A contrast and comparison of Aeschylus and Shelley as dramatists from the point of view of Prometheus Bound of Aeschylus and Prometheus Unbound of Shelley to prove that Shelley was indebted to Aeschylus

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A Contrast and Comparison of Aeschylus and Shelley as dramatists from the point of view of Prometheus Bound of Aeschylus and Prometheus Unbound of Shelley to prove that Shelley was indebted to Aeschylus.

by

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Statement of Problems

The *Prometheus Unbound* of Shelley has been analyzed, criticized, and allegorized from various points of view, not only because it is recognized as one of Shelley's greatest dramatic works, but because its imagery is drawn "from the operations of the human mind", and the tendency in modern times is to delve beyond the material realm into the abstract where these operations have their origin.

When the question of complex allegory is settled, as William M. Rossetti has explained it, then the question arises as to the ultimate source of this drama, and herein lies the basis of this thesis.

The purpose of this study to prove as clearly as possible (1) that Shelley was indebted to Aeschylus for his inspiration; (2) that Shelley was indebted to Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* and the fragment *Prometheus Unbound* both directly and indirectly; (3) that
although Shelley was greatly indebted to Aeschylus, yet he differs from him in dramatic technique; (4) that the background and philosophy of Aeschylus and Shelley as individuals had an undeniable influence in the molding of their respective dramas.

This study is an attempt to show that Shelley was indebted to the Greek spirit, and particularly to the lofty idealism of Aeschylus far more than is apparent on first consideration. He became as it were a part of the Greek spirit and this is especially true in his Prometheus Unbound. The very nature of Shelley's genius seized the Aeschylean Titan chained at the depths of Tartarus and raised him to the height of Platonic idealism.

The problem is not to prove that Shelley was a dramatist par excellence because Shelley will always be the lyricist of the soul's own melodies; or that he conformed to the Aristotelian principles of dramaturgy codified during the Italian Renaissance; but rather to take the drama Prometheus Unbound as it is, and with the elements present, to prove Shelley's debt to Aeschylus. That is to say, the spark which had fallen in the sixth century B. C. waited to be kindled by the passion of Shelley's poetic genius in the early years of the nineteenth century.

Shelley's debt to Aeschylus can only be estimated by a detailed study of both dramas, and a comparison of their ideas and philosophy. The entire conclusion is in the realm of opinion depending on the reader's point of view. But from an actual comparison of the lines of both texts there is bound to be a certain proportion of objectivity.
The lives of the two dramatists, their philosophy, their dramatic technique, their style, their poetic potentiality, the influence of the age on their work, and in short, all the factors which could have in any way contributed to a contrast, and which would ultimately help to prove that Shelley was indebted to Aeschylus, are treated in this discussion.

Comparison is used here as a method of literary procedure whereby the various elements such as the lives of the dramatists, the background of their works, their philosophy, and their dramatic technique are placed side by side in order to observe the similarities or dissimilarities which are apparent upon such an observation.

Contrast is used in the sense that it heightens or pronounces the results of a detailed comparison.
CHAPTER II

Background

Aeschylus, the first great tragedian of ancient Greece, who lived from 525 - 456 B.C. has justly been called the "Father of Classical Drama", because he raised the method of dramatic presentation from the primitive ritual of folk dancing and mummmery of Thespis and his predecessors into the relatively broad light of modern day. His understanding of the basic principles which governed dramatic production is evident from the fact that he not only produced dramas but acted in them as well. He was in his official capacity, playwright and producer. Living at a time when Greece had to fight to the last man against the invading Persians under Xerxes, when the terrors of barbarism threatened to overrun Europe, it seems incredible that any individual could find time for the fine arts. Yet Aeschylus found time to write some ninety plays, seven of which have been preserved, namely: The Suppliants, The Seven Against Thebes, the Orestian trilogy composed of the Agamemnon, the Choephori and the Eumenides, and the Prometheus Bound, which is part of a lost trilogy.
The drama of Greece had its origin in the religious festivals of the folk held biannually in honor of Dionysus the god of wine, sex and fertility. The Lenaea or spring festival celebrated the approach of spring and new life; the City Dionysia, or winter festival, the harvesting of the crops.

On these festive days an elaborate procession moved slowly to the altar where a goat was sacrificed as an oblation to Dionysius, while singers disguised as satyrs chanted a choral ode or a dithyramb to the accompaniment of a harp or flute. The object of this dithyrambic hymn was

"to describe in song various episodes from the life of Dionysius, and at the same time to present these episodes in a concrete form by means of expressive mimicry and pantomime."(1)

From the song of the revellers or 'comus' comedy began; from the song of the 'tragi' or goat-like satyrs tragedy began.

As a survival of folk ritual the dithyramb was naturally crude and unpolished in form. It remained for Arion, a celebrated harp and flute player of Lesbas, to arrange the ode in anti-strophic measure, thereby limiting the wild gestures of the chorus. The chorus was the all-important element in the drama until Thespis introduced an actor who was detached from the chorus, and yet essential to it. Thus the actor or "answerer" took the part of all the prominent figures from the gods

to the messengers. It was the beginning of real action, which is absolutely necessary to good plot and characterization.

"It is not therefore without reason that Thespis came to be regarded by the common opinion of antiquity as the real originator of tragic drama." (2)

By the time Aeschylus began to write, drama had advanced beyond the embryonic stage, although in point of view of time it was still a child. Previously the drama lacked vitality because the dialogue was almost entirely between a single actor and the members of the chorus, but

"Aeschylus was the first to conceive the possibility of depicting in dramatic form the central incidents of a story, and he effected his purpose by the employment of a second actor." (3)

This innovation was a product of gradual development rather than a startling change; the importance of the actors increased noticeably from play to play while the need of the chorus lessened. From the Persae to the Prometheus there is a considerable advance in structure, and the chorus ultimately fades into the background, and serves merely as an interpreter of the actions for the spectators.

Whatever importance we may attribute to Aeschylus in the history of dramatic development, the fact remains that he seized an opportunity to make action the central feature of his plays, and laid the basis for further innovations in this field.

(2) Ibid - p. 28
(3) Ibid - p. 61
"He was a master of dramatic situation and of climax, having an eye for what was theatrical and spectacular in the least sense." (4)

"The world" writes Haigh, "has seldom seen a more splendid combination of the arts of poetry, music, dancing, and stage management than was produced under the guidance of this genius." (5)

Aeschylus was a very religious man, serious and thoughtful about the problems which vexed mankind. He was a philosopher in his own right, and respected the tradition and learning of Athens. Like Plato in his Republic, he declared that the burden of government should rest upon the well-educated and well-born. He believed in liberty but within a limit, the limit being the authority of the gods whom he revered sincerely.

To Aeschylus, as to all true Greeks of the fifth century, B.C., Zeus was the sublime ruler of the universe; every other minor deity merely ministered to his will. Throughout the works of Aeschylus the fundamental idea that "Nothing comes to mortal man except by the will of Zeus" (6) is evident. But Zeus is bound by a moral ordinance which governs the world and which is more powerful than he – Justice, Law, Necessity. He must govern the world by these selfsame principles.

It follows, therefore, that injustice can never prosper and that punishment for sin is inevitable. These ideas permeate the entire corpus of Aeschylus: the character of divine justice, the punishment

(4) Bellinger, History of the Drama  
(New York, Henry Holt and Company, 1927) p. 32

(5) Haigh, op cit. p. 74

(6) Ibid: p. 90
which follows crime even from generation unto generation, and the spiritual benefit which is derived from suffering.

This deep concern for suffering and the workings of divine Justice can be seen in the Promethean trilogy, particularly in the *Prometheus Bound* of Aeschylus where the Titan Prometheus is chained to a rock because he dared to give mankind the gift of fire against the pronounced decree of Zeus. Not only did Prometheus provide man with fire against the will of Zeus, but he refused to divulge the secret of a certain danger which threatened the longevity of the monarch's reign. It was the secret familiar to every Athenian who was acquainted with Greek mythology - the overthrow of Zeus by one of his own sons - a fact which Aeschylus considered unnecessary to explain.

After the *Prometheus Bound* came the *Prometheus Unbound*, a fragment in which the mighty Titan was liberated from his chains. The scene was laid again in the Caucasus where Prometheus, fixed to a rock, related his sufferings to his fellow Titans who came to offer him sympathy. Hercules appeared and upon learning of his future wanderings shot the vulture which gnawed at Prometheus' liver and freed the hero. Zeus was informed of the danger of a marriage to Thetis, and thus his wrath was appeased.

*Prometheus the Fire-Bringer* is often considered the final part of the trilogy, but if such is the case, the character of Zeus is inconsistent. This is a problem for another phase of study.

Just as the life of Aeschylus, his beliefs and practices, influenced to a large extent the production of his dramas, so the
personal life of Shelley had a direct effect upon everything he wrote.
A brief review of Shelley's life (7) may prove helpful as a background
for a more complete understanding of the spirit which pervades his entire
corpus - a spirit of rebellion against tyranny of any form and against
all orthodox beliefs, a spirit born within the soul itself.

Percy Bysshe Shelley was born near Horsham Sussex on
August 4, 1792. He was educated at Eton and at University College, Oxford
where he was expelled for writing on "The Necessity of Atheism". To
save Harriet Westbrook from the tyranny of a father who insisted that
she attend school, Shelley married her on the agreement to part if
"their marriage should prove a source of misery instead of happiness."(8)
Armed with the revolutionary principles of William Godwin, Shelley,
Harriet, and her wilful sister Elizabeth proceeded to Ireland in an
effort to convert the Irish Catholics to Atheism. The expedition failed.
During their travels abroad Shelley became disgusted with married life
and so, having parted with Harriet, he fell in love with Mary
Wollstonecraft and subsequently sailed to France. At this time, while
he was steeped in debt, Harriet gave birth to a second child, and Mary
gave birth to a son, William. His own health began to give way beneath
the terrific strain, and the news of Harriet's suicide in the Serpentine
made Shelley more depressed. When Shelley tried to claim his children,

(7) Dowden, E. The Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley

(8) Ibid, p. XVII
Chancery refused him because

"...(his) professed opinions led to conduct which the law pronounced immoral, (therefore) the children could not be placed in his immediate care." (9)

Once again Shelley's wings were clipped.

To regain his health, he and Mary, who was now his legal wife, went to southern Italy where he witnessed the greatest sorrow of his later years - the death of his beloved son William.

Shortly after the birth of a second son Percy Florence, they moved to Pisa where Shelley met Maria Gisborne, upon whom he looked with great favor. When Shelley moved to San Guilano, Edward Williams and his wife became his constant companions. While Shelley was out sailing with Williams, the boat capsized and, a week later, the bodies of the two men were washed up on the shore. Shelley's whole life was a tragedy. Perhaps it was self-caused in some ways, but he was, nevertheless, a tragic figure. His weariness with life is revealed in "Stanzas Written in Dejection".

"I could lie down like a tired child
And weep away the care of life which
I have borne and still must bear."

The "tired child" had played himself out.

The Romanticism which arose in the early part of the nineteenth century as a reaction against the prevailing rationalism of the previous

(9) Ibid, p. XXV
century, suited the temperament and nature of Shelley perfectly. It was a reaction not only in literature, but in philosophy, religion and politics as well. Shelley, we might say, was born into it, and in the field of romantic poetry he has no equal. But it is not Shelley the poet who concerns us here. It is Shelley the dramatist, Shelley the romantic experimenter in dramatic form.

The early years of the nineteenth century were barren as far as the history of drama is concerned. The rise of Romanticism, with the emphasis on the subjective and emotional, reached its height in the lyric field but sank to its depths in drama. This intense personalism and subjectivity may have been the ultimate cause of the dearth of drama. The inability to rise out of the poet's own tiny world into the objective world about him was typical of the Romantic poets. The Romantic poets wrote drama - Coleridge succeeded in getting one play acted and Byron brought several of his plays to the stage, but they simply were not the "stuff" that plays are made of. They could not, or at least they did not supply that for which their age was seeking. Each in his own way had a talent for the theatre, but the lyrical genius stifled it completely. What the age demanded was action, and they gave it melodrama.

In an essay the "London Magazine declared,

"Action...is the essence of drama, but 'you' meaning the Romantic dramatists, "you seem to think that the whole virtue of tragedy lies in its poeticity...At any rate, if you don't think this, you write as if you did ...In short your action is nothing, and your poetry everything". (10)

(10) Nicoll Allardyce
A History of Early Nineteenth Century Drama 1800 - 1850
Cambridge, University Press, 1930) Vol I p.89
The Romantic temperament demanded breadth and sweep for its activity; dramatic art requires classic calm and steady workmanship. In spite of Byron's highly developed dramatic sense, his dramas are closet dramas meant for leisurely reading rather than for presentation on the stage; the same is true of Shelley's dramas.

Realizing the impossibility of producing dramatic material which would be in harmony with the spirit of the age, the Romanticists turned abroad to France and Germany for inspiration. Even Schiller, Kotzebue, Dumas, and Victor Hugo failed to satisfy the literary ambitions of these writers. Finally they turned to Elizabethan drama and Shakespeare, its chief exponent. As a result, the poetic drama of the early nineteenth century is literally filled with Shakesperian and Elizabethan imagery. Not only inspiration resulted but wholesale borrowing accompanied by slavish imitation of plot and character.

"Blank verse unimaginatively follows the cadences of a Shakespeare or a Fletcher. Iagos subtly insinuate their way on to the stage, and Rosalind's lisp in quivering forests of Arden." (11)

In an effort to conform to the idols of the past they stinted their own imaginative powers and creative ability, and in the final analysis failed as writers of drama.

Aeschylus was both producer and playwright who knew the stage and its limitations intimately, but Shelley and the entire romantic school were all men of literary attainments, "who had served no apprenticeship to the stage and knew little of technical theatrical requirements." (12) This is evident in "The Borderers" by Wordsworth.

(11) loc. cit.
which is indebted to the influence of Schiller: "Osorio" by Coleridge
which was rejected by Sheridan, but appeared fifteen years later under
the title "Remorse": "Otho the Great" by Keats which was too florid
to be acceptable as a drama. These works are all typical of the failure
of the Romantic school to achieve any great success in the field of
drama. Byron, no doubt, was the most successful Romanticist
because the records show that "Marino Faliero", "Sardanapulus", "The Two Foscari"
- which are attempted revivals of French classical drama, and his one
romantic play "Werner", had the opportunity of being tried on the stage
sooner or later. Byron had within him the genuine "stuff" that dramas
are made of; his plays depict a struggle of the will instead of the
portrayal of an emotional crisis.

The fact is that Shelley had every possible advantage over
Aeschylus as far as a background of sound dramatic technique is con-
cerned, but Shelley was not interested in contemporary drama. Hogg,
his colleague at Oxford asserts that,

"far from feeling a desire to visit the theatres,
Shelley would have esteemed it a cruel infliction
to have been compelled to witness performances
that (even) less fastidious critics have deemed
intolerable." (13)

Shelley's knowledge of the stage was limited considerably, but his
dramatic sense surpassed that of any of his contemporaries. As a
model for his method he turned back to the great Greek and Elizabethan
dramas with which he was familiar, but unfortunately his acquaintance
with these master dramatists was a literary acquaintance or apprentice-
ship and entirely insufficient for practical problems of stage

(13) Ibid p. 63
presentation. Action was the central feature of the dramas which
Shelley used as his models: Speech or dialogue, on the other hand, is
the central feature of Shelley's own dramas.

"Shelley simply did not know enough about the stage
to write a successful stage drama; he was not suffi-
ciently a master of theatrical tools." (14)

Aeschylus was a religious man, but that does not mean that
by comparison Shelley was not religious. Shelley in his own way was
religious, but his religion was so intimately connected with Shelley,
the individualist, that it can hardly be separated and analyzed ob-
jectively. When he wrote his lyrical drama Prometheus Unbound he was
revealing himself to us through his beliefs, especially his belief in
the tremendous power of love when it becomes active within the limits
of this world.

Like the scene of Aeschylus in Prometheus Bound, the
Prometheus Unbound of Shelley is laid on the icy peaks of the Caucasus.
After three thousand years have elapsed, Prometheus is chained to the
rocks where each day the hounds of hell rend and tear his flesh away.
The spirit of the Titan remains unbreakable and unyielding, but deep
suffering has caused him to mellow in his hatred of his oppressor.
Indignation has given way to pity, hatred to love, rebellion to quiet
resignation. Helpless in his prostration, tortured mentally by thwarted
hopes and plans for the future, he is utterly alone and dejected in
spirit. As the scene shifts the power of Jupiter, once so indomitable
and supreme, is slowly waning, and finally he is hurled from his throne
to the depths of oblivion. The scene shifts again and Hercules unbinds

(14) Ibid p. 64
Prometheus whereupon Prometheus descends and predicts an age of love and happiness for mankind when evil and error shall fall away from the mind and love alone prevail. Thus good is made ultimately to triumph over evil.

Just as the Aeschylean trilogy was the direct outcome of the religious beliefs and philosophy of ancient Greece and the nature of Aeschylus, so Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* was the direct outcome of a philosophy perhaps best called eclectic. Whatever you call it, fundamentally it is that philosophy best suited to the nature of Shelley, the individualist. Aeschylus was a born believer; Shelley, an unbeliever; Aeschylus lived in an age of faith; Shelley in an age of religious and philosophical disbelief and doubt. Aeschylus was a conformer; Shelley, a rebel against all orthodox religion and creeds. Shelley hated intensely any kind of authority - religious, parental or political because he believed that it destroyed the spirit of individualism in man. In accordance with his convictions he wrote his works, and his works illustrate a continuous spirit of rebellion.
CHAPTER III

HISTORICAL - PHILOSOPHICAL PROBLEMS AND CONCLUSIONS

In the Greater Dionysia three contests for poets were held: one in comedy, one in tragedy, and one in the dithyramb. For the contest in tragedy three tragic poets each presented a tetralogy composed of three tragedies and a satirical afterpiece. At this time Aeschylus saw the dramatic advantage of a trilogy which had the same theme running throughout, such as the Oresteia.

The controversy over the three plays of Aeschylus, the Prometheus Bound, Prometheus Unbound, and the fragment Prometheus the Fire-Bearer as a possible trilogy, has caused such scholars as Schutz, A. W. von Schlegel, Blumner and Gotfried Hermann much difficulty, although the problem originated in the "de Aeschyli" of Sibelius in 1794. Assuming that the reader admits three plays to begin with, the question arises as to the proper sequence.

Weckler, a German scholar, showed by his research that the fragment Prometheus The Fire-Bearer must be taken as the third part of
a trilogy and that, unless taken in relation to the other two plays
Prometheus Bound and Prometheus Unbound, it cannot be properly under-
stood. If the plays are taken as (1) Prometheus Bound (2) Prometheus
Unbound and (3) Prometheus the Fire-Bearer, then the Greek idea of
Retribution in its three stages of Crime, Punishment, and Reward is
clearly and consistently presented. The theme of Retribution was common
in many Greek plays, but it had particular significance in the principal
dramas of Aeschylus. In addition to this logical sequence of events
the belief which pervades all the poetry of Aeschylus - a belief in Zeus
as an eternal, righteous, all powerful ruler of the universe - surely
must have been present in this trilogy as elsewhere.

The other solution to the problem of the Aeschylean trilogy
is settled deeply in the philosophy and religion of the fifth century
B. C., which was a gradual evolution from primitive beliefs. It was
the result of development from a state of unconsciousness and unconcern
about the nature of things to a state of consciousness and reflection
about the nature of the gods and the relationship which existed between
the gods and men. The gods were presented by Homer in the Iliad and the
Odyssey as formed in the image of man, superior to man by strength and
immortality, and yet inferior to man morally. Furthermore the Homeric
gods are neither omniscient nor omnipotent, but limited in power by
Fate or Destiny, which though unexplained is inexorable.

Like every Athenian of the fifth century B. C. Aeschylus was a
polytheist, a believer in many gods; but Zeus is preeminent as "the
father of the gods and men" and the personification of Justice. The
minor divinities included Hera, the wife and sister of Zeus, Athena, the goddess of war, Apollo, patron of archers, Hephaestus, the master-builder, Poseidon, the tyrant of the sea and other subordinates. The manifestations of phenomena in the physical universe were regarded merely as a result of the will of some divinity. This is the system of gods which Aeschylus used in his tragedy with frequent variations from the traditional view.

With the intensity of a Hebrew prophet, Aeschylus stressed the punishment which inevitably follows sin. It is echoed and re-echoed throughout his entire corpus because he felt a moral obligation to teach righteousness.

It was inconceivable to the logical mind of Aeschylus that Zeus, the god of justice could permit injustice to preside in the world and still be a just god. Man had a moral obligation to strive after the righteous and the just and to make these elements prevail in the world. If Zeus was made in the image of man, was it not his duty also to make Justice prevail?

One of the main duties of Zeus as administrator of Justice was the punishment of sin, as a form of evil. The problem which has perplexed philosophers since the beginning of time appears again. Whence the origin of evil? The seventh century B.C. attributed the origin of evil to the gods; in the "Works and Days" of Hesiod, evil is traced back to the story of Pandora who opened the lid of the box and let all the woes escape into the world. Aeschylus, however, implies that man's sin is due to some frailty within human nature which impels him toward evil instead of toward good. This theory lessens the responsibility of the
gods for the presence of evil in the world, and makes man culpable for his own transgressions if he surrenders to this tendency. The theory of moral guilt had further results; the sin committed persisted relentlessly through each successive generation as in the case of the descendants of Atreus who served Kneles, his brother, the flesh of his own sons at a banquet. The hereditary effects "of the sin of the parents visited upon the children" is apparent everywhere in early Greek literature.

The idea that "The reward of sin is death", or that "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" went hand in hand with the Greek conception of the nature of justice. Retribution was accepted as just punishment for crime. In the Agamemnon trilogy, for example, Agamemnon lost his life because he sacrificed his daughter Iphigenia to Diana. The murder of Agamemnon, moreover, was avenged by the slaughter of Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus her paramour. Only by divine intervention could a crime committed against justice be obliterated, and this seldom happened.

If we understand Aeschylus' idea of Prometheus and Zeus, and if we can appreciate the concept of Justice and Retribution as the Greeks of the fifth century B. C. perceived it, then we will know why Aeschylus chose to reconcile Zeus with the champion of mankind, whereas Shelley, using the same theme, chose to free Prometheus.

Aeschylus had a two-fold conception of Prometheus, which was the result of a fusion of Attic mythology and the rustic mythology of Hesiod. Attic mythology presented the Titan as a benign and venerable
object of worship, while rustic mythology presented Prometheus as a representative of the human race with the temperament of an impious rebel seeking to bring mankind to a level higher than the gods but ultimately bringing heavy punishment upon them. This is noticeable chiefly in *Prometheus the Fire-Bearer* where the two mythologies are so blended that Prometheus is first the rebel against authority by aiding mankind, and is finally a benign creature at peace with divine ordinance.

The Hesiodic tradition taught that Zeus and his followers were the source of all evil; but Aeschylus, a deeply religious man, could not believe this and so "he sought to reconcile the imperfections of human nature with the perfection of Zeus’s government". (15) He came to the conclusion that Zeus intended to destroy existing humanity only in order to create a race of supermen endowed with the godlike qualities which he himself possessed. Prometheus, in his short-sightedness, raised violent opposition to this plan. In his effort to be the savior of the human race he became the "perpetuator of human imperfection and all his services could not remove this blot". (16) His crime was even greater because he had destroyed all mankind’s claim to Zeus’ beneficence. The punishment is severe, but it is in accordance with the nature of the crime.

On one side stands Zeus the Just, on the other, Prometheus the

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(15) Wecklein – Aeschylus Prometheus – Introd. p. 15
(16) Ibid p. 16
impetuous champion of the human race, who means right but oversteps the limits of divine ordinance in his effort to accomplish great things.

Shelley was the greatest of the many romantics who turned to the Prometheus, just as every pseudo-classicists had turned to the Oedipus a century earlier. All during his travels at Milan, Venice, and Rome his thoughts centered in the Prometheus; with Byron on the shores of Lake Leman he read the Prometheus over and over again. The little volume of Aeschylus found in Shelley's pocket after his death bore witness to a lifelong fellowship with the poet of moral grandeur and sublime majesty.

In the preface to Prometheus Unbound Shelley refers to the Greek custom of taking any myth and using it to suit the purpose of the author, who by no means conceived himself bound to adhere to the common interpretation or to imitate in story, as in title, his rivals and predecessors. The Agamemnon theme, the Oedipus, the Hippolytus theme, all show variation in the interpretation of a basic story when applied to the medium of the stage. "I have presumed to employ a similar license," declared Shelley.

The Prometheus Unbound of Aeschylus supposed the reconciliation of Jupiter with his victim as the price of the disclosure of the danger threatened to his empire by the consummation of his marriage with Thetis. Thetis...was given in marriage to Peleus, and Prometheus, by the permission of Jupiter, was delivered from his captivity by Hercules. "Had I framed my story on this model, I should have done no more than have attempted to restore the lost drama of Aeschylus. But in truth"
said Shelley in his Preface "I was averse from a catastrophe so feeble as that of reconciling the champion with the Oppressor of mankind."

Shelley was averse to any kind of reconciliation, compromise, or mediocrity; it was not in his nature to conform and accept where he could rebel and rationalize. It was as if Shelley was deeply intoxicated with the Falernian wine of life. He was a radical on one hand, a revolutionist, a hater of tradition because it meant being shackled; and yet there was a finer side to Shelley's nature, almost an angelic side; he was Shelley the visionary; Shelley the seer, the Shelley who was pleading for the return of a Golden Age which had disappeared beneath the cynicism and narrowness of an age now steeped in industrialism. Like Byron, his friend and associate, he was at war with the society in which he lived, and society had ostracized both for similar reasons.

The idealistic side of Shelley's nature seized upon an opportunity to develop the ancient classical theme of the Suffering of Prometheus. There was an intangible, inexplicable element which thrilled Shelley as he pictured this innocent victim chained to Mt. Caucasus for 3,000 years, suffering inhuman agonies, his liver pecked daily by an eagle because he dared to give fire to mortal man and dared to withhold the secret which threatened the reign of Zeus. It was a complex denial of absolute authority, that same authority which had dug its claws deep into Shelley's heart when it drove him from England.

Shelley's Prometheus Unbound is meant as a sequel to the Prometheus Bound of Aeschylus, not as an adaptation of a merely familiar
theme, but in accordance with Shelley's idea of poetry as a

"mimetic art...which creates by combination and representation (until it) produces intelligible and beautiful analogy with the sources of emotion and thought". (17)

"The architecture (of Shelley's drama) is less simple, its character is more rhetorical, more ornamented, more metaphysical (than that of Aeschylus). But it owes its existence to the fact that Shelley lived so long in a world of Greek literature", (with the Greek tragedians as constant companions in his wanderings through Italy) "in a world very remote from that in which he moved and had his being". (18)

Just as the conclusion to the Aeschylean trilogy was consistent with Aeschylus' philosophic principles and beliefs, so the conclusion to the Promethean Unbound was consistent with Shelley's philosophy and creed. But the philosophy of Shelley was more complex than that of Aeschylus; it was eclectic and progressive, not simple and traditional.

His philosophy was that of an extreme individualist who was a skeptic, then a rationalist, again a materialist, finally an "immaterialist" but in spite of all a Godwinite. Living in an age literally steeped in scientific agnosticism, he cast revealed faith aside and took up reason as a solution to metaphysical problems. Sometimes his philosophy seemed to be at variance with what he believed, as is seen in "Queen Mab", where he supported the doctrine of necessity which held that every human being is irresistibly compelled to act precisely as he does act,

(17) Shelley - Preface to Prometheus Unbound

(18) Tucker, T. G. The Foreign Debt of English Literature
    (London, George Bell and Sons, 1907) p. 63
while in the same poem he states that

"...Nature, impartial in munificence
Has gifted man with all subduing will".

At other times he appears merely to have identified himself with any cause which needed a champion. He felt the influence of Helvetius, D'ambert and Voltaire, Godwin, Berkeley and Plato at various intervals in his poetic career. His was the search of a sensitive soul for a reality beyond the material and mechanistic; for a millennium freed from tyranny and vice; for the perfect society based on love. In "Alastor" we see the tragedy of an idealist who seeks in reality the counterpart of his ideal; in the "Cenci" his passionate hatred of parental tyranny; in "The Revolt of Islam" his condemnation of political tyranny; and in "Queen Mab" his detestation of religious tyranny. His intense hatred for tyranny in any form was counterbalanced by his ardent love of liberty and of his fellowman.

During the summer of 1816, while Shelley's ideas were still in a state of transmutation, he became deeply interested in Platonic philosophy. The result of this interest was his "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" in which he came to the realization of Beauty as the ultimate reality:

"The awful shadow of some unseen power (which)
Floats tho' unseen amongst us."

This doctrine of Beauty as the ultimate reality is peculiar to Plato, a philosopher outstanding for his union of moral and ethical fineness. It was a system of idealism which was in complete harmony with Shelley's aesthetic temperament and so he seized upon it. Like Plato, Shelley be-
lieved in a Supreme Power beyond and above this world yet contained within it, whose underlying principle was spirit which was always, everywhere and essentially the same. Plato conceived of this spirit as the One in contradistinction to the many, the Supreme Good, the Supreme Wisdom, the Supreme Beauty beyond all lesser beauties, the Breath which inhabits all matter and compels it to its will, the Supreme Love above all other loves which is most excellent in proportion as individuals reflect it. Both to Plato and to Shelley the Supreme Being is less personal and anthropomorphic than the God of the Christians, because they comprehend God from an aesthetic point of view. "The (painted) veil which those who live call life" (19) was but the shadow of an ideal world, or an eternal world of perfection. Between the shadow of this life on earth and the eternal world of the ideal was but a thin veil of error which man might dispel if he has sufficient Wisdom, according to Plato, and sufficient Love, according to Shelley. To Shelley this world of ideality was a spiritual millennium from the sorrows and tyrannies of a ruthless world; it was the norm by which the world of actuality might be judged.

As the problem of evil had baffled Plato and the greatest philosophers since the time of Christ, so Shelley struggled either to comprehend it or transcend it. With the downfall of Napoleon, Shelley had witnessed the intense suffering of humanity, and his sympathies

(19) Shelley *Prometheus Unbound*
the oppressed were strong and deep. He felt that it was his duty to aid the cause, and so he turned to teaching moral virtue by the depiction of strong moral character. "Prometheus," he declared in his Preface, "is, as it were the type of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature, impelled by the purest and truest motives to the best and noblest ends."

The philosophy which pervades Prometheus Unbound is the result of deep meditation, serious thought, and careful study about the problems of life, love, suffering and evil. It was not Shelley's purpose to give an account of the origin of evil in this drama; Shelley realized the limits of human understanding. He knew that evil was present in the universe but per accidens, — the result of the corruption of institutions on one hand, and the tendency of man's nature toward evil on the other. This "homartia" common to every man, he realized, caused the greater part of human miseries and unhappiness which flooded the world. Mrs. Shelley declared in her "Notes" that

"Shelley believed that mankind had only to will that there should be no evil and there would be none...The subject he loved best to dwell on was the image of One warring with the Evil principle, opposed not only by it, but by all, even the good, who were deluded into considering evil a necessary portion of humanity; a victim full of fortitude and hope with spirit and triumph, emanating from a reliance in the ultimate omnipotence of Good."

In accordance with his views on the problem of evil, Shelley adapted the Promethean myth to show this dualism of good and evil in the character of Prometheus, who is represented as the soul of man, his mind noble, his suffering keen. In Jupiter, however, is exemplified
the evil, the baser side of man, his concupiscence, his errors of mind, his sins of the flesh. Evil is again represented in the Furies who are utterly miserable in their basivity, while Prometheus amid his tortures can still pity them.

Aeschylus did not believe that the wholly good and true could exist at all in a world ravaged by the terrors of barbarism where might determined right, and the strongest survived. He believed in submission to the will of the gods without question. Because Zeus was Power, and Power was good, then Zeus was good. But Shelley hated power, authority, or tyranny in any form with all the intensity of his passionate nature. He maintained that since the reign of Zeus was filled with evil and moral chaos, then Zeus must die. Aeschylus was content with a reconciliation of Zeus and Prometheus because he believed in the value of suffering. Shelley in his impetuosity saw only one thing—Right must triumph over Might.

"To him goodness was the ultimate and only power which could set all things right and his poem is based upon his faith in the ultimate triumph of the Right and the Good. . . . Aeschylus is resigned in his noble Greek pessimism; Shelley is rebellious in his Christianity." (20)

CHAPTER IV

The Physical Effects of the Stage on the Art of the Dramatist

It is impossible to understand the dramaturgic methods in vogue at any particular period without taking into consideration the circumstances of performance of at least half a century earlier. There is a marked difference between the theatre of Dionysius at Athens and the Roman theatre; between the Restoration playhouse and the Elizabethan Theatre. The ancient theatres, as compared with the modern theatres, are "sharply distinguished from one another by their size, by their shape, by their method of illumination, by their absence of real scenery, and by the arrangement of the seats for the spectators" (21). It is apparent that the physical conditions of the stage must have exerted a powerful influence upon the method of the individual dramatist.

In order to appreciate Aeschylus as a dramatist, it is necessary to recall the condition of the stage at the time when Aeschylus reached dramatic height. The theatre, from external appearances, was a semi-circular, curved tier of seats called the theatron or koilon

where the spectators sat to watch the performance. A diazoma or level walk divided the upper and lower parts of the theatron. Below the diazoma was the throne of the Priest of Dionysius who presided over the whole performance. "The theatron (was) large—in fact, the one in Athens, in the theatre of Dionysius, with its seats banked up on the south slope of the Acropolis seated approximately 17,000 persons."(22) Looking down from the theatron (was) the circular orchestra, or the main dancing place where an altar was set in the center. Much of the dramatic action, including the dances and the choral odes sung by the chorus, took place in the orchestra. At each side of the theatron are paradi which serve as entrances and exits for the spectators as well as the actors and the chorus.

Beyond the orchestra is the skene or scene-building which was first made of wood and then changed to stone. It was the scenery which represented a house, a castle, or a temple. Within the skene were two or three extra doors which served as entrances and exits for the actors. In front of the skene was a proskenium, or logeion, a level platform where much of the dramatic action of the plays took place, although the actors could walk out into the orchestra. Flanking the proskenion were two projecting wings, called the paraskenia.

To counteract the limitations of the theatres of the fifth century, B. C., dramatic producers used two mechanical devices.

The "skene" imposed a strict limitation upon the dramatist in his choice of scenes; thus, it was necessary to confine the scene to the out-of-doors, in front of a house, palace, temple, or whatever the case might be. To overcome this difficulty, a mechanical device called the eccyclema, or a platform on wheels, was developed which could be rolled out from the "skene" in the form of an interior scene.

The second mechanical device was called the deus ex machina, a device necessary when a god was introduced into the action. The machine was a crane by which the deity was let down from the heavens.

"Inasmuch as the god who was thus introduced usually served to disentangle the complicated threads of the dramatic action, and on occasions seemed to be brought in quite gratuitously by a playwright unable to work out a denouement from elements already in the situation, the term "deus ex machina", "the god from the machine", has become standard in dramatic criticism." (23)

The tragedies which were presented on the feast of the Greater Dionysia were elaborate and complicated works of art. They were composed of rhythm, dancing, vivid action, and brilliant color. Music accompanied the choral odes and choral singing. The fact that the actors wore masks heightened the effect of the dramatic setting; in fact masks were necessary because the actors were so far removed from the audience.

"The mask also tended to fix the dominating trait of any characters in the minds of the audience, and at the same time to elevate characters, to make them effectively and significantly unreal, and in some way to raise them above the audience." (24)

(23) Ibid XVII
(24) Ibid XIX
The circumstances which surrounded the dramas of Aeschylus were far removed from those of the nineteenth and twentieth century stage presentation.

"Imagine the brilliant sky of Greece, imagine a vast concourse, thirty-thousand men and women assembled beneath it to watch not a horse-race, not a football match, but a presentment of the mightiest forces that can rule the will of man, gathered in mortal struggle for the possession of his soul. Imagine this mental conflict set forth with all the charm that majestic language and music, the noblest spectacular effect, the deepest associations of religion have the power to give. Imagine the multitude ranged tier above tier, round three quarters of a vast circle, the eyes of all fixed upon a stage far ampler than any we have seen, and beneath it an altar round which the chorus either stands or moves in stately gestures doing honor to Dionysius, the god of inspired song and dance and action, taking part in the dramatic movement of the tragedy, invoking divine and human justice upon the deeds and words of those whose destinies are at stake before their eyes. Imagine all of this and we have some faint reflection, but only a reflection, of what the tragic drama was to Greece." (25)

The physical conditions of the stage during the first quarter of the nineteenth century were far different from the conditions which existed during the dramatic career of Aeschylus. The change which took place was the result of a process of slow evolution from the time of the Restoration. The theatres were wooden buildings such as we have today. The art of scenery became popular, and the box-set was devised whereby the interior of a room would be visible to the audience. There was also a tendency, in the direction of realism, to make every scene

(25) Vaughan, C.E.: Types of Tragic Drama (London, Macmillan and Col., 1924) p. 20
...
characteristic of the particular period represented, and to depict the relation of the character to his environment. The facilities for lighting up the stage were vastly improved, first by the introduction of gas, then by the invention of the limelight, and finally by the perfection of the electric light. It was found possible to illuminate the stage so as to show the expression of the actors' faces, even in the remoter corners of the stage. Then the apron, that part of the "projecting area of the stage between bow of the footlights and the line of the curtain" (26) was abolished. The stage was then cut back to the proscenium-arch, which became a frame for the stage opening. This stage is called the "picture-frame stage."

By contrasting the open air theatre of Athens with the picture-frame theatre of the nineteenth century it becomes clear that Aeschylus had comparatively few dramatic aids with which to work, while Shelley had the wealth of all the greatest dramatists before him. It must be remembered that

"the technical possibilities of any art at any moment must more or less determine and may more or less limit, not only how the artist shall express what he has to say, but also what he shall attempt to express. And it is only after we have analyzed these technical possibilities that we are really prepared to appreciate what the artist has actually accomplished." (27)

In addition to the influence of external stage conditions on the dramatic method of the poet, it is necessary to consider the internal

(26) Ibid. p. 61

(27) Matthews, op. cit. p. 66
structure of a Greek play as compared with the internal structure of a nineteenth century drama. A typical Greek tragedy is divided into definite parts. The opening speech is the "Prologue", a speech in which a single character speaks for the purpose of giving the setting and the details necessary to the story. This is the situation in the Agamemnon of Aeschylus where the guardsman is seated on the roof of the palace watching the return of his master from the wars. After the "Prologue" comes the "Parados", the first appearance of the chorus who suit the rhythm of their gesticulation to the gravity of the song which they sing or chant.

The chorus is the all important element in the Agamemnon of Aeschylus, but in the later plays the chorus serves merely to sing interludes, and has no direct bearing on the action of the play.

"Normally the members of the chorus served as interested commentators upon the action, sometimes functioning as a background of public opinion against which the situation of the particular play is projected, or again becoming the vehicle whereby the poet is able to make clearer the more universal significance of the action."(28)

The Chorus in Aeschylus serves the latter function, and as such embodies the very essence of the plays. The fifteen members of the chorus usually remain on the stage at the conclusion of the parados, so that they may respond to the actions of the chief characters during the play. The leader of the chorus is oftentimes one of the chief actors.

(28) Cates and O'Neill, op. cit. p. XX
When the choral song is completed, the first episode occurs, which is the exact counterpart of a modern act. Then a "stasimon" or choral ode follows the episode, and gradually these two alternate parts four or five times. "The commus", a lyric passage sung by the chorus and chief actors, is distinguished from the "stasimon", the first choral ode only by its complex metre. After several alternations of "episode" and "stasima", there is the finale or "exodus", the closing scene of the play, at which time the chorus leaves the stage by way of the "parado". Such was the internal structure of a Greek play when Aeschylus introduced his second actor.

The structure of the English drama was firmly established by the time that Shelley decided to turn his poetic talent in that direction. The drama had evolved from a religious ceremony to a play divided into five acts. This division of a play into acts and scenes is a usage originating in the subject matter of the drama itself. The individual acts are commonly separated by intervals during which a dropped curtain conceals the stage. Each act in turn may be subdivided into scenes, which should, in a certain sense, be complete in themselves, and at the same time should form an essential part of the whole drama. Every dramatic plot naturally divides itself into three logical parts—the exposition, the development, and the catastrophe. This is a natural division by subject matter, but practically this would require extreme condensation of material. Horace, a Roman literary critic, stated in his Ars Poetica, that a play should be divided into five acts.
The first act introduces the characters, gives the setting and begins the action; the second act increases the action and leads up to the crisis in the third act; the fourth act prepares the catastrophe; the fifth act is the dénouement. This was the established structure of the drama when Shelley began to write. The Greeks did not make any such formal distinction of acts in their drama, but their tragedies are subjectively capable of division into parts or episodes which are separated by the lyrical chants of the chorus.

Shelley had intended to write a classical tragedy and in that way to follow the ancients, particularly Aeschylus, whose drama of suffering appealed to Shelley's sensitive nature. Shelley realized, however, that he could not write a drama which would directly imitate Aeschylus in form and structure, but he desired his drama to resemble the Greek as much as possible.

His first draft of the Prometheus Unbound contained three acts, the introduction, the development and the catastrophe, and as such the drama conformed to the Greek idea of simplicity. He made his succession of scenes depend, like his classical model, upon the entrance and the exit of the main characters. If he had concluded the Prometheus Unbound without adding the fourth act, as a lyrical hymn of rejoicing in the fulfillment of the prophecy, his drama would have been much more Greek in spirit and tone. The minute Shelley's Prometheus is unbound, all his glory departs from him, and all the languors of a flowery universe peopled with dreams cannot bring back his original greatness.
The genius of Aeschylus flourished despite the limitations of the stage and of the age in which he lived, but that was because the genius of Aeschylus was broad and deep enough to be at once a poet and a dramatist. Shelley was primarily a lyric poet who regarded the drama merely as a form of literature which might or might not gain something from a representation on the stage. He had no conception of the nature of dramatic art, nor the requirements for stage production. In a letter of April 18, to Peacock, this statement appears in reference to his proposed drama:

"But you will say I have no dramatic talent; very true in a certain sense; but I have taken the resolution to see what kind of a tragedy a person without dramatic talent could write."

His own statement in regard to his purpose in his Preface to the Prometheus is certainly not dramatic, but rather poetic. He declares:

"I have what a Scotch philosopher terms 'a passion for reforming the world'...My purpose has hitherto been simply to familiarize the highly refined imagination of the more select classes of poetical readers with beautiful idealisms of moral excellence; aware that until the mind can love, and admire, and trust, and hope, and endure, reasoned principles of moral conduct are seeds cast upon the highway of life which the unconscious passenger tramples into dust, although they would bear the harvest of his happiness."

From this statement it can be seen that his purpose, though moral, had an aesthetic aspect. Shelley was not trying to write a perfect drama, but rather, in accordance with his conception of his own calling as a poet divinely inspired, he was attempting to set forth
principles of moral excellence as guides to man's conduct. In the Preface to Prometheus he states:

"Whatever talents a person may possess to amuse and instruct others, be they ever so inconsiderable, he is yet bound to exert them." (29)

In writing his lyrical drama, a drama more poetic than dramatic, Shelley was merely fulfilling his duty as a poet and a teacher of moral excellence.

From a consideration of the external conditions of stage presentation and the technical structure of the drama itself, it can be seen that the positions of Aeschylus and Shelley as dramatists are at opposite poles. The difference between the dramatic method of Aeschylus and that of Shelley is as widely removed as the Aristotelian definition of tragedy is from the modern conception of it. In his famous definition of tragedy, Aristotle declared that "Tragedy is an imitation of an action", and in this statement he meant that action is necessary to drama and without it there can be no drama; action, so to speak, is the soul of drama. Action may be regarded as the summation of individual acts into a unified and coherent plot, or as the characteristic action of a man as the result of his ethical behavior plus his emotional behavior. In the latter case the action implies an agent, an agent who is morally free to choose, who has a free will which makes him responsible for his own acts. If man were merely a puppet as the blinded Gloucester in King Lear cries out

(29) Shelley, Preface to Prometheus Unbound
As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods
They kill us for their sport
then these could be no tragedy.

Although there were no dramatic rules when Aeschylus was writing, Aristotle in the Poetics which was written about 70 years later, tells us that "every Greek tragedy must have six parts which determine its quality - Plot, Character, Diction, Thought, Spectacles, and Song."
Action, as mentioned above, was the vital principle, the very soul of the drama and as such is well exemplified in the dramas of Aeschylus. For the most part his dramas contain few dramatic incidents and the plots are extremely simple. When one considers the condition of the Greek stage at this time, the simplicity of plot is not surprising. For example, in the Prometheus the Titan is chained to a rock in the opening scene; a storm breaks on him at the close, and the drama ends. Although he may not be a master of plot, Aeschylus is, however, a master of dramatic situation. Consider once again the situation in Prometheus: the towering cliffs and peaked crevices of Mr. Caucasus where Prometheus, the friend of mankind, is dragged forth by two ruffians Force and Might. In a crescendo of torture they clamp him to the cliff with iron fetters in accordance with the divine will of Zeus, made blind by jealousy. Racked on his bed of suffering, burning from humiliation, the sufferer refuses to open his lips in the presence of the ministers of Evil. As soon as they depart, he cries out to Heaven in the supreme agony of his soul. The remaining part of the play is one long cry of defiance against a god of Injustice. As a storm bursts
forth, and the lightning flashes, his tortures are redoubled yet his will remains unbroken and his courage undaunted.

All the characters of Aeschylus' plays are drawn with a broad sweep, and they stand out sharply against the stormy background of the action.

"In the Prometheus Bound Aeschylus was faced with a difficult problem of dramaturgy since he had to build a play in which his central character could not move, in a very literal sense of the word. Consequently the poet found himself considerably limited in scope and was forced practically to eliminate from his play anything which we might call "Action". Aeschylus solves the problem by introducing several characters who in one way or another set off the central figure. He contrasts Prometheus now with Oceanus, now with Io his fellow-sufferer at the hands of Zeus, and finally with Hermes, the "lackey of Zeus," as Prometheus bitterly calls him. In and through the dialogues between Prometheus and his various interlocutors gradually emerges the poet's analysis of the questions he is raising in the play." (30)

"Thought - that is, the faculty for saying what is possible and pertinent in given circumstances," Aristotle declared, "is practically inseparable from "diction...the expression of the meaning in words." (31) The dramas of Aeschylus are colossal creations planned and executed with a largeness of design and a depth of purpose for which it would be difficult to find a parallel, and this is due to the fact that he could express noble thoughts in a "grand style", the essence of which is simplicity.

Spectacle and Song, the two remaining parts of a Green tragedy, received great impetus in the hands of Aeschylus. He was the trainer of his own choruses, and in the art of choral dancing, he is said to

have been pre-eminent, and to have shown unusual skill in the invention of new movements and figures. Many of his odes are composed with a view to effective presentation in the dance. Such, for example, are the lyrics in the Prometheus Bound, where the chorus bemoans the suffering Titan in plaintive tones. If we imagine these odes as they were performed in the orchestra, to the accompaniment of appropriate music with wild and despairing gesture, we may form some conception of the intensity which such a spectacle would produce. The art of dorial mimicry was brought to its highest perfection by Aeschylus.

Although Aeschylus was regarded by many of his successors as a prodigious writer who followed the impulse of the god within him rather than the rules of reason, no dramatic poet ever had a higher sense of the aesthetic unity which tragedy demands. Each of his masterpieces from the Supplices to the Persae present a coherent and completely organized whole,

"every part is penetrated with the dominant thought and passion that inspired it. Moreover, he had absolute conception of the formal requirements of his art. When he received tragedy in its emergence from the dithyrambic stage he gave it the form which it maintained throughout the brilliant period of Attic culture." (32)

It was he who curtailed the function of the chorus and developed dialogue, thus expanding the old Thespian elements of tragedy in accordance with the true spirit of the drama. By adding a second actor, by attending diligently to the choric songs and dances, by inventing

the cathurnus and the tragic mask, and by devising machinery and scenes adapted to the large scale of the Athenian stage, he gave its permanent form to the dramatic art of the Greeks.

In all matters pertaining to the theatre Aeschylus was a wise critic and a potent founder. His position as one of the greatest dramatists of all time is firmly established, although the style in which he worked went out of date even in his own lifetime.

Aeschylus differs from Shelley in dramatic technique as the Aristotelian definition of tragedy with its insistence on action differs from the Romantic conception of closet drama with its insistence on inaction.

"The attempt to write tragedy for the closet rather than for the stage has resulted either in adopting the supposed conditions of the Greek or some other foreign theatre, or in breaking away from the strict limits defined by the stage and writing lyrical medleys or dramatic monologues or imaginary conversation...Object as tragedy rightly may at times to the limitations of the theatre, it cannot safely leave its precincts without losing its own identity."(33)

Closet-drama was meant to be read; it is considered the offspring of the unwillingness or inability of certain poets, namely the romantic poets, to acquire the craft of the theatre, the special craft which makes the dramatist what he is. Precisely in this failure to learn the art of stagecraft so necessary to dramatic presentation, Shelley failed as a dramatist on one hand and rose to great poetical heights on the other.

In regard to the dramatic structure of Shelley's Prometheus

(33) Thorndike, Ashley H. Tragedy (Boston and New York, Houghton Mifflin Co.)
Unbound it can be said that in form he tried to imitate the Elizabethans for the most part; in spirit he tried to capture the moral grandeur and loftiness of Aeschylus. Action according to Aristotle, is the determining characteristic of any great drama. The determining characteristic of Prometheus Unbound is speech.

"Shelley is so much more interested in what his characters feel and say than in what they do, that each situation in his play tends to be self-sufficient, existing for the sake of the emotions and the poetry which it in itself suggests, instead of as a rightly subordinated part of the total plot." (34)

The tendency in Shelley's drama to long, individual lyric speeches was chiefly due to his constant literary study of Aeschylus and Sophocles. Because Shelley followed Aeschylus so closely, even the structure of his scenes is Greek. Like that of Aeschylus, his dialogue is between two persons who appear upon the stage at once, rarely among three.

It must be remembered that it is difficult for a dramatist to build a play where there is no action, because the main character does not move. Aeschylus first used the method of contrast by letting Io, who had also suffered at the hands of Zeus, approach Prometheus, chained to the mountain. When Shelley used Aeschylus as a model, he retained this method of contrast to draw out his character analysis.

But

"where Aeschylus has painted human portraits, Shelley has remembered that his canvas is the Heavens, and he has drawn great dim luminous figures in the clouds..." (35)

(34) Bates, op. cit. p. 56

(35) Campbell op. cit. p. 203
As a whole, it may be said that Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* is not an acting drama at all; it is a literary tragedy whose acts fail to advance the plot in the least. Shelley's *Prometheus* is more like a symphony than like a drama, a symphony where the music, exquisite at every point, is modulated with wondrous beauty and subtlety into a grandly progressive whole. The unity of the poem, like the unity of music, is primarily emotional, and certainly there is no emotion theme deeper than this drama of redemption. Each act represents a mood. The first act represents patient endurance in the midst of extreme agony; the second act represents hope and life, wherein the spirit of life palpitates through every line; the third act represents the peace which comes from fulfillment; and the fourth act represents triumph which surges upward in unequalled harmony. It is in the poetic moods of the acts that *Prometheus Unbound* best resembles a symphony in blank verse.

When the external structure of the Greek theatre is contrasted with nineteenth century theatre, when the complicated structure of a Greek play is contrasted with the simple structure of a fairly modern play, and when the dramatic method of Aeschylus is contrasted with that of Shelley, it must be conceded that, despite the limitations of the Greek stage and method, Aeschylus is a master of dramatic technique and Shelley merely a literary dramatist.
CHAPTER V

COMPARISON AND CONTRAST OF PROMETHEUS BOUND AND PROMETHEUS UNBOUND

Although Shelley was not in any sense a Greek scholar, yet he read Greek with apparent ease. While he was in Italy writing Prometheus Unbound, Mrs. Shelley tells us: "The Greek tragedians were now his most familiar companions, and the sublime majesty of Aeschylus filled him with wonder and delight." (36) The confirmed enemy of any form of tyranny must have thrilled at the opening chorus of Aeschylus, where the tragedian hints that the ruthless power of Zeus may yet be ended; but where Aeschylus hints that the rule of Zeus may yet be ended, Shelley was certain that it must be ended. Zeus was evil; therefore Zeus must die. Though steeped in the spirit of Aeschylus, the treatment of Prometheus Unbound is exclusively Shelley's. It reveals the tremendous influence of one great poet upon another.

While travelling in the Alps before writing his drama, Shelley wrote the following passage in his Journal, March 26, 1818:-

(36) Mrs. Shelley - Notes to Prometheus Unbound
"After dinner we ascended Les Echelles, winding along a road cut through perpendicular rocks of immense elevation...The rocks, which cannot be less than a thousand feet in perpendicular height, sometimes overhang the road on each side, and almost shut out the sky. The scene is like that described in the Prometheus of Aeschylus:—vast rifts and caverns in granite precipices; wintry mountains with ice and snow above; the loud sounds of unseen waters within the caverns, and the walls of toppling rocks, only to be scaled as he describes, by the winged chariot of the ocean nymphs."

In the Prometheus Unbound, Shelley combined reminiscences of the Alps and of Switzerland with the scenery used by Aeschylus in Prometheus Bound.

Before contrasting the two dramas, Prometheus Bound and Prometheus Unbound, it is necessary to review the situation as it exists in Aeschylus. Chained to a rock near the ocean, Prometheus is finally plunged down to the depths of Tartarus because he has given mankind the gift of fire against the commands of Zeus, thereby raising mankind from its brutish condition to the state of civilization. Nailed to a cliff of the Caucasus, suffering untold tortures, he refused to disclose the secret which, if revealed, would prevent Jupiter from toppling from his throne. This is the status in the Aeschylean drama, but Shelley was not content with such patient suffering. He takes the Aeschylean theme as his starting point, but directs it toward an ideal which is far different from the temperate righteousness of the Greeks. Despite the differences of procedure there are many similarities in descriptions, story, speeches, and characters which are apparent on first reading.
The direct comparison between the two dramas is confined for the most part to the first act of Shelley's drama because this is the part which parallels to a marked degree the situation represented in Aeschylus.

In both the Prometheus Bound and the Prometheus Unbound the description of the scene is the same. Both dramas are set on the icy peaks of the Caucasus mountains amid tempestuous winds and the falling of snow. "Three thousand years of sleep-unsheltered hours" have passed away; three thousand years of "torture and solitude" has Prometheus spent bound to this precipice; but the gods know not time, for the gods are immortal. "Heaven's winged hound" comes to gnaw his vitals daily, and the fiends of Hell rend and tear his flesh, but Prometheus remains unyielding. Unyielding yes, but his spirit has been changed by endless suffering. Indignation and hatred of his tyrant as depicted in Aeschylus have given way to pity in Sehlley's drama. Morning breaks as the drama opens with a great cry from Prometheus:

"Three thousand years of sleep-unsheltered hours
And moments aye divided by keen pangs
Til they seemed years, torture and solitude
Scorn and despair - these are mine empire
...........
Ah me! Alas, pain, pain every, for ever
No change, no pause, no hope! Yet I endure

...............I speak in grief
Not exaltation, for I hate no more."

At the very moment of his capture in Aeschylus' play, he had cursed Zeus and never revokes his curse, but in Shelley's drama he wants to revoke the curse that he may be freed from the taint of revenge. So horrible was it that all the powers of earth dare not repeat it. From the
dreadful abyss of the underworld the phantasm of Jupiter appears and
pronounces the dreadful words, and Prometheus in sorrow recalls them.
From the heights of Olympus, Jupiter observed the change in the character
of Prometheus, and presuming that Prometheus had relented, immediately
sent Mercury down to extort the much-desired secret from the Titan and
to inflict new tortures if he should prove rebellious. In Prometheus
Unbound, moreover, the character of Mercury too, is changed; in the
drama of Aeschylus he insolently taunts the Titan; here he hates to
execute the commands of a new revenge. He begs Prometheus to bend his
soul in prayer and beseech forgiveness of Omnipotence. But the Titan
rejects all thought of submission.

".........................I will not yield
Let others flatter Crime, where it sits throned
In brief Omnipotence..............I wait
Enduring thus, the retributive hour
Call up the fiends."

With this utterance, throngs of Furies, the most horrible forms of
darkness, demons of pain, fear, hate, and clinging crime, surge up and
taunt Prometheus about his suffering, his helplessness, and the failure
of his noble plan to benefit mankind. Every spiritual agony that the
soul can endure they inflict upon him, but to no avail. In the midst
of the torture, Prometheus cries out

".........................Peace in the grave
The grave hides all things beautiful and good;
I am a God and cannot find it there,
Nor would I seek it; for, though dread revenge,
This is defeat, fierce king, not victory
The sights with which thou torturest gird my soul
With new endurance, till the hour arrives
When they shall be no types of things which are."
To console the weary Titan, a chorus of Spirits arises which sings of Freedom, Hope, Righteousness, Death and Victory, and the first act ends with the solemn words of Prometheus:

"I would fain
Be what it is my destiny to be
The savior and strength of suffering man,
Or sink into the original gulph of things:
There is no agony, and no solace left;
Earth can console, Heaven can torment no more."

As the mornings slowly dawns, he turns his wistful thoughts toward Asia and toward love.

The second act of Prometheus Unbound opens in a lovely vale in the Indian Caucasus, a decided contrast to the bleak ravine where Prometheus suffers. Separated from Prometheus, Asia, his wife is sorrowful until Panthea, an intuitive spirit, tells her of the extreme sufferings of Prometheus and of his corresponding fortitude. In the eyes of Asia, Panthea sees two visions - first, Prometheus happy and free; secondly, the birth of progress by the downfall of Jupiter, and eventually a reign of justice and love. Together they set out to the cave of a mysterious being whom Shelley calls Demogorgon, who has the power to pierce the veil of Futurity and read what Destiny holds in store. Asia tells him of the good that Prometheus has done for mankind and how he suffers excruciating torments at the hands of an unrelenting tyrant. "Who is it?" asks Asia, "Who is it rains down evil on the world?" Before this question is answered completely, Asia and Panthea are transported in the cars of the Hours to a mystic height. Asia is transfigured by the radiance of her own beauty; and the voice of
Prometheus is heard chanting to her a worshipful lyric, to which she responds with a song of profound meaning. Already the power of Jupiter is waning beneath the tremendous influence of love.

The third act opens in Heaven where Jupiter is surrounded by satellites and messengers. He vainly boasts of his omnipotence and of his marriage to Thetis. The prophecy is fulfilled as the Spirits of the Hours and Demogorgon enter the courts of Heaven. Thunder, lightning, curses, - all are futile, and Jupiter is hurled from his throne into the depths of oblivion. The curse is fulfilled.

The scene shifts to the peaks of the Caucasus again where Hercules unbinds Prometheus, who, united with Asia, enters upon an existence of limitless freedom and perfect love. The Spirit of Earth trembles as though some new life thrills through her when Prometheus descends and predicts an age of unequalled love throughout the universe, when evil and error shall fall away from the human mind, and truth and love alone prevail. Here Shelley is expressing his own desires.

"............................man remains
Sceptreless, free, uncircumscribed, but man
Equal, unclassed, tribeless, and nationless;
Exempt from awe, worship, degree, the king
Over himself; just, gentle, wise."

The fourth act was an afterthought. Mrs. Shelley, in her "Notes" declares that

"At first he completed the drama in three acts. It was not till several months after, when at Florence, that he conceived that a fourth act, a sort of hymn of rejoicing in the fulfillment of the prophecies with regard to Prometheus, ought to be added to complete the composition."
It is a lyric chant of rapturous gladness by the choruses of Spirits, together with Prometheus, Asia, Panthea, Ione, the Hours, and the Spirit of Earth. The play ends with the declaration by Demogorgon of the spiritual principles which must ultimately triumph over evil, in the words

"To suffer woes which Hope thinks infinite
To forgive wrongs darker than death or night,
To defy Power, which seems omnipotent,
To love and bear; to hope till Hope creates
From its own wreck the thing it contemplates;
Neither to change, nor falter, nor repent;
This, like thy glory, Titan, is to be
Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free;
This is alone Life, Joy, Empire and Victory."

From a comparison of the story of the Prometheus Bound and that of Prometheus Unbound it is at once apparent that Shelley takes as his starting point the old story of Prometheus as he found it in the drama of Aeschylus, who had adopted his facts from Greek mythology.

"Then with an arduous license born of the Revolution, he modifies, enlarges, innovates, to suit his own desires, till the glowing and complex phantasmagoria of his drama bears likeness slight to the grave and simple austerity of the Aeschylean treatment." (31)

Thus Aeschylus was the spark which set Shelley's poetic genius on fire. However, Aeschylus was more than the inspiration for Shelley's idea; Aeschylus was the actual and substantial source to which Shelley resorted when he sat down to write his drama and to free Prometheus.

Shelley himself, in his Preface to Prometheus Unbound tells us:

(37) Scudder, Vida D. Prometheus Unbound (Boston, D. C. Heath and Co. 1892) introd. p. XXXIX
"Should I live to accomplish what I purpose, that is, produce a systematical history of what appear to be the genuine elements of human society, let not the advocates of injustice and superstition flatter themselves that I should take Aeschylus rather than Plato as my model."

Although it is clear that Aeschylus was the inspiration and model for Shelley's drama, the extent to which Shelley was indebted to Aeschylus is apparent only from a study of the lines and speeches of both dramas.

In addition to the scenic identities between the drama of Shelley and that of Aeschylus, there are many parallel passages in the dramatic development. The opening invocation of Shelley's Prometheus is almost a literal translation from Aeschylus.

** Compare Shelley Act. I 11.25-29

"I ask the Earth, have not the mountains felt
I ask you Heaven, the all-beholding Sun
Has it not seen? The Sea, in storm or calm
Heaven's ever-changing shadow, spread below,
Have its deaf waves not heard my agony?
Ah me, alas, pain, pain ever, for ever,"

*With Aeschylus 11. 88-96

"O thou bright sky of heaven, ye swift-winged breezes, ye river waters, and multitudinous laughter of the waves of the ocean, O universal Mother Earth, and thou all seeing orb of the sun, to you I call! Behold what I, a god, endure of evil from the gods...Woe! Woe!

For misery present and misery to come I groan."

This is the invocation which Sidney Lanier says "seems still to assault our physical ears, across the twenty odd centuries."

* Aeschylus - Greek and English Translation
  translated by Herbert Weir Smyth

** Complete Poetical Works of Shelley
  edited by Hutchinson, Thomas
Also in this introductory speech of Prometheus in *Prometheus Unbound*, the Titan blasts Jupiter with the following words, ll. 9-10.

"...............thou, eyeless in hate
Hast...made reign and triumph, to thy scorn"

It is a Promethean taunt of the dramatic moment quite in keeping with the words Aeschylus makes his hero speak to Io concerning Zeus, his persecutor and her lover:

Io: By whom shall this imperial sceptred hand
    Be emptied so?

Prometheus: Himself shall spoil himself, through his idiotic counsels."

Hate has so darkened the mind of Zeus that he must ultimately cause his own destruction.

In Act I l. 34 "Heaven's winged hound", namely, the vulture which daily pecks at the vitals of Prometheus, is an epithet taken directly from Aeschylus.

Then in l. 40

"When the rocks split and close again behind" is reminiscent of *Prometheus Bound* 11. 1205-09

"... ..................For at first
The Father will split up this jut of rock
With the great thunder and the bolted flame,
And hide thy body where a hinge of stone
Shall catch it like an arm."

Tortured beyond the power of physical and mental endurance, Prometheus, in his agony, cries aloud to his mother:
ll. 112 ff ........................Mother....
........................Know ye not me
The Titan? he who made his agony
The barrier to your else all-conquering Foe?

The same idea existed in the *Prometheus Bound* of Aeschylus where

Prometheus cries out:

........................Earth, Mother of all,
And the Sun's orb, all seeing, I invoke -
See me tormented by the gods, a god.

In *Prometheus Unbound* while the Titan cries out in his agony,

Jupiter (Zeus) sends Mercury (Hephaestus) to inflict new tortures upon
Prometheus, unless he reveals the secret which threatens the very life
of the Supreme Ruler. But Mercury is changed, for while in the drama
of Aeschylus he taunts the Titan, now he hates himself because he has
to obey the commands of a mighty despot who represents evil in every
respect.

In the speech of the first fury, ll. 342-345

"Darest thou delay, O Herald! Take cheer, Hounds
Of Hell! What if the Son of Maia soon
Should make us food and sport - who can please long
The Omnipotent?"

The "Son of Maia" is, of course, Mercury. In this very speech there is
a vindictive suggestion of Zeusian vengeance which overtakes hesitancy,
as in Power's words to Hephaestus in *Prometheus Bound* ll. 73-75:

"Dost thou flinch again
And breathe groans for the enemies of Zeus?
Beware lest thine own pity find thee out."

The attitude of Mercury is at once apparent in his speech with

Hephaestus before he completes his evil duty:
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11. 352 ff. - Mercury:

    Awful Sufferer!
    To thee unwilling, most unwillingly
    I come, by the great Father's will driven down,
    To execute a doom of new revenge.
    Alas! I pity thee, and hate myself
    That I can do no more
    .........
    Thy worn form pursues me night and day
    Smiling reproach........
    .........
    .........bend thy soul in prayer,
    And like a suppliant in some gorgeous fane,
    Let the will kneel within thy haughty heart:
    For benefits and meek submission tame
    The fiercest and the mightiest.

In the introductory speeches in the *Prometheus Bound* of Aeschylus between Hephaestus and Mercury the same attitude is evident.

Hephaestus:

    "What Zeus hath spoken, Strength and Force with you
    Hath swift fulfillment, and its course is free:
    But I - no heart have I to chain a god.

Strength:

    "Clap then the fetters on this fellow straight
    Nor let thy Father find thee loitering.

Hephaestus:

    "Ah, I am grieved Prometheus for thy pain.

As a final plea in Shelley's drama, Mercury turns to Prometheus:

11. 371 ff:

    "There is a secret known
    To thee, and to none else of living things,
    Which may transfer the sceptre of wide Heaven,
    The fear of which perplexes the Supreme.
    Clothe it in words, and bid it clasp his throne
    In intercession;"

Compare this speech with the speech of the Prometheus of Aeschylus to the Chorus beginning with 1. 168 ff:
"Verily the day shall yet come, though I be tortured thus in stubborn fetters, the Prince of the Blessed shall have need of me to reveal the new design and by whom he shall be stripped of his sceptre and his dignities. Not by persuasions, honied enchantments shall he charm me; and never will I, cowering before his dire threats, divulge this secret, until he shall release me from my cruel bonds and desire to proffer satisfaction for this outrage."

This is the secret on which both great dramas turn. Aeschylus solves the problem in his last play, Prometheus The Fire-Bearer, by making Prometheus submit to Zeus and thereby obtain his freedom. But it was not within Shelley's reason to have tyranny triumph over goodness. So great is Shelley's hatred of tyranny that he makes Prometheus request that the curse which he has pronounced on Jupiter be repeated. So devastating was it, that only the phantasm of Jupiter who comes up from the underworld would dare utter it. Although there is no passage in Aeschylus' drama which coincides exactly with the curse itself, yet the spirit of the curse is produced perfectly.

Phantasm of Jupiter 1. 262 ff:

"Fiend, I defy thee! with a calm, fixed mind,
All that thou canst inflict I bid thee do;
............
Rain then thy plagues upon me here,
Ghastly disease, and frenzizing fear;
And let alternate frost and fire
Eat into me, and be thine ire
Lightning, and cutting hail, and legioned forms
Of furies, driving by upon the wounding storms,
............
O'er all things but thyself I gave thee power,
And my own will.
............
............ All-prevailing foe,-
I curse thee!"

Compare this, with the speech of Prometheus in Aeschylus' drama 1. 990 ff;
Let his blazing levin be hurled, and with the white wings of the snow and thunders of earthquake, let him confound the reeling world. For naught of this shall bend my will even to tell at whose hands he is fated to be hurled from his sovereignty.

The pity of Prometheus for Jupiter, and his wish to recall the curse formerly pronounced mark the moral transformation of his character, which brings it into sharp contrast with the character of Prometheus as conceived by Aeschylus. This is the precise point of departure from the ancient myth which is here left behind.

This imprecation finds sublime fulfillment in the great closing passage, l. 1080-90 of Aeschylus.

Lo, now it hath passed from word to deed—the earth rocks, the echoing thunder peal from the depths rolls rolling past me; the fiery wreathed lightning flashes flare forth, and whirlwinds toss the swirling dust; the blasts of all the winds leap forth and set in hostile array their embattled strife; the sky is confounded with the deep. Behold, this stormy turmoil advances against me, manifestly sped of Zeus to make me tremble. O holy mother mine, O thou firmament that dost revolve the common light of all, thou seest the wrongs I suffer!

The last stanza of the Phantasm's Curse in Prometheus Unbound has a definite parallel in lines 915-919 of Aeschylus describing the fall of Jupiter.

Act I 1.296-301

An awful image of calm power
Though now thou sittest, let the hour
Come, when thou must appear to be
That which thou art internally
And after many a false and fruitless crime
Scorn track thy lagging fall thro' boundless space and time.
Aeschylus 1. 915 -

So let him sit in his assurance, putting his trust in the crash reverberating on high and brandishing in his hands his fire-breathing bolt. For naught shall these avail him against falling in ignominious and unendurable ruin.

There is also a very close parallel in dramatic situation in both dramas, particularly in the conversation between Hermes and Prometheus. Hephaestus or Mercury, in both dramas has been sent by Zeus to extort the secret known to the Titan, or to inflict fresh tortures if reason was unprevailing. In each case Mercury is scorned by Prometheus, who rejects his offers unrelentingly. It has been said that this is the instant wherein Shelley most closely resembles Greek Drama – in the short, pithy sentences of Mercury and Prometheus.

Compare Shelley, Act I., l. 429

Mercury: Pity the self-dispising slaves of Heaven
Not me, within whose mind sits peace serene,
As light in the sun, throned

with Aeschylus l. 966 ff.

Prometheus: For thy servitude, rest thee sure, I'd not barter my hard lot, not I

Mercury: Better no doubt, to serve this rock than be trusted messenger of Father Zeus!

Prometheus: Such is the proper style for the insolent to offer insult.

The main difference in the Hephaestus of Aeschylus and the Mercury of Shelley is that the first is cruel and flippant, while the second is regretful and sympathetic.

Another parallelism occurs in the entrance of the Furies.
Although they are not depicted in the Prometheus Bound, they do occur in the Choephoroi and the Eumenides as "hounds of hell", the daughters of sable-vested night, loathsome in appearance and sisters of the Fates. And Shelley, at the end of the first act of Prometheus Unbound depicts the transition of the chorus of Furies to the chorus of healing spirits. This same transition occurs in the Eumenides.

In the second act of Prometheus Unbound, in the passage wherein Asia describes to Demogorgon the service which Prometheus has rendered to man, Shelley follows Aeschylus very closely. Compare Shelley II, 4, 32ff.

Asia:       Prometheus
Gave wisdom, which is strength, to Jupiter
And Jove now reigned.

And Love he sent to bind
the human heart;
And he tamed fire.

He gave man speech, and speech created thought
And Science struck the thrones of earth and heaven

And music lifted up the listening spirit

marble grew divine

He told the hidden power of herbs and springs
And disease drank and slept. Death grew like sleep

cities then
Were built

Such the alleviations of his state,
Prometheus gave to man, for which he hangs
Withering in destined pain.
with Aeschylus 1. 455-471:

Prometheus: ....I taught them to discern the rising of the stars and their settings. Aye, and numbers too, chiefest of sciences and the combining of letters...
I, too, first brought brute beasts beneath the yoke to be subject to the collar and the pack-saddle, that they might bear in men's stead their heaviest burdens.... 'Twas I and no one else that contrived the mariner's flaxen-winged car to roam the sea.

Aeschylus 1. 476-506

....if man ever fell ill, there was no defense - no healing food, no ointment, nor any draught - but for lack of medicine they wasted away, until I showed them how to mix soothing remedies where-with they now ward off all their disorders..... Now as to the benefits to men that lay concealed beneath the earth - bronze, iron, silver and gold - who would claim to have discovered them before me? ....Hear the sum of the whole matter in the compass of one brief word - every art possessed by man comes from Prometheus.

In spite of these close parallelisms in lines and thought, the difference in the treatment of the scene is tremendous in the two dramas. Shelley in every aspect of his presentation is a modern; this is especially true of his treatment of nature. Shelley is a brilliant word-painter who gives us greater fullness and detail, greater spirituality of conception than Aeschylus. Yet Aeschylus, in his utter simplicity is often more effective than Shelley. Although Shelley elaborates the physical setting in the opening act of Prometheus Unbound to a marked degree, yet the clear cut description in the Prometheus Bound of Aeschylus, though less emphasized, makes a more lasting impression. Perhaps this is due to the fact that the clear, pithy language of Aeschylus served as a fitting vehicle for the expression of his mighty conceptions and moral ideals, whereas the
poetic language of Shelley was merely a vehicle for his revolutionary principles.

When Shelley was writing *Prometheus Unbound*, he stated, "It has no resemblance to the Greek drama. It is original;" and in a certain sense this statement is true. The relation of Prometheus to Jupiter, as a sufferer subject to extreme tyranny and cruel tortures because of his love for mankind, the scene of his torture on the Caucasus mountains overlooking the sea, the attendance of the sea nymphs in the chorus who come to console Prometheus, the herald Mercury, messenger of Zeus, the vulture which comes daily to peck at the heart of Prometheus, the violent elements of nature such as the lightning, the earthquake, the whirlwind in the imagery are common to both poems. This was not a coincidence however; as I stated before, Shelley had been reading Aeschylus and was thrilled by his moral grandeur. So thrilled was Shelley with Aeschylus that he decided to write a drama of his own which would have the problem of suffering for its theme. In Aeschylus he had a model, but Shelley went beyond his teacher in treatment. He took the groundwork of Aeschylus and so modified every existing element as to recreate it. The ethical motive behind Shelley's drama, the allegorical meaning, his metaphysical combinations and suggestions, the development of the old characters, the introduction of new characters, the music, the lyric poetry, - all transform the

(38) Shelley - Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*
original myth of Aeschylus. But Shelley does not transform the original myth of Aeschylus essentially; Shelley merely elaborates in accordance with his own poetic principles until he has a drama formed to his own liking. The basic myth of Aeschylus remains; it is the basis on which Shelley forms his story; no matter how it is treated, essentially it remains the same. How then could Shelley say that it was original, that it had no resemblance to Greek drama, when facts and comparisons prove otherwise?

"Where his idea for it originated he does not tell us. He attributes its composition, as he had done that of "The Revolt of Islam" to the glories of nature - to the blue sky of Rome and the awakening of the Italian spring. But not even Shelley could make a drama out of a blue sky: though he could make a dream, like "Islan"." (39)

Mrs. Shelley writes further of the effect of Italy upon her husband

"The charm of the Roman climate helped to clothe his thoughts in greater beauty than they had ever worn before; and as he wandered among the ruins, made one with nature in their decay, or gazed on the Praxitelean shapes that throned the Vatican, the Capitol, and the palaces of Rome, his soul imbied forms of loveliness which became a portion of itself. There are many passages in the Prometheus which show the intense delight he received from such studies, and give back the impression with a beauty of poetical description peculiarly his own." (40)

The sublime climate of sunny Italy did, no doubt, put Shelley in a mood to write, but it was his association with Aeschylus and the Greek spirit which was the immediate cause of his inspiration.

(39) Campbell, op. cit. p. 197

(40) Mrs. Shelley "Notes to Prometheus Unbound
"We are all Greeks" declared Shelley. "The human form and human mind attained to a perfection in Greece which has impressed its image on those faultless productions whose very fragments are the despair of modern art, and has propagated impulses which cannot cease, through a thousand channels of manifest or imperceptible operation, to enoble and delight mankind until the extinction of the human race." (41)

Does this statement not prove Shelley's affinity with the Greek ideal?

"We are tempted to say that had Greece not existed Shelley would have invented it, so curiously did his nature conform to the Hellenic type, despite the romantic phantasies of his youth. That Shelley was a classical student and genius is proved by the facile fusion of romantic ideas which the Greeks could hardly conceive of, with a mystical blending and perfect harmony of Greek (spirits and ideals). This is most apparent in the Promethean myth where he blends and reshapes to suit his own purposes, until the Hellenic passages of grandeur are obliterated as he sweeps up in lyrical outbursts into an ideal world." (42)

From a comparison of the lines in Prometheus Unbound with those in Prometheus Bound it can hardly be denied that Aeschylus was the actual and substantial source for Shelley's drama. Thus, Shelley's debt to Aeschylus was tremendous. Aeschylus was the source of his inspiration; Aeschylus was his guide and teacher; in short, had not Aeschylus existed, Shelley could never have written a drama of such a hypostatic nature and substance.

"Aeschylus' images possess a poetic depth and intensity which could only come from a mind

(41) White, Newman I History and Personal Background of Shelley's Hellas (Modern Language Assoc. of America 1925) p. 59 Vo. XL NO. 1

(42) Boston Browning Society Papers p. 4140
driving deeply into the essence of that which it was seeking to express." (43)

It was this intensity and moral grandeur which fascinated the poetic and aesthetic nature of Shelley, and drew him to admire and imitate the greatest of moral Greek poets.

(43) Oates, W. J. and O'Neill E. Jr. op. cit. Introduction p. XXX.
COMPREHENSIVE ABSTRACT

After the statement in Chapter I of the four-fold nature of the problem: (1) that Shelley was indebted to Aeschylus for his inspiration; (2) that Shelley was indebted to Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* and the fragment *Prometheus Unbound* both directly and indirectly; (3) that although Shelley was greatly indebted to Aeschylus, yet he differs from him in dramatic technique; (4) that the background and philosophy of Aeschylus and Shelley as individuals had an undeniable influence in the molding of their respective dramas; I have attempted to prove with specific references to the texts that Shelley was indebted to Aeschylus.

It is necessary to consider the dramatist himself as an individual, the world in which he lived at the time he was writing, his philosophy, and the physical condition of the stage during his dramatic career in order to appreciate his art of dramatic presentation. Because the essential nature of this thesis is a comparison and contrast of Aeschylus and Shelley as dramatists, I have confined my thesis to historical, biographical and textual criticism as opposed to Criticism proper.

Under Historical Criticism we must consider the fact that Aeschylus was writing at a time when the terrors of barbarism threatened to overrun Europe; at a time when it was necessary to fight to the last man against the invading hordes of Persians; at a time when military
life was foremost in the mind of every able-bodied man. Such were
the conditions in Greece during the fifth century B.C.

The Romantic period of nineteenth century England was in
decided contrast to the militarism of the Greece of Aeschylus. Echoes
of the French Revolution were still prevalent; the "back to nature"
doctrine of Rousseau had become popular, and the emphasis was transferred
from Reason to Emotion, and by way of emotion to individualism and
complete freedom. Whereas Aeschylus was busy fighting for freedom,
Shelley and the Romantics found freedom in abundance to suit their
temperaments. If the Greeks are conservatives, then the Romantics are
radicals in their extreme emotionalism.

When Aeschylus began as a dramatist, the drama as a means of
literary representation of life on the stage was in an embryonic state.
From mummary and folk-dancing it gradually developed until Thespis
introduced a first actor who was actually responsible for the beginning
of dramatic action. Aeschylus then seized upon the idea that action
should be the central feature of every drama, and by introducing a
second actor he helped to make action the "sine qua non" of drama.
The place that Aeschulus occupies in the history of dramatic development
can hardly be over-estimated.

The dramatic career of Shelley is comparable to Aeschylus only
by its far-reaching differences. To begin with, Shelley was not a
dramatist and did not pretend to be a dramatist. He was a poet, a
romantic poet, and as such a foreigner to dramatic requirements. If
Shelley had desired to be a great dramatist he had all the greatest dramatists of all time and in all countries as models. But Shelley wanted to write a drama; he wrote to Peacock and told him so. Shelley wanted to write a drama on the problem of suffering. "Why do the good suffer?" was a problem which obsessed him, a problem which has baffled every philosopher from Plato to the present day. Like Byron, Shelley, Keats, Wordsworth and Coleridge, Shelley succeeded in writing a poetic drama, or what we today call a closet drama; that is, a drama which was meant to be read, not acted. Action was the central feature in the Greek dramas; character presentation was the central feature of the Romantic, or closet dramas.

The physical structure of the Greek stage and theatre was far different from the stage of the early nineteenth century. The Greek theatre was a semi-circular curved tier of seats which was open at the top, and which seated approximately 17,000 persons. In the center of the orchestra where much of the dramatic action took place, an altar was set for the worship of Dionysius. Behind this altar was a "skene", or representative scenery, and in front of this "skene" stood a logeion, or a level platform where the dramatic action took place. The theatre of nineteenth century England was a process of slow evolution from the time of the Restoration theatre. The theatres were wooden buildings, the use of scenery became popular, the box-set type of stage was devised whereby the audience could see into the interior of a room; gas-lights were used as a means of illumination, the lime-light attained great
popularity, and finally the electric light revolutionized stage production. Eventually the apron was cut from in front of the stage, and the title "picture-frame" was appended to the stage. The technical structure of the stage puts a limit on the art of the dramatist. In spite of the fact that Aeschylus was hampered by the drastic limitations of the Greek stage he was a great dramatist, while Shelley who had the benefit of a wealth of dramatic predecessors and a modern stage to help him remained but a great poet.

Likewise the internal structure of a Greek play differs vastly from the five act play of the Romantic dramatists. A Greek play is composed of a Prologue, the Parados, or the first appearance of the chorus, and alternating Episodes followed by a Stasimon or the second choral ode. The chorus played a main part in the dramatic action. The structure of a nineteenth century drama on the other hand was the typical five act play which could be subdivided into scenes. The action represents three stages of development (1) the exposition (2) the development (3) the catastrophe. The three stages are developed throughout the five acts.

Biographical Criticism is of necessity intimately connected with Historical criticism. Aeschylus was a typical Greek conservative believer in the hierarchy of the gods and their absolute justice. He lived in an age of faith, an age which reverenced the gods sincerely. Shelley, on the other hand, is best called an eclectic; his philosophy
and beliefs were those of an extreme individualist. Living, in an age which was steeped in scientific agnosticism, he adopted the views of a free thinker. In accordance with his beliefs Shelley chose to free Prometheus in his *Prometheus Unbound*, whereas Aeschylus in accordance with his beliefs kept Prometheus chained. Thus the background and philosophy of Aeschylus and Shelley as individuals had an undeniable influence in the solution of their respective dramas.

The fact that Shelley was indebted to Aeschylus for his inspiration for *Prometheus Unbound* is proven from the fact that Mrs. Shelley in her *Preface* declared that Aeschylus was his constant companion during their trip through the Alps. Also Shelley himself declared that he read Aeschylus over and over again with Byron on the shores of Lake Como. If Shelley had no acquaintance with Aeschylus we might say that his drama was original; but knowing from Shelley himself that he admired the moral grandeur of the Greek, it seems that Aeschylus was the inspiration, or the spark which set Shelley's genius burning.

The fact that Shelley was indebted to Aeschylus for his inspiration, and the fact that although Shelley was greatly indebted to Aeschylus, yet he differs from him in dramatic technique, I have endeavored to show by Shelley's own statements in his *Preface* to his *Prometheus Unbound*, by Mrs. Shelley's *Preface* to her husband's works which support this theory, and by a contrast and comparison of Aeschylus and Shelley as dramatists.
By textual criticism I have proved that Shelley was indebted to Aeschylus' _Prometheus Bound_ and the fragment _Prometheus Unbound_ both directly and indirectly. I have shown this in Chapter V by an actual comparison of the lines, the characters, the story and the situation as they exist in Aeschylus' _Prometheus Bound_, and as they exist in Shelley's _Prometheus Unbound_.

The background and philosophy of Aeschylus and Shelley as individuals had an undeniable influence in the molding of their respective dramas. The contrast between the fate of Prometheus bound to eternal suffering by Aeschylus and the fate of Prometheus released from his bonds to eternal happiness by Shelley is the natural consequence of the difference in their philosophies.
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