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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Barbara Jones Nipp entitled "The Dramatic Element in Milton's Poetry." I recommend that it be accepted for nine quarter hours of credit in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English.

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THE DRAMATIC ELEMENT IN MILTON'S POETRY

A THESIS

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Barbara Jones Nipp

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CHAPTER I

MILTON'S DRAMATIC INTERESTS

When I am weary grown, the splendor
of the rounded theater welcomes me,
and summons me to sound its plaudits.
(Elegy I, 31-33)¹

During his rustication from college in 1626, Milton wrote to his friend Diodati these words revealing his enthusiasm for the theater and its invigorating effect upon him. One cannot read far into Milton's prose or poetry without coming upon remarks concerning drama as a literary form or an entertainment, instances of dramatic imagery or terminology, allusions to characters from drama, or references to specific playwrights. Not all of these dramatic allusions, however, are as enthusiastic or complimentary as the reference (quoted above) to the theater made by young Milton in the epistle to Diodati. An investigation into the numerous aspects of Milton's dramatic interests, gleaned from his biography and writings, should prove of value to a study of the dramatic element in his poetry. His knowledge of drama as a literary form, his experiences as a performer and spectator, and his general attitude toward drama at various periods in his life no doubt influenced the conscious, or at times perhaps unconscious, choices

¹ All quotations from Milton's works are taken from The Works of John Milton, 18 vols., Columbia University Press, 1931-38 (hereafter referred to as Columbia Milton). References after prose quotations are to volume and page; after poetry to lines.

of dramatic forms and techniques which he employed in his poetry. An investigation into Milton's dramatic interests, therefore, should prove not only helpful but necessary to a well-rounded study of his poetry.

One of Milton's earliest attempts at dramatic composition was his performing the exercise of impersonation at St. Paul's School. The exercise required the boys to compose lines for a person, real or imaginary, to be spoken under given circumstances, and although difficult, the task was no doubt beneficial in bringing alive to the boys' imaginations dramatic scenes from classical literature.² The oratorical nature of this exercise, as Professor Clark points out, might account in some measure for the excellent speeches Milton composed for characters to deliver in Comus, Paradise Lost, and Samson Agonistes, speeches which Clark thinks superior to the dramatic dialogues in those works.³ Besides putting the boys' imaginations into play, the exercise emphasized the observance of decorum concerning the person speaking, the person spoken to, and the emotional coloring of the circumstances.⁴ This early lesson in dramatic propriety seems to have left a lasting impression upon Milton. In "Of

² Donald Lemen Clark, John Milton at St. Paul's School . . . (New York, 1948), p. 242.

³ Ibid., p. 244.

⁴ Ibid., p. 242.

Education" (1644), he advises that study be made of that "sublime art which in Aristotle's Poetics, in Horace, and in the Italian commentaries of Castelvetro, Tasso, Mazzoni, and others, teaches what the laws are of true Epic Poem, what of a Dramatic, what of a Lyric, what Decorum is. . . ."⁵ Another statement on dramatic propriety appears in The First Defence (1651). Milton offers his own explanation of the theory of dramatic propriety after pointing out that Salmasius misrepresented the sentiments of Aeschylus by quoting him out of context:

We must not regard the poet's words as his own, but consider who it is that speaks in the play, and what that person says; for different persons are introduced, sometimes good sometimes bad, sometimes wise men, sometimes fools, and they speak not always the poet's own opinion, but what is most fitting to each character.⁶

Besides experience with dramatic composition, Milton's school-days afforded him experience as a performer. While at Cambridge, he was chosen to act as "master of ceremonies" for a college performance. The lines "At a Vacation Exercise," which make up the third part of the exercise composed for the occasion, show that Milton had wit and, as a youth, a sense of humor, important qualities in drama. Tillyard points out that, although Milton was probably unfitted for activity involving exuberant fun, he made the exercise a success.⁷

⁵Columbia Milton, IV, 286.

⁶Ibid., VII, 307.

⁷E. M. W. Tillyard, ed., Milton: Private Correspondence and Academic Exercises, trans. Phyllis Tillyard (Cambridge, 1932), p. xxxi.

Milton's innumerable references to the classical dramatists and their works reveal his intimate knowledge of the drama of Greece and Rome.⁸ Besides knowing classical drama, he deeply respected it, especially for its moral qualities. In his treatise "Of Education," he advises, ". . . it would be wholesome enough to let them [the boy students] taste some choice Comedies, Greek, Latin, or Italian: Those Tragedies also that treat of Household matters, as *Trachiniae*, *Alcestes*, and the like," and after studying such subjects as theology and political science, the boys, Milton continues, should become acquainted with "Attic Tragedies of stateliest and most regal argument."⁹ He pays further tribute to the tragedians in Church Government, where he includes as "Dramatick constitutions . . . doctrinal and exemplary to a Nation" the works of Sophocles and Euripides along with the pastoral drama in the Song of Solomon and the Apocalypse of Saint John;¹⁰ and in Paradise Regained:

Thence what the lofty grave Tragedians taught
 In Chorus or Iambic, teachers best
 Of moral prudence, with delight receiv'd
 In brief sententious precepts, while they treat
 Of fate, and chance, and change in human life;
 High actions, and high passions best describing:
 (IV, 261-266).

The preface to Samson Agonistes contains Milton's highest praise of

⁸Cf. index, Merritt Hughes ed., Milton's Complete Poems and Major Prose (New York, 1957).

⁹Columbia Milton, IV, 285.

¹⁰Ibid., III, 237.

classical tragedy: "Tragedy, as it was anciently composed, hath been ever held the gravest, moralest, and most profitable of all other poems," and his dramatic poem, modeled on the principles of ancient drama, stands as a final tribute to those tragedians Milton deeply admired.

Milton's attitude toward classical drama is easily discerned from his allusions to it; his feeling toward the drama of his time, however, is not so easily recognized. Several condemnatory remarks concerning contemporary drama appear in his works. In "Il Penseroso," Milton gives high praise to the "gorgeous tragedy" of classical literature but reveals that he considered few later tragedies to be noble works:

Or what (though rare) of later age,
Ennobled hath the Buskind stage.
 (101-2)

In Church Government, Milton advises, "It were happy for the commonwealth if our magistrates would take into their care . . . the managing of our . . . festival pastimes," and he calls for "the procurement of wise and artful recitations . . . at set and solemn paneguries in theaters. . . ."¹¹ Milton's disgust with contemporary theatrical productions is most evident in the "Apology for Smectymnus." Having been upbraided for alluding to theaters in his writings and for showing himself more familiar with "Playhouses and the Bardelloes" than he, a

¹¹ Ibid., III, 239-40.

Puritan, should be, Milton answers by strongly hinting that it was at Cambridge where he had several opportunities to see plays: ". . . in the Colleges so many of the young Divines, and those in next aptitude to Divinity have bin seene so oft upon the Stage writhing and unboning their Clergie limmes . . . prostituting the shame of that ministry which either they had, or were nigh having. . . ." ¹² During the reigns of James I and Charles I, the custom of performing plays at public schools and universities was at its height. ¹³ Milton was among those scholars who viewed such productions: "There while they acted, and overacted, among other young scholars, I was a spectator; they thought themselves gallant men, and I thought them fools, they made sport, and I laught, they mispronounc't and I mislik't, and to make up the atticisme, they were out, and I hist." ¹⁴ Milton was writing these words only a few months before the closing of the theaters by Parliament on September 2, 1642. ¹⁵ His final criticism of contemporary drama appears in the preface to Samson Agonistes in which he finds it necessary to cite ecclesiastical authority in support of the moral sanctity of writing tragedy, thereby vindicating tragedy

¹² Ibid., III, 299-300.

¹³ David Masson, The Life of John Milton (London, 1881), I (rev. ed., New York, 1946), 221.

¹⁴ Columbia Milton, III, 301.

¹⁵ Hughes, n. 27, p. 692.

from the small esteem, or rather infamy, which in the account of many it undergoes at this day with other common interludes; happening through the poet's error of intermixing comic stuff with tragic sadness and gravity; or introducing trivial and vulgar persons, which by all judicious hath been counted absurd; and brought in without discretion, corruptly to gratify the people.

Although disparagement of modern drama and preference for the classic are sentiments often found in Milton's works, they must not be taken as conclusive proof of his disapproval of contemporary drama. Masson points out that Milton's dislike, as stated in his works, was for the moral degradation of the theaters which made him wish for reformation rather than suppression of the drama.¹⁶ Furthermore, Milton's writing early dramatic pieces (Arcades and Comus) and his admiring references to the acted plays of Jonson and Shakespeare¹⁷ show that he did not share the antipathy of the Puritans toward the acted drama.¹⁸ Professor Hanford argues convincingly that no evidence exists to prove that Milton ever outgrew his early love of Elizabethan drama, even though the more aesthetic essence of Elizabethan poetry--the spirit of the masque and lyric which is evident in Comus--passed out of the poet.¹⁹ The many parallels between Shakespeare's and Milton's

¹⁶Masson, VI, 662.

¹⁷Cf. "L'Allegro," 132-35.

¹⁸Masson, VI, 662.

¹⁹James Holly Hanford, "The Dramatic Element in Paradise Lost," Studies in Philology, XIV (1917), 178-95.

poetry are proof that delight in the beauty of Elizabethan dramatic poetry never left Milton.²⁰ Further evidence of his high regard for Elizabethan drama, at its best, appears in the prefatory note to Paradise Lost. Milton's choice of meter is "English heroic verse without rhyme," the meter, he says of "our best English tragedies." The blank verse of Paradise Lost, then, is a medium borrowed from Elizabethan drama, though as the poet points out in the note, justified by classical and Italian precedent.

Other, and less substantial, evidence that Milton's disparaging statements on contemporary drama are not proof of his dislike for the acted drama of his time concerns his theater-going while not at Cambridge. It is not altogether clear whether Milton actually attended plays while away from and after leaving Cambridge or whether the dramatic allusions in his works refer merely to his reading of plays. Whereas his commendatory verses "On Shakespeare," first printed in the Second Folio of Shakespeare (1632), offer no substantial evidence of his having seen Shakespeare's plays acted, the lines from "L'Allegro,"

Then to the well-trod stage anon,
If Jonsons learned Sock be on,
Or sweetest Shakespear fancies childe,
Warble his native Wood-notes wilde,
(132-5),

²⁰The most thorough account of Milton's debt to Shakespeare is found in Alwin Thaler's Shakespeare's Silences (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1929), pp. 139-208. See also John M. Major, "Comus and The Tempest," Shakespeare Quarterly, X (1959), 177-83; Ethel Seaton, "Comus and Shakespeare," Essays and Studies, XXII (1945), 68-80; George Coffin Taylor, "Shakespeare and Milton Again," Studies in Philology, XXIII (1926), 189-99; and Alwin Thaler, "The Shakesperian Element in Milton," PMLA, XL (1925), 645-91, and "Shakespeare and Milton Once More," SAMLA Studies in Milton (Gainesville, 1953), pp. 80-99.

give the impression that Milton had attended productions of Jonson's and Shakespeare's plays (especially Shakespeare's comedies). The epistle to Diodati, written during Milton's rustication from college in 1626, contains the same ambiguity.

Presently, when I am weary grown, the splendor of the rounded theater welcomes me, and summons me to sound its plaudits whether I am listening to some canny ancient, or to a spendthrift heir, or a suitor is on the boards, or a soldier, with his casque now laid aside, or if some lawyer, grown rich through a suit ten years prolonged, thunders out in an uncouth court outlandish words, or if some roguish slave comes to the aid of a love-struck son, and at every turn tricks the nose of the lad's unbending father. Ofttimes, there, a maiden, marvelling at new fires, knows not what love is, yet, while she knows not, loves. Mayhap Tragedy, distraught, shakes her blood-dyed staff, her locks the while flung loose, her eyes rolling wildly. It pains me, and yet I look, and find pleasure in looking though it pains me. Sometimes there is a sweet bitterness in the tears I shed, if some hapless lad leaves joys untasted, and falls in death, fit subject thus for tears, through the rending of his love, or if some merciless avenger of crime, issuing from the darkness, traverses again the Styx, and with his funeral brand affrights conscience-stricken souls, or if sorrow o'erwhelms the house of Pelops, or the lordly house of Ilium, or if Creon's court makes atonement for incestuous forebears.

(31-52).

Professor Hughes comments that the language "rounded theater" suggests the "curving theater" of Ovid's Art of Love, I, 89, or the "sinuous awnings" of the splendid Roman theaters in Propertius, I, iv, 15, and that the first characters and plots Milton mentions resemble those of Roman comedy rather than any to be found in contemporary English drama, except academic plays imitating Plautus and Terrence.²¹ Of the tragic

²¹Hughes, n. 27, p. 8.

characters mentioned, the "hapless lad" might well be Romeo;²² the other characters, however, suggest plays like the Agamemnon, the Libation Bearers, and the Eumenides of Aeschylus or plays like Sophocles' Oedipus trilogy, in all of which Creon has a part.²³ These suggestions as to plays and characters Milton refers to in the letter to Diodati indicate that he may have been alluding merely to his reading of plays rather than his actual attendance at theaters.

Other evidence concerning Milton's knowledge of drama as a stage spectacle lies in the dramatic imagery which he employed in his poetry and prose. Although this imagery does not reveal an exceptional knowledge of stage production, it does have considerable range and shows that Milton might have been an interested theater-goer.²⁴ In the three Defences, many of the images refer to the details of a theatrical performance: curtain raiser, prelude, fable, dialogue, *dramatis personae*, chorus, making an entrance or exit (cf. Columbia Milton, "First Defence," VII, 15), being hissed off the stage, having little to do in a walk-on part,

[It is wearisome to read] so many names of Kings
one after another, acting little more than mute
persons in a Scene

("History of Britain," x, 185),

²²Thomas Warton was one of the first to suggest Romeo as the "lad." Cf. Thaler, Shakespeare's Silences, p. 145.

²³Hughes, notes 37-46, p. 8.

²⁴Theodore Howard Banks, Milton's Imagery (New York, 1950), p. 32.

and acting as a prompter,

[Eve confronts Adam with an apple] in her face excuse
Came Prologue, and Apologie to prompt
(Paradise Lost, IX, 853).²⁵

Milton's knowledge of the spectacular aspects of the masque is shown in his imagery drawn from the machinery and devices of the stage architect, particularly from the ascending and descending of divine beings in clouds:

any other of that heavenly brood
Let down in cloudy throne to do the world some good
("On the Death of a Fair Infant," st. viii);

She crowned with olive green, came softly sliding
Down through the turning sphere
("On the Morning of Christ's Nativity," st. iii;
see also sts. xiv and xv).

The opening of great palace doors was a favorite masque device and a favorite image of Milton's poetry. Thus when Sin takes the "fatal key" to open hell gate for her father, Satan,

Forthwith the huge portcullis high updrew . . . [and]
. . . on a sudden open fly . . .
The infernal doors, and on their hinges grate
(Paradise Lost, II, 871ff.; see also V, 253ff.,
"On the Morning of Christ's Nativity," st. xv,
and Paradise Regained, I, 79ff.).²⁶

That Milton was familiar with a variety of dramatic entertainment (other than tragedy and comedy) is also evident in his dramatic imagery. He

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Enid Welsford, The Court Masque in England (Cambridge, 1927), pp. 307-11.

refers to masques:

[The allegorical frontispiece of Eikon Basilike is]
the conceited portraiture before his Book, drawn out
to the measure of a Masking Scene . . .
(Eikonoclastes, V, 67; see also V, 68 and
V, 247);

a puppet show:

[Without freedom to choose, Adam] had bin else
a meer artificiall Adam, such an Adam as he is in the motions
(Aereopagitica, IV, 319);

and morris dances:

[Milton's opponent] plaies the most notorious hobbihors . . .
frisking in the luxury of his non-sense . . . that no antic
hobnaile at a Morris, but is more handsomely facetious
(Colosterton, IV, 257).²⁷

Milton's imagery does not take us backstage or to a rehearsal, but it
does suggest observations which he, as a theater-goer, might have re-
membered.

Milton's use of dramatic terminology in his poetry, like his use
of dramatic imagery, reveals a knowledge of considerable range concerning
theater and drama: the stage ("L'Allegro," 131; "Il Penseroso," 102;
"The Passion," 2); Jonson's learned sock, the emblem of comedy ("L'Allegro,"
132); tragedy and tragic ("Il Penseroso," 97; Paradise Lost, IX, 6);
buskined ("Il Penseroso," 102); tragedians (Paradise Regained, IV, 261);
masque ("L'Allegro," 128; Paradise Lost, IV, 768); motion, a movement
indicating a character trait, (Paradise Lost, VI, 302; IX, 674; Paradise

Regained, IV, 601); mummings, antics, and mimics (Samson Agonistes, 1325); antagonist (Paradise Lost, II, 509; X, 387); theater (Paradise Regained, IV, 36; Paradise Lost, IV, 141; Samson Agonistes, 1605); and festival (Paradise Lost, XI, 723; VI, 94; "The Nativity Ode," 147; Comus, 848; Samson Agonistes, 983, 1598). The appearance of these dramatic terms in a variety of poems and the appropriateness of their application indicate that Milton had them at easy and frequent command.

One of the most essential conclusions derived from our examination of Milton's dramatic interests is that his statements concerning drama must not be accepted individually. Each must be considered as only a part of his true feeling toward the drama, a feeling which cannot be determined on the basis of an incidental remark found in his poetry or prose. His knowledge of the drama, his experiences as a spectator, performer, and playwright, and his very personality--including its scholastic, didactic, and aesthetic aspects--are essential considerations in the formulation of an inclusive judgment as to his likes or dislikes of literary drama and theatrical production. And the final testing ground of these opinions lies not so much in his statements about them but rather in his application of dramatic form and technique in his poetry. Our major study, therefore, will center upon the dramatic elements in the poetry itself.

CHAPTER II

MILTON'S MASQUES: ARCADES AND COMUS

In fulfilling requests for entertainment to be presented before the Countess Dowager of Derby and the Egerton family, to which Milton's friend Henry Lawes was musical tutor, Milton chose the semi-dramatic form of the masque. Generally attributed to the Horton period of the poet's life,¹ Arcades and Comus are Milton's contribution to the masque tradition which flourished in Elizabethan England under such capable poets as Jonson. Arcades, the earlier of the two works, is "wholly in the . . . Jonsonian masque tradition."² Music, dancing, and spectacle were the chief factors upon which the masque depended for its effects;³ one of the primary attractions of Arcades, therefore, is its lyric beauty, a quality which asserts itself in such liquid poetry as

O'er the smooth enamel'd green
Where no print of step hath been
Follow me as I sing . . .
(ll. 84-86).

Like Arcades, much of Milton's other poetry has lyric beauty reminiscent of Elizabethan masques. Outstanding examples of poems in which music

¹Masson gives full details concerning the production and composition of the masques, I, 578-96 and 604-11.

²Harris Frances Fletcher, ed., The Complete Poetical Works of John Milton (Cambridge, 1941), p. 82.

³Ibid.

prevails are "Upon the Circumcision," "At a Solemn Music," "The Passion," "The Nativity Ode," and much of Paradise Lost. Besides music, other prominent characteristics of the masque left their mark upon Milton's poetry, first and last. His earlier verse is full of personifications which move and dance. "L'Allegro," for example, contains many lively images:

Haste thee nymph, and bring with thee
Jest and youthful Jollity
(ll. 25-26);

And laughter holding both his sides
(l. 32);

Come and trip it as you go
On the light fantastic toe
(ll. 33-34).

Dancing songs appear in "Lycidas":

There entertain him all the Saints above
In solemn troops, and sweet Societies
That sing, and singing in their glory move
(ll. 178-180);

and in Paradise Regained:

Admiring stood a space, then into Hymns
Burst forth, and in Celestial measures mov'd
Circling the Throne and Singing
(Bk. I, 169-171).⁴

We have already seen that the spectacular aspects of the masque influenced much of Milton's imagery.⁵

⁴Enid Welsford, The Court Masque in England (Cambridge, 1927), pp. 308-09.

⁵See Chapter I, p. 10.

Although Arcades and the other poems of Milton's which incidentally show influences of the masque are important to our study in that they reveal the poet's affinity with this type of "dramatic" entertainment, Comus, because it contains a dramatic quality lacking in Arcades, offers more for our investigation. As Tillyard points out, it is noteworthy that Milton did not write another masque spectacle like Arcades, although it was successful as fine poetry, but chose to be more dramatic in writing Comus.⁶ But the fact that Milton intensified the dramatic element in his second masque complicates the task of critical appraisal. The crux of the matter is this: should Comus be judged by masque standards, by dramatic principles, by both of these criteria, or by neither?

Although Comus has the usual masque construction--poetic induction, two antimasques, main masque, and epilogue⁷--and also the mythological, allegorical, and pastoral elements found in the conventional masque⁸--it differs in several ways from the typical masque. One must be aware of these differences before hastily applying masque standards to Comus. Welsford clearly states the technical reasons against labelling Comus as a conventional masque: the central moment of the

⁶E. M. W. Tillyard, Milton (London, 1934), p. 70.

⁷Welsford, p. 317.

⁸James Holly Hanford, John Milton, Englishman (London, 1950), p. 80.

masque was the moment of discovery of the masquers, but Comus does not even have masquers; the essential movement of the masque was the masque dance and the revels, but the position of the dance in Comus is such that it is possible to read the work almost without realizing that there are dances in the action; the poetry of the masque was a mere explanation of adornment of the dancing, but the poetry of Comus is essential in that it is the medium for the debate between Comus and the Lady. Other differences which separate Milton's performance from the conventional masque tradition are its moral quality; its atmosphere, which gives the impression of being outdoors; and, as already mentioned, its dramatic element, which is of greater intensity than the drama of the conventional masque.⁹ Quite evidently, critical principles applied to a conventional masque must not be applied without qualifications to Comus, since it differs in so many respects from the usual masque. On the other hand, if one considers Comus as a drama and judges it accordingly, one is apt to overlook the fact that the piece does conform in many ways to the masque rather than the drama. For instance, as in a masque, the lyric element of Comus often becomes more prominent than the dramatic, the action is slight, and the qualities which are indispensable to an ordinary drama, such as logical development of dramatic motive and plausibility of story, are lacking. Is it fair,

⁹Welsford, pp. 316-19. See also Eugene Haun, "Inquiry into the Genre of Comus," Essays in Honor of Walter Clyde Curry (Nashville, 1954), pp. 221-40.

then, to condemn Comus for its lack of these dramatic essentials, since as a masque it does not profess to need them? Hughes warns against judging Comus by standards far too strict for it,¹⁰ a position anticipated by Verity: "It is manifestly unfair to judge any work by tests which do not properly apply to it: we must not condemn a thing for not being what it does not profess to be--a truism which criticism often ignores."¹¹

This "truism" which Verity has stated seems especially applicable to Dr. Johnson's criticism of Comus; although highly praising the poetry of Milton's performance, he finds that "as a drama it is deficient. The discourse of the Spirit is too long, an objection that may be made to almost all the following speeches; they have not the spriteliness of a dialogue . . . but seem rather declamations deliberately composed and formally repeated on a moral question."¹² Dr. Johnson's verdict is unfair not because it is adverse but because it is based on standards applied to Comus "as a drama." Before venturing an opinion as to the success or lack of success of the drama in Comus, it is necessary to examine carefully the components of the dramatic element in the work, components which include the action, characterization, conflict, tension, and theme. Also important to our investigation are the dramatic sources

¹⁰ Hughes ed., p. 88.

¹¹ A. W. Verity, ed., Comus (Cambridge, 1921), p. xxxiii.

¹² "Life of Milton," in Lives of the English Poets, ed. G. B. Hill, I (London, 1905), 168.

and dramatic techniques and styles which Milton employed in writing Comus. By determining the extent to which Comus is dramatic and by applying dramatic standards fairly, we may attempt to evaluate its dramatic quality.

The dramatic sources of Comus are numerous, although some which have been pointed out rest only on verbal parallels. Elements in the plot of Comus, especially the abduction and rescue incidents, the two brothers separated from their sister, and the echo dialogue, are found in George Peele's Old Wives' Tale (1595).¹³ Comus and the neo-Latin play Comus (1608) by Hendrik van der Putten (Erycius Puteanus) show marked resemblances in theme, in the character of Comus as the chief protagonist, and in verbal likeness.¹⁴ Jonson, in his masque, Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue (1618), characterizes Comus as a glutton.¹⁵ Milton's Comus, "of Bacchus and Circe born," typifies sensuality, like Jonson's character, and magical power. In his Inner Temple Mask (1615), William Browne employs an anti-mask of men transformed to bestial monsters,¹⁶ a

¹³Bertha Badt, "Milton's Comus and Peele's Old Wives Tale," Archiv für das Studium der Neueren Sprachen und Literaturen, n.s. CXXIII (1909), 305-09; and Gretchen Finney, "Comus Drama Per Musica," Studies in Philology, XXXVII (1940), 482-500. Miss Finney points out also parallels between Comus and several Italian court masques.

¹⁴Ralph H. Singleton, "Milton's Comus and the Comus of Erycius Puteanus," PMLA, LXVIII (1943), 948-55.

¹⁵Fletcher ed., p. 83.

¹⁶Ibid.

dance similar to the one of the "ugly-headed monsters" in Comus' palace. John Fletcher's Faithful Shepherdess no doubt influenced the disenchantment scene of Comus in which Sabrina comes to the Lady's aid.¹⁷ Ethel Seaton has traced Shakespeare's masque-like imagery and language in Comus and has pointed out similarities in theme and conduct of characters between Comus and A Midsummer Night's Dream, The Tempest, and Romeo and Juliet.¹⁸ The Tempest proves especially close to Comus in several respects, as John Major's recent comparative study of the two works reveals. There are marked similarities between the Attendant Spirit and Ariel, the Lady and Miranda, Comus and Caliban, and in the atmosphere (which is a land of enchantment in both works), the combination of lyric and dramatic qualities, and in dramatic situation (for example, the first meeting of Ferdinand and "his goddess" Miranda is similar to the first meeting of Comus and the Lady, whose plaintive song brings his interest in her near to worship).¹⁹ Although Milton drew material for Comus from both dramatic and non-dramatic sources,²⁰ it is evident that that which was drawn from

¹⁷ Verity, p. xxxiii; and W. E. A. Axon, "Milton's Comus and Fletcher's Faithful Shepherdess," Manchester Quarterly (July, 1882).

¹⁸ Ethel Seaton, "Comus and Shakespeare," Essays and Studies, XXXI (1945), 68-80. See also above, Chapter I, n. 20.

¹⁹ John M. Major, "Comus and The Tempest," Shakespeare Quarterly, I (1959), 177-83.

²⁰ Non-dramatic sources include Spenser's Faerie Queene, Book II, canto xii, and Book III (see J. H. Hanford, "The Youth of Milton," University of Michigan Publications, I (1925), 140-43); the Odyssey, Book XI (see Fletcher, p. 83); and Plato's Phaedo (see Hughes, p. 88).

masques and drama makes up a sizeable part of the work. Because some of the sources pointed out rest only on verbal parallels, however, it cannot be determined whether Milton made conscious or unconscious use of them. Moreover, Masson warns that too much has been made of the coincidences which are discernible between Comus and its suggested sources, with the result that Milton's genius in creating Comus has been overlooked or belittled.²¹ For our purposes, it seems sufficient to conclude merely that a significant part of the action, themes, characters, and wording of Comus had been employed in similar ways by dramatic and semi-dramatic writers preceding Milton. Milton utilized his knowledge of their work in writing his second masque; Comus, therefore, retains much of the dramatic quality of its sources.

The drama of Comus involves two major sources of conflict--one is primarily a conflict of attitudes and the second a conflict of ideas and wills. The two brothers provide the first type of conflict: the Elder Brother's belief that "no Goblin, or swart Faery of the mine,/ Hath hurtfull power o'er true Virginity" clashes with the Second Brother's more cautious view that "beauty like the fair Hesperian Tree/ . . . had need the guard of dragon watch with uninchanted eye,/ To save her blossoms." The Elder Brother, through his golden tongue (he anticipates Belial in Paradise Lost), almost persuades his brother (see ll. 475ff.),

²¹Masson, I, 622.

but the Second Brother retains fear for his lost sister and, upon hearing of her meeting Comus, cries out:

O night and shades,
How are ye join'd with Hell in triple knot
Against th' unarmed weakness of one virgin
Alone, and helpless! is this the confidence
You gave me brother?

(ll. 579-83).

Thus the conflict between the two views is renewed. Although as Verity contends, the absence of names for all the characters except Comus prepares us for the absence of characterization,²² the brothers, who lack any real development, are a little more than mere abstractions. The Elder Brother's speeches show that he speaks beautifully but prudishly, that he thinks he knows perfection but does not. The Second Brother shows an awareness of his brother's skill at smooth-tongued speech and comments with penetrating insight when he says:

How charming is divine philosophy!
Not harsh, and crabbed as dull fools suppose,
But musical as is Apollo's lute,
And a perpetual feast of nectar'd sweets,
Where no crude surfet reigns.

(ll. 475-79).

Though interesting primarily for their contribution to the dramatic conflict of Comus, they do reveal personality characteristics which also catch our interest.

The second, and most important, source of drama in Comus is the conflict of ideas and wills between the Lady and Comus: Comus' plea for

²²Verity, p. xxxiv.

lavish self-indulgence conflicts with the Lady's advocacy of disciplined restraint.²³ Unlike the brothers, the Lady and Comus are not mere personifications--Comus is more than an abstraction of sensuality and sorcery, and the Lady is more than a personification of virtue or chastity. Although the Lady appears defenseless and girlish when we first meet her lost in the woods, she shows another side of her character later when she stands fearless and clear-sighted against her wily opponent. Dowden describes her in this manner: "Something of weakness belongs to the Lady, because she is a woman, accustomed to the protection of others, tenderly nurtured; but when the hour of trial comes she shows herself strong in powers of judgment and of reasoning [she refutes each point of Comus' argument in logical order], strong in her spiritual nature, in her tenacity of moral truth, in her indignation against sin."²⁴ Comus is even more complex. Though an inheritor of twofold vice from his parents, Circe and Bacchus, he is not outwardly foul--he is no grim monster and, like Caliban,²⁵ not all bad. After hearing the Lady's vehement answer to his argument that chastity is an injury to nature, he says quietly:

²³The theme of Comus recurs frequently in English Renaissance poetry and drama; for instance, in the chastity debate in Jonson's Volpone, in Marlowe's Hero and Leander, and in Shakespeare's All's Well That Ends Well.

²⁴Quoted from Dowden by Verity, p. 140.

²⁵Major, p. 183.

She fables not, I feel that I do fear
 Her words set off by som superior power;
 And though not mortal, yet a cold shuddring dew
 Dips me all o're

(ll. 799-802).

He seems to show here a sensitivity to good which a being of all evil would most likely either lack or belittle. In his lively and opulent speeches, even though he often gloats over his hapless victims, Comus exerts a certain charm, even a "beauty of his own . . . He is sensitive to rich forms and sweet sounds, graceful in oratory, possessed . . . of high intellect, but intellect in the service of the senses."²⁶ Comus is certainly the fullest and liveliest character of the work which bears his name.

Having noted the main characteristics of Comus and the Lady, we see that food for dramatic conflict lies in their very natures. When two diametrically opposed persons such as these meet, a clash of wills can be the only result. Such is the case at the meeting of the Lady and the enchanter. This is not to say, however, that dramatic tension necessarily arises at their meeting. There is some tension after the Lady comes under Comus' power, but the whole episode depends on accident and the reader never seriously doubts that the outcome will favor the Lady. The Attendant Spirit's first speech informs us that he was "from Soveran Jove . . . dispatcht for their [the Lady and her two brothers'] defence and guard"; the Lady assures us before her meeting with Comus

²⁶Quoted from Dowden by Verity, p. 140.

that "the Supreme good . . . would send a glistening Guardian if need were/ To keep my life and honor unassail'd"; and the Elder Brother, although in a priggish manner, adds to our confidence in the Lady's safe delivery from the hands of her captor. Fletcher points out that, in eliminating dramatic suspense (as we know it) in Comus, Milton was using classic, not Renaissance, canons of dramatic construction.²⁷ If we are to judge the drama of Comus, then, we should not condemn it for its lack of tension; rather, we should judge how well Milton carries out his announced theme.

Incongruity and unity, or lack of it, are two matters of concern in a discussion of the action of Comus. Incongruity seems to occur in the conduct of the Attendant Spirit. Since in his first speech he describes his purpose as not only to guard and defend but also to give safe convoy to the children passing through the wood, it would seem natural that, upon his first seeing the meeting of Comus and the Lady, he would have intervened to deliver the Lady from the sorcerer. Or, after hearing the Lady's song, had he merely feared rather than witnessed the meeting, rushing to tell the brothers of his fear rather than his actual knowledge of the meeting, his action would have been more congruous with his stated purpose for being in the area.²⁸ From a dramatic standpoint, however, the Spirit, by delivering the Lady before the temptation

²⁷Fletcher, p. 84.

²⁸J. F. Bense, "The Conduct of the Attendant Spirit in Comus," Englische Studien, XLVI (1912-13), 333-335.

scene with Comus, would have destroyed what tension there is and would have defeated Milton's purpose of showing the Lady's power to triumph over temptation (see ll. 210-19). The incongruity of the Spirit's action is not removed by such an explanation but his conduct is given dramatic justification.

Opinions differ widely as to the unity, or lack of unity, in Comus. How one reads and interprets the allegory and philosophy of the work affects the question of its unity. Since various interpretations and various opinions concerning the unity of Comus exist, we shall glance briefly at three of the most important. Those who read the dramatic part of Comus as, at most, a dramatized debate which ends in a stalemate see the songs and speeches following the Lady's refusal of Comus' offer as having no effective dramatic consequence.²⁹ They conclude, therefore, that Comus lacks unity. A second opinion is held by Fredella Bruser, who sees in Comus the most complete answer in English poetry to the carpe diem tradition (which Comus represents). Miss Bruser thinks that the Lady's denial of Comus' contention and her elaboration of the beauty of virginity, the Elder Brother's praise of chastity, and the epilogue, with its suggestions of virtuous, heavenly love among the gods, give the impression that, although there is no complete reconciliation of the opinions involved in these three parts of the work, there is an attempt to answer Comus' arguments through a combination of viewpoints.³⁰ Such

²⁹Welsford, p. 340, and Dr. Johnson, Life of Milton.

³⁰Fredella Bruser, "Comus and the Rose Song," Studies in Philology, XLIV (1947), 625-44.

a reading suggests that Comus is an integrated, if not a unified, work. The strongest spokesman for the presence of unity in Comus is Tillyard. His interpretation of the piece is that neither the Lady nor Comus is right and that not until the final words of the Attendant Spirit is the truth revealed, the truth being most probably that marriage, not virginity and not promiscuity, is the doctrine which Milton is upholding. Tillyard asserts that, when one realizes the epilogue's importance in revealing this truth, the ignorance of the Lady and of Comus becomes dramatic irony, and the whole work takes shape and solution, all actions and speeches pointing toward the final revelation by the Spirit.³¹

The matter of the unity of Comus, then, is directly related to one's interpretation of Milton's didactic intention: was he merely stating the case for virtue and sensuality; was he answering the claims of those adhering to the carpe diem tradition by showing the beauty and moral superiority of chastity; or was he asserting that neither extreme, virginity or promiscuity, is better, but that virtuous love, temperance, marriage, or some other condition is the desirable one to seek and to preserve? The question of the exact virtue which is upheld in Comus, as Robert Adams has pointed out, is affected by Milton's failure to distinguish between chastity and virginity in the text³² even though

³¹ E. M. W. Tillyard, "The Action of Comus," Studies in Milton (London, 1951), pp. 82-95.

³² Robert Martin Adams, Ikon: John Milton and the Modern Critics (Ithaca, New York, 1955), p. 9.

the doctrine of chastity, in Milton's day, could mean monogamy as well as virginity.³³ It does seem, however, that Comus does not necessarily uphold virginity as the greatest virtue. The Lady, though opposing Comus' licentious offers, does not necessarily oppose marriage, temperance, or virtuous love; she merely opposes "lewdly pamper'd Luxury," "vast excess," and "swinish gluttony." Perhaps Milton was advising through the epilogue and actions of the Lady--a part which, after all, was played by a mere child of thirteen or fourteen--³⁴ that triumph over sensual temptation while young is a virtue which will grow in meaning to a young lady as her wedding day approaches. (This same advice is found in Milton's sonnet, "To A Virtuous Young Lady.") If it does not imply marriage, the epilogue at least seems to praise virtuous love even in its references to Venus and Adonis and Cupid and Psyche. The Sabrina episode, which precedes the epilogue, shows us that heavenly grace protects young virgins in the midst of temptation. It seems logical that the epilogue, which follows the Lady's own victory over temptation and her deliverance by Sabrina from the enchanter, would add a final touch concerning the solution of the Comus-Lady debate. Whether or not this solution can definitely be determined, the unity and dramatic appeal of Comus are enhanced by the continuance of action to the end of the piece.

³³Tillyard, "The Action . . . ," p. 90.

³⁴By Alice Egerton. See Masson, I, 611.

Also worthy of investigation are the dramatic styles and techniques which Milton employed in Comus. Tillyard has shown that the masque contains a variety of dramatic styles. The opening prologue, for example, is Euripidean in nature--more descriptive than dramatic. Comus' first speech, in irregular couplets, is non-dramatic, but as soon as he begins speaking in blank verse,

Break off, break off, I feel the different pace,
Of som chast foot near about this ground,
(ll. 145-6),

interest in the action is immediately aroused.³⁵ (It is noteworthy that many of the openings of speeches in Comus are dramatically effective and that all the speeches or recitatives, except Comus' first speech, are in blank verse--Milton's first sustained effort in this metrical form which he employed so successfully in his three long works.) Dramatic interest rises again when Comus, after hearing the Echo Song, shows, in another blank verse speech, that he is even more anxious to capture the Lady. This speech is followed by dialogue in another dramatic style, stichomythia, reminiscent of Greek tragedy, in which short, rapid dialogue is often exchanged:

Comus: What chance good Lady hath bereft you thus?
Lady: Dim darkness, and this leavie Labyrinth.
Comus: Could that divide you from near-ushering guides?
Lady: They left me weary on a grassie terf.
(ll. 276-79).³⁶

³⁵Tillyard, Milton, p. 68.

³⁶Ibid., p. 69.

The songs of Comus, though sometimes sheer poetry, are often integrally related to the drama of the piece and, furthermore, are often dramatic in themselves. The Echo Song provides further motivation for Comus by enhancing his desire to capture of the Lady. Sabrina is called upon through song to come to the Lady's rescue, and answers the request in a song which informs us of her special powers. The Spirit presents the children to their father in a song which praises their behavior in the face of "sensual folly." But even though Milton made the songs dramatically effective, the songs, the dance measure, and the lovely poetry take us primarily into the realm of the masque rather than of drama. Diekhoff's analysis of the manuscript revisions of Comus shows that in many passages Milton subordinated Comus' language to the conventions of the masque and to a corresponding harmony of tone through softening harsh combinations and using alliteration.³⁷ We must not, therefore, necessarily think that because Milton used dramatic style and technique in the work, he intended to elevate it above its lyric, or masque, quality.

Our study of the dramatic components in Comus enables us to see that this element makes up no small part of the whole. Those who overlook the drama in Comus are probably so enraptured with its lyric beauty that they either fail to see the drama or feel that it is so far beneath the lyric quality as to be of little consequence to the success of the work. Sir Henry Wotton, writing to Milton in April, 1638, shows his

³⁷ John S. Diekhoff, "Critical Activity of the Poetic Mind: John Milton," PMLA, LV (1940), 748-72.

preference for the lyric over the dramatic quality, though he liked both: "I should much commend the tragical [serious] part, if the lyric did not ravish me with a certain Dorique delicacy in your songs and odes."³⁸ Dr. Johnson, as we have already seen, highly praised the poetry, "A work more truly poetical is rarely found," but underrated the drama of Comus.³⁹ The songs of Comus are indeed beautiful, but we must agree with Van Doren, who states that the drama which the songs punctuate has its own claims upon our interest and should not necessarily be supposed secondary in the work.⁴⁰ Because Comus is not merely a drama, it is difficult and unfair to apply strictly dramatic standards to it. Separated from the rest of the work, the drama of Comus is not great--it may be criticized for faults such as implausible or incongruous action, long-winded speeches, and seeming want of unity. But placed with the masque, where it belongs and should be kept, the drama of Comus is an important part of its success. The dramatic element gives personality to the characters, enhances the interest in the action, and gives the work an intellectual as well as an emotional appeal. Comus might live forever merely as a thing of beauty, but because of its complexity, to which its drama contributes, it is a work ever fresh for new interpretation and appraisal.

³⁸ Quoted by Mark Van Doren, author of preface, The Masque of Comus, the Poem of John Milton . . . (Cambridge, 1957), p. 7.

³⁹ "Life of Milton," Hill ed., I, 168.

⁴⁰ Van Doren, p. 5.

CHAPTER III

PARADISE LOST AND PARADISE REGAINED

The story of the evolution of Paradise Lost in Milton's mind is a vital part of his biography for a period of more than twenty-five years. As recorded in several of his works, Milton dedicated himself early in life to the project of writing on a lofty subject of epic scope. The first indication of the fall of man as the choice of his subject for this project, which culminated in Paradise Lost, is found in the four plans for a drama which have been preserved in the Cambridge Manuscript.¹ A quick perusal of the four successive dramatic drafts, which constitute the first definite step in the composition of the epic, reveals that the human possibilities of the theme are sorely diminished in the drama by the machinery of angels and allegorical figures. Perhaps Milton adopted the epic form upon realizing that neither the human element nor the divine could receive its full development within the limits of drama. At any rate, we know that he evidently abandoned the idea of writing the tragedy (or tragedies) for which the outlines were drafted and chose the challenging epic form as the medium for the theme of Paradise Lost. His abandonment of the dramatic form, however, was not altogether complete, for, as we shall see, Paradise Lost retained

¹For a discussion and chronological listing of Milton's works which reveal his dedication to this project, cf. James Holly Hanford, A Milton Handbook, fourth edition (New York, 1946), pp. 177-87.

many elements of his dramatic plans. To determine which of these he retained, and their effect upon Paradise Lost, will be our first goal,² the second being to determine in both Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained the qualities which are the result of Milton's use of other elements of dramatic technique.

Although the external form of the play Milton outlined, with its prologues and songs by a chorus of angels that remain on the stage throughout the action, is classical, the early drafts seem to indicate that what he had in mind was a morality play in which three old morality plots were combined. In Draft Three, Act I introduces the morality theme involving a Debate of the Four Daughters of God; Acts II, III, and IV employ the Conflict of the Vices and Virtues (with the three stages of innocence, temptation, and life-in-sin involved); and Act V presents the theme of the Coming of Death. In Paradise Lost, the morality personifications which were so prominent in Milton's initial plans fade into the background but are still discernible. Transformed into the discussion between Father and Son, the Debate of the Four Daughters of God re-appears in Book III--corresponding roughly to Act I of the early draft--and also in Book X. The four virtues--Truth, Justice, Mercy, and Peace--constantly recur in the discussion, personified but no longer personalized, as in, for example,

² For many of the following parallels between the early dramatic plans and Paradise Lost, I am indebted to Allan Gilbert's On the Composition of Paradise Lost (Chapel Hill, 1947), especially pp. 18-21 and 127.

Dye hee or Justice must; unless for him (III, 210),

With Joy and Love triumphing, and fair Truth (III, 338),

and

shall Truth fail to keep her word,
Justice Divine not hast'n to be just?
But Death comes not at call, Justice Divine
Mends not her slowest pace for prayers or cries
(X, 856-9).

In Paradise Lost, Milton kept considerably more of the Coming of Death theme. The figures of Sin and Death are, in fact, the only pure allegorical figures retained from the early plans, although the "mutes" listed in Act V nearly all reappear in the cloud of evils which Book X describes as descending upon the earth. The most important trace of the influence of morality themes on Paradise Lost is not found in the retention of any single abstraction, however, but in the grouping of characters, which causes in both the morality play and Paradise Lost the role of the technical hero (mankind) or the leader of the Virtues to be weak, whereas the strongest role is played by the leader of the Vices.³

Our consideration of the elements in Paradise Lost which were retained from Milton's dramatic plans has concentrated so far upon Books III and X. There are, however, indications of retained elements in nearly every book. In Book I, Satan's soliloquy recalls that part of Plan Four in which "Lucifer appears after his overthrow, [and] bemoans

³Robert L. Ramsay, "Morality Themes in Milton's Poetry," Studies in Philology, XV (1918), 148-52.

himself." The first part of Book III, as already pointed out, contains a debate corresponding to that of Justice, Wisdom, and Mercy (Plan Three, Act I). Satan's pretended desire to know more of man (III, 662) is the same as that reason given by the Chorus early in Plan Four for Gabriel's descending to Paradise. Lines 383-415 of Book III, in which the angels celebrate the Son, perhaps recall Draft Four's choric song of "the Battel, & victory in heaven against him & his accomplices."

Book IV has much affinity with the tragedy outlined by Milton. The scene of the book is the Garden (as is the scene of the tragedy). Satan's first speech (32-113), which is a soliloquy, and other passages (358-92, 505-35) show "Lucifer contriving Adam's ruin," as in Plan Three, Act III, and seeking revenge on man as in Plan Four. A considerable part of the book describes Paradise (132ff. and 543ff., etc.) just as the Chorus in Plan Three, Act II, and Gabriel in Plan Four describe the Garden. The Evening Star is alluded to (605) as in Plans Two and Three, and the marriage song (711-19, 750-70) recalls Act II of Plan Three. The love and marriage of Adam and Eve is dealt with in Plan Four as it is in Book IV. As the angelic guardians prepare to fight with Satan but let him escape (782-1013), so in Plan Four the Chorus had prepared to resist him as "after discourse of enmity" he departs.

Corresponding to the Chorus' account of Lucifer's rebellion and fall (Plan Three, Act III) and the battle and victory in Heaven (Plan Four) is Raphael's narrative of the war, in the latter part of Book V.

The Hymn of Creation in Book VII (565-73, 602-32) is anticipated in Plan Three, Act I, and in Plan Four, in which, after the first act, the Chorus sings a hymn of the creation. Book IX contains parts corresponding to Draft Four's plans for the angels to tell "the manner of [Adam's] fall" and for Adam and Eve to accuse one another. In Book IX, Adam blames Eve (1134-89) as in Plan Four he "lays the blame to his wife." On the whole, Book IX is highly dramatic, and Book X, in part, continues the dramatic character of the preceding book. The council in Hell may owe something to the insert in Plan Four: "here again may appear Lucifer relating, & insulting in what he had done to the destruction of man." The judgment by the Son in Book X (96-208) recalls Plan Three, Act IV, "Conscience cites them to God's examination," and Plan Four, "Justice cites him to the place whither Jehova call'd for him." The "winter, heat, [and] Tempest" of Plan Three, Act V, become the change of climate after the Fall (651-706, 846-51, 1062-69).

In Book XI, lines 58-59 and 162-69, there is a suggestion of the Chorus bewailing "the good Adam hath lost" of Plan Three, and both Books XI and XII present the ills which appear as mutes in Plan Three, Act V, and in the mask of evils in Plan Four. Michael's instruction of Adam in Book XII parallels the comfort and teaching of Faith, Hope, and Charity in Plan Three, Act V, and the work of Mercy in Plan Four, where she prophesies the coming of the Messiah, calls in the three Virtues, and instructs Adam. Adam "repents gives God the glory, [and] submits to his penalty" (Plan Four) as he does in Book XII (552-73).

The evidence just presented justifies the conclusion that, in one form or another, every element suggested by the dramatic plans reappears in Paradise Lost. The order of events in the epic is on the whole that of the fourth draft, although with interesting alterations which free the poem from the necessity of preserving unity of place and allow Milton to gain effectiveness by beginning with Satan on the burning lake and by introducing the indispensable council of fallen angels. Even traces of what ultimately becomes the most striking difference between the dramatic plans and Paradise Lost (the use of personification and allegorical figures in the drama) are found in the epic. Besides those already mentioned, we find, for example, War (XI, 713), Love (IV, 763), Wisdom (VII, 10), Night, Chaos, Rumor, and Chance (II, 960-7), Despair (XI, 489), and Misery and Death (IX, 12) present in Paradise Lost as personified abstractions. But, though Milton retained many of the elements of the early plans, his poem could not be confined within the narrow limits of the morality and its abstract characters. Under his hand, the forces at work took on the shape of individualized characters; the whole orientation of the poem is rooted in individual characterization. The angels, for example, are sharply differentiated. Belial, Mammon, Moloch, and Beelzebub become unique personalities as they debate their predicament after being thrust from Heaven. The two angels who tell of God's creative powers, the affable Raphael and Uriel, reveal their personalities as they relate the wondrous effects of God's power; Raphael, the metaphysician, records amazing events and contemplates profoundly

their causal relationships, whereas Uriel, a pious but not very perceptive physicist, sketches rapidly and with enthusiasm.⁴ These individualized characters, then, are not the result of Milton's following his early dramatic plans but of his abandonment of those plans in favor of individual character development. There is, however, one dramatic element in the poem which does seem to be the result, at least in part, of Milton's following the outline of events of Draft Four: Paradise Lost has a unity of design more apparent than such epics as the Iliad or Aeneid, in which the action is much more episodic.

Retained portions of the dramatic plans affected the dramatic element in Paradise Lost, as a whole, relatively little; the element is primarily the result of Milton's employment of other aspects of dramatic technique. He used these also in Paradise Regained, although to a lesser degree. Before pointing out the apparent sources of this technique, we shall present, in summary, a general dramatic interpretation of the two epics, in order that the full import of the drama they contain may be demonstrated.

Because many individual scenes in Paradise Lost have a highly dramatic quality, one can say, as Hughes does, that the poem "is an epic built out of dramas."⁵ These dramatic scenes include the council

⁴Walter Clyde Curry, Milton's Ontology, Cosmogony, Physics (Lexington, Kentucky, 1957), pp. 93 and 113.

⁵Hughes, p. 173.

of devils in Book II, with Moloch, Belial, and Mammon making their bids for leadership; the council in Heaven, in Book III, where Christ makes himself responsible for mankind's redemption, thereby discovering his own character; Satan's bitter soliloquy on first beholding Adam and Eve "imparadised in one another's arms" and his first attempt to seduce Eve, by a dream, in Book IV; the revolt of Satan's followers against God, as Raphael describes it to Adam in Books V and VI; the speech by Raphael apprising Adam of the forces of evil, in Books VII and VIII; and, most important, the story of Adam and Eve in Books IX through XII. Their story constitutes the high point of the dramatic element in Paradise Lost. Dramatic-psychological analysis is Milton's aim in so far as the merely human aspect of the story is concerned. Adam and Eve represent man and woman essentially as we know them, with all the deeper emotions and the more universal motives of humanity. Dr. Johnson disagrees, saying that the reader has little sympathy for Adam and Eve because "the plan of Paradise Lost comprises neither human actions nor human manners . . . the man and woman who act and suffer are in a state which no other man or woman can ever know."⁶ Adam and Eve's story, however, is a type of all tragic human experience, involving elements of human strength and weakness, the power of evil, resistance to evil, fatal error, and consequent misery. Milton neither states nor implies, as Johnson intimates, that the two principal characters are in a state of

⁶ "Life of Milton," Hill ed., I, 181.

perfection, as we conceive of it, before the Fall and, therefore, are far removed from humanity. Rather, Milton shows clearly that Adam and Eve are not perfect, in the sense of being more than human, but are merely innocent or sinless before the Fall. He gives a plausible psychological description of the change from this state of innocence to a fallen state by revealing their weaknesses before the acts of disobedience are committed.⁷ Eve's intellectual inferiority and her defects of curiosity and vanity are obvious. When she views her reflection in the water (IV, 460-66), she reveals a trace of vanity in her nature. In recounting her demonic dream to Adam (V, 28-94), she suggests a potential weakness in her ability to withstand evil temptation. Her inferior intellectual judgment is shown when she insists upon working apart from Adam, although aware of the possible presence of Satan in the garden (IX, 214ff.). Satan seizes upon Eve's defects of curiosity and vanity to bring about her fall from innocence. Adam's weaknesses before the Fall, uxoriousness and inability to exercise his superior intellect, are as clearly shown as Eve's. He confesses his tendency toward inordinate love of Eve, ironically revealing at the same time a tragic flaw. In recalling his first union with Eve, he says:

here passion first I felt,
 Commotion strange, in all enjoyments else
 Superiour and unmov'd, here onely weake
 Against the charm of Beauties powerful glance
 (VIII, 530-33).

⁷For more detailed accounts of the psychological change see H. V. S. Ogden, "The Crisis of Paradise Lost Reconsidered," Philological Quarterly, XXXVI (1957), 1-19; and Arnold Stein, Answerable Style (Minneapolis, 1953), pp. 75-108.

When he allows Eve to work apart from him and allows himself to disobey God's commandment, having been warned by Raphael of the dangerous consequences, Adam fails to exercise his superior mind.

In his absorption in the human situation of Adam and Eve, Milton all but forgets the larger movement of the poem. Book IX is almost all dialogue and Book X, although it contains an interruption of the dramatic movement in the interest of epic action, picks up the earlier scene with renewed intensity (l. 720ff.). After committing sin, Adam is tortured with remorseful thought and Eve becomes a very pathetic figure. Adam's moods change rapidly. His feelings of exultation and passion pass away and recrimination and revulsion take their place. The pronouncement of banishment and Michael's prophecy continue the intense human action. When Adam beholds the consequences of his sin visited upon his descendants, he starts back in tragic horror and his inward agony reaches its pitch, just as the agony of Othello, Oedipus, and Lear becomes most bitter when they behold, for the first time clearly, the ruin they have caused.⁸

The fall of Adam and Eve by no means ends their dramatic story, for their regeneration is a vital part of the drama. If a reader feels that Paradise Lost loses much of its energy and interest after the Fall, he should consider the dramatic appropriateness of Milton's arrangement

⁸James Holly Hanford, "The Dramatic Element in Paradise Lost," Studies in Philology, XIV (1917), 186.

of events.⁹ During the ninth and the first part of the tenth books, it is appropriate that attention be directed toward the temptation, the eating of the fruit, and its immediate effects. All references to redemption and the benefits to be derived from the sin are avoided, because the impact of the Fall must be experienced before the ultimate good can have any meaning. Books XI and XII dwell upon the idea of redemption and show emerging in Adam and Eve new attitudes of conviction of guilt and of desire that justice be done. The theme of restoration is given full emphasis in Book XII, especially in the perfect ending of the poem which depicts Adam and Eve going forth with complete humility from Eden, the place of their sin, to find a happier paradise within themselves. If it is asserted that the books after the Fall reveal a loss of poetic vitality, it can be as justifiably maintained that their mood depicts, in a very appropriate and pleasing way, the release from tension after the crisis.

The drama of Paradise Regained does not, like that of Paradise Lost, turn about a psychological analysis of human motives. It centers upon the debate between Christ and Satan, which is climaxed by their discoveries of the full truth about themselves and each other and, consequently, by Christ's final victory over his tempter. Having refused the first two temptations Satan offers, Christ overcomes the third by

⁹ Robert Allen Durr, "Dramatic Pattern in Paradise Lost," Journal of Art and Aesthetic Criticism, XIII (1954-56), 520-26.

obeying Satan's ironic command to stand on the point of the pinnacle to prove his deity. Christ complies and "Satan smitten with amazement" falls to the earth. The same kind of quiet ending which so beautifully adorns Paradise Lost is achieved by Milton in his second epic. Secure in the knowledge of his nature and his mission, the Redeemer "Home to his mother's house private return'd": home to Mary, who had helped him find the truth of his nature.¹⁰ In general, Paradise Regained does not have the intense dramatic interest that Paradise Lost maintains throughout. There is some inward dramatic tension in Christ's experience, as he seeks to know himself fully, but he has no human weaknesses with which we can identify our own, and remains at all times above the contest with Satan.

The dramatic technique which Milton employed in his two epics to intensify their dramatic quality reflect both Elizabethan and classical influences. As we saw in Chapter I, there is much evidence in Milton's works that he shared the dramatic impulse of Elizabethan dramatists. Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained in no small way support this conclusion. In the prefatory note to Paradise Lost, Milton states as one reason for rejecting rhyme in favor of blank verse, that "our best English tragedies" have "rejected rhyme." The blank verse of Milton's epics, therefore, was first the medium of Elizabethan dramatists.

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A. S. P. Woodhouse, "Theme and Pattern in Paradise Regained," University of Toronto Quarterly, XXV (1955-56), 181.

Innumerable parallels between Milton's epics and many of Shakespeare's plays have been detected and stand as further evidence of Milton's high regard for Elizabethan dramatic poetry.¹¹ Likenesses in dramatic theme occur in Paradise Lost, Othello, Hamlet, and Macbeth; in each, the ideal love of man and wife is ruined by evil. Similar use of dramatic symbolism is found in Paradise Regained, Paradise Lost, and several of Shakespeare's plays; for instance, a change of seasons is used symbolically in Paradise Lost and A Midsummer Night's Dream, and a storm in Paradise Regained and King Lear. One of Milton's finest touches in Paradise Lost is an instance of dramatic symbolism. After Eve tells Adam that she has eaten the apple, Adam stands speechless, limply holding a flower wreath which he had made for his beloved while she was away. Symbolically,

From his slack hand the garland wreath'd for Eve
Down dropp'd, and all the faded roses shed.
(IX, 892-3).

Details of stage settings and backgrounds are similar in Shakespeare's plays and Milton's epics, especially in that they both use shadowy shapes (for instance, Hecate and the weird sisters and Sin and Death) and spirits. A Tempest-like banquet appears in Paradise Regained. Many of the soliloquies of Milton's epics, like Shakespeare's, are revelations of character and motive and constitute an integral element in the plot. Satan, for

¹¹ See Thaler's Shakespeare-Milton studies for parallels between Milton's epics and Shakespeare's plays (see Chapter I, n. 20).

example, echoes many of the tortured thoughts of Hamlet's Claudius. (Besides revealing character, the speeches of Paradise Lost, and Paradise Regained to a lesser degree, are dramatic in two other ways: the setting is often brought before us, not in the narrative, but through description put into the mouths of the characters, and the speeches often indicate the entrance of a new character--Gabriel, for instance, announces the coming of the angelic guard of Satan, and Adam announces the coming of Michael.)¹² The inwardness of many of Shakespeare's characters is reflected in Milton's: Eve has qualities similar to Desdemona, Lady Macbeth, and Cleopatra; Adam reflects characteristics of Hamlet; and Satan has traits in common with Iago, Iachomo, Richard III, Claudius, and Macbeth. The parallel between Adam and Eve and Satan, and Othello, Desdemona, and Iago is especially striking. Satan, contemplating Adam and Eve in their bliss, is like Iago when he views the happiness of Othello and Desdemona with malicious thoughts. The two evil-doers are alike in their jealousy, malignancy, ironical self-pity, and motive-hunting. Satan, however, is more than Iago or any other dramatic character. We see Satan again and again at high points of drama, but his story is essentially epic rather than dramatic. He misses his chance of being a tragic hero because of his lack of nobility. We can perhaps sympathize with him as he lies on the burning lake or as he soliloquizes before confirming himself in evil, but his final fall,

¹² Hanford, "The Dramatic Element . . . ," p. 181.

unlike Adam's, is not tragic. Adam's fall is greater and more worthy of our sympathy because he is noble.

Other dramatic touches of Milton's in Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained which recall Elizabethan dramatic technique include the use of disguise and comic elements. By portraying Satan in disguise, in both Paradise Lost (IV, 196, 800; IX, 494-5) and Paradise Regained (I, 314; II, 298-300), Milton enhanced, at least theatrically, his Satanic quality. Related to the disguise technique is the use of eavesdropping--a kind of spying in disguise because it results in the same sort of complication for the person under observation.¹³ Eve repeatedly listens in on conversations between Adam and angels (IX, 276-7; XI, 265-6). Hearing, in this way, of the danger posed by Satan before Adam tells her of it, she is able to use her eavesdropping to gain her way with Adam. She tells Adam that she heard the angel's warning, implying that whereas she might expect the angel to doubt her ability to withstand the foe, just as he might also doubt Adam's, she will be hurt if Adam shares the angel's doubt of her:

That such an enemy we have, who seeks
Our ruin, both by thee informed I learn,
And from the parting angel overheard
As in a shady nook I stood behind . . .
But that thou shouldst my firmness therefore doubt
To God or thee . . . I expected not to hear it.
(IX, 274-81).

¹³ Victor Oscar Freeburg, Disguise Plots in Elizabethan Drama (New York, 1915), pp. 2-3.

It is hard not to smile upon visualizing this scene between Adam and Eve in which Adam gives in to his beautiful wife's charming, but not very logical, arguments. Whether Milton intended to give this scene a comic touch is debatable. The high seriousness of the drama as a whole does not seem conducive to intentional comic touches. Other scenes in Paradise Lost, however, do seem to be intentionally comic--although comic in a satiric or grim sense. Such a scene is that of the devils as they prepare for war (Book VI). God laughs at the antics of the devils, who, after all, are working to no avail; perhaps the reader should laugh, too, or at least realize the absurdity of the situation.¹⁴ The rollicking scene in which the devils fire their cannon, sending angels head over heels, and Satan and Belial in "gamesome mood" taunt their foes (VI, 584ff.) is a scene not unlike the drunken-porter and grave-diggers scenes of Macbeth and Hamlet in which the sustained seriousness of the drama is relieved by the intrusion of comedy.

Our study of the dramatic elements in Milton's epics also indicates that in both form and technique they owe much to classical drama. In Paradise Lost, the dramatic pattern is generally that of Greek tragedy: tragic flaws bring about the characters' downfalls, and regeneration

¹⁴ Carolyn Herbert, "Comic Elements in the Scenes of Hell in Paradise Lost," Renaissance Papers (1956), pp. 92-101.

follows.¹⁵ Paradise Regained (like Comus, as we saw in Chapter II) has, like Greek drama, the spiritual lift and the quiet ending following a dramatic climax. Like the Greek dramatists, Milton gives away the outcome of the conflict long before the conflict is actually resolved; the events of his dramas, then, suggest that fate has a hand in their occurrence. But like Seneca's, Milton's characters possess free will, and their actions are the result of their own decisions. After committing acts of disobedience to God, Satan's, Adam's, and Eve's downfalls are inevitable, but their initial acts, Milton insists, are of their own choosing. In other ways, too, the drama of Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained is reminiscent of Senecan drama.¹⁶ Seneca often employs a presentiment of evil in his tragedies; Eve's demonic dream suggests the evil which later comes to prevail in the garden scene. In his dealing with universal ideas and men, Seneca is more introspective than the Greeks; Milton's themes are universal, and his drama achieves a psychological effect through its soliloquies in which his characters, by turning their thoughts inward, cause us to study our own hearts. The speeches in Milton's epics are often highly rhetorical, as are Seneca's dramatic speeches. Seneca includes elaborate descriptions in his plays; Milton's epics contain many descriptions abounding in lush

¹⁵See Chapter I, pp. 3-4 concerning Milton's high opinions of the Greek tragedians as moral teachers.

¹⁶For the characteristics of Senecan drama, cf. John W. Cunliffe, The Influence of Seneca on Elizabethan Tragedy (London and New York, 1893), pp. 15-20, 31, and 77.

detail.

A final way in which the drama of Milton's epics and classical drama are alike concerns the presence of irony in both. Irony is essential to the whole plot of Paradise Lost. Satan succeeds in tempting man to transgress God's commandment, believing that his success can have only one effect: that as he and his followers have brought ruin on themselves by disobedience, Adam and Eve will also. But Satan fails to see that his comparison is false. Whereas his motivation came entirely from within, Adam's and Eve's was partly from without--partly the result of Satan's deception. The end result is that Adam and Eve are able to attain an inner paradise better than that which they give up.¹⁷ Many smaller ironies lie within the larger one. For instance, Adam and Eve in their idyllic happiness are in a sadly ironical situation. Milton's description here of primeval beauty, harmony, joy, and love is not one of mere exuberance; it comes after Satan has entered the garden, therefore taking on an added significance. Other instances of irony include Adam's choosing to cast his lot with Eve after her sin has already made an unbroken and innocent union impossible, and Satan's becoming, for a moment, "stupidly good" upon seeing Eve's beauty--beauty which helped bring about Adam's fall. We have already pointed out the irony of Satan's fall in Paradise

¹⁷Paradise Lost, XII, 585. E. M. W. Tillyard points out the major irony of the plot in The English Epic and Its Background (London, 1954), p. 436.

Regained.

In thus summarizing the dramatic elements in Milton's epics and in dwelling upon the elements he retained in Paradise Lost from his plans for a drama, it has not been our intention to prove that the poems are primarily dramatic rather than epic. Neither has it been our intention to overemphasize the dramatic elements, to assert that they outweigh the other elements which co-exist with the dramatic, such as didactic or philosophic purpose or the personal experience of Milton. It is only by recognizing fairly and in balance all the elements which Milton's epics hold that we can do full justice to his artistry and greatness. Fair consideration of the dramatic element in the epics, because of its effectiveness and generous presence, is certainly essential to our recognition of the poems' ultimate harmony and power.

CHAPTER IV

SAMSON AGONISTES

Milton's dramatic urge, as we have seen, found expression in no small way in Comus and in his epics. The dramatic element in these poems, though subordinate to the masque and epic forms, nevertheless adds to rather than detracts from their artistry. In Samson Agonistes, the drama is no adornment; it is the very essence of the poem. If we accept the traditional dating of Samson, which makes it the last of Milton's poems,¹ it is possible to view the work as the final emergence of that dramatic urge which Milton showed in his early poems and great epics. And because Samson is Milton's only avowed dramatic composition (although written to be read rather than acted),² it is primarily here that the poet's abilities as a dramatist should be judged.

We have seen that certain dramatic principles are either completely inapplicable or must be used with caution in the cases of

¹Choices for the date of composition include Masson's traditional and vague 1666 to 1670; Woodhouse's "year before the Restoration (May, 1660) and the spring of 1661" (in Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada, third series, XLIII (1950), 157-75); Parker's surmise of "the period 1647-1653" (in Philological Quarterly, XXVIII (1949), 164); and Gilbert's proposal of an earlier time (in Philological Quarterly, XXVIII (1949), 98-106).

²In the prologue to the poem, Milton says: "Division into act and scene referring chiefly to the stage (to which this work never was intended) is here omitted."

Comus, Paradise Lost, and Paradise Regained. The same is true of Samson Agonistes. Dramatic principles are applicable to the dramatic poem only when they are appropriate to the kind of drama Milton attempted. Milton's warning in his prologue to the poem is extremely important: "they only will best judge who are not unacquainted with Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, the three Tragic Poets unequall'd yet by any, and the best rule to all who endeavor to write Tragedy." In order to judge Samson Agonistes fairly, the reader must be aware of the poem's debt to Greek drama and to "best rule," indicating, among other things,³ Aristotle's observations concerning successful tragedy. Was Milton, seventeenth-century Englishman, able to capture not only the form but also the spirit of ancient tragedy? If so, his dramatic artistry excels.

Like the Greek dramatists, Milton began with a well-known legend and ennobled it.⁴ The story of Samson, as found in the Book of Judges, chapters 13-16, reveals its hero to be a crude, conceited ruffian--a typical mythological figure whose primary virtue lies in his physical

³ In "Of Education," Milton spoke of the Italians as the best representatives, after the ancients, of "that sublime art which in Aristotle's 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 masterpiece to observe."

⁴ William Parker Riley, Milton's Debt to Greek Tragedy in Samson Agonistes (Baltimore, 1937), p. 5. This chapter--like much recent work on Samson Agonistes--is especially indebted to this work.

strength. In contrast to the tone of the Book of Judges, in Samson Agonistes, a sense of high seriousness reigns over all, and the theme is solemn and profound.⁵ In order to achieve this desired effect, Milton had to omit much from the original story; thus, his omissions are a part of his dramatic inventiveness. Omitted are the angel's instructions to the hero's mother, her story to Manoa, the description of the angel, Manoa's prayer for a second visit, and the angel's encounter with the woman in the field--all incidents which would have drawn attention away from the protagonist. To ennoble Samson, Milton omitted the incident of the harlot at the gates of Gaza and of the foxes, and made Dalila Samson's wife. Each change or omission from the original story helps to enhance the tragic dignity of Samson, bringing him closer to the tragic hero of Greek drama and removing him farther from the crude mythological hero.⁶ Even the title helps to effect this change. "Agonistes," which means "advocate" or "champion," tells us much about Samson's character. Milton borrowed the ancient practice of attaching a distinguishing epithet to the name of the protagonist.⁷

⁵Chauncey B. Tinker, "Samson Agonistes," in Tragic Themes in Western Literature, ed. Cleanth Brooks (New Haven, 1955), p. 64.

⁶Parker, pp. 6-7; see also K. Fell, "From Myth to Martyrdom: Towards a View of Samson Agonistes," English Studies, XXXIV (1953), 145-55.

⁷Parker, pp. 12-13.

Omissions from the original story are of no slight significance to the success of Milton's Samson; the subtle additions which he invented, however, may be even stronger evidence of his skill. He makes Manoa a living person, whereas in the original story his character is not marked at all. Only Dalila's treachery is revealed in the Book of Judges, but in Milton's poem she becomes subtle and complex. Harapha, bully and coward, is Milton's own creation, and the excited messenger and likeable Public Officer are further additions to the original story. The natures of these characters and their roles in the drama will become clearer as our discussion of the poem progresses.

Before pointing out the specific ways in which Samson is like Greek tragedy in form and spirit, let us review the incidents of the drama. At the outset, Samson, in a moving soliloquy, laments his fallen state. Once set apart, fostered, and chosen by Jehovah for the accomplishment of Israel's deliverance, he is now among his enemies, the Philistines, "eyeless in Gaza at the mill with slaves." Blind and weary, his physical discomfort is great, but even greater is his mental agony: "I seek . . . ease to the body some, none to the mind/ From restless thoughts." Stripped of God's favor and his own exceptional strength, which God had "hung . . . in [his] hair," he is utterly destitute, a broken and useless instrument cast aside. The Chorus echoes the tortured thoughts of Samson; then turns to him to offer "salve to [his] sores" through "apt words." The Chorus' assurance that "just are the ways of God,/ and justifiable to men" suggests to Samson

that divine will must be put before his own. We wait for his response to this assurance, hoping that his mental grief will be somewhat assuaged by it. But before Samson can respond, his father, Manoa, comes upon the scene, awakening in the hero "another inward grief"--the grief of knowing that he has brought shame to his parents. Shocked by his son's pitiful appearance, Manoa places the blame on God: "Alas methinks whom God hath chosen once/ To worthiest deeds, if he through frailty err,/ He should not so o'erwhelm." Samson reproves his father and affirms his faith by upholding God's justness in allowing these ills to fall upon him: "I myself have brought them on, Sole author I, sole cause." Having accepted full responsibility for his predicament and believing himself utterly defeated, Samson leaves the future contest to God and Dagon, god of the Philistines. Manoa agrees that God will not suffer defeat by a false god, but tells Samson that, even so, "Thou must not in the meanwhile here forgot/ Lie in this miserable loathsom plight/ Neglected," adding with unconscious irony, "who knows/ But God hath set before us, to return thee/ Home to thy country and his sacred house." After trying to encourage Samson by suggesting hope for his return to God's favor, Manoa hurries off to ransom his son. A brief interlude between the Chorus and Samson follows in which there is a Job-like discussion on man: "Just or unjust, alike seem miserable,/ For oft alike, both come to evil end."

Dalila, described by the chorus as "bedecked . . . like a stately

ship of Tarsus," comes before her husband.⁸ The reason for her visit is not easily discernible. Does she come because of malice, to seek forgiveness, to reassure her sense of power, or because of real pity and love? Her defense is threefold: (1) her actions, for which his strong love first suggested the scheme ("For what I did thou shewdst me first the way"), were designed to make him her prisoner and motivated by love; (2) having been besieged by magistrates, princes, and priests, she gave in to their demands because of concern for her people; and (3) she realizes the folly of her actions and begs forgiveness. Samson remains firm against each of her arguments. Even though he had formerly loved her to excess, he asserts that she was not the primary cause of his downfall, his former pride being foremost: "I to myself was false ere thou to me." Then, in more bitter language, he tells her that their reconciliation is impossible, and Dalila, with scornful words and wounded pride, takes her leave. The importance of the Dalila episode cannot be overemphasized. It is the ultimate testing of Samson's character and the sincerity of his repentance. Its dramatic power lies in the fact that the protagonist, who has met ruin by yielding

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Stein sees Dalila's entrance as an intentionally comic touch (in Heroic Knowledge: An Interpretation of Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes (Minneapolis, 1957), p. 167). That it was not meant to be comic is supported by Milton's own statement of dislike concerning "intermixing comic stuff with tragic sadness and gravity" (in the prologue to the poem). Parker points out (p. 126) the seriousness involved in the description of Dalila. Like Helen, wife of Menelaus, she comes before her husband in finery bought not by him but by the enemy.

to a certain temptation, is now permitted to win for himself the privilege of atonement by withstanding precisely the same kind of temptation.⁹ Dalila teaches Samson that at last he is master of himself. Having passed this test, he is able to react to Harapha with a renewed fighting spirit. Harapha, the Philistine giant, comes to taunt and insult the once mighty Hebrew, but instead of causing Samson to sink further into despair, he arouses Samson's urge to act and leaves, cowardly fashion, "in a sultry chafe." Preparation for the final action is now complete, and the play hurries toward its conclusion. Samson, the man who failed once in his divinely appointed mission, has gained a spiritual victory over his own weaknesses so that now he is permitted to destroy his enemies as an external sign of his inner victory--he is willing to sacrifice his own life to prove it. Manoa, still speaking of the ransom he is trying to arrange, returns, only to hear soon that his son, by pulling down the pillars of a temple to which he was chained and destroying all the Philistines who had gathered there to mock him, "Pulled down the same destruction on himself." At first grief-stricken, Manoa recovers his composure and brings the drama to a quiet end, asserting that "Samson hath quit himself/ Like Samson, and heroically hath finished/ A life heroic." He speaks of taking his son home and erecting a monument to his memory,

⁹Walter Clyde Curry, "Samson Agonistes Yet Again," Sewanee Review (1924), p. 343.

which will inflame the breasts of valiant youth "to matchless valor, and adventures high."

Samson Agonistes, as we have interpreted it, is a drama of regeneration in which the primary interest falls upon Samson's reconciliation with God and his consequent reward that allows him to fulfill his "fate" as God's instrument.¹⁰ Other interpretations place the emphasis elsewhere. Jebb, for instance, asserts that "the issue of the drama" is Jehovah over Dagon, the Hebrews over the Philistines.¹¹ Marilla's interpretation emphasizes the universality of the theme rather than either an individual or a nation; the drama shows, he says, that "all who assume responsibility for leadership shall set ultimate interests of humanity above accomplishments of immediate ends . . . [and] shall dedicate themselves to the preservation of sacred ideals."¹² With regard to these interpretations, it seems clear that although nationalism and universality of theme are certainly important components of Samson, the main conflict, which is psychological, centers upon Samson as he gradually regains spiritual, and consequently physical, strength.

The lack of external action in Samson is of little importance when we look at the drama, as Milton intended, through the eyes of a

¹⁰ Parker labels the poem "a drama of regeneration" (p. 237).

¹¹ Quoted from Jebb by Parker, p. 221.

¹² E. L. Marilla, "Samson Agonistes: An Interpretation," Studia Neophilologica, XXIX (1957), p. 76.

Greek. The Greek, who did not expect to be surprised but to be instructed and interested,¹³ would view the internal conflict of Samson as the action of the drama. Partly because he failed to see the progression of Samson's spiritual regeneration, Dr. Johnson complained that the drama "has a beginning and an end which Aristotle himself could not have disapproved," but that it must "be allowed to have no middle, since nothing passes between the first act and the last, that either hastens or delays Samson's death."¹⁴ Johnson's view has been upheld by Tupper and Knowlton and attacked by Hanford, Baum, Krouse, Parker, and Grenander.¹⁵ Each attacker finds a middle in Samson, but it is Grenander who answers Johnson best by defending the drama in the terms of Aristotelian criteria--the same criteria used by Johnson. To summarize Grenander: Aristotle, in the Poetics, distinguishes between imitation of an action and the action itself, which includes much of what has taken place outside the play itself. The beginning of Samson,

¹³Parker, p. 26.

¹⁴"The Rambler, 139," The Works of Samuel Johnson, LL.D., Oxford ed., III (London, 1825), 162; the same sentiments are found in the "Life of Milton," Hill ed., I, 189.

¹⁵James Waddel Tupper, "The Dramatic Structure of Samson Agonistes," PMLA, XXXV (1920), 375-389; E. C. Knowlton, "Causality in Samson Agonistes," MLN, XXXVII (1922), 333-9; J. H. Hanford, "The Temptation Motive in Milton," Studies in Philology, XV (1918), 176-94; Paull Franklin Baum, "Samson Agonistes Again," PMLA, XXXVI (1921), 354-371; F. Michael Krouse, Milton's Samson and the Christian Tradition (Princeton, 1949), p. 125; Parker, p. 19; and M. E. Grenander, "Samson's Middle: Aristotle and Dr. Johnson," University of Toronto Quarterly, XXIV (1954-55), 377-389.

therefore, takes place before the drama's opening and concerns Samson's fall from God's favor. The middle begins with the drama's opening and includes the episodes of Manoa, Dalila, and Harapha, in which we see the hero's gradual reconciliation with God through inner spiritual victory. After Harapha's exit, Samson feels disposed "with rousing motions" to go to the Philistine festival. Samson shows himself ready to act; here the end begins as the drama moves quickly to its catastrophe.¹⁶

In form, Samson Agonistes is indebted to Greek tragedy in the following ways: the title contains a distinguishing epithet after the protagonist's name; unity of time, place, and action¹⁷ create artistic concentration; conflict and action are primarily internal rather than external; Samson is composed of symmetrical parts (each visitor adding to Samson's regeneration); and the calm ending relaxes tension in such a way as to produce a cathartic effect upon the reader.¹⁸ The Chorus is especially reminiscent of Sophocles' choruses in its piety, readiness to sympathize with what is noble, essential loyalty to the hero, belief in moderation, and, above all, its relevancy to the drama.¹⁹

¹⁶Grenander, pp. 379-388.

¹⁷Milton acknowledges adherence to unity of time in the prologue: "the whole drama begins and ends . . . within the space of 24 hours."

¹⁸Parker, pp. 13, 18, 26, 60, and 70. The debts which I point out are primarily of a general nature. For specific debts to Greek playwrights, see Parker's Chapter II, pp. 75-185.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 148.

Like the Greeks, especially Sophocles, Milton leaves bodily violence off the stage.²⁰ The final incident is not seen but merely related, and Harapha, though threatening physical violence, leaves without carrying out his threats. Finally, Samson Agonistes is like Greek tragedy in form in its use of conscious and unconscious irony.²¹ An outstanding example of conscious irony is found in ll. 1403-06; having won self-mastery and regained his physical strength, Samson seems partially aware of a coming opportunity to serve God once again:

I am content to go,
Masters commands come with a power resistless
To such as owe them absolute subjection;
And for a life who will not change his purpose?

Manoa's speeches offer time and again examples of unconscious irony. Irony flashes most poignantly at the moment of the fall of Dagon's temple when Manoa is telling the Chorus about his confidence that God would not have permitted Samson's

strength again to grow up with his hair
Garrison'd round about him like a Camp
Of faithful Souldiery, were not his purpose
To use him further yet in some great service.
(ll. 1496-99).

The same unconscious irony is shown by Manoa in ll. 581-87:

But God who caus'd a fountain at thy prayer
From the dry ground to spring, thy thirst to allay
After the brunt of battle, can as easy
Cause light again within thy eyes to spring,
Wherewith to serve him better than thou hast;
And I persuade me so; why else this strength
Miraculous yet remaining in those locks?

²⁰Ibid., p. 153.

²¹Ibid., p. 157.

The irony found throughout Manoa's speeches reaches its climax when he asserts that he is "fixt not to part thence without him [Samson]," little knowing that he will take a dead son home.

To copy the form of Greek tragedy is one thing; to capture the artistic and intellectual spirit is another. Is this spirit definable--can it be described in other than abstract terms? Parker describes it as serious, thoughtful, didactic, religious, and sublime. Samson Agonistes does have these qualities. With scarcely a trace of humor,²² the drama, elevated by its diction to the sublime, provokes much psychological and philosophical speculation in the reader. One question which arises, for instance, is that which is contained in the highly philosophical Book of Job: are the ways of God unsearchable for the individual? The didactic intention of Samson seems to assert that God's ways are mysterious--best in the end for mankind but not necessarily for the individual. Samson's death is both a punishment for his weaknesses and a reward for his regaining spiritual strength. This idea of reward for spiritual regeneration is Christian, but is an idea not absent from Greek drama. The idea of punishment for sin is common to Samson and Greek tragedy, especially the tragedies of Aeschylus.²³ Like Euripides and Sophocles, Milton tries to reconcile religious legend and philosophy.²⁴ The Greek idea of fate is strongly invoked in Samson,

²²Cf. n. 8.

²³Parker, p. 219.

²⁴Ibid., p. 220.

but Milton seems to make fate synonymous with universal law and the justice of God, a mysterious divine decree.²⁵ Samson had been designated to overcome God's enemies, the Philistines, before his fall from God's favor. Samson both receives his punishment and fulfills his "fate" by his catastrophic act, which is not suicidal but providential and yet fatal. In many ways, therefore, the religiosity of Samson is of the Greek spirit.

Although the final test for the presence of the spirit of Greek tragedy in Samson should lie with the reader's own impression, a reader with little or no direct knowledge of ancient drama must take on faith the opinions of respected scholars and literary artists concerning Milton's success in writing a tragedy according to "ancient rule, and best example." Goethe commented, after reading Samson Agonistes more than once, that he knew of scarcely any other work that had been composed so entirely in the spirit of the ancients, and Coleridge called it "the finest imitation of ancient Greek drama that ever had been or ever would be written."²⁶ Parker, the latest scholar to deal with the work in detail, concludes that "Milton was one of the last men whose intellect comprehended all the aspects of the Greek spirit and whose genius caught that spirit in a piece of living art."²⁷ In short,

²⁵ Ibid., p. 213.

²⁶ Quoted from Goethe and Coleridge by Fletcher, p. 439.

²⁷ Parker, p. 210.

Milton not only succeeded in producing an imitation of a noble model, but also, by virtue of his genius, created a freshly individual work of art.

CONCLUSIONS

Perhaps because his achievement in Paradise Lost was so overwhelmingly great, Milton is today known primarily as an epic poet. We have seen, however, that his dramatic sense in no small way adds to the success of his great epic and to all his longer poems. This collateral dramatic achievement does not detract from his renown as the author of one of the world's great epics; it merely takes us one step closer to the full realization of Milton's artistry, an artistry which produced, besides Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained, great sonnets, elegies, masques, tragedy, and such outstanding prose works as the Areopagitica.

Milton's allusions to drama in his works, through direct reference and imagery, reveal a wide knowledge of theatrical entertainment and literary drama. His knowledge of classical and contemporary drama, at its best, was profound. Although in his works he frequently praised and showed great respect for classical drama while disparaging the drama of his time, his poetry reveals, through many parallels to Shakespeare's plays and through the employment of many Elizabethan dramatic techniques, sources, and blank verse, that Milton retained throughout his life an abiding sympathy for the best of Elizabethan dramatic poetry. His early poetry, and to a small degree his later, shows influences of the semi-dramatic form of the masque. In Arcades and Comus, his contributions to the masque tradition which flourished in Elizabethan England under such poets as Jonson, Milton captured the

aesthetic essence of the masque, especially its lyric beauty. And he intensified the dramatic quality of Comus by using well-remembered dramatic devices such as asides and stichomythia, soliloquies and interludes of song. Masque-like elements had hardly any place in Milton's later and more serious poetry, but the influence of Elizabethan drama remained in the form of the blank verse medium and of echoes from Shakespeare's plays, especially in the use of similar situations, themes, and characters.

Even though Milton employed Elizabethan dramatic sources and techniques, he was most indebted to classical tragedy, especially to the works of Sophocles, Euripides, Aeschylus, and Seneca, for his own dramatic attempts. The dramatic action in Comus, the epics, and Samson Agonistes follows classic construction: in each, the theme and the outcome of the conflict are announced before the conflict is resolved, and, following the dramatic climax, a quiet ending adorns each poem, providing a certain spiritual elevation and, in Paradise Lost and Samson Agonistes especially, true katharsis. As in classical tragedy, universal themes and characters motivate Milton's tragedies, and, at all times, a profound seriousness underlies every action. Like the classical dramatists, in the drama of the epics and in Samson Agonistes, Milton employs tragic flaw, self-realization of one's shortcomings, irony, and, paradoxically, free will and fate. Written entirely in the Greek manner, Samson Agonistes follows Greek form and captures the artistic and intellectual spirit of Greek tragedy.

To say that Milton fashioned his drama after classical canons of dramatic construction in order to protest against the form taken by the drama of his day is not a valid conclusion. His turning to "ancient rule" was perhaps demanded chiefly by his excellent classical training and his essentially sober outlook on life. At any rate, his drama is written primarily in the ancient manner, and, therefore, must not be compared with such drama as Shakespeare's, which, written in a completely different manner, possesses such qualities as thorough character development, animated dialogue, and artistic blend of comic and tragic elements. Milton's dramatic abilities must be judged only according to principles appropriate to the type of drama he chose to write.

Having summarized Milton's indebtedness to Elizabethan and classical dramatists, we may consider in what respects Milton's dramatic achievement may claim its own praise. In Comus, he was able not only to produce lyric beauty reminiscent of Elizabethan masques but to intensify the intellectual content of his work by the use of dramatic technique. In his epics, especially in Paradise Lost, he enhanced the human interest by dramatic touches appealing to universal human motives and emotions. Samson reveals Milton's dramatic genius in its closeness to the challenging form and spirit of Greek tragedy--a closeness Milton achieved through adherence to its strict rules and by dramatically effective omissions from and additions to the well-known Samson legend. For Comus, the epics, and Samson, Milton wrote

excellent soliloquies, some of which are highly psychological. Examples of these outstanding soliloquies are Comus' first speech, Satan's tortured outburst before confirming himself in evil, Christ's first soliloquy in Paradise Regained, and Samson's opening lament. None of Milton's characters is highly developed, but since "ancient rule" did not demand complex characterization, such characters as Comus, Satan, Adam, Eve, Samson, Dalila, and Manoa are memorable achievements in their own right.

Milton's dramatic genius was by no means merely imitative of the form or spirit of preceding literary artists. He can claim his own praise for dramatic inventiveness, as his poetry, in which the dramatic element is both prominent and effective, illustrates. Witness, for example, the unforgettable closing scene of Paradise Lost. The sad but humbly courageous exit of our parents from paradise illustrates at once Milton's epic vision and his dramatic genius.

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