike the frustrating emotions of expectation and desire, more strictly associated with the ends of, and not the means to, ideal objectives.³³ Hope may be appreciated as a natural duty of man

32 The distinction in meaning denoted by the use of the word "successful" is elucidated in the following passage: "I suggest that the purpose of good criticism may be summed up as seeking to answer three questions: What did the author set out to do? Did he succeed in doing it? And, was it worth doing? These questions were first propounded by Goethe in a slightly different form: 'What did the author set out to do? Was his plan reasonable and sensible, and how far did he succeed in carrying it out?' The order first given, however, is the order in which the critic should proceed. He should want to know the author's intentions first, and last of all he should try to [evaluate]... the work." (A. R. Thompson, The Anatomy of Drama, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1946, p. 43.)

33 Milton suggests by his definition in the De Doctrina that hope is an end and not the means, which is faith. Thus, hope is still more properly to be associated with static poetry, although, too, it can be argued that hope, though it is an end of faith, is also a means towards yet another, and a higher quality: the fulfillment of the Promise. (See quotation, p. 15.)

not only because it is closely associated with the human function of praising God but also because the condition of men who are without that natural function evinces the metamorphosis, as it were, of the noble savage into the ignoble beast, of the unspoiled man into Swift's Yahoo, a creature living in a negative and wild capacity, entirely immoral because he is beyond the positive manner of life. Without hope, there can be no fulfillment, and without fulfillment, there can be no realization of the image of God, which is, in effect, man's ultimately free nature.³⁴

Active poetry, on the other hand, is probably best described as containing a great amount of emotion of a violent nature which is finally resolved into a catharsis, always, of course, with the provision that the artist has successfully used the emotions he deals with. Such emotions as pity and fear, horror, hate, or expectation, or any number of other emotions which lend themselves to violent physical reaction, can be used in order to obtain a successful catharsis.

Static poetry at its best represents an extended purgation -- that is, a prolonged state of peacefulness. Active poetry at its best displays an exposition of the frustrating emotions which are finally resolved by a catharsis. At their worst, static poetry is dull and lifeless (e.g. much of Wordsworth's later verse)³⁵ and active poetry is finally frustrated and uncontrolled

³⁴ See H. N. Fairchild, The Noble Savage, New York, Columbia University Press, 1928.

³⁵ However, for a contrary view see Bernbaum, Guide to the Romantic Movement.

(e.g., Otway's Venice Preserved and, in our own time, many of the plays of the contemporary American school of realism).³⁶ When they are resolved, made compatible, however, the two types of poetry in their coalescence produce the very nature of poetry itself; i.e., "creative energy made effective through restraint."³⁷

³⁶ One eminent and recent example is Arthur Miller's The Death of a Salesman.

³⁷ J. L. Lowes, Convention and Revolt in Poetry, Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1919, p. 346.

CHAPTER III : MILTON AND ARISTOTLE (2)

Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes as two kinds of poetry. -- Examples in contrast. -- Convention and revolt. -- Opposition of Plato and Aristotle. -- Milton's idea of prayer. -- Prayer and poetry. -- Poetry and mysticism. -- References to Aristotle in Milton. -- Milton's chief debt to Aristotle.

The distinction between the two types of poetry will be extended somewhat in later chapters but it is necessary first to realize that Milton is peculiarly a practitioner of a verse which is highly qualified in both distinctions. Paradise Regained, for example, is one of the most static of all English poems, and Samson Agonistes is one of the most active. The two poems are generally underrated because each offers its peculiar difficulty, since the nature of the purely static and the violently active in literature always meet with a great amount of opposition on the part of readers and critics who themselves tend to appreciate one kind of poetry at the expense of the other. For example, an individual who appreciates the characteristic work of Wordsworth or Arnold to the exclusion of that of Goethe or Browning will tend to prefer Paradise Regained and reject Samson Agonistes. The reverse situation is also true.

The solution for anyone who is faced with such a problem involving taste or inclination may perhaps lie in his realization of an important principle, not only of letters, but also of life: the fundamental principle of "left hand, right hand," i.e., the historical and aesthetic estimation of convention and revolt, the opposition and the complementary nature of peace and war, of

tranquility and action, of night and day.³⁸

That it is a pre-occupation of Milton's, from the time at least of his undergraduate days, is evidenced by his address on the comparative value of day and night.³⁹ It is further marked by the companion and complementary poems L'Allegro and Il Penseroso, and it recurs throughout the pamphlets in the expression of his political and social ideas. While in his last two great works he illustrates their individual completeness, in Paradise Lost he continually reveals the opposition of the restraining and irrational factors of life, on the divine, temporal, and the subhuman levels of existence. This reconciliation of the romantic outlook of man with the virtues of classical restraint is perhaps in Milton more perfectly blended than in any other poet, although it is true that there are a number of instances in his work where the two aspects clash.⁴⁰

Aristotle's ideas on poetry appear to be chiefly a consideration of the active kind of verse. Since Plato, whose outlook is generally more compatible with the static view of poetry, had carried his opinion to its most extreme conclusion and thereby banished from his ideal state all poetizing, seeing

38 The whole thesis is developed and illustrated in J. L. Lowes, op. cit., passim.

39 John Milton, Whether Day is more Excellent Than Night, Vol. XII.

40 See Appendix for an exposition of the weaknesses in control in Samson Agonistes, pp. 129 ff.

it as an extraneous and even harmful part of civilization,⁴¹ it is understandable that Aristotle's commentary should become at least in part an over-emphasis of the opposite view. No one except the most steadfast Platonist would deny the effectiveness of Aristotle's justification of art; nevertheless, it is apparent that Aristotle's position is logically non-contemplative and neglects, consequently, the contemplative qualities found in the highest religious poetry. The epic form, furthermore, which is perhaps more closely akin to religious contemplation and to religious subjects than the tragic form, significantly takes second place in Aristotle as a great art form.⁴²

Milton would in all likelihood not disagree with the fundamental position taken by Plato in the Republic; however, he would be the first to deny that poetry had no place in the ideal state of man. The morning prayer of Adam and Eve is a fundamental part of their lives, and it is pure, contemplative poetry. The identification of prayer and poetry, furthermore, is for Milton

⁴¹ F. M. Cornford, trans., The Republic of Plato, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1941, (Book X, 595A-608B) pp. 314-32.

⁴² Aeschylus, to whom Aristotle does not often point (in contrast to the philosopher's dependence upon Sophocles and Euripides for example and illustration), is not to be included into the strict classification of Aristotelian tragedy. Aeschylus represents in the Oresteia a peculiar genre, one which is as unlike tragedy as we ordinarily understand the meaning of the word as the classical oratorio is unlike the modern opera. The strongly conventionalized dramaturgy of Aeschylus actually is one of the rare examples in our literature of the reconciliation to a very high degree of the tragic and the epic elements.

as it is for Hopkins, one of his most basic functions as a man,⁴³ since his work is an offering to God, and as such is intended as an invocatory attempt.

It appears that because of the identity of prayer and poetry, because prayer gives rise to the static, purgative kind of poetry, Milton realized the need for the static mode in art. Wordsworth, too, contains at his poetic core the idea of the voice of stillness which reaches heaven. One of his Evening Voluntaries plainly illustrates this view which associates prayer and poetry, the static kind of poetry:

The sun is couched, the sea-fowl gone to rest,
And the wild storm hath somewhere found a nest;
Air slumbers--wave with wave no longer strives,
Only a heaving of the deep survives,
A tell-tale motion! soon will it be laid,
And by the tide alone the water swayed.
Stealthy withdrawals, interminglings mild
Of light with shade in beauty reconciled--
Such is the prospect far as sight can range,
The soothing recompence, the welcome change.
Where now the ships that drove before the blast,
Threatened by angry breakers as they passed;
And by a train of flying clouds bemocked;
Or, in the hollow surge, at anchor rocked
As on a bed of death? Some lodge in peace,
Saved by His care who bade the tempest cease;
And some, too heedless of past danger, court
Fresh gales to waft them to the far-off port;
But near, or hanging sea and sky between,
Not one of all those winged powers is seen,
Seen in her course, nor 'mid this quiet heard;
Yet oh! how gladly would the air be stirred
By some acknowledgment of thanks and praise,
Soft in its temper as those vesper lays
Sung to the Virgin while accordant oars
Urge the slow bark along Calabrian shores;

⁴³ Symptomatic of this identification is the early Fifth Elegy.

A sea-born service through the mountains felt
Till into one loved vision all things melt:
Or like those hymns that soothe with graver sound
The gulfy coast of Norway iron-bound;
And, from the wide and open Baltic, rise
With punctual care, Lutheran harmonies.
Hush, not a voice is here! but why repine,
Now when the star of eve comes forth to shine
On British waters with that look benign?
Ye mariners, that plough your onward way,
Or in the haven rest, or sheltering bay,
May silent thanks at least to God be given
With a full heart; "our thoughts are heard in heaven!"⁴⁴

The poetry which is closer to prayer, which, as this of Wordsworth's, finds its own way to prayer, is essentially opposed to that kind of active poetry which finds its inspiration in man's striving towards a personal fulfillment which he is probably reluctant to attain on a conscious level. In this connexion it is interesting to observe that Static poetry is associated with heaven and the angels; active poetry with Satan and hell.⁴⁵ Static poetry which is offered as prayer represents, moreover, a less personal and more collectivistic fulfillment.⁴⁶ It is the fulfillment of a religious dedication, not unlike, analogically speaking, the man who is dedicated to the practice

⁴⁴ William Wordsworth, The Poetical Works of..., eds., E. de Selincourt & Helen Darbishire, Oxford, Oxford University Press, Vol. 4, pp. 3-4.

⁴⁵ An admixture of the two kinds indicates the condition of mankind: the centre of the strife between the two poles.

⁴⁶ Cf. Tolstoy's view of art generally. These are, incidentally, the qualities which can be attributed to Tolstoy's only two tales which he himself, of all his works, adjudged to have merit. See Leo Tolstoy, What is Art?, London, Oxford University Press, 1930, note p. 246.

of mysticism and who finally attains the beatific vision.

Father Brémond, however, points to the fallacy which is prevalent concerning the confusion of poets and mystics; and, while indicating the parallel natures of their experiences, he warns us not to confuse their respective natures:

The more of a poet any particular poet is, the more he is tormented by the need of communicating his experience; the more of a poet he is, the easier and the more inevitable he finds the magic transmuting power of words by means of which something of his poetical experience passes from his deeper soul to ours. The more of a mystic any particular mystic is, the less he feels this need of self-communication, and the more such communication seems to him impossible, should he have the desire to make it, as, indeed, in point of fact it is, all mystical grace supposes, 'an absolutely gratuitous and free intervention on the part of God.' Well, you will say, does not that alone prove the inferiority of the mystic and the superiority of the poet? Yes, without any doubt, if it is a question of the communication of ideas, images, sentiments; no, if it is a question of a piece of real unitive knowledge.⁴⁷

Milton is not only a poet in the sense that Father Brémond describes, i.e., one who communicates "ideas, images, sentiments," but he is also a mystic in that the sum total of the panoramic and revelatory view begun by Raphael and completed by Michael is a glimpse of "real unitive knowledge."

Unlike Plato, Aristotle is not concerned with the revelatory powers of poetry, but merely with the idealization of particulars -- a primarily psychological and naturalistic

⁴⁷ Henri Brémond, Prayer and Poetry, London, Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1927, pp. 189-90.

view; while, of course, the psychological and naturalistic interest in phenomena is of great interest to Milton, it is not his greatest interest, which lies in the supernatural sphere of experience. Thus, Milton at his highest level becomes not merely a poet, but also a religious teacher, attaining much the same position as Aeschylus had attained in Greek literature. Regarding Aristotelian influence, therefore, there are comparatively few direct references in Milton's works to the philosopher, though there are more than enough to give us definite knowledge of his views on Aristotle and Aristotelianism. Several of the references show not only his opinion of and debt to Aristotle, but also the particularity of his understanding of him.

As a youth, Milton's interest is shown by his De Idea Platonica quemadmodum Aristoteles intellexit, in which he effusively calls upon Plato to reinstate the poets who have been banished from the Republic, on the grounds that they serve the function of offsetting ugliness and bringing beauty into the world.⁴⁸ But this early effusion is a far cry from the maturity of one of the outstanding contributions of his later life, his Artis Logicae. When Milton finally came to write his treatise on Logic, his philosophical knowledge of Aristotle was most perceptive, in that the whole work may be regarded as an attempt to reconcile Platonic and Aristotelian

⁴⁸ John Milton, De Idea Platonica &c., Vol. I, Part I, pp. 266-9.

philosophy, and to make clear to Platonists and Aristotelians that their respective positions were really not so far apart as they tended to believe. The following passage is an example:

But genus is the whole essential to the parts, since in its signification it embraces that essence, namely matter and form, which is equally common to all species, or more briefly, since it is a symbol of the common essence. For Genus does not properly communicate essence to species (since in itself it is in truth nothing outside the species) but merely signifies their essence, for the notion of what is essential and common to all species is called genus, and by the Greeks often idea, but not separated from things, as they think the Platonic ideas are, which are clouds, according to Aristotle (Metaphysics I. 7; 12.5) but what in thought and reason is one and the same thing common to many species in each of which in fact and nature it appears singly, as Plato says in the Meno.⁴⁹

Milton further comments on Aristotle in his discussion concerning the nature of the concrete and abstract in conjugates:

There follow examples, as justice, just, justly. In examples of this sort it should be observed that what they call abstract is the cause of the concrete, and the concrete is the cause of the adverb, for justice is the cause why any one is just, and since he is just, therefore he does justly; but this is not everywhere true, for what is healthful, that is, what produces or preserves health, is the cause of health, the concrete indeed of the abstract....⁵⁰

Moreover, in treating that most integral aspect of our discussion, the nature of motion or action, he writes:

... most interpreters of Ramus are of the opinion that the doctrine of motion, as of a general thing,

⁴⁹ Milton, Artis Logicae, Vol. XI, pp. 238-9.

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 214-7.

pertains to logic, but not rightly. For what can logic teach about motion that is not natural and according to physics. 'Things known' they say from Aristotle (Physics 8.3) 'and opinions, all use motion.' Surely they use it, but, as physics teaches, taken from nature.⁵¹

Concerning his own theories of art, moreover, Milton is extremely indebted to Aristotle, but, as this key passage denotes, Milton is no Aristotelian in the sense where he accepts verbatim Aristotle's ideas; he shows a discretion rather, even a reservation perhaps, while retaining a due respect:

Time serves not now, and perhaps I might seem too profuse to give any certain account of what the mind at home in the spacious circuits of her musing hath liberty to propose to herself, though of highest hope, and hardest attempting, whether that Epick form whereof the two poems of Homer, and those other two of Virgil and Tasso are a diffuse, and the book of Job a brief model: or whether the rules of Aristotle herin are strictly to be kept, or nature to be follow'd, which in them that know art, and use judgement is no transgression, but an enriching of art.⁵²

This passage, along with that found in Of Education,⁵³ is the only statement found in Milton's prose pointing to his understanding of epic theory. It is here alone, however, that Milton's disagreement concerning epic or tragic superiority is hinted at, although it would be erroneous to conclude from it much more than that it is not true to say he agreed with

51 John Milton, Artis Logicae, Vol. XI, p. 75.

52 John Milton, Church Government, in ibid., Vol. III, Part I, p. 237.

53 See quotation, pp. 48-9.

Aristotle that the tragedy was of higher value than the epic.

Milton's preface to Samson Agonistes is another important indication of his depth of understanding of Aristotle:

Tragedy, as it was antiently compos'd, hath been ever held the gravest, moralest, and most profitable of all other Poems: therefore said by Aristotle to be of power by raising pity and fear, or terror, to purge the mind of those and such like passions, that is to temper and reduce them to just measure with a kind of delight, stirr'd up by reading or seeing those passions well imitated. Nor is Nature wanting in her own effects to make good his assertion: for so in Physic things of melancholic hue and quality are us'd against melancholy, sowr against sowr, salt to remove salt humours.⁵⁴

In contrast to his argument in Of Education and the quotation from his pamphlet concerning Church Government, it would appear, on the surface, that in writing Samson Agonistes Milton had finally come to consider the tragedy to be of higher quality as a form than epic. However, upon closer examination we can conclude only that he has not made for himself any definitive judgement concerning the respective forms, but rather he has left his capacities open for experiment and momentarily, at least, calls upon the reader's poetic faith and willing suspension of disbelief.⁵⁵ Samson Agonistes, as a whole, indicates also Milton's capacity to extract meaning and poetical intensity from accepted, even seemingly

⁵⁴ John Milton, "Of that sort of Dramatic Poem which is call'd Tragedy," Samson Agonistes, p. 505.

⁵⁵ Coleridge's maxim can be used not only as a warning against doctrinal and other adhesions but also against readers' prejudices for certain poetic forms.

outworn, conventions:

It suffices if the whole Drama be found not produc't beyond the fift Act, of the style and uniformitie, and that commonly call'd the Plot, whether intricate or explicit, which is nothing indeed but such oeconomy, or disposition of the fable as may stand best with verisimilitude and decorum; they only will best judge who are not unacquainted with Aeschulus, Sophocles, and Euripides, the three Tragic Poets unequall'd yet by any, and the best rule to all who endeavour to write Tragedy. The circumscription of time wherein the whole Drama begins and ends, is according to antient rule, and best example, within the space of 24 hours.⁵⁶

Besides this external evidence, we have the internal evidence of the tragedy of Samson Agonistes itself to illustrate to us the extent to which Milton adapted Aristotelian maxims in the writing of his tragedy. He has accepted Aristotle's ideas of tragedy on so many counts that Samson Agonistes is one of the few truly "Greek" tragedies written in English. The probability that Milton wrote Samson Agonistes after and not before he wrote Paradise Lost, moreover, indicates not that he thought one mode superior to another, but that the value of one form did not denigrate the value of another.

Regardless, however, of all these considerations, the chief debt which Milton owes to Aristotle is in form -- meaningful form -- rather than in any philosophical ideas. Aristotle's effectiveness in revealing the meaning in form, especially in the tragic, is the chief aspect of Aristotle by which Milton profited. The English poet appears closely to have considered

⁵⁶ John Milton, "Of that sort of Dramatic Poem which is call'd Tragedy," p. 506.

most of Aristotle's work, and in the case of the construction of Samson Agonistes, his debt to the Poetics is incalculable. It was, above all, in his employment of the structural parts of the tragedy and in his interpretation of the pathological theory of catharsis⁵⁷ that Milton benefited. But the main concern here is that in the case of Paradise Lost Milton not only agreed with Aristotle, but he also overcame Aristotle's most persuasive objections to the epic, finally answering the philosopher by the most persuasive of all arguments: the creation of a work of art devoid of the usual mortal shortcomings which previously existed in the best examples of that particular art form.

57 Butcher, op. cit., pp. 247-8.

CHAPTER IV : PLATONISM AND ARISTOTELIANISM

The beginning of Aristotle's literary influence. -- Associations of Platonism and Aristotelianism. -- The chronological relationship. -- Example of musical form. -- Example of the Oresteia. -- Example of the Bible. -- Example of Milton's idea on divorce. -- Plato, Aristotle, and Socrates. -- Influences favouring Platonism. -- The Cambridge Platonists. -- The scientific attitude to Aristotelianism (Scholasticism). -- Bacon's view. -- Discontinuity in English History.

The condition of Platonism and Aristotelianism in the sixteenth century is probably the key to the problem of the opposing evaluations of epic and tragedy. Sandys informs us of a most pertinent fact:

In 1536 Ramus obtained his doctor's degree in Paris by maintaining that all the doctrines of Aristotle were false, thus marking the decline of Aristotle's teaching in philosophy; but, in the very same year, the dedicator of Pazzi's posthumous work declares that, in the treatise on Poetry, 'the precepts of poetic art are treated by Aristotle as divinely as he has treated every other form of knowledge', -- thus marking the beginning of Aristotle's influence in literature.⁵⁸

Thus, while the decline in the teaching of Aristotle's philosophy spread, there was a rise in the teaching of Plato's ideals; and the most important single influence upon England, with regard to this Renaissance Platonism, was from Italy via the Florentine Platonic Academy, which ultimately furnished the Cambridge Platonists with the scholarly precedent they readily utilized.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ J. E. Sandys, A History of Classical Scholarship, Cambridge, University Press, 1908, Vol. II, pp. 133-4.

⁵⁹ See Ernst Cassirer, The Platonic Renaissance in England, London, Thomas Nelson, 1953, pp. 8-24.

In the twentieth century Platonism has been largely associated with conventionality and reaction, while Aristotelianism possesses an association of open-minded, scientific inquiry. Our attitude has developed partly through reaction against the nineteenth century, and concerning this modern revolution, it is not difficult to accept the argument that, as with all revolutions much of what was good in Victorianism has been destroyed, along with much of what was bad. Anti-Victorianism, however, is not the only factor affecting the modern attitude to Platonism and Aristotelianism. The more subtle effects of a mistaken chronological relationship between the two philosophers is often overlooked. The thinking, especially of Christians, upon the general notion of chronological relationships, is crucial in this context and needs to be elaborated, because it is deeply concerned with discovering which, of all forms, is the most truly essential in life as well as in art.⁶⁰

Christians tend to regard that which is first in time as superior to that which follows, except in those instances where God is credited with cumulative revelation. The most elemental example of the superiority of the first subject and the inferiority of that which follows is probably the fundamental relationship between fathers and sons. The father,

⁶⁰ i.e., which of all ideals is the highest. The object in attempting to ascertain this form or ideal of highest value should, of course, be able to stand psychological, historical, religious and artistic tests for coherence.

being in a superior position, essentially for no reason other than that he is first in time and has generated his offspring, is, consequently, the figure representing order and justice. But it should be pointed out that the emergence of the son gives rise to the condition which means that the father's position is not only defined but also fulfilled, because the two elements complement each other.

This essential form of "first" and "last," of anterior and posterior, of beginning and end, admits, however, of only two parts. If the form were applied to the arts, an omission becomes apparent. In musical form we would find that the prior quality (the father) is represented by the exposition section; the latter quality (the son) by the recapitulation. These two parts are alike in form but different in time. They bear a different relationship, one to the other. But in music there is a middle or developmental section which not only makes the exposition and recapitulation more pertinently complementary, but often it also adds something which is distinctively its own, since the developmental section analogically represents not merely the link between father and son, but the common ground of experience which those two motives evince, having been composed of variations on figures originally revealed by the exposition and finally affirmed by the recapitulation.

In poetry the exposition, representing the paternal aspect of the form, is contained in the idea of a beginning. The idea of the filial aspect is in the ending, and the transi-

tion between the two represents the development of the work of art. Thus, we come to Aristotle's observation that poetry must contain a beginning, a middle, and an end, if it is to be unified and complete.

Aeschylus' Oresteia stands as perhaps the best example in the drama of the reconciliation of three-part and two-part form. The trilogy is, in its principal theme, the conflict between the old, established law (the father motif) and the new, revolutionary freedom (the son motif). In describing the triumph of the new, Olympian religion of light over the old, Chthonic code of darkness, Aeschylus substantially illustrates the essential chronological relationship, the action of which is antithetically described in the two parts of which his theme is composed.⁶¹ The trilogy itself, being three plays, reconciles the idea of development in the figure of Orestes, who comes between the original action (effected by Clytemnestra in the Agamemnon) and the final action (effected by Athene in the Eumenides). The Oresteia may thus be considered the reconciliation of the inconsistency of two- as opposed to three-part form, since two-part form is observed by the nature of the content of the poem, while the aspect of three-part form is manifested by the trilogy construction employed by the poet.

Like the Oresteia, the Bible represents a conflict between the old and the new, in that the Old Testament reveals

⁶¹ i.e. The conflict of the old (the first part) and the new (the second part).

the Law of God and the New Testament the Gospel of God. This difference between Law and Gospel is of special importance to Milton, as we shall see shortly. The Old and New Testaments are, like the father-son relationship, opposed while they are, simultaneously, complementary. On the surface, it appears that they are purely two-part divisions, and that the problem of a middle section does not arise; however, the Gospels themselves, in so far that they illustrate Christ's activities, give us the necessary development for the final interpretations which take up the remainder of the New Testament in the writings of St. Paul and other early Church Fathers. It is Christ's teaching and not his teachings (i.e., the events of his active life and not the content of the Gospel) which have to do with the middle of the story.

The Greek dramatist-teacher's trilogy and the Bible, as well as Milton's epic, have, consequently, this in common: they celebrate the triumph of charity over the rule of Law; the religion of light over the religion of darkness; the breaking of the hitherto unbreakable rule of lex talionis, an "eye for an eye."

Milton's argument in defence of divorce is directly linked with this interpretation of the Gospel vs. Law:

... marriage was thought so Sacramentall, that no adultery or desertion could dissolve it; and this is the sense of our Canon Courts in England to this day, but in no other reformed Church els; yet there remains in them also a burden on it as heavie as the other two were disgraceful or superstitious, and of as much iniquity, crossing a Law not onely writt'n by Moses, but character'd in us by nature, of more

antiquity and deeper ground than marriage it selfe; which Law is to force nothing against the faultles proprieties of nature; yet that this may be colourably done, our Saviours words touching divorce, are as it were congeal'd into a stony rigor, inconsistent both with his doctrine and his office, and that which he preacht onely to the conscience, is by Canonically tyranny snatcht into the compulsive censure of a judicall Court; where Laws are impos'd even against the venerable and secret power of natures impression, to love whatever cause be found to loath. Which is a hainous barbarisme both against the honour of marriage, the dignity of man and his soule, the goodnes of Christianitie, and all the humane respects of civilitie.⁶²

Milton is here arguing by contexts. The Old Testament was the giving of Law to man; the New Testament was the giving of Charity. To make Law of Christ's statements concerning divorce is to be unfaithful to the whole message of the Messiah. The new religion of light (Christianity) cannot take on the darkness of such an unnatural law as the indissolubility of marriage. Milton is probably mindful of Christ's warning: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill."⁶³

The application of the notion of a chronological relationship to Platonism and Aristotelianism is useful if we contrast the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries' attitudes to the Greek philosophies.⁶⁴ In the seventeenth century, it

⁶² John Milton, The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce, Vol. III, Part 2, p. 383.

⁶³ Matthew, V, 17.

⁶⁴ Contrast and compare twentieth-century English thought. To the minds of many intellextuals, Pre-Raphaelitism and Platonism appear to have been strongly associated. Consequently, such writers as D. H. Lawrence and Aldous Huxley have condemned, especially during the 1920's, the philosophy of Plato. The old world of Victorian morality had, from the revolutionary point

appears that almost the reverse of the original chronological relationship came about in the minds of Englishmen, and European Scholastic stagnancy in the sixteenth century had pervaded England by the seventeenth. By the time Milton gave his address in the debate on Aristotle at Christ's College in the early 1620's, Cambridge was already becoming the defender of a still new and vigorous, though increasingly accepted, revolt against Aristotelianism.

Platonism, therefore, in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries was a part of the healthy reaction against a stagnated mould of Aristotelianism, much as the reverse is true in our century, in that the characteristic temper of the inter-war period is opposed to Victorian idealism. Throughout English history we can witness the alternate rise and decline of both Aristotelianism and Platonism, and in the sixteenth century, as a result of Italian critical and social influences, we see the re-emergence of Platonism, curiously commingling, towards the end of the century, with the Puritanism of England.

During Elizabeth's time, Plato's doctrines, principally his doctrine of love, permeated the English Court.⁶⁵ But this influence did not find an unimpeded passage from court to university. The rise of Platonism at Cambridge found its roots

of view, to be completely deposed, and with it all its hapless associates.

65 The influence of Castiglione's Book of the Courtier is exemplary of the manner in which Plato's doctrine's were "distilled" through Italian Platonists to Elizabethan nobility.

in the Italian Platonic Renaissance in the Florentine Academy of Pico della Mirandola and Ficino.⁶⁶

Regarding the seventeenth century, one finds considerable difficulty in identifying the ideas and influences in which Plato's philosophy can be found. Although an appreciation of Plato was current at Cambridge during Milton's years at Christ's College, it was not until a few years had elapse that Smith, Cudworth, More and Southcote established with some clarity the stand of the Latitudinarians, as the Cambridge Platonists were called.

Although the Latitudinarian doctrine is often compatible with the Puritan ideals of the poet, nevertheless in many respects Milton and Latitudinarianism were at variance.⁶⁷ The Latitudinarians were attempting a reconciliation of Puritan and Prelatist points of view. Although Milton's Puritanism is often more politically than spiritually strict, nevertheless one cannot admit him amongst these Platonists, since his wholehearted devotion to the Puritan cause precluded any conciliation with the Prelatists. Apart from their broadly aiming at the social synthesis of already disparate forces they were also unlike Milton in emphasizing Plotinus' philosophy more than

66 Sandys, op. cit.

67 The Cambridge Platonists held that reason within man was his true ruling power, an idea not incompatible with Milton's Paradise within the individual, governed by reason. (See Appendix).

Plato's.⁶⁸

There is reason also to believe that the Cambridge Platonists gain much importance in English history as a reaction, though not an overt one, against Roman Catholic influences. Since Aquinas and the Scholastics had incorporated Aristotelianism into the Church doctrine, it is probable that this gave an impetus, on the part of English Protestantism, towards the turning of its affections to the older philosophy of Plato.

Yet another consideration is important: the rising partiality on the part of scientific men for materialism. One would think that, without its historic associations, Aristotle's philosophy should have been adopted by Bacon and his offspring. Certainly, Aristotle's empirical attitude, and his work as a natural historian, should have recommended his philosophy to the scientists, but such was not the case. The adoption of Aristotelianism did not occur because, as Bacon himself writes, the Schoolmen were educationally degenerate:

Surely, like as many substances in nature which are solid do putrify and corrupt into worms; so it is the property of good and sound knowledge to putrify and dissolve into a number of subtle, idle, unwholesome, and (as I may term them) vermiculate questions, which have indeed a kind of quickness and life of spirit, but no soundness of matter or goodness of quality. This kind of degenerate learning did chiefly reign among the schoolmen: who, having sharp and strong wits, and abundance of leisure, and small variety of reading, but their wits being shut up in the cells of a few authors (chiefly Aristotle their dictator) as their persons were shut up in the cells of monasteries and colleges, and knowing little history, either of nature or time, did out of no great quantity of matter and infinite agitation of

68 F. M. Powicke, The Cambridge Platonists, *passim*.

wit spin out unto us those laborious webs of learning which are extant in their books.⁶⁹

Basil Willey points out that England of the seventeenth century was a Janus-headed nation, that it pointed on the one side to religion and on the other to science; its most representative individuals (especially Sir Thomas Browne) see both material and metaphysical aspects of life almost in equipoise. Bacon, too, recognized the two opposing strains in the activity of the time, and illustrates this acknowledgment in saying that "It is therefore most wise soberly to render unto faith the things that are faith's,"⁷⁰ and, by implication, to science the things that are science's. To the New Science, Platonism (represented by the Cambridge Platonists) became the chief opponent. Aristotelianism (represented by the declining Scholastics) was even to a greater extent inadmissible because of its historical as well as contemporary association with Rome.

England's intellectual history from the Restoration to the present indicates an incessant discontinuity. In one period the scientific outlook (more properly Aristotelian though not Scholastic) finds favour; in the next, the major poets and thinkers find their sympathies lie with Plato's contemplative and mystical attitude. With the development of

69 Bacon, Advancement of Learning, pp. 31-2.

70 Bacon, Novum Organum, I, lxxv; quoted in Basil Willey, The Seventeenth Century Background, New York, Doubleday, 1953, p. 35.

the Royal Society and the Age of Rationalism in the eighteenth century, the empirical attitude which is found in Aristotle's writings was more than compatible; and it was this current which counteracted against what remained of the seventeenth century's mystical propensity towards Plato. The Romantic movement, however, represents another reaction; it finds its truth "carried alive into the heart by passion"⁷¹ in the dichotomy of body and soul, and Wordsworth's Intimations of Immortality remains as perhaps the most important single poem of that era. The contemplative attitude of the Romantics was carried on by the Victorians (especially by Arnold and Tennyson, and, in their own manner, by the Pre-Raphaelite poets), although Tennyson is perhaps as realistic as he is Romantically contemplative.⁷² Perhaps as a part of the revolt against Victorianism, effected in the first thirty years of the twentieth century, Platonism was rejected along with Victorian morality, Pre-Raphaelite art and Romantic dualism by such naturalistic and psychological writers as Norman Douglas, D. H. Lawrence, and James Joyce.

⁷¹ Although Wordsworth's definition of poetry acknowledges Aristotle, one is not convinced that his point of view is not dominantly Platonic. The context of Wordsworth's definition reads: "Aristotle, as I have been told, has said, that Poetry is the most philosophic of all writing: it is so: its object is truth, not individual and local, but general, and operative; not standing upon internal testimony, but carried alive into the heart by passion...." (Wm. Wordsworth, "Preface to the Lyrical Ballads," in op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 394-5.)

⁷² Maud is perhaps one of the best illustrations of Tennyson's Romantic and realistic strains contained within one poem.

CHAPTER V : MILTON AND THE SIXTEENTH-CENTURY ITALIAN CRITICS

Mixed opinion on epic superiority. -- Milton's attitude to Aristotelianism. -- Early fifteenth-century conflict between Platonism and Aristotelianism. -- Aristotelian precedence. -- Milton's avowed theoretical influences. -- Trissino. -- Minturno and Scaliger. -- The general opinion on epic and tragedy. -- Mazzoni. -- Tasso. -- Castelvetro. -- Castelvetro, Milton, and the Epic Hero. -- Castelvetro and tragic superiority. -- Milton's theory also derived from other critics, e.g., Scaliger.

The sixteenth-century Italian critics to whom Milton points as the proper theorists for the epic poet to follow differ with regard to their Aristotelian and Platonic tendencies. The Italian critics differ not only over whether they are generally to follow Plato or Aristotle but, more particularly, whether they are to consider the epic or the tragedy as the superior genre. Castelvetro, for example, agrees with Aristotle's preference for tragedy, and although Vida early pointed to epic superiority over all other forms, yet such a critic as Minturno is torn between the ideal of tragic superiority and the practical preference for the epic; i.e. there were no tragedies worthy of the name produced in the Italian theatre, while the epic was a form in which Italian poets excelled.

That Milton's attitude was, during his undergraduate days, anti-Aristotelian, and amicable to the comparatively new Platonic movement is exemplified by the youthful discourse which crudely condemns Aristotle's influence.⁷³ It is, never-

73 John Milton, De Idea Platonica &c.

theless, of little more than biographical value to us today. Before his death he had modified his strongly Platonic views, not only to the point of speaking well of Aristotle in his later prose works, but also to the extent of fashioning Samson Agonistes principally upon the model laid down in the Poetics. The famous preface to the tragedy acknowledges the debt Milton owed; concerning it, Spingarn comments:

This passage has been regarded by Twining, Bernays and other modern scholars as a remarkable indication of Milton's scholarship and critical insight; but after all, it need hardly be said, he was merely following the interpretation of the Italian commentators on the Poetics. Their writings he had studied and knew thoroughly, had imbibed all the critical ideas of the Italian Renaissance....⁷⁴

The preface is certainly a far cry from the awkward undergraduate attack Milton had made upon Aristotle.

In the early fifteenth century, the Peripatetics had become largely "pedantic;" at the same time, the Platonists were largely "mystical."⁷⁵ This distinction appears to have set the basic pattern of Aristotelianism and Platonism at least for the next two hundred years, though often with strong modifications on both sides. The Platonist cultist Gemistos was perhaps the earliest of Renaissance Platonists to set up a mystical and esoteric group founded on Plato's writings.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ J. E. Spingarn, Literary Criticism in the Renaissance, New York, Columbia University Press, 1908, p. 80.

⁷⁵ J. A. Symonds, Renaissance in Italy, London, Smith, Elder, & Co., 1909, Vol. II, p. 179.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 149.

Symonds relates the basis of his later influence:

While resident in Florence he published two treatises on Fate and on the differences between Plato and Aristotle. The former was an anti-Christian work, in so far as it denied the freedom of arbitrary activity to God as well as men. The latter raised a controversy in Italy and Greece, which long survived its author, exercising the scholars of the Renaissance to some purpose on the texts and doctrines of the chief great thinkers of antiquity. Gemistos attacked Aristotle in general for atheism and irreligious morality, while he proved that the Platonic system, as interpreted by him, was deeply theological. Without entering into the details of a dispute that continued to rage for many years, and aroused the bitterest feelings on both sides, it is enough to observe that Aristotle had for centuries been regarded as the pillar of orthodoxy in the Latin Church, while Plato supplied eclectic thinkers with a fair cloak for rationalistic speculations and theistic heresies. The opponents of Aristotle were undermining the foundations of the time-honoured scholastic fabric. The opponents of Plato accused his votaries of drowning the Christianity they pretended to maintain, in a vague ocean of heretical mysticism.⁷⁷ It is indeed difficult to understand how Minturno [sic] who worshipped Plato no less fervently than Christ, could avoid reducing Christianity to the level of Paganism, while he attempted to demonstrate that the Platonic system contained the essence of the Christian faith. This was, in fact, nothing less than abandoning the exclusive pretensions of revealed religion and the authority of the Church.⁷⁸

It is necessary to realize that, although these were perhaps the beginnings of neo-Platonism, Aristotelian philosophy was in comparison of much wider acceptance, and in criticism Aristotle's Poetics had become almost analogous to the Bible; what there was of Platonic literary criticism (deriving principally from the Phaedrus and the attack in the

⁷⁷ Read "Gemistos" for "Minturno." Judging by the context there is here an oversight in Symonds' text, since the discussion of Minturno comes later in Symonds' study.

⁷⁸ J. A. Symonds, op. cit., pp. 150-1.

Republic) appears to have gained few, if any, adherents. The acceptance of Aristotle's literary criticism was by no means entire, especially with regard to the matter at hand: the problem of epic superiority. Spingarn comments:

The reverence for the epic throughout the Renaissance may be ascribed in part to the mediaeval veneration of Virgil as a poet, and his popular apotheosis as prophet and magician, and also in part to the decay into which dramatic literature had fallen during the Middle Ages in the hands of the wandering players, the histriones and the vagantes. Aristotle indeed had regarded tragedy as the highest form of poetry; and as a result, the traditional reverence for Virgil and Homer, and the Renaissance subservience to Aristotle, were distinctly at variance.⁷⁹

It is the same conflict which carries over, even into the time when Milton faced the problems of creating the epic and tragedy of Paradise Lost.

In addition to Aristotle and Horace, whose furtherance of the doctrine of "decorum" had become a standard part of epic and tragic theory,⁸⁰ there are a number of Italian commentators and critics who influenced Milton in his own evolution of Paradise Lost:

Logic therefore so much as is useful, [Milton writes,] is to be referr'd to this due place withall her well coucht Heads and Topics, untill it be time to open her contracted palm into a graceful and ornate Rhetorick

79 Spingarn, op. cit., p. 107.

80 The doctrine of "decorum," or propriety, is especially notable an influence in the criticism and dramaturgy of Ben Jonson, whose consideration of it, as applied to the creation of character, gave him the means towards the construction of plot. Through Horace, the Greek idea of decorum led thus directly to Jonson's formulation of appropriate humours for appropriate character types.

taught out of the rule of Plato, Aristotle, Phalereus, Cicero, Hermogenes, Longinus. To which Poetry would be made subsequent, or indeed rather precedent, as being less subtle and fine, but more simple, sensuous and passionate. I mean not here the prosody of a verse, which they could not but have hit on before among the rudiments of Grammar; but that sublime Art which in Aristotles Poetics, in Horace, and the Italian Commentaries of Castelvetro, Tasso, Mazzoni, and others, teaches what the laws are of a true Epic Poem, what of a Dramatic, what of a Lyric, what Decorum is, which is the grand master-piece to observe. This would make them soon perceive what despicable creatures our common Rimers and Play-writers be, and shew them what religious, what glorious and magnificent use might be made of Poetry both in divine and humane things. From hence and not till now will be the right season of forming them to be able Writers and Composers in every excellent matter, when they shall be thus fraught with an universal insight into things.⁸¹

This passage indicates a number of important critical views which must have been held by the poet. The idea of pure forms of the separation of tragic, lyric, and epic poetry, is suggested in his mention of which "grand master-piece to observe." His thought, moreover, appears to be following upon Scaligerian lines; i.e. he is acceding to the notion of ideal forms which Scaliger had recommended, though somewhat too rigorously.⁸² There is a hint in the passage, as a result of the separation of ideal forms, of a hierarchy of evaluation, a suggestion (implied perhaps even in the word-order) that his view is not unlike that of the Italians and the Renaissance generally, in the belief that the epic is the supreme literary form.

81 John Milton, Of Education, Vol. IV, p. 286.

82 See pp. 55-6.

One of the Italian commentators who found himself caught between the Scylla and Charybdis of the actuality of epic superiority and a reverence for Aristotle's view was Trissino.⁸³ Spingarn comments that, as a result of his conflict, Trissino "concludes by leaving the reader to judge for himself whether epic or tragedy be the nobler form."⁸⁴

Most of the critics of the Italian Renaissance prefer the epic to the tragedy. Minturno takes a definite stand concerning epic superiority; he writes that "heroic poetry is the divine art and easily first in poetry."⁸⁵ Scaliger also openly agrees, and writes that it is "epicum, quod idcirco omnium est princeps, quia continet materias universas."⁸⁶ Scaliger adopts the Horatian conception of the epic, following Horace's idea of "heorum genus, vita, gesta,"⁸⁷ which profoundly influenced much of Renaissance theory of the epic poem. Tasso agrees with Scaliger and Minturno, in that his literary criticism is con-

83 This problem is exemplified in Trissino's Poetica. The first four divisions were first published in 1529; the fifth and sixth divisions were not published until 1563. The general point of view expressed, however, was already contained in esse, as it were, in Sofonisba, an early tragedy by Trissino. (Allan H. Gilbert, Literary Criticism: Plato to Dryden, New York, American Book, 1940, p. 212, note.)

84 Springarn, op. cit., p. 108.

85 Minturno, De Poeta, quoted in H. B. Charlton, Castelvetro's Theory of Poetry, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1913, p. 141.

86 Scaliger, Poetices Libri Septem, quoted in Ibid.

87 Horace, Ars Poetica.

fined to the appreciation of the epic.

Among the critics named in the passage in Milton's treatise on education, there is definitely no unanimity regarding which form is superior. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to presume that Milton himself should have considered the problem at some length. Aristotle, his principal reference, argues for tragic superiority. Horace represents "decorum" but does not in the Ars Poetica discuss the comparative merits of the kinds of poetry. Castelvetro argues for tragic superiority, while Tasso supports the epic. Mazzoni chooses the tragedy because it holds the highest place in his own interpretation of the inculcation of art into the Platonic social hierarchy.

Mazzoni, although he was one of those singled out by Milton in Of Education, probably did not have a "direct and strong influence on the English Poet."⁸⁸ Yet, in such an individual point as that which is at present considered, Mazzoni is one of the "Commentators"⁸⁹ who clearly influenced

⁸⁸ Allan H. Gilbert, op. cit., p. 358.

⁸⁹ "There is inaccuracy ... in [Milton's] manner of speaking of the Italians; Castelvetro's work is a commentary, but those of Tasso and Mazzoni are not; perhaps Milton has in mind their dependence on Aristotle; at any rate, the word probably should not suggest lack of acquaintance with them. Clearly, the writers that came first to Milton's mind are primarily conservative. Castelvetro is not without independence, yet he is after all a commentator. Tasso, though he wrote the Jerusalem Delivered, also rewrote it in closer accord with the ruling Aristotelianism of his time. Mazzoni defended Dante as one who had observed the ancient rule of structure. Of those who asserted the rights of modern literature Milton says nothing. Perhaps this means no more than that he thought their writings relatively unsuitable for his young pupils." (Allan H. Gilbert, op. cit., pp. 536-7.)

Milton. Although Mazzoni's preference for tragedy is indicated throughout his work, perhaps it is best exemplified in his reconciliation of poetry with Plato's ideal state:

Plato holds that the state should be composed of three sorts of persons, that is, of artificers, soldiers, and magistrates. Proclus adds that among the artificers Plato includes all the citizens of low and middle rank, and that among the magistrates are rated all the more powerful, who have the conduct of the state in their hands. Now if that is granted I say that through the foresight of the civil faculty there originated in the city three principal kinds of poetry, namely the heroic, the tragic, and the comic, each of which, even though it availed itself of pleasure in order to benefit all the people, nevertheless was chiefly applied to the benefit of one of the three parts, which, according to Plato, are necessary to the civil unit. Therefore we say that heroic poetry was chiefly directed to soldiers, since they may be encouraged to imitate the virtuous actions of the heroes presented in it as though by the sharp stimulus of glory. Tragedy is concerned chiefly with what is useful and helpful to princes, magistrates, and powerful persons, and for this reason, in order to hold them always subject to the justice of the laws, it prefers to present the horrible and terrifying accidents of the great; this acts as a bridle which tempers and moderates the greatness of their fortune. Comedy has as its chief purpose to benefit persons of low or middle estate, and in order to console them for their low fortune was in the habit of presenting actions that conclude happily.⁹⁰

Thus, Mazzoni's view of epic poetry lies chiefly in the idea that it is merely martial in character; an idea which Milton is later to reject in his abandonment of his proposed Arthuread, and his appropriation of the story of the Christian myth.⁹¹ Milton, of course, retains, notably in Books V and VI of Paradise Lost, the martial tradition of heroic poetry, but the martial

⁹⁰ Mazzoni, Discourse in Defense of the Comedy, excerpted in Gilbert, op. cit., p. 382.

⁹¹ Hanford, op. cit., pp. 179-81.

motif is certainly never central to his epic, never usurps the place of the story of the Fall, though it does have the effect of giving the epic an added "sharp stimulus of glory."⁹²

Tasso, too, is in much the same position with relation to Milton, although his epic doubtlessly gave the English poet many of his ideas concerning epic construction. Tasso's artistic preference is the epic ideal, a choice which he clearly expresses in his Discourses on the Heroic Poem:

The heroic style is not remote from the gravity of tragic style nor from the beauty of lyric style, but it exceeds both the one and the other in the splendor of its wonderful majesty. Yet it is not inappropriate to the epic poet that issuing sometimes from the limits of his splendid magnificence, he should cause his style to approach the gravity of the tragic writer, as he often does; at other times, though more rarely, he can cause it to approach the flowery ornaments of lyric style.⁹³

However, we cannot conclude that Milton wholly agreed with Tasso on this point, although he appears to have benefitted from Tasso's advice in his descriptions of the infernal council (II, 1-506), of the epic battle (VI, 139-866), and of dawn, in Paradise Lost; as well as the description of an army (III, 299-336), in Paradise Regained.⁹⁴

Of those Italians named by Milton, Castelvetro is the only writer who gives us a true "Commentary" on Aristotle's

⁹² Mazzoni, loc. cit.

⁹³ Tasso, Discourses on the Heroic Poem, excerpted in Gilbert, op. cit., pp. 501-2.

⁹⁴ Gilbert, Ibid., p. 491, note 84.

Poetics. Castelvetro is, nevertheless, no slavish emulator and expositor, since he differs with Aristotle on a number of subjects, the most important of which concerns the matter of the unities and epic unity. He argues that poetry is imaginative history and can, therefore, do anything history can do; and, since history recounts the whole life of a single hero without giving a unity of action, there is no reason why poetry should not do the same.⁹⁵ The distinction, however, which Castelvetro does make between poetry and history is probably of indirect importance to Milton, in that Castelvetro declares history to be a narration of what has actually happened and poetry to be a narration of what never happened but of what may possibly happen. Milton's treatment of the whole history of mankind from its beginning, passing the present, to its end, precisely fulfills Castelvetro's requirement as a narration of what, at least in part, has not happened, but what could very possibly happen. In fact, Milton's work extends and strengthens the idea expressed by Castelvetro to the point where there is much more in the view than perhaps the Italian commentator himself ever dreamed there was.

Regarding the epic hero, Castelvetro has perhaps exerted another major influence on Milton. Although Castelvetro propounds the idea that the unity of the life of the epic hero is not indispensable to the epic, he concludes his argument by pointing out that if the epic hero does have unity of action,

95 Spingarn, op. cit., pp. 44-7.

as Aristotle urges, such a quality indicates the excellence and ingenuity of the poet.⁹⁶ Milton's attitude to the epic hero is more complex than Castelvetro's. Milton found that for his purposes there must be no one, traditional, type-figure of a hero such as Aeneas, but, instead, the heroic ideal must be diffused into a variety of characters, embodying Satan as well as God, enlarging both Adam and Eve, and even infusing itself into such a heroic minor character as Abdiel, who is prepared alone to defend the forces of goodness against the infernal attack. Michael -- and Raphael as well -- are yet other figures sharing in the glory of the heroic role.

Castelvetro, along with his master, Aristotle, preferred the tragedy to the epic. Charlton informs us that after Minturno Renaissance criticism in general devotes itself to epic superiority, except for Castelvetro, who "alone held that tragedy is the supreme poetic species."⁹⁷

Besides these "Commentators" whom Milton named, the poet's own ideas of epic theory appear to be partly derived from the "others" whom he anonymously mentions. Scaliger, for example, who owed little to Aristotle, except for that which he obtained through Horace, is, although several times he speaks most disparagingly of Plato, Platonic in so far that his reasoning process is deductive. Spingarn describes Scaliger's approach and gives him credit for furthering the evaluation

96 Charlton, op. cit., p. 92.

97 Ibid., p. 141.

of ideal forms or genres in literature:

It has been said of Scaliger that he was the first modern to establish in a body of doctrine the principal consequences of the sovereignty of the reason in literature. That was hardly his aim, and certainly not his attainment. But he was, at all events, one of the first modern critics to affirm that there is a standard of perfection for each specific form of literature, to show that this standard may be arrived at a priori through the reason, and to attempt a formulation of such standard for each literary form. 'Est in omni rerum genere unum primum ac rectum ad cuius tum normam, tum rationem caetera dirigenda sunt.' This, the fundamental assumption of Scaliger's Poetics, is also one of the basic ideas of classicism. Not only is there a standard, a norm, in every species of literature, but this norm can be definitely formulated and defined by means of the reason; and it is the duty of the critic to formulate this norm, and the duty of the poet to study and follow it without deviating from the norm in any way. Even Homer, as we have seen, is to be judged according to this standard arrived at through the reason. Such a method cuts off all possibility of novelty of form or expression, and holds every poet, ancient or modern, great or small, accountable to one and the same standard of perfection.⁹⁸

Although, as Spingarn here indicates, Scaligerian conceptions of an artistic norm can have the effect of decreasing the creative intensity of the poet by hindering his poetic freedom, we must not allow the difficulties of the practical application or enforcement of such a view to obscure its intrinsic value. At its core, Scaliger's theory presents the ideal for which every artist properly strives. With a mental conception of an ideal form, the artist purposes to imitate that pure ideal and, from the primacy of such a generalization as the pure epic form, to find the particulars which will thence lead to the final idealization. The manner in which

98 Spingarn, op. cit., pp. 149-50.

Milton speaks in Of Education indicates that his sense of propriety tells him of the perfection of epic, tragedy, and lyric, as ideal forms. The proper procedure in the effort to apprehend such an archetype of the epic is, consequently, left much to the poet's own choice. But if, like Milton, he has the valuable assistance of the best critics, many of the poet's labours will be mitigated. Furthermore, his errors will be largely circumvented and his final product will be a closer approximation to the ideal original in his mind, an ideal which is always tantalizingly just beyond complete possession.

CHAPTER VI : THE GENERAL AND THE PARTICULAR

Relevance of particularization and generalization. -- The ideal and the actual. -- The Heraclitan philosophy of fire. -- Parmenidian philosophy opposed to change. -- Milton's attitude to the two views. -- Relation of Plato and Aristotle. -- Their dichotomy by no means complete. -- Milton's attempt to reconcile them. -- Results of Milton's attempt. -- From the general to the particular. -- Milton generally not anti-Aristotelian. -- Aspects of his Platonic and anti-Aristotelian ideas.

Before either the construction of Paradise Lost as a whole or the treatment of Book IX in particular can be appreciated, it is important to acknowledge a general background for much of such further discussion. The problems of imagery, for example, are fundamental to other, perhaps even more important problems, such as the over-all concentration and expansion of a work of poetic art. And any consideration of concentration and expansion, of thought and image, of intellect and emotion can be reduced under the heading of generalization and particularization.

The general or intellectual, the idea, is fundamentally linked to the ideal, and the particular or emotional -- that is, the expressive utterance -- is similarly inextricable from the actual. In our minds, the ideal concept is usually in close association with an inactive, static aura; while the actual is as life factually is to ordinary men: a life of constant, unceasing change. Amongst pre-Socratic philosophers, Heraclitus and Parmenides, both of whom stated their philosophical views so extremely that they are perhaps unique in the totality of their opposition, represent constant activity and non-activity respectively.

The metaphysics of Heraclitus is centred on one basic idea: fire is the essential substance. Moreover, it is not merely actual fire of which he speaks, but, more essentially, the symbol of fire which "steers the universe,"⁹⁹ and indicates to man that ever-moving nature of reality. From the Heraclitan point of view, all reality exists only in movement; even the unifying principle of nature is, according to him, in a state of constant flux:

This ordered universe (cosmos), which is the same for all, was not created by any one of the gods or of mankind, but it was ever and is and shall be ever-living Fire, kindled in measure and quenched in measure.¹⁰⁰

His criterion of judgement appears to rest in the proper use of the senses. Although they are limited and imperfect, Heraclitus singles out the most superior of the senses, sight and hearing, as most worthy of sanction from a philosophical point of view. Thus, he remarks, "Those things of which there is sight, hearing, knowledge, these are what I honour most."¹⁰¹ The senses experience only that which is in the state of constant change, and, consequently, all man can know or understand is the nature of a world which cannot know motionlessness. It is "the turning world" which can be apprehended by the senses which is

⁹⁹ Heraclitus, Frag. 64, in Kathleen Freeman, trans., Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1952, p. 29.

¹⁰⁰ Heraclitus, Frag. 30, in Ibid., p. 26.

¹⁰¹ Heraclitus, Frag. 55, in Ibid., p. 28.

idealistically apprehendable, not the "still point,"¹⁰² which is, at best, mere conjecture, little better than "children's toys."¹⁰³ Even harmony is to Heraclitus an active rather than a static quality, in that it "consists of opposing tension."¹⁰⁴ Another fragment elaborates on the idea: "That which is in opposition is in concert, and from things that differ comes the most beautiful harmony."¹⁰⁵ One cannot help but think that this is much like Goeth's final view, in which even heaven was a place of activity:

I am firmly convinced, (he said to Eckermann,) that our spirit (mind) is a being whose nature (essence) is absolutely indestructible, a being that continues to be active on and on from eternity to eternity; it is like the sun which to our earthly eyes seems to set, which, however, never really sets but shines on unceasingly.¹⁰⁶

To a mind possessing Parmenidian attitudes, Heraclitus' outlook is equivalent to the destruction of absolutes and ideals and the idolization of "means" at the expense of "ends." Parmenides explicitly denounces those for whom "in everything there is a way of opposing stress,"¹⁰⁷ and argues that essential

102 T. S. Eliot, op. cit., p. 9.

103 Heraclitus, Frag. 70, in op. cit., p. 29.

104 Ibid., Frag. 51, p. 28.

105 Ibid., Frag. 8, p. 25.

106 J.W. Von Goethe, Conversations with Eckermann, (May 2, 1824), quoted in Faust, trans., G.M. Priest, New York, Covici-Friede, 1932, p. 418, note.

107 Parmenides, Frag. 6, in Freeman, op. cit., p. 43.

being is absolutely unchanging. Furthermore, Parmenides admonishes the seeker of reality not to rely on his sensuous apprehension of things, saying:

You must debar your thought from this way of search, nor let ordinary experience in its variety force you along this way, (namely, that of allowing) the eye, sightless as it is, and the ear, full of sound, and the tongue, to rule....¹⁰⁸

Parmenides argues that only by Reason (Logos) can one arrive at the truth of reality.¹⁰⁹

While to the Heraclitan mind inactivity is equivalent to stagnancy, in the Parmenidian outlook stillness is associated with perfection, the realization of the ideal, the reality beyond the appearance, the substance behind the shadow. It is pertinent that where Parmenides considers day and night, he thinks of them as irreconcilable opposites:

But since all things are named Light and Night, and names have been given to each class of things according to the power of one or the other (Light or Night), everything is full equally of Light and invisible Night, as both are equal, because to neither of them belongs any share (of the other).¹¹⁰

Heraclitus, on the other hand, inevitably combines them, associating the two opposites, in his description of God, as "day-night, winter-summer, war-peace...."¹¹¹ Thus, while it is

¹⁰⁸ Parmenides, Frags. 7 & 8, in loc cit.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Heraclitus' idea of Logos in Frag. 115: "The soul has its own Law (Logos), which increases itself (i.e., grows according to its needs). (Heraclitus, Frag. 115, in op. cit., p. 32.)

¹¹⁰ Parmenides, Frag. 9, in op. cit., p. 45.

¹¹¹ Heraclitus, Frag. 67, in op. cit., p. 29.

twilight and dawn which Heraclitus takes as his criterion, it is midnight and noon which is appropriate to the thought of Parmenides.

Milton is concerned with both ways of looking at nature, but, on the whole, he is more Parmenidian in outlook than he is Heraclitan. Considerations, nevertheless, of twilight and dawn are fundamental not only to L'Allegro and Il Penseroso but they are important throughout the rest of his work: the paradox of "darkness visible," for example, is a motif found in the poetry and prose from the earliest to the latest of his works.

Plato and Aristotle cannot be placed in such complete opposition as Platonists and Aristotelians have, in the past and at the present, assumed. The two greatest of Greek philosophers are certainly not so strictly opposed in the manner in which Parmenides and Heraclitus are opposed; yet, although there is a zone of shadow between them, there are nevertheless matters in which they do tend towards direct opposition. Plato is certainly more Parmenidian than Aristotle, and Aristotle, in turn, is certainly more Heraclitan than Plato. In fact, one may even argue that essentially Plato's ideal is static in nature; while Aristotle's is active.

Milton, it is noteworthy, attempted a reconciliation between the metaphysics of the two philosophers in his Artis Logicae:

Form is the cause through which a thing is what it is. This definition joins those of Plato and

Aristotle. For Plato defines form as the cause through which, Aristotle as that which is. As the matter, so also the form is a kind of effect of the efficient. For the efficient produces the form not yet existing and induces it into the matter; but the form is also the cause of the effect and especially and alone argues the effect, which exists chiefly by the strength of the form. For the efficient cannot be frustrated by the form, the form by the effect. Through which: the phrase signifies that force which informs and constitutes the thing or effect. For there is nothing that does not have its form, though unknown to us.¹¹²

Of Milton's attempt, in this most important passage in his Logic, to reconcile the two philosophers, Ralph W. Condee writes:

What Milton is trying to do is join the Platonic idea of Form as something separate from Matter with the Aristotelian idea of Form as something inherent in Matter, its essence, the being of the Matter.¹¹³

Whether it is a successful union or not, Milton's reconciliation of Plato and Aristotle is not on the basis of complete equality; Plato's supposed dichotomy of body and soul has become less defined and Aristotle's tendency towards the inextricability of form and matter, of ideal and actual, has been largely adopted, though with certain restraints.

The restraints are understandable, when we consider that it is not only as a Christian but also as a personality

112 John Milton, Artis Logicae, Vol. XI, p. 59.

113 Ralph W. Condee, Milton's Theories Concerning Epic Poetry, Doctoral Dissertation, Urbana, University of Illinois, 1949, p. 16; he also notes that, before Milton, Ficino had attempted the reconciliation of Plato and Aristotle concerning the final cause. (p. 16).

that Milton must remain Platonic, although both as a Christian and a human being he presents the basis for the argument of the goodness of the flesh. That as a Christian Milton must accept the Platonic dichotomy as well as the idea of the goodness of the flesh is obvious enough; that as a personality he must accept it is, however, less evident.

His is a personality which, unlike Shakespeare's begins with the general concept and finds illustration for it from an object in nature. That is, in proceeding from the idea of form separate from matter, or of the concept separate from its most appropriate image, he advances to the realization of that matter or image, as the case may be. Conversely, he does not proceed, in Aristotelian fashion, merely from the matter or the image to the form or idealization of the image.

"Poetry," says Aristotle, "is a more philosophical and a higher thing than history: for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular."¹¹⁴ What he appears to mean is that the end of poetry is the appreciation of the universal; however, this universal, at least with relation to the creation of character is, in Aristotle, only comparative or relative in nature. "Good portrait-painters," he says a little further on, "while reproducing the distinctive form of the original, make a likeness which is true to life and yet more beautiful."¹¹⁵ In other words, if we grant these two

¹¹⁴ Aristotle, Poetics, IX. 3, in Butcher, op. cit., p. 35.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., XV. 8, p. 57.

contexts any compatibility, poetry is the appreciation of a universal which is relative, in that the end creation is "more beautiful" rather than "most beautiful." The weakness in such thought perhaps begins with a misunderstanding of the true quality of the original subject. Certainly, the great portrait-painter will not only see his model idealized upon his canvas into an object more beautiful than it is in actuality, but also as the most beautiful, the ideal, which exists in all its absolute purity, within his mind.

A similar disregard for the Platonic ideal is illustrated by an omission in Aristotle's argument concerning the proper procedure which the poet should adopt in the creation of his art. "As for the story," he says, "whether the poet takes it ready made or constructs it for himself, he should first sketch its general outline, and then fill in the episodes and amplify in detail."¹¹⁶ This is, of course, extremely valuable practical advice, but it is doubtful whether its success, on the highest level, can be assured, since the true departure-point for a great number of poets is not in the particularity of a general outline, but in the generality of the basic meaning which resides in the core of his poem.

The whole difficulty depends upon the interpretation of the working of the creative imagination. Coleridge quotes

¹¹⁶ Aristotle, Poetics, XVII. 3, in Butcher, op. cit., p. 63.

Sir John Davies' lines:

Thus doth she, when from individual states
She doth abstract the universal kinds,
When then reclothed in divers names and fates,
Steal access thro' our senses to our minds,¹¹⁷

and Butcher remarks, concerning the theory of imagination.

The meaning is not that a general idea is embodied in a particular example -- that is the method of allegory rather than that of poetry -- but that the particular case is generalized by artistic treatment.¹¹⁸

A little further on, Butcher quotes Goethe: "A special case requires nothing but the treatment of a poet to become universal and poetical," and then remarks that Aristotle would have agreed.¹¹⁹

Thus, Aristotle, Goethe, Coleridge, Sir John Davies, and Butcher, all agree that the natural action of the poet's imagination is to proceed from the particular to the general or universal. What they are forgetting to mention, however, is that such two-part action is for the poet, as it stands, but two-thirds of the whole truth of creativity. Before any particular is intelligible, there must at least be a vague idea of the general principle in the poet's mind, awakening, as it were, from its obscured life. Therefore, the critical process originates, at least from a Platonic point of view, in the general abstraction of the ideal to its

¹¹⁷ Sir John Davies, quoted in Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, Chapter XIV.

¹¹⁸ Butcher, op. cit., p. 194.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

particular example; thence to an approximation of that found particular into its approximate idealization.

Although Plato came to believe that in art there is at best nothing but a mere semblance of truth, still his view of thought is important in the present argument. Butcher says:

Starting from the notion of pure Being (Plato) found reality only in the world of ideas (i.e., ideals), sensible phenomena being but so many images which at best remind us of the celestial archetype. To him Becoming was the simple antithesis of Being; it meant the world of change, the sphere of phenomena, the region in which the individual life appears for a moment and then vanishes away.¹²⁰

Milton, like Plato, is never very far from the notion of pure Being, and, although he found it necessary for the purposes of the creation of art to adopt many Aristotelian expedients, such as the idea of Becoming, his essential temper of thought is Platonic. It is true that he disagrees with Plato's ideas on the licensing of books. Moreover, their respective arguments for the virtuous education and for religious and civil nurture are at variance. Furthermore, Milton takes Plato to task for his exclusion of poets and poetry from society.¹²¹

Nevertheless, Milton's sympathies during his youth were unquestionably pro-Platonic and openly anti-Aristotelian. His partiality is shown most clearly perhaps in the second

¹²⁰ Butcher, op. cit., p. 159.

¹²¹ John Milton, Areopagitica, Vol. IV, pp. 316-8.

Prolusion, defending Plato and Pythagoras and attacking, though in light vein, Aristotle:

That most skilful interpreter of Mother Nature, Plato, has followed (Pythagoras), since he affirms that certain sirens sit one upon each of the circles of the heavens and hold spell-bound gods and men by their most honey-sweet song....

Aristotle, the envious and perpetual calumniator of Pythagoras and Plato, desiring to pave a way to renown on the shattered opinions of these great men, imputed to Pythagoras the unheard symphony of the heavens and tunes of the spheres.¹²²

Throughout his mature works, however, Milton does not descend to mere attack upon Aristotle, but often merely shows, as in this passage from the Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce, his preference by the syntactical subordination of one to the other:

... it is the constant opinion of Plato in Protagoras and other of his dialogues agreeing with that proverbiall sentence among the Greeks, that no man is wicked willingly; which also the Peripateticks doe rather distinguish then deny.¹²³

On the whole, Milton is positively appreciative of Aristotle, as Irene Samuel points out:

Milton recognized what many students forget, that Plato taught Aristotle for long years to the apparent satisfaction of both, and that the writings of master and pupil disagree far less than those of the militant Platonists and Aristotelians of later generations. On Milton's page, the two often appear together in support of the same doctrine, and their agreement is not forced. The emphasis is right; in general, Aristotle does 'rather distinguish than

122 John Milton, Areopagitica, Vol. IV, pp. 316-8.

123 John Milton, The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce, Vol. III, Part II, p. 464.

deny' Platonic teachings. And where Aristotle 'distinguished,' Milton often accepted the refinement.¹²⁴

Thus, from an over-all point of view, it appears that Milton seeks to reconcile and justify both philosophers, although he tends to give Plato his preference more frequently when the two are in more or less direct opposition.

It is especially concerning the following points that it can be said Milton is at variance with Aristotle and at one with Plato: (1) his general ideal ultimately tends towards a static rather than an active nature; (2) his intellectual interest is rationalistic rather than empirical; and (3) his imaginative process is more concerned with generality than with particularity. Shakespeare, with regard to this latter point, is in contrast to Milton, in that the greatest of English dramatists is concerned primarily with particulars and secondarily with the ideal form which in the present context is regarded as the seed of creativity and called the generality.

¹²⁴ Irene Samuel, op. cit., p. 34.

CHAPTER VII : THE CONSTRUCTION OF PARADISE LOST

Classical tragic epics. -- The five-act epic. -- Paradise Lost five-act epic. -- The five acts of Paradise Lost. -- Aristotle's comparison of tragedy and epic. -- The general and the particular. -- Proper point of imaginative source. -- The rule as a critical preconception. -- Aristotelian discussion neglects most important distinction. -- Importance of epic devices. -- The epic simile. -- In medias res. -- The psychological meaning in device. -- The beginning, middle and end. -- The device as gainer of interest. -- Examples of Tolstoy's novel. -- Statement of theme and in medias res. -- Reconciliation of a paradox. -- Tolstoyan objections anticipated. -- Humility in Paradise Lost. -- Coleridge on Paradise Lost.

It has been observed that in structure Paradise Lost is in the tradition of the Iliad and the Aeneid.¹²⁵ These two classical epics are structurally remarkable chiefly in that, unlike the Odyssey, they confine their tragic story in such a way that the expansiveness of the total epic is intensified by the particularized emotional experience; particularized, that is, within one book. Book twenty-four of the Iliad and the action of Books three and four of the Aeneid are self-contained, human tragedies, while the two epics, as a whole, are generalized epic-tragedies, tragedies which, through their extension of time and place, bring to the beholder a vision panoramic in scope and definitive in meaning.

The panoramic vision of mankind and the world may be considered an intrinsic and unique aspect of epic writing, since, in a manner of speaking, the panorama is the soul of

¹²⁵ Arthur Barker, "Structural Pattern in Paradise Lost," Philological Quarterly, Iowa City, University of Iowa, (Oct. 1949), No. 4, Vol. XXVIII, pp. 17 ff.

the epic, the only aspect of epic which can be found nowhere else. It is true, of course, that the drama has often attempted to include the panoramic effects for which it has consistently felt the need, but the grand style with which the panorama is closely intermingled is almost always uncomfortably misplaced in drama.¹²⁶

The classical epic, it should be noted, lends itself, as far as dramatic form is concerned, to separation into five "acts." The five-act division of modern tragical theory has, consequently, its basis in Aristotle's acknowledgement of the structural likeness between epic and tragedy.¹²⁷

Oedipus Rex, to Aristotle, the most nearly archetypal of all tragedies, is composed chiefly of five stasimons and five episodes; likewise, Renaissance conceptions of tragical form developed from this Aristotelian starting-point, finally to evolve the five-act tragedy.¹²⁸ It is less commonly recognized

126 The Elizabethan theatre affords one of the most interesting examples of the need of dramatists for the panoramic view of life and the glories of the grand style. Marlowe's plays are, for the most part, attempts to create in the drama its mistaken propensity to grandiloquence. Shakespeare, too, is significant in this respect, for his attempts to dramatize the epic, perhaps most successfully in Henry V and most unsuccessfully in Troilus and Cressida, probably indicate the appetite and need the Elizabethans had for epic panorama. Likely one of the most perfect examples of panorama in Shakespeare is found in the Duke of Burgundy's speech in Henry V, (V,ii, ll. 23-67).

127 Barker, loc. cit.

128 See T.W. Baldwin, "The Evolution of the Theory of Dramatic Structure from Aristotle to Donatus," Shakespeare's Five-Act Structure, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1947, pp. 53-63.

that, since generally the same rules of structure were applied by Aristotle to the epic as to the tragedy, Renaissance epical theory also acceded to the idea of a five-act structure in the epic poem, it taking the form of a ten-book division. The first published version of Paradise Lost, consequently, contained not twelve but ten books.

Arthur Barker writes that:

The 1667 edition of Paradise Lost presents a firmly organized five-act epic, perfectly exemplifying what were thought to be the Aristotelian requirements for structure. It successfully achieves what Sidney had earlier attempted, and it certainly out-Gondiberts Davenant. Its plot is seen at a glance to consist of five 'acts' (with appropriate 'scenes'), and the cumulative effect of these acts is exactly what Davenant said it should be.¹²⁹

Davenant in his Gondibert attempts to realize the formal and structural requirements of the five-act epic, just as Sidney before him aimed at creating the epic division into five books or acts in Arcadia.¹³⁰ In his preface to Gondibert, Davenant writes:

The first Act is the general preparative, by rendering the chiefest characters of persons, and ending with something that looks like an obscure promise of design. The second begins with an introduction of new persons, so finishes all the characters, and ends with some little performance of that design which was promised at the parting of the first Act. The third makes a visible correspondence in the underwalks, or lesser intrigues, of persons, and ends with an ample turn of the main design and ex-

¹²⁹ Barker, op. cit., p. 22.

¹³⁰ Sir Philip Sidney, The Complete Works, ed., Albert Feuillerat, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1926, Vol. IV.

pectation of a new. The fourth, ever having occasion to be the longest, gives a notorious turn to all the underwalks, and a counterturn to that main design which changed in the third. The fifth begins with an intire diversion of the main and dependant Plotts, then makes the general correspondence of the persons more discernable, and ends with an easy untying of those particular knots which made a contexture of the whole, leaving such satisfaction of probabilities with the Spectator as may persuade him that neither Fortune in the fate of the Persons, nor the Writer in the Representment, have been unnatural or exorbitant.¹³¹

Professor Barker outlines, according to the principles set down by Davenant, the five-act division of the 1667 version of *Paradise Lost*:¹³² Act I reveals Satan's condition in hell, and treats of the infernal council and the departure of Satan (Books I and II of the 1667 version); Act II contains a scene in heaven which is focussed on Satan who is on his voyage, and it also includes the Devil's first attempt at seducing the "Mother of Mankind" (Books III and IV). Act III is mainly concerned with the past, and Adam learns of the war in heaven and Satan's defeat (Books V and VI). In Act IV the story of the Creation is told Adam, and it is followed by the colloquies on astronomy and woman and by the turning point of the action, the Fall (Books VII and VIII).¹³³

¹³¹ Sir William Davenant, "Preface to *Gondibert*," (1650), *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century*, ed., J.E. Spingarn, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1908, pp. 17-18.

¹³² Barker, *loc. cit.*

¹³³ This material is covered in the 1667 edition in Books VII, VIII and IX; in the 1674 revision in Books X, XI and XII.

The over-all construction of Paradise Lost into a five-act epic tragedy is based on Aristotle's comparison of the epic and the tragic forms. It is unfortunate in the Poetics that it is but a fragmentary chapter,¹³⁴ which discusses the comparisons and contrasts between the two forms, in which Aristotle asserts that "all the elements of an Epic poem are found in tragedy, but the elements of a tragedy are not all found in the Epic poem."¹³⁵ Such a statement appears to be opposite to the Miltonic concept of the epic, since the structure of Book IX, constituting a tragedy, is contained within the larger structure of the five-act tragedy.

It is characteristic and fundamental in Aristotelian criticism that all poetry, as we have considered in Chapter VI, proceeds from the particular to the general, from the image to the concept, from the microcosm to a macrocosmic universality. This outlook is appropriate to certain scientists and poets alike, but it is not appropriate to the idealistic philosopher or poet. The poet or philosopher who starts with a generalization and ends with that generalization illustrated or imaged is more characteristic of a man whose nature is idealistic, and Milton's is a mind which functions in that manner.

It has been argued, as we have seen in Chapter VI,

¹³⁴ S. H. Butcher, "Analysis of Contents," op. cit., p. 1.

¹³⁵ Aristotle, Poetics, V. 5, in op. cit., p. 23.

by Aristotelians, that the poetry of men who proceed from generalization to concentration of image is inferior and that the opposite is the mark of the greatest poetry; but it is a point which admits of so many qualifications that one can conclude only that both the image and the generalized thought must be present in the greatest of poems, and that no one can ever lay down absolute rules as to whether the general or the particular should be the point of commencement in the creative imagination. Nevertheless, the three-part procedure of the poet's creation, as it is outlined in Chapter VI, appears to overcome possible Aristotelian objections applied to Milton's art.

In this fast rule of progression from particular to ideal, we find an important critical pre-conception which permeates Aristotelian literary criticism. The maxim appears to give rise to Aristotle's preferring the tragic to the epic form, to valuing a poet's emotional intensity over a poet's power of continuity, and, consequently, to a reverence for the violence of emotion. In short, it shows a propensity towards over-valuing active poetry, and, in turn, to under-estimating the more profound though quieter intensity found in static poetry.¹³⁶ Even in the philosopher's statement that "all the elements of the epic poem are found in tragedy, but

¹³⁶ Although his emphasis is on the active aspect of poetry, Aristotle nevertheless acknowledges the importance of continuity. (See p. 131); and the stillness which resides at the "still centre" of all things (See p. 132).

the elements of tragedy are not all found in the Epic poem"¹³⁷ presumes that the more exact, the more particular, is superior to the general, and what may be called universal mode.

Aristotle, in a fragmentary chapter, asserts that epic and tragic poetry are alike in that they both treat of heroes, but that they differ on a number of points: the metre of the epic poem is unique; it is written as a narrative; and it is greater in length than the tragedy.¹³⁸ He points out that tragedy attempts unity of time, (i.e. confines itself roughly to a single day), while the epic has no temporal limits.¹³⁹ It is unfortunate that we should not have a fuller development of these ideas, since it appears that probably the most important difference between the epic and the tragedy is that the former is characterized by the vastness of its panoramic view, while the latter is of its nature almost completely visual,¹⁴⁰ almost solely physically illustrative.

137 Aristotle, Poetics, V. 5, in op. cit., p. 23.

138 Aristotle, Poetics, V. 4, in ibid., pp. 21-2.

139 Ibid., p. 23.

140 The heroic plays of Shakespeare, for example, constantly suggest the epic, and at the same time the tragic limitations. Such plays as Henry IV, V, and VI, as well as Julius Caesar and Troilus and Cressida seen of their nature to desire to break the bonds of the "Wooden O" and metamorphose themselves from tragic to epic form. Shakespeare, and Marlowe as well, appears to have within him the desire to create an epic, though the times perhaps and the particular circumstances of the two dramatists certainly were not right for it.

Furthermore, many of the devices which form the conventions of the epic, whether or not they are used in tragedy, can indicate important differences between epic and tragedy. It is true that such a convention as the recognition scene is common to both epic and tragedy, but truly important devices, such as the extended simile and the use of in medias res are conventions more successfully related to the epic, since they are associated more closely with its structure and with what is commonly called the panoramic or epic view of life.

The extended epithet is specially relevant because it not only fills a functionary need in the interruption of concentrated narrative but also in that it lends itself to the expansive view of life, a prospect which is wider than the particular example usually afforded by the narrative. Book I of Paradise Lost offers many examples of the extended epithet; and it shows that, although the narrative is lengthened by means of extended images, the vividness of concentrated verse need not be lost; there need be no disintegration into imagistic weakness, an incapacity which, incidentally, marks the poorest of epic writers. Milton's "clustering" epithets are examples of extended similes which give peculiar credibility to the condition of Satan and his cohorts in hell. The deliberate obscurity, and yet the intensity afforded by such similes as those concerning the leaves of Vallombrosa:

Thick as Autumnal Leaves that strow the Brooks
In Vallombrosa, where th' Etrurian shades
High overarch't imbowl; or scattered sedge

Afloat, when with fierce Winds Orion arm'd
Hath vex't the Red-Sea Coast, whose waves orethrew
Busiris and his Mephian Chivalrie,
While with perfidious hatred they pursu'd
The Sojourners of Goshen, who beheld
From the safe shore their floating Carkases
And broken Chariot Wheels, so thick bestrown
Abject and lost lay these, covering the Flood,
Under amazement of their hideous change;¹⁴¹

and the bees clustering round the hive:

As Bees

In spring time, when the Sun with Taurus rides,
Poure forth thir populous youth about the Hive
In clusters; they among fresh dews and flowers
Flie to and fro, or on the smoothed Plank,
The suburb of thir Straw-built Cittadel,
New rub'd with Baume, expatiate and confer
Thir State Affairs. So thick the aerie crowd
Swarm'd and were straitn'd;¹⁴²

- this combined obscurity and intensity add to the high measure of Milton's success in giving hell a particular credibility in readers' minds. There is, as a consequence of his deliberately vague visual imagery,¹⁴³ an accentuation of auditory imagery;

¹⁴¹ Paradise Lost, I, 302 ff.

¹⁴² Ibid., I, 768 ff.

¹⁴³ T. S. Eliot's celebrated attack on Milton, in later years somewhat retracted, (T. S. Eliot, "A Note on the verse of John Milton," Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1936, pp. 32-40), appears to rest its case on the fact that Milton's imagery is visually weak and aurally strong. Eliot did not, of course, realize what benefits Milton's poetry enjoyed from making his imagery deliberately vague. For example, the scenes of heaven, hell, and Paradise, attain a credibility as a result of this vagueness (which, incidentally, is compensated for by vividness in sound qualities) which otherwise they could never have attained. Thus Milton prevents the reader from imagining Eden or Hell or Heaven to be fairy-tale worlds but rather more credible than any fantasy could hope to be. For a complete defense against Eliot's attack, see E.M.W. Tillyard, "Milton's Visual Imagination," The Miltonic Setting, London, Chatto & Windus, 1949, pp. 90-104.

and the element of the vividness of the extended epithets, coupled with the auditory element, give a picture of hell which is not only visual, nor merely auditory, but one which possesses a distinctively unique mood. The mood, however, is not like that which is presented by most writers who attempt to depict hell and create a semi-supernatural, fairy-tale atmosphere, a mood of märchen, but one which possesses the credibility of the actual, natural world.

The other epic device whose meaning has often been underestimated and neglected is that of in medias res. The starting of an epic in "the middle of things" has a special relevance to any man who attempts a comprehension of life on a vast scale. The Odyssey is especially noteworthy in this respect. There the device has the subtle, unconscious effect of accentuating the urgency of the present crisis concerning Odysseus' home-finding. Because the eventful past is related just before the dénouement, the climax of the plot is charged with suspense. Considered analogically, the epic begins its chronology with the expulsion and wandering and concludes it with fulfillment, when Odysseus finally finds his Utopia-home. The device of in medias res is, when it is used by a great writer, never a mere technical embellishment of his text. Since he does not mention it, Aristotle either failed to recognize or give much importance to the psychological importance of the device, as used in Homer. But surely this at least is an example which belongs to the epic, an instance where the

tragedy cannot boast its primacy; In its use of in medias res then, the epic has primacy in time and effect.

Psychologically, the device has much meaning. It is roughly in the middle of their lives that men come to full consciousness, after the dream-like consciousness of childhood and before the fulfillment which comes with age. The first words of Dante's Comedy signify well the idea:

"In the middle of the journey of our life I came to myself in a dark wood where the straight way was lost."¹⁴⁴ It is at physical and mental maturity that an individual looks both backward and forward. It is, in short, the beginning of life, started, as it were, in "the middle of things." Thus, the device of in medias res has for everyone a psychological truth to life "in the broad."

Aristotle, in discussing art, stresses the importance of the beginning, the middle, and the end,¹⁴⁵ but it is unfortunate that we have from him no discussion of the beginning which is also in medias res. It is possible, of course, that he would perhaps have mistakenly thought in medias res an unworthy or superficial mechanical device, even though his psychological interests might be expected to lead him to the support of such a device. In the drama, the same device is, of course, at work; there, however, it appears to be present

¹⁴⁴ Dante, Inferno, Canto I, ll. 1-3, London, Dent, 1932, p. 3.

¹⁴⁵ Aristotle, Poetics, VII.2, in op. cit., p. 31.

more often for its merely mechanical convenience as a means towards the maintenance of the unity of time.

In the drama the device is extremely effective in its capacity to gain the spectator's interest. The opening scenes of Shakespeare's tragedies illustrate the point well. In Hamlet, a ghost has just been seen; in Othello a war has just been won; in Macbeth the witches have gathered to cast their spell; and in King Lear, an old monarch has just declared his abdication and is about to divide his kingdom. The plays, of course, are not constructed with the in medias res principle at work as it is in epic poetry; since it acts primarily as a technical device in the drama, it does not contain an essential truth within it as it does in the epic; nevertheless, it is not difficult to realize that the same basic principle is at work in the two forms of poetry.

Tolstoy's Anna Karenina offers an outstanding example of a modern use of the same principle. "Everything was in confusion in the Oblonskys' house,"¹⁴⁶ is the first sentence in the narrative. One of Tolstoy's editors points out:

... on the 19th March, 1873, Tolstoy noticed an opened book on the table as he went into his son's bedroom; it was Doubrovsky, a novel by Pushkin. He glanced at the first page of Part Two and read: 'On the eve of the celebration the guests began to arrive...' This abrupt way of approaching a story, with no preliminary explanation, struck him so forcibly that he withdrew to his working quarters and, on the spot, wrote

¹⁴⁶ Tolstoy, Anna Karenina, New York, Modern Library, 1950, p. 3.

the beginning of Anna Karenina which began, suddenly, in the first version, with these words: 'All was confusion in the Oblonsky Household.'¹⁴⁷

The epic device of the "statement of theme" is closely interdependent with that of in medias res, and where that interdependence is most crucial is in the problem of Aristotle's idea of wholeness. That is, the work of art must have a beginning, a middle, and an end. It is true that all artistic form must have those three components and in that order. In music, for example, sonata form, based as it is upon simple song-form, is, in its exposition, development, and recapitulation, significantly analogous to the essential literary form containing a beginning, middle and end.

The truth of the triad of parts is finally emphasized by the facts of human existence, which are composed of three like parts: the beginning, i.e., the awakening or exposition into life which is childhood; the middle, i.e., the consciousness or development of personality which is youth; and the end, the simultaneous fulfillment and return to innocence which is age.

The statement of theme reconciles the truth of exposition with the truth of in medias res because it, with the "epic question" is like life in microcosm. Milton, in the first few lines of his poem gives the whole essence of Paradise Lost. The Fall of man, the justice of God's actions, and what caused man to fall, are the essential elements in

¹⁴⁷ Henri Troyat, "Introduction," Anna Karenina, p. vi.

the poem and constitute the essential nature of it. The need for more than these opening lines is the need for the quantitative qualification of the whole.¹⁴⁸

If civilized human beings were "unperverted," as Tolstoy believed children and peasants to be, both logically and emotionally, there would be no need for much more than the opening thirty lines of Paradise Lost, and even less need for the story of the Fall in Genesis. But neither the "noble savage," in the sense in which Rousseau refers to unspoiled man, nor the "unperverted peasant," who appears to be Tolstoy's ideal critic,¹⁴⁹ really exists. Hence, there is a real need for interpretation within the work of art,

¹⁴⁸ Ct. the view taken by René Guénon, who argues that the present concern with quantity is a tendency rather than a need and that quantity and quality are by nature opposite rather than compatible: "... our period could almost be defined as being essentially and primarily the 'reign of quantity.' This characteristic is chosen in preference to any other...because of its truly fundamental nature, for reduction to the quantitative is strictly in conformity with the conditions of the cyclic phase at which humanity has now arrived; and also because it is the particular tendency in question that leads logically to the lowest point of the 'descent' which proceeds continuously and with ever-increasing speed ...throughout the whole course of the manifestation of a humanity such as ours. This 'descent' (when it reaches) the lowest point takes on the aspect of pure quantity, deprived of every qualitative distinction." (René Guénon, The Reign of Quantity, London, Luzac & Co., 1953, p. 10.) The present point of view contrasts with this in that, while quantity is somewhat presumed in the works of Milton, the problem afforded by the quantity is not. Moreover, the severance of the qualitative and quantitative, as here described by René Guénon, does not necessarily apply to literature, although in any discussion which treats literature as an important part of ordinary life, quality and quantity must not be divorced, since we have a need, natural or cultivated, which must be answered.

¹⁴⁹ Leo Tolstoy, What is Art, London, Oxford University Press, 1930.

for artists to possess the power to make both over-civilized and "perverted" readers natural, innocent and, consequently, properly responsive. This feat, which is rarely accomplished, is actually realized in Paradise Lost for the reader who has passed initial difficulties of language and idiom and who reads the poem throughout, subverting his sentimental or inhibiting tendencies, his critical preconceptions, technical presuppositions, mnemonic irrelevancies and doctrinal adhesions¹⁵⁰. Then is the reader conditioned to the state of humility which Milton himself possesses with regard to the substance of his greatest poem.

The spirit of humility which permeates Paradise Lost lies in the relevance of time. It is the only poem which contains every essential aspect of human history from its beginning to its end. Moreover, it is the only poem which passes from the beginning to the end of time, since time has only to do with the mortal condition of the fallible life of man. Time, being a condition in which personality possesses a self-conscious self-interest, it is reasonable to assume that a work which successfully masters time by fully encompassing it, will bring about a condition outside temporal measurement for both poet and reader. Such a condition, amounting to a humility because the ego of the self is overcome, is fully realized in Books XI and XII in which all his-

¹⁵⁰ I.A. Richards, Practical Criticism, London, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1929.

tory is encompassed to the end of time. Michael concludes:

...so shall the World goe on,
To good malignant, to bad men benigne,
Under her own waight groaning, till the day
Appeer of respiration to the just,
And vengeance to the wicked, at return
Of him so lately promiss'd to thy aid,
The Womans seed, obscurely then foretold,
Now amplier known thy Saviour and thy Lord,
Last in the Clouds from Heav'n to be reveald
In glory of the Father, to dissolve
Satan with his perverted World, then raise
From the conflagrant mass, purg'd and refin'd,
New Heav'ns, new Earth, Ages of endless date
Founded in righteousness and peace and love,
To bring forth fruits Joy and eternal Bliss.¹⁵¹

Coleridge is quick to admire Paradise Lost on the grounds that it is all-inclusive and possesses the continuity not only of constant excellence in versification, but also in the continuity of time. He points out that the qualities of Books XI and XII have been neglected by critics and students of Milton:

I wish the Paradise Lost were more carefully read and studied than I can see any ground for believing it is, especially those parts which, from the habit of always looking for a story in poetry, are scarcely read at all, -- as for example, Adam's vision of future events in the 11th and 12th books. No one can rise from the perusal of this immortal poem without a deep sense of the grandeur and the purity of Milton's soul....¹⁵²

Perceptively, Coleridge also indicates one of the greatest virtues of the poem, its continuity, when, in comparing Paradise Lost with the Iliad he finds that Milton's

151 Paradise Lost, Book XII, ll. 537-551.

152 S.T. Coleridge, Course of Lectures, Lecture Ten, "Milton," Notes and Lectures, etc., Vol. IV, pp. 304-5.

poem has the virtue of simplicity and that it is the only work in literature which possesses a real beginning, middle, and end:

Consider the exquisite simplicity of the Paradise Lost. It and it alone really possesses a beginning, a middle, and an end; it has the totality of the poem as distinguished from the ab ovo birth and Parentage, or straight line, of history.¹⁵³

Coleridge appears to perceive that Paradise Lost chronologically begins with the beginning of time at the Creation and ends at the final consummation of the world.

153 Coleridge, op. cit., p. 301.

CHAPTER VIII : THE CONCEPT OF TIME

The longer work and the time scheme. -- Advantages of an elaborate time scheme. -- Lyrical length. -- Tragic length. -- Epic length. -- Poe's view in contrast. -- The substance of Poe's lecture. -- Poe's defence is of weak readers. -- Style as an answer to Poe. -- On reading Paradise Lost in one sitting. -- Preparation for reading necessary. -- Attitude of the common reader to lengthy works. -- Example of Wordsworth and Donne. -- Milton and his readers. -- Milton and Joyce compared. -- Individual reader's sensitivity an answer to obscurity. -- The centre of the time scheme. -- Occidental and Oriental considerations of length. -- Appropriateness of the genre to the culture. -- The re-telling of a story. -- Expansion from Genesis. -- Substance and extension into the epic scale.

Considerations of the use of in medias res and of the accomplishment of epic grandeur and epic panoramic effects naturally lead to an over-all consideration of the use of time in various literary forms. In poetry, as in music, the longer work usually contains a more highly developed temporal scheme than the shorter work, while preserving, if it is a successful work, its unity as a whole.

Presuming that the content of the poem contains depth of thought, it is not unreasonable, then, to assume that length is also a requisite of the great work of art. Nevertheless, the lyric poem, with its limited length, can contain all that the tragedy contains.¹⁵⁴ Similarly, as Aristotle points out, the epic does not differ from the tragedy as far as its story-like aspects are concerned. The most important

¹⁵⁴ For an example, Meredith's poem is quoted in Chapter I, p.5.

point of difference is in length. The epic concept of time will cover a greater period, and contain the most "diffuse" and various ways of relating the fable, as a result of the difference in treatment, in epic and tragedy, of the unity of time and the unity of character. Where, on the one hand, the tragedy of fulfillment¹⁵⁵ will communicate the fall and the subsequent rise of a single character, the epic, on the other hand, attempts the communication of the fall and rise of the race, as in the Aeneid, through the central character, who, unlike the central character of tragedy, represents an archetype of the nation or race. Milton's epic carries the progression in time to an even greater degree, to the point at which his epic becomes the story not only of a character, of a nation, or of a particular race, but of human kind in general, at least in so far that the Christian vision of humanity can claim to represent that of the whole world.

The lyric can indicate the world in a grain of sand, and in one line a poem can perhaps be written which contains within it the seed of everything that man needs to know. For example, the statement, "God is Love" may contain, and has indicated to many persons, all the knowledge of the world. An additional line of elucidation, however, makes the statement simultaneously more understandable and less acceptable; in fact, any explanation of such a generalization has the effect of making it more vivid and at the same time less

155 See Chapter IX and Appendix.

capable of general acceptance because of its superimposed limitation and confinement.

It is possible, furthermore, to develop the generalization even into a tightly-packed sonnet, in which pity and fear could be communicated and a purgation effected. That sonnet, however, will contain only the essence of tragedy and cannot, consequently, claim to be in itself a tragedy. For the tragedy proper will render these emotions in a more vivid manner than the lyric because the extended framework of the poet will give him all manner of opportunity to gain the conviction of his audience. No longer will "God is Love" be a purely subjective statement, but it will take on a hard and tangible meaning, through such extended illustration. Thus, by showing, rather than merely stating, the poet communicates through his unique creation a truth which is universally understood.

The development from tragedy to epic is substantially the same as this development from lyric to tragedy. The epic framework being larger than the tragic, equally more scope can be given the grand theme. "God is Love" becomes in the epic, then, an idea containing an even deeper meaning if such a poet as Milton presents the reader with a time scheme greater than any tragedy could contain. That difference is exactly what Milton accomplishes in Paradise Lost. There, the temporal appreciation is carried from the beginning of time to the end of it, and in its presentation, the reader feels that the God of the early books is a false creation of

the poet and that the real God of Paradise Lost begins to show himself more truly in the unfolding of the panorama after Book IX. As a result of the visions which Michael shows to him, not only is Adam receiving his supreme joy, but the reader also then becomes impressed with the justice of God's actions. The apprehension of a God who is Timeless, who is outside the time he has created, is revealed in the epic by the co-existence of detachment and exhilaration in both Adam's mind and in the reader's, a mental condition which results from the temporal vision. Thus, the understanding of time is in a very important way the key to an understanding of Paradise Lost.

A view almost directly opposed to that which is at present presented is expressed in Edgar Allan Poe's famous lecture "The Poetic Principle."¹⁵⁶ Poe presents what may be called the "lyric point of view," in which he argues that "a long poem does not exist."¹⁵⁷ In fact, he argues that "after

¹⁵⁶ Edgar Allan Poe, "The Poetic Principle," in The Complete Works, ed., J.A. Harrison, New York, Kelmscott Society, 1902, Vol. XIV, pp. 266-92.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., P. 266. Cf. Jacques Maritain's consideration of Poe's statement in the following passage, which perhaps gives him too much the benefit of the doubt, since the example Poe uses is Paradise Lost, a poem which claims steadiness or continuity as its chief poetic virtue: "...the modern poem is determined and bound, to be all poetry. This is perhaps why Edgar Allan Poe considered a long poem 'simply a flat contradiction in terms.' If it relates to the length of a poem materially considered, the quantity of lines, this statement might be questioned. At least one would like to know at what number of lines a poem starts to be long.... But Poe's statement is simply true, I believe, if it relates to the length of a poem in relation to its own inner measure, which is the poetic sense. The developed

the lapse of half an hour, at the very utmost, (a poem) flags--fails-- a revulsion ensues-- and then the poem is, in effect, and in fact, no longer such."¹⁵⁸ In arguing that it is impossible to find a poem which will sustain itself or the reader or both (Poe's point is not entirely without ambiguity), he concludes that only the short poem can be considered worthy of the name of poetry.

His critique is further elaborated upon by his consideration of Milton's epic, concerning which he states the following points: (1) It is impossible to maintain for Paradise Lost, "during perusal, the amount of enthusiasm which... critical dictum would demand," i.e., that Paradise Lost is to be "admired throughout."; (2) Paradise Lost is "poetical only when, losing sight of that vital requisite in all works of Art, Unity, we view it merely as a series of minor poems."; (3) "if, to preserve its Unity--its totality of effect or impression--we read it (as would be necessary) at a single sitting, the result is but a constant alternation of excitement and depression."¹⁵⁹ Poe adds yet another point to

narrative, the description of characters, the exposition of a system, appear from this point of view as invested with incurable length. A great modern poem can be philosophical - why not? - or in the form of a tale. It must always be contained within the span of a free and pure conveyance of anything intuitively caught in and through the might of subjectivity." (Jacques Maritain, Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry, New York, Pantheon, 1935, pp. 389-90.)

¹⁵⁸ Poe, loc cit.

¹⁵⁹ Poe, Ibid., p. 267.

his argument:

After a passage of what we feel to be true poetry, there follows, inevitably, a passage of platitude, which no critical pre-judgment can force us to admire; but if, upon completing the work, we read it again, omitting the first book - that is to say, commencing with the second - we shall be surprised at now finding that admirable which we before condemned - that damnable which we had previously so much admired. It follows from all this that the ultimate, aggregate, or absolute effect of even the best epic under the sun, is a nullity: - and this is precisely the fact.¹⁶⁰

Poe proceeds thereupon to take exception to the view of many critics which argues that the longer work possesses virtue because it is a "sustained effort."

If [he writes] by 'sustained effort,' any little gentleman has accomplished an epic, let us frankly commend him for the effort - if this indeed be a thing commendable - but let us forbear praising the epic of the efforts account. It is to be hoped that common sense, in the time to come, will prefer deciding upon a work of art, rather by the impression it makes, by the effect it produces, than by the time it took to impress the effect or by the amount of 'sustained effort' which had been found necessary in effecting the impression.¹⁶¹

In many respects, Poe's critique of epic poetry has much in it which deserves defending, especially with regard to Poe's powers of observation. However, his argument appears to be far from the whole truth of the matter. His first point, for example, is weak because it is little more than a defence of weak readers. A reasonably well trained reader can read Paradise Lost and admire it throughout. Poe's objection is based on human weakness; and even if it could be proven that

¹⁶⁰ Poe, loc. cit.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p. 268.

the epic is too great for the mental capacities of most men, such a criterion of numbers would surely be anomalous.

It is surprising that Poe should have found it difficult to admire Paradise Lost for more than half-hour periods. Milton's variety and range of emotions, contained as they are within his over-all framework and reigned over by propriety and continuity, amply care for the endurance of a reasonably sensitive reader. Epics written by lesser poets are, however, deficient exactly with respect to such virtues. Consequently, Poe's remarks bear for them more potency than they can by his own infelicitous application of his epic theory to Paradise Lost.

Poe's second point - that Milton's epic is poetical only when we read it for its parts and not for its whole, only if we do not look for the unity of Paradise Lost, and read merely sections of the poem, presumably in half-hour sittings - cannot be defended if we consider the great variety in style Milton employed to sustain the reader. Milton's grand style includes a great variety in language: for example, there are what may be called the personal style, the pastoral, the panoramic, the dramatic, the baroque, the invective, and many others as well. By means of a variety in style, the poet succeeds, through the combination of what Poe must consider to be mere parts, in varying, while simultaneously maintaining, his continuity. And this variety is maintained by Milton's grand style, which covers in toto all the subordinate stylistic variety.

Poe further speculates that if, in order to preserve the unity of Paradise Lost, it were read in a single sitting, the result would be "a constant alternation of excitement and depression." Poe's statement implies that he had never read the poem in such a manner, since that experiment, for all its difficulties and challenges to mental endurance, can be successfully attempted. If the poem is read aloud over a period of twelve hours by a small group of persons who are willing to give the work the necessary poetic faith, almost universal agreement concerning the advantages in such a reading inevitably ensues, since, on that revolution of the clock, the readers, having devoted a whole day of their lives to the epic, are able to apprehend, though not exhaust, its fullest, deepest, and most far-reaching effects. Not only do thoughts, phrases, images and speeches recur in the individual consciousness for days following such a reading, but a sense of order and completeness, a sense of superexaltation beyond time and limitless space take hold of the mind. Such exaltation does not result from the sporadic reading which is suggested by Poe. His observation, that much of the reading will be trying, is not without its validity, but those difficulties derive from obstructions outside the poem, not within it. The well-prepared reader, as the well-prepared contemplative, will contain a willingness, a sense of acceptance constituting a poetic faith of a special nature. Every important work of art, let us remember, requires an individual degree and adaptation of poetic faith and the willing suspension of disbelief.

It is true, of course, that a twelve-hour reading will perhaps overlook many of the subtle, complex ideas and emotional experiences contained in such a massive work as Paradise Lost, but such a reading can surmount these obstacles to a certain extent by previous and private investigation of the poem in parts, at different and shorter sittings. The results of these preliminary studies could be recalled at the time of the twelve-hour reading of the epic.

There is reason to believe that Milton intended his epic to cover a reading-period of twelve hours.¹⁶² As it stands, Paradise Lost is a short epic, compared to those of Homer, Virgil and Tasso. Moreover, when we consider Castelvetro's statement concerning the utmost limit of the time of the action for a tragedy, it becomes apparent that, with respect to time, Milton is indeed concerned with preserving the tragic concentration. Castelvetro, limiting the time of tragic action to twelve hours, argues that "people, owing to bodily needs, could not possibly remain in the theatre longer than that."¹⁶³

Poe's views on epic poetry and Paradise Lost are symptomatic of a view held by many ordinary modern readers. Today the "common reader" is, unfortunately, too often not as

¹⁶² The poem can be read at leisure exactly from noon to midnight, with an hour's break for dinner and with short five-minute breaks between books, and the desired result can be attained.

¹⁶³ Castelvetro, quoted in Charlton, op. cit., p. 35.

Dr. Johnson would have him, "uncorrupted by literary prejudices."¹⁶⁴ Even when he is of the nature of Tolstoy's ideal critic, the hypothetical "unperverted peasant," it is obvious that much of our best literature would never be admitted, consequently, through the closed doors of such a mind. Whether it is intellectual or emotional incapacity, whether a reluctance to work, or whether it is merely pleasure that is sought, is not our present concern. However, the whole problem of length is to the reader largely a psychological problem, and to the poet it is allied to his particular problems in concentration of expression or image-making.

It may be said, for example, that John Donne, in his concentrated fashion is much more effective than Wordsworth, who perhaps, expresses apparently no more in a mensurably longer work. Yet Wordsworth's "Intimations" is probably a greater poem than "Go and Catch a Falling Star" because it is sustained over a longer period of time and embeds itself, as it were, into the reader's consciousness in a much deeper and inextricable manner than Donne's excellent song. Both poems appear to be inexhaustibly endless in their suggestiveness. "Go and Catch" also has its particular appeal to the consciousness of the reader, of course, especially in its individual lines and isolated thoughts, but the poem, as a

¹⁶⁴ Samuel Johnson, "Lives of the Poets," in Works of ..., Troy, New York, Pafraets Press, Vol. XI, p. 181.

whole, does not return to the reader's full consciousness in as convincing, as deep, as enduring a fashion as Wordsworth's piece. One of the chief reasons for the deeper conviction stimulated by Wordsworth's poem is in its capacity, largely through its length, to encompass a larger scheme of time than Donne's poem. Donne's has doubtlessly more immediate appeal; therefore, it should have for itself more readers. Except for the fact that Wordsworth's "Intimations" has been extolled by more eminent critics, it is reasonable to suppose that Donne's poem would ordinarily have a greater number of readers. This partiality is symptomatic generally of an important condition concerning the readers of epics, tragedies, and lyrics.

Poe's view is perhaps that of many modern readers who are not slovenly as readers and attempt to attain a sincere appreciation of literature. Milton's answer to them is perhaps too simple: he is content to have a small but select audience for his great work, and really expects little more than that, while he confirms his faith that the perpetuity of his work is assured:

More safe I Sing with mortal voice, unchang'd
To hoarse or mute, though fall'n on evil dayes,
On evil dayes though fall'n, and evil tongues;
In darkness, and with dangers compast round,
And solitude; yet not alone, while thou
Visit'st my slumbers Nightly, or when Morn
Purples the East: still govern thou my Song
Urania, and fit audience find, though few.¹⁸⁵

Milton's answer, however, is not enough. It is too isolated from the common, private reader to be totally convincing. His defence, much like that of James Joyce, invites, at least to some extent, the failure and loss of his message. Joyce expects Finnegan's Wake to be taken as a lifetime study.¹⁶⁶ He has made it largely necessary for the reader to be a specialist. Milton's attitude is not unlike that of Joyce, in that he probably expects his readers to have, for example, a thorough knowledge of the classics before his epic can be read properly, before, in fact, a reader can claim to be qualified as a reader.

The reassuring aspect of all such admonitions is not that Finnegan's Wake or Paradise Lost is, as a whole, unintelligible because of the extent of its obscurity primarily in language and secondarily in psychology, but that in Milton's case it appears that he was in error about those who could appreciate Paradise Lost. The gaining of an appreciation or understanding for Paradise Lost is not essentially dependent upon classical learning, not even on Biblical learning or Renaissance scholarship; a sincerity of approach, combined generally with a sensitivity to poetic effects is, however, necessary. This sensitivity, which though perhaps not commonly found amongst intellectual readers is, nevertheless, frequent among the most intellectual of scholars and the most unperverted of peasants alike.

¹⁶⁶ Herbert Gorman, James Joyce, New York, Farrar & Rinehart, 1939, p. 342.

It is precisely those readers who can understand the communication in such a poem as Four Quartets, which emotively communicates its experience not only by means of its technical competence but also of its inherent simplicity.

What is of the utmost concern here is, however, the time the poet employs in communicating the archetype,¹⁶⁷ both the time in which he allows himself to tell the story revolving around the vision of Eden and the time scheme at the centre of which is the climax, where is found the unity both of action and experience. The unity of experience is made as a result, on the one hand, of a present moment's glimpse into an archetype and, on the other, of an equi-poised knowledge of the past and the future. If an individual dwells equally upon past and future, the present will be made, in a sense, ever-present. In other words, in the embracement of time past and time future, the "still point" of the present will, as a paradoxical fulfillment, be revealed. "She pluck'd, she eat,"¹⁶⁸ is the actual climax of Paradise Lost, and its author, who has given a most tremendous prelude to that moment, and who later gives the most complete aftermath possible, declines any elaboration upon the action. This scrupulousness

167 It should perhaps be added that the geographic centre of "Burnt Norton" is the same as that of Paradise Lost: the garden of Eden. And the communication of that archetype is an experience innately common to all men.

168 Paradise Lost, IX, 781. The simplicity of the expression in this line has the effect of subduing the action it relates. cf. Samson's internal action. (See Appendix, passim.) Such subdued action, containing the essence of the static aspect of poetry tends, therefore, to solve the active-static conflict.

is not the result of any aversion to or denigration of climax or the present moment; it is rather the grain of sand, the still point, the "God is Love," about which the world revolves.

It is necessary not to omit an important qualification concerning the consideration of length throughout this enquiry, and especially in the present chapter. The view herein taken concerning length is essentially ethnocentric and its acceptability will, consequently, depend upon the superiority of the concept of time held by mankind generally in the western world. Oriental standards appear to be fundamentally opposite to those of the west. In China, the long epic novel is considered much in the same way that Homer was originally regarded, as an entertainment. The lyric, regarded as the most significant poetry of China, runs on an average from four to twelve lines.¹⁶⁹ In content, the typical Chinese poem impresses one as holding the world in a grain of sand.

The value of the oriental standard is, of course, identical with the value of the lyrical point of view, and is, like Poe, cognizant of the superiority of the small, the microcosmic, the non-temporal. The advantages of the oriental view, moreover, are obvious, but the disadvantages are not. The need for a large, macrocosmic, temporal construction, which would not only imitate life's particulars but also life's ideals

¹⁶⁹ Chi-Chen Wang, "Chinese Poetry," A Dictionary of World Literature, ed., J.T. Shipley, New York, Philosophical Library, 1943, p. 93.

is ever-present in the complex, various culture which has grown to its maturity in Europe and has been inherited by North America and the other new worlds.

Because of the divergence of oriental and occidental attitudes to time, there is a divergence of oriental and occidental literary tastes and values. The epic came to be appropriate to the European mind because it accommodated the need of that mind, and the lyric has been appropriate to the oriental mind for a similar reason. Thus to the oriental, lyric occupies the place of the epic, while, to the occidental, the converse is true. However, although the literary values of the respective cultures are obviously opposed, the fact that both contain epical and lyrical capacities suggests the fundamental connection amongst even the most seemingly dissimilar of men.

Regardless of ethnocentric limitations, probably the most important justification of the epic lies in the application of an extended time scheme to a story or stories which are comparatively slight or fragmentary. Such a story is that of Adam and Eve. The possibility of presenting a more meaningful interpretation in a re-telling of the story of the Fall is realized by Milton because he has given it much of the religious and archetypal material necessary before Genesis completely convinces the reader.

The story of the creation and the fall is told, in a certain respect, perfectly, in Genesis. The conviction of many such Biblical narratives, however, is not readily com-

municated to a great number of readers because their telling is, in a sense, too simple, too apparently naïve, too vaguely remote from contemporary daily life and experience. Thus, the role of the poet becomes the role of the intermediary; in nature much like that which Christ himself plays in Paradise Lost - the revealer of the essential, Biblical truth. Paradise Lost does not intend to transcend or depose Genesis, but rather to emulate it, to bring us closer to the realization of the Word that is already spoken; and through creative inspiration to arrive at the commonalty which lies beyond uniqueness - to arrive at the likeness and spirit of acceptance and convention, in its best sense, by means of uniqueness, of personality, emotion and feeling, by means of intellectual choice of subjects and human expression which will direct readers to an apprehension of the divine expression of the Bible.¹⁷⁰

It may be objected that the first thirty lines of Milton's epic contain all that is necessary substantially. There is a sense in which all that the poet has to say is contained there, and since it is unnecessary to elaborate upon what is already substantiate, as it were, the bulk of the

¹⁷⁰ T.S. Eliot's objection against Paradise Lost on this count can be refuted, if we recognize the importance of two things: (1) the danger of "doctrinal adhesions" and (2) the importance of the poet as intermediary. Eliot has argued that "so far as I perceive anything, it is a glimpse of a theology that I find in large part repellent, expressed through a mythology which would have better been left in the Book of Genesis, upon which Milton has not improved." (T.S. Eliot, "A Note on the Verse of John Milton," in op. cit., p. 38.)

epic is, consequently, worthless. This view, while credible in part, is by no means acceptable when one considers it is equally easy to suggest that the final lines of the epic also say substantially everything that Milton had to impart. It may also be argued that Book IX alone contains all that the poet needed in order to communicate his great idea. But the validity of such a critique fails when we realize what is, after all, obvious: although the first thirty lines, the final lines dealing with the expulsion from the Garden, and Book IX (and for that matter, many another part of the epic) do, in fact, contain the essence of Paradise Lost, they are at the same time that they are alike, quite different from each other. They are not repetitive of each other, moreover, in the least respect.

Perhaps the secret of the epic is, as a consequence, exactly this blending and interdependence of its parts, from the agony of Satan's greatest speeches, to the morning prayer of Adam and Eve. All that can be concluded is that the epic as a whole is not expendable. Time would be lost, moreover, and, as has already been estimated, God's justice could never have been shown on anything other than the largest map conceivable. Michael's completion of mythical, historical, and prophetic time, therefore, is the real key to the understanding of Milton's epic as a whole. Poe's suggestion of a sporadic apprehension of its parts cannot hope to result in a reader's mastery of the total poem. A work of lesser length could never, therefore, with any effectiveness, include all time, from its beginning to its end.

CHAPTER IX : BOOK IX AND THE TWO TYPES OF TRAGEDY

Unity of Book IX. -- Book IX as a tragedy. -- Elements of Book IX. -- Tragic and heroic. -- "Patience and Heroic Martyrdom." -- The two roads of Christianity. -- Epic and tragedy, macrocosmic and microcosmic. -- Vividness and vagueness in poetry. -- "Streaks of the tulip." -- Blake's contradiction. -- The defence of Johnson's critique. -- The illusion and probability. -- Two strains of tragedy. -- Relation of Book IX and the whole epic. -- Tragedies of failure. -- Tragedies of fulfillment. -- Aristotle and the Christian tradition. -- Examples of the two types of tragedy. -- Difficulty in evaluating the two types of tragedy. -- Paradise Lost as the reconciliation of the two types. -- Comparison with the Oresteia. -- Promise and Paradise Lost.

Arthur Barker asks a very pertinent question:

Was it Milton's aim in the redivision of the poem in 1674 to shift this weight of emphasis from the book of the Fall, and so to offset... the tragic implications of the counter-turn in what looked like Act IV?¹⁷¹

The answer to this question lies most probably in the total impression we receive from Book IX. Although the tragedy in Book IX is, as Barker intimates, to some extent shifted in its relation to the epic as a whole, it is nevertheless so self-contained that its inclusion into the epic tragedy as a whole cannot really be considered to "offset" the complete work; rather Book IX is "that part of the poem round which everything else revolves."¹⁷² The characteristic emotions of tragedy, pity and fear, are the two principal emotions of Book IX. Pity and fear are, after all, the emotional components of the story of

¹⁷¹ Barker, op. cit., p. 23.

¹⁷² E.M.W. Tillyard, Milton, London, Chatto & Windus, 1936.

the Fall. While the structure of the Book is not so rigorously uniform with Greek tragedy, as that uniformity which the poet later employed in Samson Agonistes, it nonetheless prefigures the kind of formalism which Milton's tragedy represents. Like Samson Agonistes, Book IX contains the parts and divisions of a Greek tragedy, at least in essence, although it is unlikely that Milton modelled its construction on any particular work, as he did in using Oedipus Coloneus as his structural model for Samson.¹⁷³

Although it is perhaps possible to divide Book IX into the Aristotelian construction outlined in one "probably interpolated" chapter of the Poetics,¹⁷⁴ such systematization would not really be valuable for the present purposes. Book IX is a tragedy not only because it contains the emotions of pity and fear but also because of Moirai, Destiny, which dominates the remainder of Paradise Lost largely as a result of the matter in this book. Immediately after the Fall, the major concern of Paradise Lost becomes the concern over man's destiny. This, however, is a Christian concept of Moirai, and should not be confused with that which is contained in such a truly Greek poem as Oedipus Rex. Cornford warns us that "the subjection of the Gods to Fate is a belief that has passed out of modern thought, or at least taken a quite different form."¹⁷⁵ The

173 See Appendix, pp. 145-6.

174 Butcher, op. cit., p. 2.

175 F.M. Cornford, From Religion to Philosophy, London Edward Arnold, 1912, p. 12.

The "different form" Moir has taken in Paradise Lost is in the contradiction, from a Greek point of view, of the intermingling of the "relentless workings of things" and true Destiny, of Nemesis and Moir. Like the Greek spectator at a performance of Oedipus Rex, the Christian reader of Paradise Lost knows the inevitable outcome; at the same time his extremity of pity mingles with "the sense of outraged justice,"¹⁷⁶ once both the particular misfortunes of Oedipus and Adam, and the general catastrophe of mankind, which springs out of the tragedies, are revealed.

It is pertinent that Book IX begins with what is to present purposes the most important of the personal statements in the poem. Milton declares that "I now must change / Those Notes to Tragic."¹⁷⁷ Since later, in the same passage, he says that his story is "more Heroic" than that of Achilles, one can note, then, that Milton associated rather than dissociated tragedy and the epic. The word "Heroic" is repeated three times in the lines immediately following. He says that "This subject for Heroic Song/ Pleas'd me long choosing,"¹⁷⁸ and, in relating why he did not attempt a more conventional epic, he states that he prefers "the better fortitude/ Of Patience and Heroic Martyrdom."¹⁷⁹ In the fourth and last reference in the passage, Milton speaks of

176 Butcher, loc. cit.

177 Paradise Lost, Book IX, 5-6.

178 Ibid., 25-6

179 Ibid., 31-2.

"Heroic Name"; he is attempting to distinguish what should be called the Heroic poem.

In referring to "that which justly gives Heroic name,"¹⁸⁰ Milton is intimating, it may be observed, that the truly heroic condition is that which involves patience and Christian martyrdom. That is, the truly heroic poem has essentially nothing to do with the Gothic trappings of Renaissance heroic poetry, but rather with Christian martyrdom.

It has been often argued, most recently perhaps by T.S. Eliot, that there are two principal roads which the Christian may follow. One is that which is commonly pursued by common men; i.e., those who possess natural mundane limitations. But such a way spells, as Eliot sees it, an unhappy and rather cheerless existence for its wayfarer:

If that is what you wish,
I can reconcile you to the human condition,
The condition to which some who have gone as far as you
Have succeeded in returning. They may remember
The vision they have had, but they cease to regret it,
Maintain themselves by the common routine,
Learn to avoid excessive expectation,
Become tolerant of themselves and others,
Giving and taking, in the usual actions
What there is to give and take. They do not repine;
Are contented with the morning that separates
And with the evening that brings together
For casual talk before the fire
Two people who know they do not understand each other,
Breeding children whom they do not understand
And who will never understand them.¹⁸¹

¹⁸⁰ Paradise Lost, Book IX, 40.

¹⁸¹ T.S. Eliot, The Cocktail Party, London, Faber & Faber, 1950, pp. 123-4.

The other road is higher and better: it means the fulfillment of the Christian in his truest end: sacrifice and martyrdom. It is the hard and long way of the Christian mystic, the road to which Milton refers as that "of Patience and Heroic Martyrdom." The two roads of faith, moreover, find their counterparts in the epic, since insofar that a fable is personal, it is tragic; and insofar that it is representatively applicable to all mankind, it is epic.

Of course, it is obvious that any tragedy worthy of the name contains social or cultural implications, but the tragic view of life does not primarily involve the more far-reaching, impersonal view of the nature of things. It is a view which is, in a sense, microcosmic, while that of the epic is both microcosmic inasmuch as it involves tragedy, and macrocosmic inasmuch as it represents a panoramic view of life. Thus, the strongest argument in favour of the epic is that its superiority over other forms lies in its capacity to effect, in toto, all that the lyric or the tragedy can do, while at the same time it can add still more -- its impersonal, panoramic view of history and of "life in the broad."

It is usually conceded, and rightfully, that a poem possessing vividness is a more effectively successful poem than one whose imagery is vague. In Aristotelian language, this is expressed in terms of "mimesis," of particularization and generalization. However, it is not difficult to argue that, although on a technical level the superiority of particularization over generalization is generally true,

this rule, nevertheless, is by no means an absolute one.

Doctor Johnson, presenting what is perhaps to us the typically Eighteenth-century view, pointed out that it is not the poet's business to count the streaks of the tulip:

The business of a poet... is to examine, not the individual, but the species; to remark general properties and large appearances. He does not number the streaks of the tulip, or describe the different shades in the verdure of the forest; he is to exhibit in his portraits of nature such prominent and striking features, as recall the original to every mind; and must neglect the minuter discriminations, which one may have remarked, and another have neglected, for those characteristics which are alike obvious to vigilance and carelessness.¹⁸²

In one sense he was right, but from an Aristotelian point of view, he was wrong. Aristotle would say that it is exactly the poet's business to count the streaks of the tulip. What the artist sees must be seen with great particularity, and such particularity is closely associated with clarity. If the poet perceives the image, as through a mist, the communication of it will render it even more clouded.

It is significant that another Eighteenth-century writer perhaps best answers Johnson's critique. Blake's lyric, "The Tyger," although its meaning is not readily apprehended by an ordinary reader, is a successful communication.¹⁸³ The power of the poet's imagination projects

¹⁸² Samuel Johnson, History of Rasselas, (1887) ed. G.P. Hill, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1949, pp. 62-3.

¹⁸³ Cf. " ...but what represents God's Wrath? Blake

the picture of the beast so strongly that the vision of the tiger is communicated to anyone who reads the poem.

There are, however, conditions under which Johnson's advice is of value to the poet. The artist does not count the streaks of the tulip when it is of advantage for him not to represent his vision too clearly. This need is apparent if we consider the deliberate vagueness in the imagery of Paradise Lost.

In his epic, Milton realized the importance of making the rationally improbable appear not only possible but feasible; that is, he was aware that men of his day, often even divines, did not, in actuality, believe many of the most essential articles of the Christian faith; for example, in the world of actuality few men could ever believe in angels. Although the problem of the literalness of the Scriptures did not reach its climax until the Nineteenth century and possibly its resolution until the Twentieth,¹⁸⁴ many of Milton's more scientific contemporaries did not

adapted the Tiger for his purpose. The Tiger is not immediately understood; but the context explains him at once." (S. Foster Damon, William Blake: His Philosophy and Symbols, New York, Houghton Mifflin, 1924, p. 67.

¹⁸⁴ There is ever-increasing evidence that scientists, philosophers, and men of religion have less cause to disagree. All appear to be content with a newly appraised interpretation of myth which recognizes that myth is true not only to religious idealism but also to psychological fact. Thus, the factual and fanciful nature of such a myth as that which concerns the Origin and Fall of our first parents is tenable not only to men of art and religion but also to men of science and rationality - for their minds' needs do not exclude the poetic explanation of mankind's origins.

believe in the literalness of the Adam-and-Eve fable. In the Seventeenth century, moreover, after Hobbes and Bacon, men of poetic, religious and intellectual sensibilities more increasingly felt compelled to answer the rising temper which dissociated rationality and the knowing and loving of God, except perhaps in the manner of a cold apprehension, through physical and natural manifestations of His works.

The relation of Book IX to the whole epic is probably best seen in the light of a theoretical distinction between two types of tragedy. From the root of Aristotelian poetic criticism have stemmed two pre-eminent theories of tragedy, one of which has been called "tragedy of fulfillment" and the other, called "tragedy of failure." Superficially, the tragedy of fulfillment and the tragedy of failure would appear to be opposites; however, the Miltonic treatment of the tragic story of the Fall, which the poet apparently believed to be the most basic, the most essential of all stories,¹⁸⁵ exhibits both through the overall structure

¹⁸⁵ Tillyard appears to agree with Raleigh's suggestion concerning the universality of the story of the Fall of Man in this passage: "A prerogative place among the great epics of the world has sometimes been claimed for Paradise Lost, on the ground that the theme it handles is vaster and of a more universal human interest than any handled by Milton's predecessors. It concerns itself with the fortunes, not of a city or an empire, but of the whole human race, and with that particular event in the history of the race which has moulded all its destinies. Around this event, the plucking of an apple, are ranged, according to the strictest rules of the ancient epic, the histories of Heaven and Earth and Hell. The scene of the action is universal space. The time represented is Eternity. The characters are God and his creatures. And all these are exhibited in the clearest and most inevitable

of his epic and through that of Book IX in particular, that the two strains of tragedy are inextricable.

Milton's blending of the two strains of tragedy is specially notable when one considers Book IX in its contextual relationship with the epic as a whole. Book IX, in standing alone and dramatizing the Temptation, the Fall, and the immediately resultant action, stands as a self-contained tragedy of failure. However, one should recognize that the tragedy of failure usually indicates the humanistic, temporal and secular outlook upon life and that a consideration of what implications that indication may have is worth while.

The greatest tragedians of failure were Sophocles, Euripides, and Shakespeare. Oedipus Rex, Medea, and Macbeth are examples of plays whose emotions of Pity and Fear have led to a recognition of truth. However, that recognition, in turn, has not effected a catharsis. Instead of leading to the peace that comes from fulfillment, it has culminated in the unhappy and frustrate end of the hero.

relation with the main event, so that there is not an incident, hardly a line of the poem, but leads backwards or forwards to those central lines in the Ninth Book:

So saying, her rash hand in evil hour
Forth-reaching to the fruit, she plucked, she eat:
Earth felt the wound, and Nature from her seat,
Sighing through all her works, gave signs of woe,
That all was lost.

From this point radiates a plot so immense in scope, that the history of the world from the first preaching of the gospel to the Millennium occupies only some fifty lines of Milton's epilogue." (Walter Raleigh, Milton, London, Edward Arnold, [1900], pp. 21-2.)

It should be observed, however, that Sophocles, Euripides, and Shakespeare, each have at least one tragedy to their credit in which the end is not frustrate, but rather one which spells fulfillment. Sophocles' Oedipus Coloneus, Euripides' Electra, and Shakespeare's Lear are each examples which contain endings whose fulfillment is uplifting to the audience. One may conclude that the closer the poet comes to a religious fulfillment in his works, the closer he comes to the realization of the cathartic end.

Aristotle did not stress the idea of catharsis,¹⁸⁶ of course, and in his choosing Oedipus Rex as the prototype of tragedy and not its sequel, he sympathizes, one can safely conclude, not entirely with the present argument. Nevertheless, in the Christian tradition, both the world and the mind of man have been diathetically altered; and the consequence of the newer and more modified interpretation of fate or determinism, along with the Christian association of life with hope for the joy of fulfillment in life, gives to western man the need to place a higher value in the tragedy of fulfillment than in the tragedy of failure.

There are many great books, especially in the Nineteenth Century and following, which are true tragedies of failure. Such titles as Madame Bovary, Jude the Obscure, and Under Western Eyes, may, to give a few outstanding

¹⁸⁶ Butcher believes, however, that at a critical point in the text of the Poetics there is a gap. In his Politics, Aristotle had promised that his Poetics would give a fuller explanation of the term; however, what we find there is so scant we must recourse to consult the Politics for further explanation. (Butcher, op. cit., pp. 251-2.)

examples at random, illustrate the fact. Nevertheless, as great as these books are, the final emotions which they convincingly communicate, such as the righteous indignation of Flaubert's novel, the utter futility of Hardy's, and the cataclysmic defeat of Conrad's, are not so valuable to us as the final emotions in such other books as Crime and Punishment or Wuthering Heights. Thus, we have, on the one hand, as tragedies of failure, Oedipus Rex, Macbeth, Madame Bovary, Under Western Eyes; and, on the other, as tragedies of fulfillment, Oedipus Coloneus, Samson Agonistes, King Lear, Crime and Punishment, and Wuthering Heights.

It is perhaps impossible to evaluate which is to be placed higher on our scale of values, the tragedy of fulfillment or the tragedy of failure; however, there is pertinence in the suggestion that one view is never entirely exclusive of the other. It may well be that the strains are complementary to each other, as youth and age, or activity and contemplation are complementary; or as Static and Active poetry are complementary to each other. On the one hand, the pure or perfect tragedy of failure, if one existed, would exemplify extreme activity, but it would also be inconclusive and fragmentary; on the other hand, the pure tragedy of fulfillment, if it were to exist, would be extremely static, but it would be dull, ponderous, and lacking in conviction. The distinction between the two views of life perhaps is most significant in the case of Milton's epic, which encompasses both views.

Paradise Lost, containing both the tragedy of failure and the tragedy of fulfillment probably better than any other work in literature, shows us a greater view of life than any of the above-named works. Book IX, considered separately from the rest of the epic, is a pure tragedy of failure, presenting the Temptation, the Fall, and the resultant frustration. Alone, it stands as a great work of art, along with Oedipus Rex, Madame Bovary, Macbeth, and Under Western Eyes. The epic as a whole, however, turns the failure and frustration of Book IX into a concluding fulfillment which is so intense that one must admit what we witness is an ascension above human failure. Such a conversion from failure to fulfillment is, substantially, like the description expressed by St. John of the Cross, of the mystical Dark Night of the Soul, or the struggle from the Slough of Despond to a fulfillment and justification of the preceding pain communicated by Bunyan.

Aeschylus' Oresteia is perhaps the only other work in literature to suffer the tragedy of failure to rise above itself and ascend to its supernatural fulfillment. At the end of the Choephoroe, we confront an impossible situation,¹⁸⁷ a condition of remorse as seemingly impossible of solution as

¹⁸⁷ Although there are lines missing at the end of the Choephoroe, the argument here is not disproved. In the progression of the story of the fall of the House of Atreus the situation at the beginning of the succeeding play, The Eumenides, points to the complete lack of solution at the conclusion of the Choephoroe.

that which we witness at the end and immediately following the end of the ninth book of Paradise Lost. Subject to the old decree of lex talionis, Orestes must pay the penalty, which is the natural consequence of his mother's murder, since the "law of the claw" is as old as nature itself.¹⁸⁸ Adam, too, having disobeyed the rule of heaven, must pay his inevitable debt, which is also death. The greatness of both Aeschylus' and Milton's views lies in the fact that both poets, or perhaps in this context they are more properly to be called "prophets," are able with surety and strength to affirm the resolution on a divine plane, of conflicts and frustrations which, on a naturalistic plane, have no fulfillment. Thus, the tragedy of failure, in which irony reigns as the only controlling factor, is overcome by the higher assertion of the resolution of seemingly impossible frustrations.

Paradise Lost, then, carries us from the tragedy of despair to a promise which is so intense that it becomes an emotional fulfillment, the same fulfillment which is later extended and developed in Paradise Regained. At the conclusion of Paradise Lost, Michael's view of the world, and the interdependence of our first parents underline the spirit of this promise, which amounts in its totality to a justification of the Christian Faith.

¹⁸⁸ Owen, op. cit.

CHAPTER X : THE TEST OF EMOTIONAL VALUE

What is the value of Paradise Lost? -- The test of emotional value. -- The three levels of life. -- Milton on the religious level. -- The test of intensity is basic. -- The difficulty of interpreting such a test. -- Propriety and sentimentality. -- Continuity or steadiness. -- Milton's metrics. -- Aristotle on steadiness. -- Left hand, right hand. -- Milton's steadiness as an answer to Aristotle. -- The nature of intensity. -- Defence of violent intensity. -- External and internal aspects of art. -- Integrity and sensationalism. -- Controlled intensity -- The Scylla and Charybdis of the two types of poetry. -- Advantages of Milton's epic style. -- Analogy to the Trinity. -- The Holy Spirit in the Analogy. -- Conclusion.

In accepting the theory that Milton aimed at answering Aristotelian objections to the epic form, and the argument that whatever the poet intended, the epic of the Fall of our first parents does, in fact, effect just that object, we are then led to the threshold of a new and even more important appreciation: the relationship of that area of art which concerns itself with values and to the various technical and ingenious means through which the poet accomplishes the communication of those values. In short, what is the final value of Milton's epic? A part of the answer to this question is indicated by Charles Williams in his introduction to Milton:

So far from being granite, his verse is a continual spring of beauty, of goodness, of tenderness, of humility. The one thing he always denounced as sin and (equally) as folly was the self-cloud "independent" spirit, the spirit that thinks itself of "merit," especially of "injured merit." It does not seem a moral entirely without relevance to us. All things derive in love -- and beyond all things, in the only self-adequate Existence, there is the root of that fact, as of all.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁹ Charles Williams, "Introduction," The English Poems of Milton, London, Oxford University Press, 1940.

Apart from the values of beauty, goodness, and humility, there are other emotional values in Paradise Lost which can be apprehended by means of applying certain tests, although those tests cannot be adjudged as supreme in themselves. For example, the tests of intensity, steadiness, variety, propriety, and universality are all useful but only with certain limits imposed upon them. No work can contain merit, moreover, merely on an isolated consideration of its virtues of propriety, just as no work can claim greatness only on the count of its universality. If it contains both propriety and universality, however, it will likely possess a positive value for mankind. Similarly, no work whose intensity of emotion is so strong that its continuity or steadiness is subverted, can claim the name of a highly valuable, and, therefore a great work of art.

Before a discussion of the importance of Milton's qualities of steadiness and intensity as they relate to Aristotelian ideas, we should benefit, perhaps, by recalling the overall scale, or levels, of poetic interest as they are found in life outside literature. Life is lived on what may be described as three levels: the religious, naturalistic, or demoniacal; the superhuman, human or sub-human; incorporeal, psychological, or animalistic. And there are poets who are in accordance with these general groups. Shakespeare, for example, is the greatest of the psychological or naturalistic humanist poets, while Dante is

usually accredited the laurels as the greatest of the religious school.¹⁹⁰ Shakespeare has, of course, often been given, because of the magnitude of his strength to depersonalize his emotion,¹⁹¹ a kind of divinity by his admirers, just as the humanistic spirit of Dante has also been pointed out. Nevertheless, these inconsistencies, though pertinent, are largely matters which are beside the point; the facts that Dante suffers the divine vision in the Commedia and that Shakespeare conscientiously deals with the world of men, avoiding the superhumanity of God and the saints, points to the justice of relegating them to their separate levels.

Milton remains the most outstanding of the religious writers in English and, although he too deals with men, they are imagined within a religious context, just as Shakespeare's more religious characters, notably Lear, are idealized within a naturalistic context.

Intensity of emotion is probably the most important and indispensable single test of emotional value because no work worthy of the name of art can be defective or void of its quality. Propriety may be offended and the range of emotions limited. The continuity may be defective to a considerable extent of unevenness. But if the intensity of

190 Cf. In criticism, Tolstoy is an eminent spokesman for the religious view, while Arnold is perhaps the critic who is most representative of the moralistic school.

191 See Appendix, pp. 129 ff.

the emotional experience is certain, the poem will have merit regardless of all other deficiencies.

The difficulty of interpreting such a test, however, lies in the critical awareness and ethical evaluation of its nature. A madman, an adolescent, a sensationlist, or a sentimentalist will exploit the emotion with all the seeming intensity of which men are capable. Thus, without a measure of the other artistic values, intensity will certainly fall into one of the unacceptable conditions, where it is rightly called insanity, immaturity, sensationalism, or sentimentality. But, luckily, the other artistic values save it.

When propriety and steadiness save intensity from overstress, sentimentality may become refined into true sentiment, as it is evidenced in the accomplishment of Jane Austen; and when steadiness and propriety come to the aid of the intense passion of such a great novel as Wuthering Heights, it is saved from chaos and insanity.¹⁹² If Wuthering Heights and Jane Eyre are contrasted in this respect, the latter book will be seen clearly to descend often into a chaos of sentimentality and frequently into sensationalism, while Emily Brontë's novel exhibits a strong sense of the appropriate complex of contrasts, structural and otherwise, as well as the continuous tempering of the passion of its tragic story. The extremes of passion (arising from

192 "C.P.S.," The Structure of Wuthering Heights, 1926.

non-depersonalized intensity) and monotony (arising out of an over-emphasis on continuity) are often found in poets and Milton is no exception.

In Paradise Lost, however, the faults to which these extremes can lead a poet are avoided by means of a careful balancing of content and form. For example, this balance is found not only in the regularity of the five-act structure whose monotony and calculatedness in pattern is relieved by the addition of several books, but it can be found in the versification.

Evenness, or continuity, is maintained throughout Paradise Lost by the use of a regular ten-syllable line. The monotony of such a contrivance is virtually eradicated by the fact that the poet allowed himself any number of stresses per ten-syllable line. Thus, spontaneity and polish, revolt and convention, are married in the Miltonic line.

There are unprecedented advantages in such a scheme, since it allows the epic poet many freedoms otherwise denied him. The use of rhyme becomes unnecessary, and even inappropriate to Miltonic heroic verse because of it; the personal attacks also become more easily acceptable because the rhythms and the over-all regularity afforded by the versification give a complementary measure of impersonality to the speaker.

Milton's personal views are, as a result of his metrics, often acceptable or worthy of rejection. In Samson

Agonistes, for example, several times is revealed an embittered Milton, as in Samson's misogynistic bitterness.¹⁹³ In Paradise Lost, however, we find a passage which in content is just as objectionable as the misogynistic passage from Samson, yet this passage, concerning the Roman Catholic Churchmen's exile to the Paradise of Fools, does not offend propriety because his attack is restrained, though not in substance, in its mode of expression.¹⁹⁴ Like Paradise Lost, Samson Agonistes is an experiment in versification, but concerning that drama, it can be argued, Milton's free style is not always saved by the over-all controlling restraint of the structure of Greek tragedy.

Aristotle's view of steadiness or continuity is expressed from quite a different point of view, but it is substantially the same. Aristotle, relating steadiness with dramatic unity, considers it to be a condition of an organic whole:

As therefore, in the other imitative arts, the imitation is one when the object imitated is one, so the plot, being an imitation of an action, must imitate one action and that a whole, the structural union of the parts being such that, if any one of them is displaced or removed, the whole will be disjointed and disturbed. For a thing whose presence or absence makes no visible difference, is not an organic part of the whole.¹⁹⁵

Aristotle in appreciating this important quality of continuity, even from a mere negative viewpoint, appears to

193 See Appendix, pp. 141-3.

194 Paradise Lost, Book III, 489-497.

195 Aristotle, Poetics, in Butcher, op. cit., p. 35.

illustrate the fragmentary nature of the Poetics by neglecting further elaboration. This seemingly negligible point deserves to be emphasized, since without steadiness, the work of art is, as Aristotle himself says, "disjointed and disturbed." Continuity illustrates the principle of the left hand guiding the energy of the right, of the genius of dryness combatting the life of the wet, of Il Penseroso restraining by complementing L'Allegro.

The kind of intensity of which Milton is capable is especially pertinent in postulating that Milton's epic answers the Aristotelian critique of the epic. That is, its intensity (concentration) is lost or broken because of the expansiveness of the epic as a whole. Milton, being capable of "dispersing," as it were, the concentration of his poem, while at the same time managing to maintain it, creates something of a paradox. Book IX, as it has been pointed out in the previous chapter, is the answer.

But what, one may well ask, exactly is intensity? Perhaps if several different poets were considered, its meaning could be delineated more precisely. John Donne, for example, has become a well appreciated poet, chiefly because of his violent intensity; just as Dylan Thomas, one of the few highly popular poets at the present time, is one of the foremost poets of what is called the new Romantic Movement.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁶ Jack Lindsay, "The Poetry of Edith Sitwell," Life and Letters, Jan., 1950, pp. 39-52.

Donne and Thomas, containing much abstruse thought, are highly concentrated in style, although an apparent ignorance of the content of these poets on the part of their readers has the result of subjecting their work to an injustice which does not appear to deter many of their loudest supporters from voicing their enthusiasm. Such poets as Wordsworth and T.S. Eliot,¹⁹⁷ on the other hand, do not elicit such enthusiasm because both poets purposely have avoided aiming at the sensational or the violent stimulation of the reader.

The suggestion that violent intensity is not to be regarded as a valid tool of the poet is not, of course, here intended. Both Donne and Dylan Thomas show us the effectiveness of sensationalism in seducing otherwise passive readers. However, it is likely that this violence is often the undoing of these poets, in that it can prevent biased readers¹⁹⁸ from advancing from the initial shock made by the surface intensity towards the real depth which lies below the stormy surface.

The same condition is true of Greek Tragedy in general, and Oedipus Rex in particular. The problem is whether its power derives from its external violence or from within its depths. Aristotle, of course, recognized that the most significant action is internal and not external;

¹⁹⁷ Reference here is to Eliot's later, less popular poetry.

¹⁹⁸ That is, in this content, those who identify poetry indiscriminately with all highly coloured, strongly rhythmical expression, regardless of its meaning or depth of content.

yet, it obviously is possible for the external intensity to become the sole communication if the spectator has allowed himself to be consumed by it.

The same denigration of art -- for any obstacle which is not overcome is ultimately a denigration -- is observable in the concert hall, when romantic music aims solely at the untrained emotions of sensation-seeking spectators; and in popular entertainments, when the sensations are sought and the superficial needs are temporarily satisfied. Tolstoy supplies an answer to the problem when he demands that sincerity be the prime requisite of the poet. In presenting his theory of the "infectiousness of art," Tolstoy proceeds to explain that, "most of all is the degree of infectiousness of art increased by the degree of sincerity in the artist."¹⁹⁹

We can conclude only that the intensity of emotion, if not controlled and directed by the reflective, discriminatory, perceptive mind of man, can become the corrupter of itself. As a consequence of this condition, it is reasonable and appropriate that such poets as Wordsworth and T.S. Eliot sing, in quieter voices, of the "still sad music of humanity."

Nevertheless, a large qualification can be made concerning both types of poet. Wordsworth, on the one hand, tends towards monotony; Eliot, on the other, towards too abstruse an intellectualism. Milton, however, lacks neither the violent intensity of Donne and Dylan Thomas, nor the

¹⁹⁹ Tolstoy, What is Art?, p. 229.

depth and purity of Wordsworth and Eliot. It is true that Paradise Regained is as sparse in metaphor and as subdued in rhythm as "Burnt Norton" and the other poems comprising the Four Quartets, but it is also true that Samson Agonistes is as violent -- and rabid -- as anything that can be found in Donne or Dylan Thomas. Paradise Lost, on the other hand, gives us a kind of mean between the two extremes of intensity, since, whenever the verse is solely thoughtful or polemical, or whenever it is purely emotive, a common tone or control "silvers everything."

In other words, Miltonic epic grand style is not only propitious to static verse but also to that which is violently and actively intense. His is the style concerning which Matthew Arnold commented:

The mighty power of poetry and art is generally admitted. But where the soul of this power, of this power at its best, chiefly resides, very many of us fail to see. It resides chiefly in the refining and elevation wrought in us by the high and rare excellence of the grand style. We may feel the effect without being able to give ourselves clear account of its cause, but the thing is so. Now, no race needs the influences mentioned, the influences of refining and elevation, more than ours; and in poetry and art our grand source for them is Milton.²⁰⁰

C.S. Lewis gives a credible argument²⁰¹ for an understanding of the Trinity which also applies, strangely enough, in the description of the components of Milton's epic style.

²⁰⁰ Matthew Arnold, "Milton," (1838), in Milton Criticism, ed., James Thorpe, New York, Rinehart & Co., 1950, p. 374.

²⁰¹ C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity, passim.

In the basic relationship of Father and Son, the two members are no better or worse than each other. They are equally powerful, equally knowledgeable, equally kind. But there is a difference between them, a difference in nature, the Father being more static and the Son more active. The static, the subdued, the controlled, the classical, the restrained aspect of life is revealed in Milton's own conventional character; while the active, outgoing, freedom-loving, romantic, and unrestrained characteristic of life is shown in Milton's revolutionary character. Thus, the Father and the Son, as symbolical representations, exist in Milton's as in many another poet's style.

The really important part of the analogy of the Trinity is in the conception, however, of the third person, The Holy Spirit, who is no less powerful or just than the Father or the Son. In fact, it is the Holy Spirit which gives the Trinity its unity, Lewis suggests, since it is the spirit, binding fathers and sons together, that cements and completes the unity.

The analogy to Milton's style cannot be extended, with respect to the Spirit, to Samson Agonistes, in which the Son triumphs, nor to Paradise Regained, in which the Father dominates. Only in Paradise Lost do we see a complete unity of style established and maintained, and witness the unification and complement of the opposing forces of the Father and Son, of convention and revolt, a union springing out of that spirit which is inherent in the

grand style.

It is through his mastery of style that Milton is enabled to communicate what is perhaps the most ideal fruition of epic and tragedy, not only in his containment of tragedy within the epic mode and in his retention of concentration within a diffuse form, but also in his capacity as a religious teacher. The deepest values he communicates are those which all men hold to be fundamental within their religions, whether those religions be public or private. They are the values which designate man's place in the universe of time and space, his faith in the highest ideals, his remembrance of a time past the consciousness of memory, a time in which he found himself bereft of the ideal world only to discover that he was promised one which was even happier, even more ideal, than the Garden he had lost.

APPENDIX

SAMSON AGONISTES, AN INTERNAL TRAGEDY

"Poetry is words that have become deeds," wrote Robert Frost; and in his utterance can be found an ample description of the achievement of Milton's only tragedy, Samson Agonistes.

His achievement, however, is even more than words becoming deeds. It can be described as passion becoming realized and understood in oral utterance and thence becoming consummated by physical action. Perhaps it is the function of all drama to do just that -- to take an unrestrained, chaotic, even insane emotion and hold it fast until it is understood and made capable of being expressed. Some writers of inferior calibre, having lived overly active lives, never are able to depersonalize their emotions to the point of expressing them in a non-sentimental or non-sensational manner. But the great writer has the ability to accomplish it.

When Tolstoy wrote The Power of Darkness, he found it was necessary almost completely to revise his ending. he was faced with a grave problem. Either he was to show on stage the horrible truth of the murder of the newly-born child or he was to exclude the sensational but true situation from the spectators' eyes by means of artifice.

His decision to adopt the indirect method whereby the sensational incident is kept off-stage attests perhaps more his artistic cunning in depersonalizing his drama than it does his personal willingness to present the horrible but true picture of its happenings.

In Samson Agonistes, Milton was never faced with the problem of concealing the sensational aspects of his story. Marlowe, and even Shakespeare, at certain points in their careers, would have delighted in showing on stage the catastrophic action of Samson's pulling down the temple on the infidel. The contemporary motion picture also relishes the display of such extravagance. But Milton knew his materials with exactitude, just as the Greeks in their prime had known theirs; and using, as he says, the "three Tragic Poets unequall'd yet by any,"²⁰² Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, as his models, he allows such decisively physical action only to be reported, never seen.

Within the tragedy, quite literally the word becomes the deed. Samson frees his people by killing the enemy, as a result of God's inner promptings. But Milton knew that the deed itself must frequently be indirectly presented, else the control would be lost -- both the detached attitude of the poet and that of the reader or audience as well.

In tragedy, always there is found both internal and external action. And it is the internal action which is by

202 Preface, Samson Agonistes.

far more integral to the tragedy than the external. Its active consummation merely puts, as it were, the seal upon the proceedings of the outward, physical demonstration. Thus, the word has become the deed. Aristotle had written that:

Fear and pity may be aroused by spectacular means; but they may also result from the inner structure of the piece, which is the better way, and indicates a superior poet. For the plot ought to be so constructed that, even without the aid of the eye, he who hears the tale told will thrill with horror and melt to pity at what takes place. This is the impression we should receive from hearing the story of Oedipus. But to produce this effect by the mere spectacle is a less artistic method, and dependent on extraneous aides.²⁰³

Thus, it is not what is seen, but what is heard that contains the really significant part of the imitation of an action. The internal struggle is communicated to us principally by the ear; the external struggle which may come by "spectacular means" to us by means of the eye, is comparatively unimportant. Violent physical action, therefore, is in the best of Greek tragedies always off-stage.

Any consideration of the internal and external aspects of a problem necessitates the pondering of the paradox with which many men have been perennially faced: the difference between the active and contemplative sides of existence. For it is in this separation that the basis of inherent problem of the internality and externality of the tragedy resides.

203 Aristotle, "Poetics," V, in op. cit., p. 49.

Plato, like Tolstoy, is, of course sceptical concerning the value of most productions of art. Plato would interpret the theatrical event as an example of the superficially external and false. The anti-theatrical view erroneously believes that the spectacular was all the theatre had to offer. Aristotle, however, though he is often wrongly considered to be the spokesman for the defence of physical action in the face of Plato's more static ideal, actually upholds the idea of the inner non-physical action of the "still point in the turning world." In his Physics Aristotle points out that everything moves but the prime mover: "... where objects are moved there is an original unmoved mover."²⁰⁴ This idea of non-activity at the centre of nature, is compatible with his idea of the internality of action as superior in quality to the externality of action, since internal action becomes the mean between the extremities of God, on the one hand, who is motionless, and Satan, on the other, who is all activity. Such a mean is, then, the human capacity, being neither super- nor sub-human.

During medieval times, with the rise of mystical theology in Europe, the life of contemplation was finally clearly divorced, in many instances, from the life of action. The author of The Cloud of Unknowing, for example, discussed the choice between the two conditions, and found that the biblical story of Martha and Mary illustrated it. He wrote:

²⁰⁴ Aristotle, Natural Science, trans., Philip Wheelwright, New York, Odyssey Press, 1935, p. 59.

Lo! friend, all these works, these words, and this behaviour, that were showed between our Lord and these two sisters, be set in ensample of all actives and all contemplatives that have been since in Holy Church, and shall be to the Day of Doom. For by Mary is understood all contemplatives; for they should conform their living to hers. And by Martha, actives, in the same manner and for the same cause.²⁰⁵

Action is associated with youth, externality and personality; contemplation with experienced age, internality, and character. Action is life, the continuous passage of time and events. "Whenever we take a step," it has been said, "everything moves." But this is perhaps action at its best. At its more characteristic worst, it embodies the cultism of demoniacal and perverted spokesmen from Satan himself to the Marquis de Sade.

Contemplation, on the other hand, is the active life of the spirit, involving a conscious dissociation from the physical life of men. Instead, it is associated with an experience of static calm, the internal manifestation of divinity, and with a sense of an over-all impersonality. It is in this area of contemplation that Croce found his definition of art: "A work of art is the perfect imaginative form that a state of soul assumes."²⁰⁶

Although in commenting on Aristotle St. Thomas Aquinas

²⁰⁵ Anonymous, The Cloud of Unknowing, ed. Abbot Justin McCann, O.S.B., London, Burns Oates, 1952, p. 32.

²⁰⁶ Benedetto Croce, Aesthetic, trans. Douglas Ainslee, London, Macmillan, 1909.

refers to the soul as the "act of an organic physical body capable of life,"²⁰⁷ Aquinas also taught that the mere fact of life was an imperfect thing. Since imperfection was in itself not to be associated with God but rather with sin and hell; therefore human, physical life on earth, of its nature imperfect, is also sinful.

Modern psychologists, like the Jungian Jesuit Fr. White, who admit the existence of the soul argue, along with Aristotle and Milton, that the Platonic dichotomy of body and spirit is a false interpretation of the true nature of the inter-dependence of the material and non-material realms of existence; yet, in Milton's mind, at least, is found the constant differentiation between the physical appearance of a thing and its truer, inner nature. Milton's belief in the goodness of the flesh is to him perhaps more of an intellectual than an emotional belief; the emotion contained in his sympathetic exposition of the goodness of matter in Paradise Lost is definitely subsidiary to the conviction in his depiction of the separation between the physical and extra-physical sides of men's lives.²⁰⁸

Milton knew and appreciated both the introspective and the extraverted sides of mankind. One side, childlike but actively inquisitive, and the other, naturally introspective and contemplative are both illustrated more or

²⁰⁷ Quoted in Kenneth Burke, A Grammar of Motives, New York, Prentice-Hall, 1945, p. 227.

²⁰⁸ For a contradictory view, see Saurat, Milton : Man and Thinker, passim.

less throughout his works. L'Allegro displays diurnal physical energy; Il Penseroso nocturnal calm in studious speculation. The appreciation of both temperaments is evident in both poems, which, although they are complementary and interdependent, are clearly marked from each other. Moreover, one cannot help but be more convinced by the melancholic Il Penseroso than by the blithely active L'Allegro. Milton himself, for all his appreciation of the active, is always predominantly the static, studious man of darkness himself.

Considerations of body and soul, of action and contemplation, are synthesized in the end, into the fundamental problem of the paradox between the kinetic and static quality of our common experience. It may be argued that the static, or anything that is absolutely immovable, can never exist in human comprehension, men being constituted in such a way that it is impossible for them to forbear the quality of eternal flux which appears to rule all life. However, if we estimate all of the really significant moments that individuals experience in their lives -- the few fleeting moments of extreme joy or pain -- we will find that seldom, if ever, under such duress, is there an awareness of time. This absence of time may well mean the same thing as an absence of flux.

It is possible to argue that time is one of the chief restraints men have placed upon themselves. Certainly, the western conception of time is by no means a measurement that

is found in every culture; but it is understandable that we have made an extensive use of time in our effort to give order to chaos. Milton, as has been argued in Chapter VIII, appears to be fully aware of this need in Paradise Lost, and gave to his poem the largest temporal scope of any literary work ever created, in that its time encompasses life from its beginning to its end. In Samson Agonistes, on the other hand, Milton has purposely employed the Aristotelian -- or rather, Castelvetroan -- maxim of the unity of time; since he realizes that unity of time is no mere convention, not merely a technical convenience, but that it has both propriety and truth to experience in it. Its appropriateness to the tragedy is revealed by its dependence on the unity of action. Tragedy, in being concentrated in scope, relies for its whole effect on the one moment during a single revolution of the clock, and the ultimate culmination of the successive steps of the action of the plot. In that one moment, the emotions of pity and fear have finally become balanced in such a way that all considerations of time or space or measurement of any kind are overcome and there is effected that extended moment of perfect peace which is called the catharsis.

The active, frustrated emotions of pity and fear have then spent themselves:

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.²⁰⁹

And peace is attained. It is the end which has justified the means: the emotions of pity and fear justified by their final purgation.

Although Milton observed the Aristotelian interpretation of tragedy in his writing of Samson Agonistes, one must be careful not to presume that the English poet was what is sometimes meant by "Aristotelian," i.e., anti-Platonic. Milton's understanding of the idealistic and static, especially as it is employed in Paradise Lost and celebrated in Paradise Regained, marks him as a "static poet." Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey," Dryden's "Song to Saint Cecilia's Day," W.B. Yeats' "The Tower," T.S. Eliot's Four Quartets, and the first chapter of the Gospel of Saint John -- all have this in common with Paradise Regained: they are poems which are predominantly static. The catharsis is effected throughout, any action or development being always either merely remembered from the past of the poet and reader previous to the writing and reading of the poem; or, if action is included, it is subordinated to the over-all static mode.

Aristotle, on the other hand, although he believes that the core of nature is static, emphasizes the developmental or active side of the human character, and although, as we have seen, Milton was by no means without this quality,

209 Samson Agonistes, ll. 1755-9.

from most aspects he subordinated all activity to the final, static, panoramic mood of selfless, impersonal, and collectivistic feeling.²¹⁰

Thus, although in form Milton adhered completely to the Aristotelian interpretation of tragedy, his ideas were also strongly Platonic, Christian, and Hebraic. It may be observed that as a Renaissance humanist, he was attracted to Aristotle; as a Christian he was elevated naturally by the New Testament; as a representative of the Reformation and Puritanism, he was inspired by Plato and the Old Testament. All these elements contributed in varying measures to the accomplishment of his great poems.

The greatest works of art, of which there are but a handful, all have one thing in common: the absence of the personality of their creators. Homer's epics and Shakespeare's greatest plays prevent us from knowing anything about their authors. It is as if the poets by their art are able to surmount the restriction of their own petty personalities to create something that can be basically understood by all humankind, understood at least once the language and conventions are learned. Paradise Lost is another example of the impersonality of the great artist at work. Milton's naturally violent and intrusive per-

²¹⁰ Cf. how Tolstoy in War and Peace progresses in the first books from the mass of particular scenes to an overall panoramic and conceptual view of life and history, abandoning the particular view of humanity to the general, collective view of the concluding portion of his modern epic.

sonality is prevented time and time again from weakening the epic by his greater understanding of the grand style. The grand style, as we have seen, enabled him to maintain his humility in the face of his great subject throughout almost the whole of the twelve books. In Samson Agonistes, this is not the case. There, unfortunately, Milton the man frequently interferes with Milton the poet.

The impersonality of the greatest art has its correspondence in the impersonality of the highest religious experience. Aldous Huxley writes that:

Those who take the trouble to train themselves in the arduous technique of mysticism always end, if they go far enough in their work of recollection and meditation, by losing their intuitions of a personal God and having direct experience of an ultimate reality that is impersonal.²¹¹

In a smaller measure, perhaps, the greatest writers give us exactly what this implies: the loss of the reader's interest in the poet for himself but the gaining of the remembered experience the poet attempts to communicate. Like the mystics, the greatest poets are impersonal; but, unlike the mystics, it is their business to communicate their experience.

The impersonality of Milton in Paradise Lost is extremely curious in contrast to his lapses from detached control in his tragedy. Perhaps the reason for the lapse is

²¹¹ Aldous Huxley, Ends and Means, London, Chatto & Windus, 1948, p. 235.

found in the change not only from epic to tragic form but also from the grand style to the free versification employed in Samson Agonistes. The grand style, as we have seen, gave to Paradise Lost a special kind of blank verse, in which every line ten syllables in length enabled Milton to maintain the unity of his expansive poem and also to preserve his detachment consistently throughout the poem. In Samson Agonistes, however, Milton depended on the strictness of the classical form of tragedy to maintain the overall consistency of episode and stasimon rather than on the consistency of the verse line. Although modelled very closely upon Oedipus Coloneus, as well as upon Aristotle's discussion, the strict form of Samson Agonistes very likely was not strict enough to prevent some of Milton's offences against depersonalization and artistic control generally.

Denis Saurat writes:

Milton is more intimately present in Samson Agonistes than in any of his other poems. Here he put the history of his own life. Did he not put here also the last and best expression of his thought? Being here more human, is he not more sincere?²¹²

This statement is likely for the most part true, but it also raises one of the most important of unsolved critical problems. Is it to the credit of the work of art that its author is more obviously present? Regarding Milton's tragedy, how-

²¹² Denis Saurat, Milton: Man and Thinker, London, Dent, 1946, p. 200.

ever, the answer to the problem is perhaps not impossible. Samson Agonistes, in its weaker sections, is not necessarily more sincere; Milton has lost his control rather than gained true sincerity. Brutus is never less human than Hieronimo, but he is always more controlled. Moreover, it is not Samson's human uncontrol which shames him, but the "divine visitations," to use Shelley's phrase, "in the heart of man," visitations which finally give him his sincerity and strength of purpose.

Milton's lack of depersonalization -- that is, his loss of control and the allowing of his personal frustrations to offend the appropriateness or propriety of the piece -- is shown especially in two of the minor themes in Samson Agonistes. Misogyny, especially, and even self-pity to some extent are the chief offenders because they are never made depersonalized enough to be convincing as emotions. An example of self-pity is found in these lines:

...the vilest here excell me,
They creep, yet see, I dark in light expos'd
To daily fraud, contempt, abuse and wrong,
Within doors, or without, still as a fool,
In power of others, never in my own;
Scarce half I seem to live, dead more then half.²¹³

Even Saurat admits that Milton is here for the first time "complaining,"²¹⁴ even though such complaining perhaps is later made acceptable by Samson's realization that his

²¹³ Samson Agonistes, ll. 74-9.

²¹⁴ Saurat, loc. cit.

offences justify an even greater punishment than that which he has received:

Ye see, O friends,
How many evils have enclos'd me round;
Yet that which was the worst now least afflicts me,
Blindness, for had I sight, confus'd with shame,
How could I once look up, or heave the head,
Who like a foolish Pilot have shipwrack't,
My vessel trusted to me from above,
Gloriously rigg'd; and for a word, a tear,
Fool, have divulged the secret gift of God
To a deceitful Woman.²¹⁵

The memory of his fault, as Hanford has suggested, is more bitter now than the punishment.²¹⁶

The weakness on the count of misogyny, however, is more grave. Milton's intrusion into the matter at Dalilah's entrance, is apparently too ludicrous to accept. Chorus describes her coming:

But who is this, what thing of Sea or Land?
Femal of sex it seems,
That so bedeckt, ornate, and gay,
Comes this way sailing
Like a stately ship
Of Tarsus, bound for th' Isles
Of Javan or Gadier
With all her bravery on, and tackle trim,
Sails fill'd, and streamers waving,
Court'd by all the winds that hold them play,
An Amber sent of odorous perfume
Her harbinger, a damsel train behind....²¹⁷

This is inappropriate and awkward enough; but, after Dalilah has spoken, Samson begins his own invective speech:

²¹⁵ Samson Agonistes, ll. 193-202.

²¹⁶ J.H. Hanford, A Milton Handbook, New York, Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1946, p. 286.

²¹⁷ Samson Agonistes, ll. 710-21.

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,
And reconciliation move with feign'd remorse,
Confess, and promise wonders in her change,
Not truly penitent, but chief to try
Her husband, how far urg'd his patience bears,
His vertue or weakness which way to assail.²¹⁸

Milton's offence against the appropriateness of the whole tragic effect is considerable. "Is this pity, or fear?" We may rightfully ask, bewildered at Milton's lapse. Even Samson's forgiving Dalilah, in saying, "At distance I forgive thee, go with that,"²¹⁹ is not enough to offset his rage at her. It is depersonalization only at a distance.

The shortcomings of these losses of control in Samson Agonistes likely spring from certain shortcomings in the personality of Milton, the man. In every man there is the continual civil war between two opposing factions -- the revolutionary and the conservative. Both points of viewing life, it has time and time again been seen, are valid -- even necessary -- but the conflict of their co-existence can prove to be, under the wrong circumstances, fatal rather than life-giving.

Milton is, by basic personal temper, a rebel and a romantic, despite all the criticism which restricts and places him solely among traditionalists. His rebelliousness,

²¹⁸ Samson Agonistes, ll. 748-56.

²¹⁹ Ibid., l. 954.

however, as well as his romanticism is controlled by his classical restraint in almost all of his works. In Paradise Lost we find the two balanced in such a way that the most desirable mean between them is attained; in Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes, on the other hand, we can observe a much different situation. Paradise Regained is restrained and depersonalized in its emotion, sometimes to the dangerous point of ineffectuality. And Samson Agonistes, displays, as we have seen, the opposite offence.

Milton turns from his treatment of right and wrong reason in Paradise Regained to a treatment in Samson Agonistes of right and wrong passion. Samson had been overcome by his evil passion for Dalilah, a passion which had brought him almost complete ruin. But, like Adam and Eve, he is not doomed, since through passion-made-pure he finally restores himself and re-aspires to the fulfillment of his dedication on earth.

Like Milton himself, Samson is a dedicated man. But where Milton dedicated himself to sing God's glory, his tragic hero was dedicated prenatally to do God's personal work on earth in freeing his chosen people from bondage. As we see in Judges, Samson's high purpose is set forth first when an angel appeared to Samson's mother:

And the angel of the Lord appeared unto the Woman, and said unto her, Behold now, thou art barren, and bearest not: but thou shalt conceive and bear a son. Now therefore beware, I pray thee, and drink not wine nor strong drinks, and eat not any unclean thing: For, lo,

thou shalt conceive and bear a son; and no razor shall come on his head; for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb: and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines.²²⁰

The significance of Samson's Nazariteship lies in the symbol of his hair. The hair of the Nazarite was never to be cut, for it was the symbol of his devotion to God as well as the delineation of the very personality of the man. Like the Blood, which is still an elemental symbol in our religion, the hair was considered an organic part of the human being. The growth of the hair meant the growth of intellect and wisdom; it was a crown which maintained the supremacy of reason over the baser passions. Samson's loss of his hair meant the loss of his birth-right, of his purpose, and of his God. Samson's dedication is experienced internally. The climactic moment of the tragedy, the decisive action around which the whole drama moves, is closely linked to it.

Although, as Milton himself wrote, the work was never "intended" for the stage,²²¹ nevertheless, Samson Agonistes could be considered with profit as a poetic stage-drama. It would be difficult to determine whether Oedipus Rex or Milton's tragedy possessed a larger share of physical or internal action. The unity of action, moreover, is of the

²²⁰ Judges, 13, 3-5.

²²¹ Preface, Samson Agonistes.

same calibre in the two tragedies. Both Samson's and Oedipus's decisive actions are internal and depend upon the making of momentous decisions.

Oedipus is compelled by inner decision to lift the veil and face the truth of which he is rightfully, mortally afraid; and Samson decides at long last to fulfil his dedication by killing the Philistines. As a result of their inner revelations, of these visitations of the divinity in man, the physical outcome is catastrophic but just: Oedipus blinds himself and Samson sacrifices his own life.

Milton's use of the Greek stage as his model is further evidenced by Parker in his thesis on Milton's Debt to Greek tragedy in Samson Agonistes.²²² This table closely illustrates Milton's adherence to the strict classical form:

	<u>Samson Agonistes</u>		<u>Oedipus Coloneus</u>	
prologos	1-114	(114)	1-116	(116)
parodos	115-175	(61)	117-137	(21)
'kommos'	176-325	(150)	138-253	(116)
epeisodion	326-651	(326)	254-667	(414)
stasimon	652-709	(58)	668-719	(52)
epeisodion	710-1009	(300)	720-1043	(324)
stasimon	1010-1060	(51)	1044-1095	(52)
epeisodion	1061-1267	(207)	1096-1210	(115)
stasimon	1268-1299	(32)	1211-1243	(38)
epeisodion	1300-1426	(127)	1249-1555	(307)
stasimon	1427-1440	(14)	1556-1578	(23)
exodos	1441-1758	(318)	1579-1779	(201)
kommos	1660-1758	(99)	1670-1750	(81)

Another reason (and probably the most important, in

²²² W.R. Parker, Milton's Debt to Greek Tragedy in Samson Agonistes, Baltimore, John Hopkins Press, 1937, p. 168.

support of the idea that Samson Agonistes is an internal tragedy and that Milton rightfully interpreted Aristotle in his idea that the tragedy was effected more vitally within than without) is found in yet another of Aristotle's arguments. In suggesting that it is the ear rather than the eye to which tragedy appeals, Aristotle was probably mindful of the need to make the limitations of the Greek theatre an asset. The highly formal masks and costumes of the Greek actors tended naturally to stereotype the visual aspect of the tragic art, while their huge theatre was acoustically almost perfect. In the theatre near Athens a whisper can be heard from the stage to the last row.

An additional argument, of course, may still be made in the defence of the oral performance in the Platonic idea that the auditory arts are first in the scale of senses and the visual come second. In the scale, first is music; then poetry; then painting; and so on. If we break down the field of poetry we will have, first and highest, all lyric poetry in which the imagery will be auditory and articulatory rather than visual; the objective correlative of sound rather than visual image.

As did the Greek theatre with its choric odes, which were either sung or chanted, Milton employed the lyrical and euphonic tragic sections, thus tending not only to encompass and fulfill this need, but also to elevate the tragic art higher, in a sense, than ever it had been elevated by Elizabethan tragedians. Shakespeare and his contemporaries

were, after all, technically concerned chiefly with the heights of visual imagery, not only in the representation of personages on the stage but also of the objective correlatives invoked in the very lines of the poetry.

Despite Milton's expressed idea that his tragedy was not intended for the stage, are we not justified in considering its possibilities as a dramatic presentation? Oedipus Rex is still frequently performed; and although there are always a number of conventional difficulties in Samson Agonistes that must be overcome, they are not really greater in number than those encountered by every producer of King Lear or Hamlet. That it is a closet drama and should remain such may be argued; but all lovers of the stage, who are aware of its great possibilities, may well think twice about Samson Agonistes.

A number of years ago, T.S. Eliot defined his now-famous term "objective correlative" in this passage:

The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative'; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that Particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.²²³

In many ways, the term is a better one to use than "imagery" because the older term frequently makes us think only of visual imagery, to the neglect of other sources of imagination,

223 T.S. Eliot, Selected Essays, London, Faber, 1949, p. 145.

such as the auditory, tactile, and gustatory, those arising from the ear, the touch and the taste. But there is yet another source, besides the obvious senses for the creation of an objective correlative: the intellective faculty of the mind. That source begins, one might add, where sound leaves off, where thought is correlated in an intellectual and objective fashion, to produce an image which has no recourse to any of the senses. Milton himself describes the objective correlative of thought in the lines:

...for who would lose,
Though full of pain, this intellectual being,
Those thoughts that wander through Eternity.... 224

Although imagery is usually obtained by a poet's use of sensory experience, there is one exception, in that the objective correlative of thought is primarily thought realized in an emotion, unified, complete, and communicable. As a whole, Lucretius' De Rerum Natura, is an example of a poem which presents this unified, complete, and communicable image of the universe. Wordsworth, at his best, also communicates this felt thought. Even some of Tennyson's and Dryden's better work, as well as much of T.S. Eliot's more recent poetry, evidences this emotional reflection, which is often shorn of every other kind of imagery but that of purely rhythmical thought. The beginning of "Burnt Norton" is one of the most recent and best examples:

224 Paradise Lost, II, ll. 146-48.

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future,
And time future contained in time past.
If all time is eternally present
All time is unredeemable.
What might have been is an abstraction
Remaining a perpetual possibility
Only in a world of speculation.
What might have been and what has been
Point to one end, which is always present.²²⁵

Milton, too, is prominent in his abundance of such thought imagery, not only in Paradise Lost and in his minor work, but also to a possibly unequalled extent in Paradise Regained. Samson Agonistes, on the other hand, appropriately contains fewer representative passages containing "felt thought," but that drama comes to be of the greatest importance when we consider that the central action of the tragedy is caused by the stirring of extra-sensory thought, and it is that stirring which is the most internal of all the internal qualities of the play. Samson, after withstanding the unwitting temptation of his father, Manoa, the calculated cunning of Dalila, the boorish attack of Harapha, and the provoking messages of the Officer, expresses the source of the strength which will enable him to carry out his great task, when he says:

Be of good courage, I begin to feel
Some rousing motions in me which dispose²²⁶
To something extraordinary my thoughts.

This is the divine guidance as it had in the past visited

225 T.S. Eliot, Four Quartets, p. 7.

226 Samson Agonistes, ll. 1381-3.

him. It recalls the same phenomenon as that which Christ had felt in the desert, when he is described as "Musing and much revolving in his brest."²²⁷ One of the chief characteristics of "felt thought," moreover, is in its approximation to the static reality at the core of active appearance. Its emotion is peacefully cathartic rather than violent in any way; in short, its passion is passion that has become subdued.

The contrast of Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes is revealing because the former poem is almost completely cathartic and depersonalized throughout, in that the conflict between Christ and his tempter is almost negligible since there is no possibility of temptation. Consequently, much of the verse of Paradise Regained cannot deserve the name of poetry because it often has the temper of passionless reason. The intellectual debate between Christ and Satan, though in many instances exemplary of the objective correlative of thought, is sometimes nothing more than an intellectual idea presented in a rationalistic manner. In Samson Agonistes, on the other hand, the preoccupation with internal passion is greater rather than with reason.

Although the offences against poetic art in both poems are about equal in number, the poems are not alike. The difference between them is in kind not quantity, in that

227 Paradise Regained, l. 135.

Paradise Regained offends by its use of thought which has no basis in emotion, while Samson Agonistes offends, as has been discussed, by its unrestrained use of emotion at the expense of the restraining influence of the intellect. We may deduce from all this that Paradise Regained offends by being too static at certain moments and Samson Agonistes by being too active.

Samson Agonistes, like all other classical tragedies, treats the active emotions of pity and fear. Milton acceded to the idea that the fear must come from the object (i.e., the hero) and the pity must come from the audience. The two interacting emotions must meet, be commingled in such a way that they are purged, and thence end in being spent. To Milton's pathological view of catharsis, it is the spent state which is the end of all tragedy. In perhaps an unprecedented way, he knew both the frustrating emotions of pity and fear and the resolution of frustration, the passionless state at the end of a prolonged purgation.

His three great works end on the quiet note of perfect peace. The famous ending of Paradise Lost is characteristic:

The World was all before them, where to choose
Thir place of rest, and Providence thir Guide:
They hand in hand with wandering steps and slow,
Through Eden took thir solitarie way.²²³

And Paradise Regained, too, ends very quietly, implying the value of private isolation:

223 Paradise Lost, XII, ll. 646-9.

Thus they the Son of God our Saviour meek
Sung Victor, and from Heavenly Feast refresht
Brought on his way with joy; hee unobserv'd²²⁹
Home to his Mothers house private return'd.

But it is Samson which really offers us what may be considered the perfect tragic closing:

His servants he with new acquist
Of true experience from this great event
With peace and consolation hath dismiss,
And calm of mind all passion spent.²³⁰

The intensity of the catharsis is very great, even to the private individual, while he is reading the tragedy. How much greater is such a moment when it is successfully presented to a group of people in an audience. Not only will the individual communication be made, but also, if the audience is an attentive one and if the production is intelligent, a collectively felt purgation will be effected.

In Samson Agonistes the central action is, as we have seen, the action which comes from within Samson's spirit, his inner compulsion to ward off his enemies and to carry out his divine purpose. It comes at the moment when he is probably at his lowest point. All is lost, it seems, until he says:

Be of good courage, I begin to feel
Some rouzing motions in me which dispose²³¹
To something extraordinary my thoughts.

229 Paradise Regained, IV, ll. 636-9.

230 Samson Agonistes, ll. 1755-8.

231 Ibid., ll. 1381-1383.

This is the moment of his great decision, the moment in which he knows the will of God means the sacrifice of his life as well as the killing of the Philistines. It is the emotion becoming the word, the word which is later to become the deed. This, the central action of the internal drama, completes the plot; remaining is the completion of the internal action off-stage, and the gathering of the minor threads of prepared tragic irony over Manoa's attempt to deliver his son, and in the justification of Samson's self-destruction. The external and internal action, united, is in a sense suspended by the emotions of pity and fear through the temporary disunity of the chorus over the proceedings; until, at the end, Manoa convinces them that Samson's sacrifice is an act of elevation:

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.²³²

An argument in favour of the production of Samson Agonistes is found in the quality of the poetry in the actual lines. Milton's style is highly euphonious; and of its own nature it requires oral reading, at the very least. I. A. Richards has pointed out the necessity for the oral reading of most poetry, in that while the larynx, the tongue and the lips combine to produce certain physiological effects, there are simultaneously certain chemical effects created in the body.²³³ An obvious example of this is found in such gusta-

²³² Samson Agonistes, ll. 1721-4.

²³³ I. A. Richards, Practical Criticism, p. 234 note.

tory images as the eating of the apple and the chewing of bitter ashes in Paradise Lost, but the more general and subtle effects of enunciation are perhaps even more important. For example, the despair of the following lines is communicated much more readily by the actual expression of the vowel and consonantal sounds:

O dark, dark, dark, amid the blaze of noon,
Irrecoverably dark, total Eclipse
Without all hope of day!²³⁴

The ideal of internal knowledge, as is evidenced in this great dramatic work, is found throughout Milton's works. The inner spiritual state of a man is the place where all real value resides, according not only to puritanism and its offspring sects, but also, in a lesser way, to Christianity in general. Man has two alternatives: either he joins the devil and finds himself comparable to Satan, in saying:

Which way I flie is Hell; my self am Hell
And in the lowest deep a lower deep
Still threatening to devour me opens wide,
To which the Hell I suffer seems a Heav'n.²³⁵

or he takes the advice Michael gives to all mankind, in seeking "A Paradise within thee, happier farr."²³⁶

Samson, at the beginning of the tragedy, finds he is far from God in his despair:

I seek
This unfrequented place to find some ease,
Ease to the body some, none to the mind
From restless thoughts....²³⁷

234 Samson Agonistes, ll. 30-32.

235 Paradise Lost, IV, ll. 75-78.

236 Ibid., XII, l. 537.

237 Samson Agonistes, ll. 16-19.

Later, he tells how he was divinely inspired:

... they knew not
That what I motion'd was of God; I knew
From intimate impulse....²³⁸

and he further relates: "Ay me, another inward grief awak't...."²³⁹

Still later, he says, answering the officer's suggestion that
he regard his own welfare:

My self? my conscience and internal peace.²⁴⁰

He is here on the upward climb; and the climax crowns his
internal development toward positive heroism:

Be of good courage, I begin to feel
Some rouzing motions in me which dispose
To something extraordinary my thoughts.²⁴¹

The internal justice which Samson experiences is
incompatible with the common ethic of those who are in power
over him. The enemy, the infidel, is the force of evil
against which his inner, divine "motions" speak. Except for
his inner spirit, he is absolutely alone. Although he has
the sympathy of the chorus and Manoa, he is, as a mystic
in direct communication with God, alone.²⁴²

²³⁸ Samson Agonistes, ll. 221-23.

²³⁹ Ibid., l. 330.

²⁴⁰ Samson Agonistes, l. 1334.

²⁴¹ Ibid., ll. 1381-3.

²⁴² Cf. "... and therefore in the sweetest and mildest
manner of paternal discipline God hath committed this other
office of preserving in healthful constitution the innerman,
which may be term'd the spirit of the soul, to his spiritual
deputy the minister of each Congregation; who being best ac-
quainted with his own flock hath best reason to know all the
secretest diseases likely to be there. And look by how much
the internal man is more excellent and noble than the

Samson represents the condition in which God's morality speaks out through one great man against the corrupted ethic of men who have enslaved him. This, the medium of God's action, is sacrificed; indeed, it appears to be almost an archetypal pattern throughout most primitive religions that there should exist the practice of sacrificing the divine or semi-divine leader or king. Although Samson, the leader of his people, is not killed by them, his death is substantially the same as the Dionysiac sacrifice; for his death has the effect of beginning the freeing of his people from the Philistian oppression. The word has become the deed.

It is the justice of God that imposes itself on mankind in the person of Samson which makes this tragedy one of the few great religious dramas in our literature. Milton's success in communicating the morality of God not only adds to his stature as one of the greatest of poets, but it also reveals him to us as a religious teacher. In Samson, the fulfilled hero, is displayed man's capability of rising from the fetters of the despairing darkness of his own personality, to become in the end compatible with the highest conception contained in man's imaginative experience. That experience is nothing less than an apprehension of God's justice.

external, by so much is his cure more exactly, more thoroughly and more particularly to be perform'd." (John Milton, The Reason of Church Government, in op. cit., Vol. III, Part I, pp. 256-7.)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

I. Reference Works

Bell, I. F., A Milton Bibliography, Vancouver, University of British Columbia, 1954.

Gayley, C. M., & Kurtz, B. P., Methods and Materials of Literary Criticism, Boston, Ginn & Co., 1920.

Oxford Classical Dictionary, ed., M. Cary, et al., Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1949.

Patterson, F. A., & Fogle, F. R., An Index to the Columbia Edition of the Works of John Milton, New York, Columbia University Press, 1940, 2 Vols.

Prendergast, G. L., A Complete Concordance to the Poetical Works of Milton, Madras, Pharoah & Co., 1857.

Shipley, J. T., ed., A Dictionary of World Literature, New York, Philosophical Library, 1943.

II. Works by Milton

Milton, John, The Poetical Works of ..., ed., H. C. Beeching, London, Oxford University Press, 1908.

The Works of ..., New York, Columbia University Press, 1931, 18 Vols.

III. Books on Milton

Addison, Joseph, Criticism on Milton's Paradise Lost, ed., E. Arber, (The Spectator, 31 December 1711-3 May 1712), Westminster, Constable & Co., 1898.

Arnold, Matthew, "Milton," (1888), in Milton Criticism, ed., James Thorpe, New York, Rinehart & Co., 1950.

Begholm, N., Milton and Paradise Lost, Copenhagen, Levin & Munksgaard, 1932.

Coleridge, S. T., Course of Lectures, Lecture Ten, "Milton," Notes and Lectures, etc., London, Geo. Bell & Sons, 1884.

Condee, Ralph W., Milton's Theories Concerning Epic Poetry, Doctoral Dissertation, Urbana, University of Illinois, 1949.

- Corcoran Sister M. I., Milton's Paradise with Reference to the Hexameral Background, Washington, D. C., Catholic University of America Press, 1945.
- Gilbert, Allan H., On the Composition of Paradise Lost, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1947.
- Hanford, J. H., A Milton Handbook, New York, Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1926.
- Hutchinson, F. E., Milton and the English Mind, London, English Universities Press, 1950.
- Johnson, Samuel, Life of Milton, in Works of ..., Troy, New York, Pafraets Press, Vol. XI.
- Krouse, F. M., Milton's Samson and the Christian Tradition, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1949.
- Lewis, C. S., A Preface to Paradise Lost, London, Oxford University Press, 1942.
- Masson, David, Life of John Milton, Cambridge, Macmillan, 1859-1880, 6 Vols.
- Parker, W. R., Milton's Debt to Greek Tragedy in Samson Agonistes, Baltimore, John Hopkins Press, 1937.
- Pattison, Mark, Milton, London, Macmillan, 1932.
- Prince, F. T., The Italian Element in Milton's Verse, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1954.
- Racine, Louis, Life of Milton, London, Hogarth Press, 1930.
- Raleigh, Walter, Milton, London, Edward Arnold & Co., 1900.
- Samuel, Irene, Milton and Plato, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1947.
- Saurat, Denis, Milton: Man and Thinker, London, Dent, 1946.
- Thompson, E. N. S., Essays on Milton, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1914.
- Thorpe, James, ed., Milton Criticism, New York, Rinehart & Co., 1950.
- Tillyard, E. M. W., Milton, London, Chatto & Windus, 1936.

Tillyard, E. M. W., The Miltonic Setting, London, Chatto & Windus, 1949.

Woodhouse, A. S. P., Milton the Poet, Toronto, Dent, 1955.

IV. Periodicals, Chapters, and Introductions

Barker, Arthur, "Structural Pattern in Paradise Lost," Philological Quarterly, Iowa City, University of Iowa, (Oct., 1949), No. 4, Vol. XXVIII, pp. 17 ff.

Davenant, Sir William, "Preface to Gondibert," (1650), Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century, ed., J. E. Spingarn, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1908.

Eliot, T. S., "A Note on the Verse of John Milton," Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1936.

Hanford, J. H., "Samson Agonistes and Milton in Old Age," Studies in Shakespeare, Milton, and Donne, New York, Macmillan, 1925, pp. 165-89.

Lindsay, Jack, "The Poetry of Edith Sitwell," Life and Letters, (Jan., 1950), Vol. 65.

Poe, Edgar Allan, "The Poetic Principle," in The Complete Works, ed., J. A. Harrison, New York, Kelmscott Society, 1902, Vol. XIV, pp. 266-92.

Ransom, J. C., "The Literary Criticism of Aristotle," Lectures in Criticism, New York, Pantheon, 1949, pp. 15-42.

Stewart, J. A., "Cambridge Platonists," Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, ed., Jas. Hastings, New York, Chas. Scribner's Sons, 1913, Vol. III, pp. 167-73.

Stoll, E. E., "Time and Space in Milton," From Shakespeare to Joyce, Garden City, New York, Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1944, pp. 413-21.

Troyat, Henri, "Introduction," Anna Karenina, New York, Modern Library, 1950.

Williams, Charles, "Introduction," The English Poems of Milton, London, Oxford University Press, 1940.

V. Miscellaneous References

Aeschylus, The Oresteia, trans., Gilbert Murray, London, Allen & Unwin, 1946.

- Anonymous, The Cloud of Unknowing, ed., Abbot Justin McCann, O.S.B., London, Burns Oates, 1952.
- Aristotle, Poetics, trans., S. H. Butcher, in Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art, New York, Dover Publications, 1951.
- Baldwin, T. W., Shakspeare's Five-Act Structure, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1947.
- Bodkin, Maud, Archetypal Patterns in Poetry, London, Oxford University Press, 1934.
- Bremond, Henri, Prayer and Poetry, London, Burns Oates, 1927.
- Buckley, T., trans., Aristotle's Treatise on Rhetoric, London, Geo. Bell, 1890.
- Burke, Kenneth, A Grammar of Motives, New York, Prentice-Hall, 1945.
- Butcher, S. H., Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art, New York, Dover Publications, 1951.
- Bywater, Ingram, Aristotle on the Art of Poetry, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1909.
- Charlton, H. B., Castelvetro's Theory of Poetry, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1913.
- Coleridge, S. T., Biographia Literaria, London, Dent, 1906.
- Cook, A. S., ed., The Art of Poetry, the Poetical Treatises of Horace, Vida, Boileau, Boston, Ginn & Co., 1892.
- Cornford, F. M., From Religion to Philosophy, London, Edward Arnold, 1912.
- trans., The Republic of Plato, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1941.
- Damon, S. Foster, William Blake: His Philosophy and Symbols, New York, Houghton, Mifflin, 1924.
- Dante, Inferno, London, Dent, 1932.
- Eliot, T. S., Four Quartets, London, Faber & Faber, 1944.
- Selected Essays, London, Faber & Faber, 1949.
- The Cocktail Party, London, Faber & Faber, 1950.

- Fairchild, H. N., The Noble Savage, New York, Columbia University Press, 1928.
- Fraser, James G., The Golden Bough, New York, Macmillan, 1953.
- Freeman, Kathleen, Companion to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1949.
- trans., Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1952.
- Garrod, H. W., Scholarship: Its Meaning and Value, Cambridge University Press, 1946.
- Gilbert, Allan H., Literary Criticism: Plato to Dryden, New York, American Book, 1940.
- Goethe, Faust, trans., G. M. Priest, New York, Covici-Friede, 1932.
- Gorman, Herbert, James Joyce, New York, Farrar & Rinehart, 1939.
- Guenon, René, The Reign of Quantity, London, Luzac & Co., 1953.
- Harrison, J. M., Platonism in English Poetry, New York, Columbia University Press, 1903.
- Herrick, M. T., The Poetics of Aristotle in England, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1930.
- Huxley, Aldous, Ends and Means, London, Chatto & Windus, 1948.
- Johnson, Samuel, History of Rasselas, ed., G. B. Hill, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1949.
- Joyce, James, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, New York, Modern Library, 1928.
- Jung, C. G., The Integration of the Personality, New York, Farrar & Rinehart, 1939.
- Lewis, C. S., Mere Christianity, London, Geoffrey Bles, 1952.
- Lowes, J. L., Convention and Revolt in Poetry, Boston, Houghton, Mifflin, 1919.
- The Road to Xanadu, Boston, Houghton, Mifflin, 1927.

Maritain, Jacques, Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry, New York, Pantheon, 1935.

Mazzoni, Discourse in Defense of the Comedy, trans., Allan H. Gilbert, Literary Criticism: Plato to Dryden, New York, American Book, 1940.

Meredith, George, Modern Love, London, Macmillan, 1892.

Miller, Arthur, The Death of a Salesman, New York, Viking Press, 1949.

Owen, E. T., The Harmony of Aeschylus, Toronto, Clarke, Irwin, 1952.

Plato, The Republic, trans., F. M. Cornford, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1941.

Priest, G. M., trans., Faust, New York, Covici-Friede, 1932.

Richards, I. A., Practical Criticism, London, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1929.

Principles of Literary Criticism

Saintsbury, George, A History of Criticism, New York, Dodd, Mead, & Co., 1902, 3 Vols.

Shakespeare, The Complete Works of ..., ed., Hardin Craig, Chicago, Scott, Foresman & Co., 1951.

Sidney, Sir Philip, The Complete Works, ed., Albert Feuillerat, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1926, Vol. IV.

Sitwell, Edith, A Book of Flowers, London, Macmillan, 1952.

Smith, J. H., & Parks, E. W., The Great Critics, New York, W. W. Norton, & Co., 1939.

Sophocles, The Seven Plays, trans., Lewis Campbell, London, Oxford University Press, 1921.

Spingarn, J. E., ed., Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1908.

Literary Criticism in the Renaissance, New York, Columbia University Press, 1908.

Symonds, J. A., Renaissance in Italy, London, Smith, Elder & Co., 1909, 7 Vols.

- Tasso, Discourses on the Heroic Poem, trans., Allan H. Gilbert, Literary Criticism: Plato to Dryden, New York, American Book, 1940.
- Taylor, H. O., Thought and Expression in the Sixteenth Century, New York, Macmillan, 1930.
- Thompson, A. R., The Anatomy of Drama, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1946.
- Tolstoy, Leo, Anna Karenina, New York, Modern Library, 1950.
What is Art?, London, Oxford University Press, 1930.
- Watkin, E. I., Poets and Mystics, London, Sheed & Ward, 1953, pp. 1-20.
- Wheelwright, Philip, trans., Aristotle, New York, Odyssey Press, 1935.
- Wordsworth, William, The Poetical Works of ..., eds, E. de Selincourt & Helen Darbishire, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1947.