

THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

GRADUATE SCHOOL

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of  
Committee on Thesis

The undersigned, acting as a Committee of the Graduate School, have read the accompanying thesis submitted by Malcolm Fisk Farley for the degree of Master of Arts.

They approve it as a thesis meeting the requirements of the Graduate School of the University of Minnesota, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA  
GRADUATE SCHOOL

Report  
of  
Committee on Examination

This is to certify that we the  
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Master of Arts

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T I T L E O F T H E S I S

Leconte de Lisle

and

The Hellenistic Elements in His Poetry

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

University of Minnesota

by

Malcolm F. Farley

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the

degree of

Master of Arts

June

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"Leconte de Lisle"

and

The Hellenistic Elements in his Poetry.

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Leconte de Lisle  
and  
The Hellenistic Elements In His Poetry.

No apology is necessary for attempting to treat in any way the work of a poet at once so much neglected and of such greatness as that of Leconte de Lisle. Perhaps the cause for this neglect has been and is, the way of approach. No author has been more a product of his century. At the same time, no genius has been more influenced in what he wrote and yet has seemed to reflect directly less of the tendencies of his age than this same Leconte de Lisle. To ascertain the cause of this apparent paradox which after all is largely the starting point of the Hellenistic Elements will be our first task.

The France of Leconte de Lisle was not the France of Racine, Corneille, Molière and a score of others. It was not the France of L'Hôtel de Rambouillet. It was not the France of a time when the whole city of Paris came out to see *Andromache*, *Le Cid*, or *L'Avare*. The society of Paris was not a society truthfully interested in Art and Literature. L'Hôtel de Rambouillet had become an "Hôtel" where money, wealth, intrigue, factories, business, plants, were the subject of interest and discussion. Materialism, greed for money, that most cursed of all sins, and the seat of all, was fast getting hold of society. The scientific developments of the eighteenth century had turned the thoughts and interests of all towards the quest of knowledge and that knowledge came to be a knowledge that had as its sole end, more money, material development. The cultured literature seeking society of the seventeenth century and the science seeking society of the eighteenth century were replaced by the money grabbers of the nineteenth century. The greed for money came to be the curse of the century, as it is today, and to replace all desire for the more spiritual things, for art, for literature.

We have Alexandre Dumas appreciating the evil and endeavoring to combat the fast growing materialism by his works for the theatre. "La question

d'Argent" and many other plays deal with this problem. Dumas was hopeful. As yet materialism was not fatal. He wanted to strike in time. Augier in his "Un Beau Mariage" makes another drive at the fast spreading plague. But he too is optimistic and suggests a remedy. In Henry Becque, "Les Corbeaux," and Eugene Brieux, "La Robe Rouge", we have the plague exposed with all its hideous wounds wide and gaping, festered and mattered and unclean. Hideous they are, but true to life. With Brieux and Becque we see no remedy. All is pessimism. There is no hope offered. The disease is fatal, incurable.

Drama treated the problem. The realistic authors tried to save the French Ideal from the realistic tendencies, the materialistic tendencies in life. Dumas and Augier still strove for the ideal. They maintained the ideal in their works even though forced to compromise. This was not true of others. Many there were who fell under the spell of materialism and commercialism. In Brieux and Becque we have the realistic picture, but there is no solution offered. The hope is all gone. Thus we understand the exaggerated materialism of men like Flaubert and Maupassant. Do we not all understand better the pessimism and discouragement which led an idealist like Leconte de Lisle to write such poems as L'Illusion Suprême, Les Siècles Maudits, L'Anathème and others?

But for Leconte de Lisle there was no such thing as compromise. While other writers were compromising, succumbing to, or falling under the force of the materialistic spell, Leconte de Lisle, true genius, rose above it and seeking rest and relief from it all turned to Ancient Greece, where he found the expression of his ideal of beauty, of life, of art, of simplicity of poetic form, of everything worth while in life.

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I.

In 1852 there appeared from the house of Marc Ducloux, éditeur, in Paris Leconte de Lisle's first volume of poetry, "Poèmes Antiques". In the front of this volume occurs the significant "Préface des Poèmes Antiques" written by Leconte de Lisle. Just why this "Préface" was omitted from the later editions of his works is a matter of question. It did not appear again until in the posthumous volume of his poetry "Derniers Poèmes", published by Alphonse Lemerre, under the direction of José-Maria de Heredia and Le Vte de Guerne. Whether to Leconte de Lisle himself it seemed too personal, a rather too definite statement of his position and purpose and was therefore omitted from subsequent editions we cannot say. Certain it is, however, that it has been seriously neglected and apparently forgotten.

But for an understanding, -- a sympathetic and scholarly appreciation of Leconte de Lisle's position and purpose with respect to his own time and Hellenism we cannot overlook, or over-estimate this preface and that to "Poèmes et Poésies" of 1855. We have here from the author's own lips and pen an explanation of his contempt for the Materialism of his time, for the ignorance and sentimentality (for him unforgivable) of the Romantics. Leconte de Lisle goes on to state the present status of poets and poetry, to exploit the cause for the decline, to suggest a remedy and point out the possible correction of the evil by a following out of his suggested remedy,--to drink deep in the pure springs of poetic sources, to return to the unparalleled Greeks of the Pre-decadent times. In this preface we have from his own pen a clearer and more exact statement of Leconte de Lisle's attitude and position with respect to his own and all times, than any we could give. It is important to keep this attitude in mind as we continue.(I.)

(I.) It will be worth while for the reader to read at this point the entire "Préface des Poèmes Antiques".



## II.

"Depuis Homère, Eschyle et Sophocle, qui représentent la Poésie dans sa vitalité, dans sa plénitude et dans son unité harmonique, la décadence et la barbarie ont envahi l'esprit humain." (I)

From the "Préface" of Leconte de Lisle it is quite conclusively evident that for him Aeschylus of all the Greek poets was the master. That Aeschylus exemplified in his work the three-fold ideal, "vitalité, plénitude, et unité harmonique" of all poetic beauty is born out by the fact that M. Leconte de Lisle not only followed directly Aeschylus' "Trilogy" as a source for his tragedy "Les Érinnyes" but also modeled his other drama "L'Apollonide", and poems "Hypatie et Cyrille", and "Hélène" and many others directly upon the standard of Aeschylus which he set as his norm.

It is the purpose, then, of this thesis to attempt to indicate how closely and how well Leconte de Lisle succeeded in following his Hellenistic models; to show clearly and exactly how this Greek predecadent ideal of art and beauty differed from others, and to indicate as nearly as possible how it is exemplified in Leconte de Lisle's works; this by signifying the parallelisms and divergencies. In order to do this it will be imperative first of all to understand quite clearly what this Hellenistic ideal of art and beauty was and for this purpose we must turn to a rather detailed study of the age of Aeschylus, see the origin and position of drama and poetry, study the nature of the stage, characters, traditions, ideals and standards of his time; and then we shall be able to compare the Greek original with the nineteenth century Hellenistic model.

In no other department of art, says John Addington Symonds, is the character of the work produced so closely dependent upon the external form which the artist had to adopt as is the Attic tragedy upon the history of the Attic stage. "Both the tragedy and comedy of the Greeks were intimately connected with the religious

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(I) Derniers Poèmes, Préface des Poèmes Antiques.

rites of Dionysus. Up to the very last they formed a portion of the cultus of the vintage god, to whom the theatre was consecrated, and at whose yearly festivities the plays were acted. The Chorus which originally formed the chief portion of the dramatic body, took its station at the altar of Bacchus in the center of the theatre. Now the worship of Bacchus in Greece had from the first a double aspect--joyous and sorrowful. The joyous festivals were held in celebration of the vigor and the force of nature, in the spring and the summer of the year; the sorrowful commemorated the sadness of the autumn and winter. There were, therefore, two distinct branches of musical and choral art connected with the Dionysiac rites--the one jovial, the other marked by the enthusiasm of a wild grief. From the former of these, or the revel-songs, sprang Comedy; from the latter, or the dithyramb, sprang Tragedy. The Chorus was attired like satyrs in goat-skins, to represent the woodland comrades of the god; hence came the name of tragedy or goat-song. At first the dithyrambic odes celebrated only the mystical woes of Dionysus: then they were extended so as to embrace the mythical incidents connected with his worship; and at last the god himself was forgotten, and the tragic sufferings of any hero were chanted by the Chorus."(I)

Thus the original element of Greek tragedy was the dithyramb; and the first step in the progress of the dithyrambic Chorus towards the Drama was the introduction of heroic legends into the odes. The next step was the addition of the actor. In all probability the actor was borrowed from the guild of rhapsodes. This actor, instead of hexameters declaimed iambics which were borrowed from the rites of the sister-cult of Demeter where they were prevalent. Thus we have the third step in the development of the drama, an actor, an interlocutor, who recited narrative passages in iambic and exchanged speeches with the Chorus,

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(I) Greek Poets--J. A. Symonds, N. Y. Harpers--1880 Pg. 145-6.



and in time came to impersonate the hero whose history was being celebrated. To Thespis, the Athenian, whose first tragic show came some ten years before Aeschylus' birth is given the credit of organizing these various theatrical elements into a harmonized whole. He not only did this but also established and affixed definite functions to the various component organs of the show, defining more or less rigidly their respective functions. Then with the growth of Nationality national events came to be depicted in the tragedy, the taking of Miletus by the Persians, and others. The range of subjects became broader. With Phrynichus came the establishment of female characters. Next Pratinas altered the form of the Chorus contriving that in the future instead of ever remaining the same, they should be attired to suit the action of the place. At the same time special pieces for the traditional tragic chorus were retained. These received the name of satiric dramas and henceforth it became the custom for a tragic author to produce at the same time three successive dramas on the subject he selected, together with a satiric play.

The only essential changes which were afterward made in Greek tragedy were the introduction of a second actor by Aeschylus, and of a third actor by Sophocles, the abandonment of the stricter rule of the tetralogy, and the gradual diminution of the importance of the Chorus.

Such is in the main the history of the origin of Greek tragedy. Let us turn now to a short study of the character of the stage and the actors that we may thereby better understand the plasticity, the statuesque form of Leconte de Lisle's verse. The great stone theatre of Dionysus, at Athens was situated on the southeast side of the Acropolis. With their faces turned towards Hymettus and the sea the spectators were seated in semicircular tiers scooped out of the solid rock. The stage fronted the Acropolis; the actors had in view the cliffs upon which stood the Parthenon and the gleaming walls of Protective Pallas. The whole was open to the air. Remembering these facts we are able to understand

the peculiar grandeur and propriety of those addresses to the powers of the earth and sky, to the temples of the gods, to the all-seeing sun and glittering ocean-waves, which are so common in Greek tragedy. The Athenian theatre was brought into close connection with all that was most brilliant in the architecture and the sculpture of Athens, with all that is most impressive in the natural environment of the city, with the very deities of the Hellenic worship in their visible manifestations to the senses of men.---Scenery in our sense of the word, was scarcely required by the Greeks. The name of a tragedy sufficed to determine what palace gate was represented by the stage; the statue of a god was enough to show whose temple was intended. This simplicity of theatrical arrangement led to a corresponding simplicity of dramatic construction, to rarity of changes in the scene, and to the stationary character of Greek tragedy in general.

We have not time here to describe in detail the various parts of the stage apparatus, the dressing rooms, the σκηνὴ, the προσκηνή, the λογέιον, the altar or thymelē of Bacchus, round which the Chorus moved on its first entrance and where it stood while witnessing the action on the stage, the semicircular pit for the orchestra, the three doors in the σκηνὴ for entrance on the stage, and the various other parts. It is sufficient to say, they were of such a size, and such a construction as not to allow of the many stage tricks and various artifices so common on the stage today. The actors entered through the three doors in the σκηνὴ which formed the background. When they stood upon the stage they had not much room for grouping or for complicated action; they moved and stood like the figures in a base relief, turning their profiles to the audience, and so arranging their gestures that a continually harmonious series of figures was relieved upon the background of the σκηνὴ.---Everything in the Greek theatre had to be colossal, statuesque, almost stationary. The Greeks had so delicate a sense of proportion and of fitness that they adjusted their

art to their necessities. The actors were raised on thick-soled and high-heeled boots; they wore masks, and used peculiar mouth-pieces, by means of which their voices were made more resonant.---All their movements partook of the dignity befitting demi-gods and heroes. To suppose that these pompous figures were of necessity ridiculous would be a great mistake. Everything we know about Greek art makes it certain that in the theatre, no less than in sculpture and architecture, this nation of artists achieved a perfectly harmonious effect.

In order to maintain ~~in~~ the grandeur of these personages on the stage, it was necessary that they should never move abruptly or struggle violently. This is perhaps the chief reason why Greek tragedy was so calm and so processional in character, why all its vehement action took place off the stage. We should now be beginning to have some conception of the chief characteristics of Greek tragedy, and if we have read only half a dozen selected poems of Leconte de Lisle the parallelisms cannot fail to be arising in our minds and we are beginning to catch a new glimpse of the Hellenistic elements in his poetry. The explanation and significance of his "Marmorean", statuesque, cameo-like verse is beginning to be more clear to us and we are coming to see the necessity of this knowledge of Greek art, as a basis for a careful appreciation and tracing of these Hellenistic Elements.

Thus "in attempting to form any conception of a Greek drama we must imbue our minds with the spirit of Greek sculpture, and animate some frieze or bas-relief, supplying the accompaniment of simple and magnificent music, like that of Gluck, or the recitatives of Porpora.---Music, dancing, acting, and scenery, with the Greeks, were sculptural, studied, stately."(1)

Thus far we have been occupied for the most part with those external conditions which were largely responsible for the particular form of the Greek drama, in order that we might understand that form and in turn trace Leconte de

(1).Greek Poets. J. A. Symonds--1880. N. Y. Pg. 154. Vol II.

Lisle's imitation of it as the inspiration and ideal for his own verse. But of equal importance in understanding Leconte de Lisle is some knowledge of the subject matter of the Greeks, and the significance for them of "Nemesis", the Cardinal Idea of Greek Drama. This is necessary in order to trace the way in which with him this Nemesis, degenerated into pure Fatalism and then in combination with his own native tendencies, the pessimism of his time, the materialistic philosophy of Taine and others, his appreciation of the hiatus between the real and the ideal and his leaning towards Buddhistic philosophy, led him to embrace the most extreme of Nihilistic philosophies, "Nirvanaism", and to combine them all into a pessimism which has hardly been excelled and no where so admirably expressed as in the verses of Leconte de Lisle. And finally we must show how his Hellenistic idealism saved him from the logical outcome of his metaphysical pessimism.

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The Greek playwrights confined themselves to a comparatively narrow circle of mythical stories; each in succession had recourse to Homer and to the poets of the Epic cycle. Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, not to mention their numerous forgotten rivals, handled and rehandled the same themes. We have, for example, extant three tragedies, the "Choephoroe" of Aeschylus, the "Electra" of Sophocles, and the "Electra" of Euripides, composed upon precisely the same incident in the tale of Agamemnon's children.---Furthermore, the very essence of Greek religion reached its culminating point in art. Epical mythology attained to final development in the free artistic creations of Sophocles. Meanwhile, the dramatists were hampered in their choice of subjects by the artificial restraints imposed upon them. They were never at liberty to invent. They were always bound to keep in view the traditional interpretation of legends to which a semi-religious importance attached. --- The conception of retributive justice pervades the whole tragedy of the Greeks; and the maintenance of this

one animating idea is due no doubt in a large measure to the continued treatment of a class of subjects which not only remarkably exhibited its workings, but which were traditionally interpreted in its light.

If we proceed to analyze the "Cardinal Idea" of Greek tragedy, says Symonds, we shall again observe the close connection which exists between the drama and the circumstances of the people at the time of its production. Schlegel, in his "Lectures on the Drama", defines the prevailing idea of Greek tragedy to be the sense of an oppressive destiny--a fate against which the will of man blindly and vainly dashes. It is of importance to notice this interpretation. It has been for many years, indeed through the centuries, the traditional interpretation of the "Fatalistic Element" in Greek verse. Within the last fifty years much has been written to explain and contradict this traditional interpretation of the cardinal element of Greek poetry, and tragedy in particular, but even today in spite of the work of such scholars as Nietzsche, John Addington Symonds, John Stewart Blackie and others it still remains to be, (though false) the popularly accepted idea. It is, however, important for us to have it in mind, because it was this interpretation of Greek Fatalism which Leconte de Lisle chose (if not fully to accept, at least) to expound and employ as fundamental, and to combine with his own pessimism to lead him off into interpretations of life, and "philosophies" entirely foreign to Greek life and ideals. No such bitter philosophy as complete "Nirvanaism" was characteristic of the Greeks of Leconte de Lisle's choice. And it is at this point of departure that Leconte de Lisle ceases to be true to his vaunted "Hellenistic ideal", ceases to be Hellenistic and is a "modern". His Ideal of Beauty saved him from the logical outcome of Nirvanaism, but it could not entirely save him from metaphysical speculation about it and the bitter expression of that speculation.

But, to continue,---this conception of hereditary destiny (the sense of an



oppressive destiny,--a fate against which the will of man blindly and vainly dashes,) seems to be strongly illustrated by many plays. Orestes, Œdipus, Antigone, are unable to escape their doom. Beautiful human heroism and exquisite innocence are alike sacrificed to the fatality attending an accursed house. Yet Schlegel has not gone far enough in his analysis. He has not seen that this inflexible fate is set in motion by a superior and anterior power, that it operates in the service of offended justice. When Œdipus slays his father he does so in contempt of oracular warnings. Orestes, haunted by the Furies, has a mother's blood upon his hands, and unexpiated crimes of father and of grand-sire to atone for. Antigone, the best of daughters and most loving of sisters, dies miserably, not dogged by Fate, but having of her own free will exposed her life in obedience to the pure laws of the heart. It is impossible to suppose that a Greek would have been satisfied with the bald fate-theory of Schlegel.

Not fate, but Nemesis, was the ruling notion in Greek tragedy. A profound sense of the divine government of the world, of a righteous power punishing pride and vice, pursuing the children of the guilty to the tenth generation, but showing mercy to the contrite----in short, a mysterious and almost Jewish ideal of offended holiness pervaded the whole work of the tragedians. This religious conception had gradually defined itself in the consciousness of the Greek race. Homer in both his epics presents us with the spectacle of crime punished. It is the sin of Paris and the obstinacy of the Trojan princes which lead to the fall of Troy. It is the insolence of the suitors in <sup>the</sup> Odyssey which brings them to their death. The Cyclical poets seem to have dwelt on the same theme. Hesiod continually insists on justice, whose law no man may violate unpunished. The Gnomic poets show how guilt, if unavenged at the moment, brings calamity upon the offspring of the evil-doer. This notion of an inheritance of crime is particularly noticeable, since it tinged the whole tragedy of the Greeks. The Seven Sages all insist on moderation, modesty, the right proportion, the due mean.

The lyrists are fascinated by the vicissitudes of life and their relation to personal guilt. They have a deep and awful sense of sudden catastrophes. Pindar rises to a loftier level; his odes are pervaded by reverence for a holy power before whom the insolent are forced to bow, by whom the humble are protected and the good rewarded.

Such are the traces of a doctrine of Nemesis to be found in all the literature of the predramatic period. That very event which determined the sudden splendor of the drama gave a sublime and terrific sanction to the already existing morality. The Persian war exhibited the downfall of a haughty and insolent race, cut off in all its pomp and power. Before the eyes of the men who witnessed the calamities of Œdipus and Agamemnon on the stage, the glory of godless Asia had vanished like a dream. Thus the idea of Nemesis quelling the insolent and smiting the unholy was realized in actual history; and to add to the impression produced on Greek imagination by the destruction of the Persian hosts, Pheidias carved his statue of Nemesis to be a monument in enduring marble of the National morality. Aeschylus erected an even more majestic monument to the same principle in his tragedies. Nemesis is the fundamental idea of the Greek drama. It appears strongest in Aeschylus, as a prophetic and awful law, mysteriously felt and terribly revealed.

From the above numerous examples it is not difficult to see that there existed in the large field of Greek poetic art and indeed in the very works of those authors whom Leconte de Lisle chose to imitate and to take as models of the "Greek Ideal", Hesiod, Homer, the Idyllists, and Aeschylus,--sufficient material to stimulate that Fatalistic tendency in his make-up. Whether his pessimism was of native or environmental origin, or of both, which is most likely, certainly he saw in Greek history parallels to his own times. The Greek idea of Nemesis appeared to him as the blind Fate of Schlegel, and this with his native pessimistic predisposition and environmental impulse, this with the loss of

idealism, the materialism of his time, the philosophy of Taine and the Buddhists, he combined into a bitter Pessimism and created of them a rank Nihilism. It may seem rather strange at first thought that an intellect so keen, so perspicacious, so discerning and divining as that of Leconte de Lisle, should not have analysed further than the Fate idea of Schlegel. But here we see to what extent even a great man is a victim of his age, is bound by the fetters of his environment.

We believe that in his first volume of poetry, "Poèmes Antiques" he did analyze further, he did go beyond the restricting Fate idea. In the majority of these poems the Fate idea is not dominant and in many it intrudes not at all, or is kept wholly in subjection. True, in such poems as "Hypatie et Cyrille" Fate is almost blind, unescapable, driving.

"Tourne au passé tes yeux; rappelle en ta mémoire  
Les destins accomplis aux jours de notre gloire.  
Nos Dieux n'étaient-ils donc qu'un rêve? Ont-ils menti?"

\*\*\*\*\*

Quoi! ce passé si beau ne serait-il qu'un songe,  
Un vrai spectre animé d'un esprit de mensonge,  
Une erreur séculaire où nous nous complaisons?"

\*\*\*\*\*

Even here Beauty, the ideal, the truth, immortal life triumphs.

"Je ne puis oublier, en un silence lâche,  
Le soin de mon honneur et ma suprême tâche,  
Celle de confesser librement sous les cieux  
Le beau, le vrai, le bien, qu'ont révélés les Dieux."

\*\*\*\*\*

"Mon enfant,-----

Tu vas mourir!



Je vais être immortelle. Adieu!" (1)

But in "Poèmes Antiques", such poems are not in the majority. In most of them the ideal is predominant; there is more of hope, more of joy. It was not until many years later, after idealism had lost more and more in France, after wars, and revolutions, National and personal disasters had entered in to disturb the calm of Leconte de Lisle's meditation, that we find him more bound by the inevitable fetters of environment, and we have from his pen "Les Érinnyes" in which,

"Ah! tout cela, jeunesse, amour, joie et pensée,  
Chants de la mer et des forêts, souffles du ciel  
Emportant à plein vol l'Espérance insensée,  
Qu'est-ce que tout cela, qui n'est pas éternel?" (2)

And again,-----

"Et ce sera la Nuit aveugle, la grande Ombre  
Informe, dans son vide et sa stérilité,  
L'abîme pacifique où gît la vanité,  
De ce qui fut le temps et l'espace et le nombre." (3)

\*\*\*\*\*

"La vie est ainsi faite, il nous la faut subir.  
Le faible souffre et pleure, et l'insensé s'irrite;  
Mais le plus sage en rit, sachant qu'il doit mourir.  
Rentre au tombeau muet où l'homme enfin s'abrite,  
Et la, sans nul souci de la terre et du ciel,  
Repose, ô malheureux, pour le temps éternel!" (4)

However if we go farther in our analysis of Aeschylus as a source of stimulation for the fatalism and pessimism in Leconte de Lisle we find that in

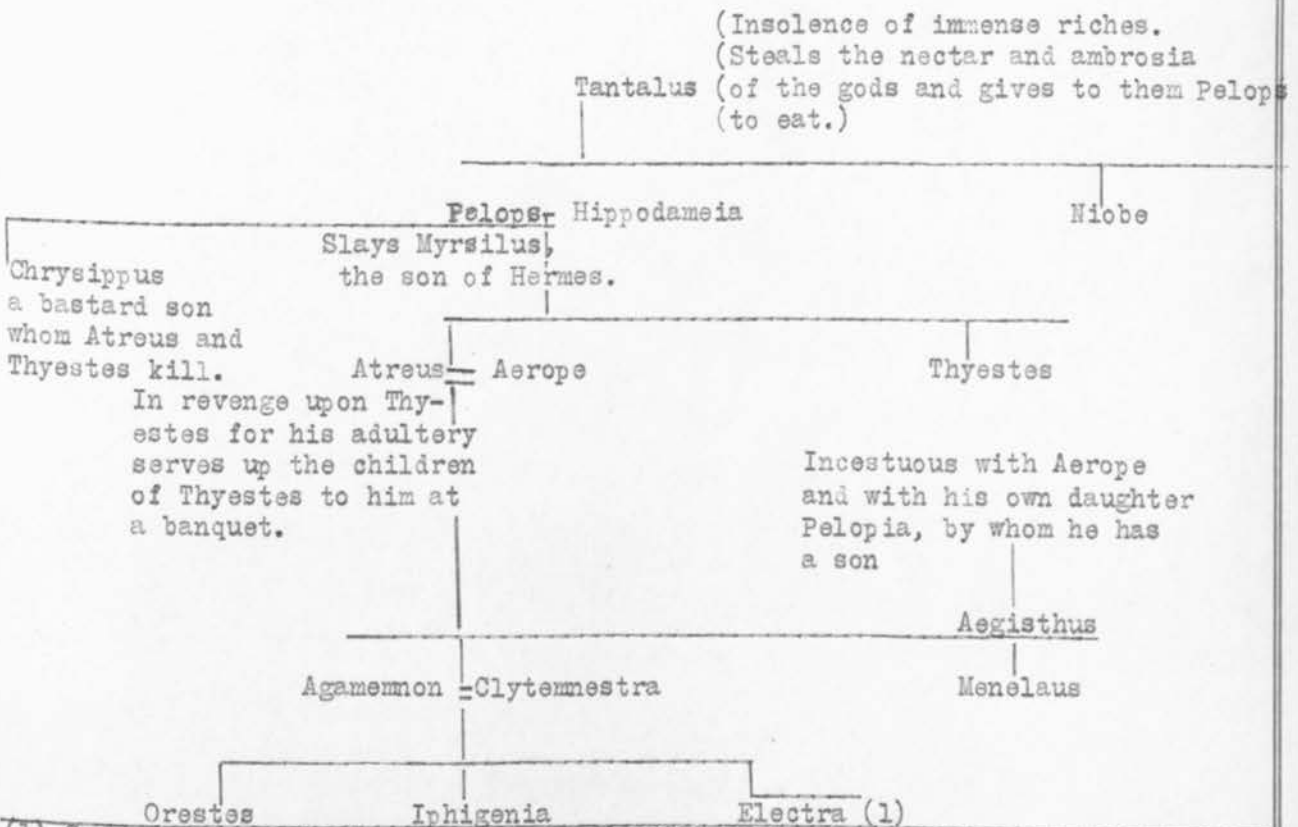
(1) Hypatie et Cyrille--Poèmes Antiques. Pg. 280-288-9  
(2) Poèmes Tragiques--L'illusion Suprême. Pg. 39  
(3) Poèmes Barbares, La Dernière Vision. Pg. 249  
(4) " " Requies. Pg. 260

him, the fundamental moral law of Nemesis, as a part of the divine government of the world, is set forth in three distinct manifestations. We find it expressed mythologically, as abstract and ideal, in the "Prometheus".....We find it expressed typically, as still ideal and almost superhuman, in the "Oresteia". Here a whole family is vitiated by the offence of their first ancestor. The hereditary curse is renewed and fortified from generation to generation, by the sins of the children, until at last a reconciliation is effected between the purifying deities and the infernal powers of vengeance. In the "Persoe" the same law is exhibited as a fact of contemporary history. It is from the vicarious suffering, the innocent being involved in the disaster of another, that Leconte de Lisle received incentive to an interpretation of this as blind fate.

It is in that great trilogy of the "Oresteia", the source of inspiration of "Les Érinnyes" that our chief interest lies. The pedigree of inherited crime and vengeance, as explained in the choruses of the "Oresteia", and as illustrated by the whole history of the Tantalidae, in this. The pride of wealth in the first instance swells the heart, and inclines its possessor to ungodly thoughts. This leads to impiety (τὸ δυσσεβές), and in the energetic language of the "Agamemnon" the arrogant man kicks with his heel against the altar of justice. A state of presumptuous insolence (ὕβρις) is the result of the original unholiness. And now the man, who has been corrupted in his soul, is ready for the commission of some signal crime. Até, or a blindness of the reason, which prevents him from foreseeing the consequences of his acts, is "the child of his presumption". Inspired by Até he sheds the blood of his brother, or defiles his sister's bed; and from this moment the seed is sown which will spring up and breed fresh mischief for each successive generation. After the spilling of blood the affair passes into the hands of the Erinnyes, whose business it is to beset the house of the guilty doer. They form the bloody

revel, which, though glutted with gore refuse to quit the palace of Atreus. They leap upon it from above, and rack it like a tempest. Yet from their power there is escape. The curse of the house works; but it works only through the impure. Should a man arise capable of seeing rightly and living purely, he may work off the curse and become free. Such a man was Orestes. The leading thought in this system of morality is that pride begets impiety, impiety produces an insolent habit of mind, which culminates in blindness; the fruit of this blindness is crime, breeding crime from sire to son. It is only when the righteous man appears who performs an act of retributive justice, in obedience to divine mandates, and without the indulgence of any selfish passion, that the curse is stayed.

The following diagram may serve to make more clear the descent of crime from generation to generation, and brings the story of Tantalus down to the events depicted by Aeschylus and Leconte de Lisle.



(1) Symonds, Greek Poets, Harpers, N. Y. 1880, Vol. II, Pg. 21  
 The preceding sketch on the Greek tragedy has been taken in substance from  
 Symonds, Greek Poets, Vol. II.

### III.

As indicated before, "Les Érinnyes" of Leconte de Lisle was inspired by the two first plays of Aeschylus' famous trilogy of "Agamemnon", the "Choe-phoras" or Libation Bearers and the "Eumeindes" or the "Furies". Although the play "Les Érinnyes" takes its name from the last play of the trilogy, the "Eumenides" yet no part of "Les Érinnyes" follows directly or indirectly in content any part of the "Eumenides". The most casual investigation reveals the "trilogy" as the source of Leconte de Lisle's work. But for the skeptical a careful consideration of the two sides will serve to remove all shadow of a doubt. Let us turn for a moment to act one.

Act one of "Les Érinnyes" corresponds almost exactly in context to "Agamemnon" of Aeschylus. Further, although the various scenes are not formally indicated in the Greek dramas, yet the different scenes in "Les Érinnyes" correspond almost exactly to the scene divisions of Agamemnon, as indicated by the entrance of new characters, (the common way of marking change of scene). The thought content of these various formal divisions is largely the same as well as the correspondence, in the scenes, in action and point of time. Furthermore Leconte de Lisle is historically true to the traditional story of Agamemnon as told by Aeschylus. In many places "Les Érinnyes" follows almost speech for speech the drama of Aeschylus, very much like a translation or a very close transcription. In others the divergence and variation of context is great, and correspondence of thought and general story is the only correspondence, without attention being given to the particular words of individual characters. Many times what is told by the chorus in Aeschylus will be given in dialogue form by the characters in Leconte de Lisle and vice versa. Leconte de Lisle's drama is much shorter than Aeschylus' work, giving in one drama of two acts what Aeschylus gives in two dramas. This is made possible by cutting out many choral passages; the chorus in Leconte de Lisle repeats and reiterates very little. The general result of this shortening is a tendency to greatly increase the

Et les yeux de l'enfance, et l'aurore, et la nuit;  
 Puis, dans l'ombre, un grand char qui m'emporte et s'enfuit;  
 Et l'injure, et les coups, et le haillon servile,  
 L'eau de la pluie après la nourriture vile;  
 Et toujours ce long rêve en mon coeur indompté,  
 Que je sortais d'un sang fait pour la liberté!  
 Et j'ai grandi; j'ai su les actions célèbres:  
 Ilios enflammée au milieu des ténèbres,  
 La gloire du retour, le meurtre forcené,  
 Et le nom de mon père, et de qui j'étais né!  
 Oh! quel torrent de joie a coulé dans mes veines!  
 Comme j'ai secoué mon joug, brisé mes chaînes,  
 Et, poussant des clameurs d'ivresse aux cieux profonds,  
 Vers la divine Argos précipité mes bonds!"(1)

For "la Poésie dans sa plénitude et dans son unité harmonique" need we look farther than the scene of Electra, her women and the Chorus of Choephorae at the tomb of Agamemnon?

"Pour tous ceux qu'il aime dans la vie éphémère,  
 Prie, ô noble Élektra, ton père vénéré;  
 Et les Dieux entendront ton appel éploré.

Élektra prend une coupe et s'approche du tombeau.

Hermès! prompt Messenger qui monte d'un coup d'aile  
 De la pâle Prairie où germe l'asphedèle  
 Jusques au pavé d'or des Princes de l'Aithèr,  
 A toi d'abord, Hermès, le vin pur du Kratèr!

Elle verse la libation.

Daimones très puissants, Rois de la terre antique,

(1) Les Erinnyes--Poèmes Tragiques. Pg. 211.

(Clytemnestra.)

"Thou wilt not kill me, son?

Beware thy mother's anger-whetted hounds."(1)

The above passages will serve to show sufficiently well after what manner Leconte de Lisle has followed his Hellenistic model. It is needless to indicate more of the large number that might be cited. "Les Érinnyes" is Hellenistic and Aeschylean in form. The chorus is employed in it in its traditional function, the tragedy being produced with musical accompaniment as was the case with the Greek drama. This is clearly done by Leconte de Lisle to make his work conform even more fully to the Greek norm. The characterization is Hellenistic. It follows the allegorical and historical interpretation of Aeschylus' time. That Leconte de Lisle has caught the "spirit" of Aeschylus is hardly to be denied. The twelve foot Alexandrine employed by so able a versifier as Leconte de Lisle serves very well to transliterate the classical verse of Aeschylus. Passage after passage from both authors might be sighted to show how Leconte de Lisle found in Aeschylus "la Poésie dans sa vitalité, dans sa plénitude et dans son unité harmonique", and how he put these qualities into his "Érinnyes".

In the words of Orestes on his return from exile when he finds his sister and ancestral home after long years of absence, we have "La Poésie dans sa vitalité".

"J'ai vécu dans l'opprobre et l'asservissement,  
 Ployant mon cou rebelle au joug d'un maître rude;  
 Mais d'anciens souvenirs hantaient ma solitude,  
 Mille images; un homme aux yeux fiers, calme et grand  
 Comme un Dieu; puis, sans cesse, un peuple murmurant  
 De serviteurs joyeux empressés à me plaire;  
 Des femmes, un autel, la maison séculaire,

(1) John Stewart Blackie. Lyrical dramas of Aeschylus "Choephorae". N. Y. E. P. Dutton, 1914.



And cease from evil-boding words."

(Agamemnon)

"A moi! je suis frappé mortellement. Infâme!(1)

"Oh, I am struck! struck with a mortal blow! (2)

\*\*\* \*\*

"Quand le meurtre a rougi la terre nourricière,  
Quel fleuve, ou quelle mer, a jamais effacé  
La souillure du sang aux mains qui l'ont versé?"

"Never may be pure again,  
So filthy hands with blood bedabbled  
All the streams of all the rivers  
Flow to wash in vain."

\*\*\* \*\*

(Le Serviteur)

"Au meurtre! on a tué le Maître! Accourez tous.

Malheur! Gardez la Reine, et tirez les verrous!"

(Servant)

"Woe's me! My murdered master!  
Thrice woeful deed! Aegisthus lives no more.  
Open the women's gates! uncase the bolts!"

\*\*\* \*\*

(Clytemnestra)

"Arrière!

Prends garde à toi, si tu n'écoutes ma prière.  
Crains d'entendre aboyer le troupeau haletant  
Des Spectres de l'Hadès! Mon cher fils, un instant!  
Non! Non! tu ne veux pas sans doute que je meure."(3)

(1) Leconte de Lisle, Poèmes Tragiques, Les Erinnyes. Act I. (3) Act II.  
Alphonse Lemerre, Paris.  
(2) John Stewart Blackie. Lyrical Dramas of Aeschylus "Agamemnon". N. Y.  
E. P. Dutton, 1914.

speed of the action although in neither case do we feel the action to be too slow or too fast. What has been said of the first act may be said with equal truthfulness of the last.

For the sake of having the means of textual comparison at first hand it may be well to quote some of the passages which show most directly Leconte de Lisle's following of Aeschylus; (we quote some of those passages where the translation or transcription is rather close.)

(Klytæmnestra)

"Elle reste muette et comme inanimée.

Je n'ai pas le loisir d'attendre, Esclave! Viens!

Les brebis, près du feu, bêtent dans leurs liens."

(Clytemnestra.)

"Come thou, too, in; this maid, I mean; Cassandra;

(Chorus)

"Captive maid,

Obey! thou shouldst."

Clytemnestra.)

"No time have I to stand without the gate

Prating with her. Within, on the central hearth,

The fire burns bright, the sheep's fat slaughter waiting."

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"Elle a, certes le flair d'un chien!

On dirait qu' elle sent l'odeur d'un meurtre ancien,

Ou qu'un souffle augural offense ses narines."

"She scents out slaughter, mark me, like a hound,

And tracks the spot where she shall feast on blood."

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"Malheureuse! tais-toi! ta parole est terrible."

"Hush, wretched maiden! Lull thy tongue to rest,



Qui siègez côte à côte en son ombre mystique,  
 Toi, Dieu terrible, et toi qui fais germer les fleurs,  
 O Déesse! écoutez le cri de mes douleurs:  
 Faites que l'Âtréide, errant dans l'Hadès blême,  
 Exauce le désir de son enfant qui l'aime!

Elle verse la seconde libation.

Maintenant, ô mon père, entends aussi ma voix,  
 Et, du fond de la Nuit irrévocable, vois!  
 Je gémiss, opprimée, et ton fils est esclave!  
 Ta demeure est aux mains d'un lâche qui te brave,  
 Qui tient ton lit, ton sceptre, et dévore tes biens.  
 O Vénéralde, entends mes prières! Oh! viens,  
 Viens! Se glorifiant du meurtre qui la souille,  
 Elle qui t'égorgea nous hait et nous dépouille.  
 Chère Ombre! sois terrible à ce couple pervers,  
 Et dresse le Vengeur promis à nos revers! (1)

Elle verse la troisième libation--Orestès sort du milieu des rochers.

Or the scene of Kallirhoè and Ismèna (the women attendants of Electra) and Orestes at the same tomb as the latter pours his libation as an offering for the successful avenging of his father's murder.

(Kallirhoè)

"La clémence est semblable à la neige des cimes,  
 Immortellement pure en ses blancheurs sublimes,  
 Elle rayonne au coeur des sages, ses élus;  
 Mais quand le sang la touche, il n'en disparaît plus:  
 La souillure grandit sans cesse, ronge, creuse,  
 Et la neige s'écroule en une fange affreuse.

(1) Les Érinnyes--Poèmes Tragiques--Pg. 207

O jeune homme irrité, laisse aux Dieux de punir!

(Ismèna)

Non! c'est dans le passé que germe l'avenir;  
 C'est la loi qui commande à la race perverse  
 Qu'un sang nouveau, toujours, paye le sang qu'on verse;  
 L'inevitable mal revient à qui l'a fait,  
 Et chaque crime engendre un plus sombre forfait.  
 Qu'importe la clémence à la Justice auguste?  
 Venge ton père, ami! car cela seul est juste." (1)

In these lines we find the expression of the Greek doctrine of Nemesis. It is at this point that Leconte de Lisle parts ways with Aeschylus and the Greeks. The doctrine of Nemesis was not all. Nemesis, retributive Justice, was all-important, but after that there was something else. There was a *Κάθαρσις*, a cleansing from sin, a purification from guilt, a saving grace. With Aeschylus we find this *Κάθαρσις* in the third drama of the trilogy, the "Eumenides". But for Leconte de Lisle the parting of the ways leads to no such *Κάθαρσις*, no such cleansings, no such salvation from guilt and sin and blood-stain. Where does it lead? We have the answer in the next lines.

"L'Infaillible a pesé ceux-ci dans sa balance,  
 Ce qui sera, sera. Tout est dit."(2)

This goes beyond the idea of retributive justice. "Tout est dit", is too pessimistic for Nemesis. It admits of no alternative, no *Κάθαρσις*. It is the blind "Fate" of Schlegel, impelling, driving on, "Ce qui sera, sera. Tout est dit." We feel it in words like these,

"Un malheur est caché dans l'ombre, je le crains.  
 Déesses, qui hantez les gouffres souterrains,  
 Faites ses derniers jours tranquilles et prospères!" (3)

(1) Poèmes Tragiques--Les Erinnyes Pg. 213-214

(2) " " " " Pg. 214

(3) " " " " Pg. 182

And even more openly in words such as,--

"Les Dieux

Ont ployé ton cou libre au joug injurieux;  
 Car il nous faut subir la sombre destinée,  
 Et c'est pour la douleur que notre race est née.  
 Les Dieux seuls sont heureux toujours." (1)

How like the attitude of the Romantic hero. We cannot but see the reflexion of Leconte de Lisle's times, "Le Mal du Siècle" in such words as the above. In spite of his Greek emulation and his Greek model he could not live entirely apart from his environment.

Nations rise and fall, great men come and go and ever "La Destinée" drives on, claiming her own.

"Puisque l'heure est venue, il convient d'être prompt;  
 La soif du sang me brûle, et le Destin m'entraîne."(2)

"She" is inevitable. The "Lot" must be fulfilled.

"Toi! tu vivrais ici, toi! qu'en diraient les Dieux,  
 Les hommes, la maison, nos enfants, nos aïeux?  
 Il faut mourir, il faut que le sort s'accomplisse."(3)

It was from the working of this "Sort" as Leconte de Lisle believed he saw it in his own life and times that he evolved the beginning of his whole pessimistic philosophy, "Nihilism". He has expressed it in these words in "Les Erinnyes."

"Quel homme peut se dire heureux sous les nuées?  
 Comme les grandes eaux qui s'en vont refluees  
 Et semblent disparaître à l'horizon dormant,  
 Les biens qu'on croit saisir reculent brusquement.  
 Nul ne peut retenir de ses mains inhabiles

(1) Les Erinnyes, Poemes Tragiques--Pg 191  
 (2) " " " " " 212  
 (3) " " " " " 228

Le tourbillon léger des phalènes mobiles.  
 Et nul aussi ne peut arreter dans son cours  
 Le torrent déchaîné des lamentables jours!"(1)

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And in the words of Electra just before the murder of her mother Clytemnestra,--

"Hélas! toujours l'attente, et l'angoisse et la haine!  
 Après la sombre veille un sombre lendemain,  
 Et jusques au tombeau toujours l'êpre chemin!  
 Qu' avons-nous fait, ô Zeus, pour cette destinée?  
 Quel crime ai-je commis depuis que je suis née?  
 Et mon cher Orestès, où donc est son forfait?  
 Nos pères ont failli; mais nous, qu'avons nous fait?  
 Si pour d'autres il faut que l'innocent pâtisse,  
 Qu'est-ce que ta puissance, ô Zeus, et ta justice?"(2)

Such words as these would hardly have occurred in a drama of Aeschylus.

Such a questioning of all powerful Zeus would have been a sacrilege not to be expressed even though it should enter the thoughts of the dramatist. These lines then, (with the many others already pointed out), lead me to my interpretation of the ultimate purpose of Les Érinnyes, an interpretation which it seems to me can hardly be avoided. The immediate aims of the dramatist have been pointed out;--to give a drama, purely Hellenistic, in form, inspiration, characterization, history, etc: to give to modern times a careful picture of the Mycenaean civilization, life, character, history and people; and to represent "la poésie dans sa vitalité, dans sa plénitude, et dans son unité harmonique". All these things Leconte de Lisle has done, if not always perfectly in every respect, at least very admirably well.

But beyond this, I believe Leconte de Lisle had another and, perhaps for

(1) Poèmes Tragiques--Les Érinnyes Pg. 195  
 (2) " " " " " 218-219

him, a larger purpose. He saw in the doctrine of Nemesis, Schlegel's doctrine of blind Fate and in "Les Érinnyes" (as already indicated) we have the workings as he saw them of that "Fate".

"L'Épée en main, le pied sur la rue immortelle,  
Douce à l'homme futur, terrible au dieu dompté,  
Elle vole, les yeux dardés droit devant elle,  
Dans sa grâce, sa force et sa sérénité!"(1)

It is at this point that Leconte de Lisle is no longer Hellenistic, that he ceases to be true to his Greek model and becomes modern. The two plays of "Agamemnon" and "Choephorae" were followed by a third, the "Eumenides" which was as much a part of the three as though it was a third act of a three act play. To have left out the third would have been to leave out an integral part. First came the crime, then the punishment, and then the cleansings, *κάθαρσις*. To leave out the last would have spoiled the whole. Such was the Nemesis theory. But with Leconte de Lisle there was no *κάθαρσις*. The blind "Fate" theory admitted of no alternative and of no cleansing, so the third part is left out in Leconte de Lisle and thus we have his interpretation.

The necessity of the blind fate theory admitting of no *κάθαρσις* is evident. For the Greeks the function of tragic drama was to appeal to our deepest sympathies and strongest passions, to arouse them, but at the same time to pacify them, and, as it were, to draw off the dangerous stuff that lies upon our soul,--to resolve the perturbation of the mind in some transcendental contemplation. This is what the greatest Greek tragedies achieve. There is in the very substance of almost all Greek tragedies a more obvious healing of wounds and restoration of harmony than this. So in the Eumenides we have the cleansing from sin. As John Stewart Blackie gives it in his "Lyrical Dramas of Aeschylus," --"according to Homer's idea, wherever there is a cry of righteous indignation,

(1) Derniers Poèmes,--La Fatalité. Pg 57.

rising up to Heaven from the breast of an injured person, there may be a "Fury or Furies."---It is not, however, on every petty occasion of common offence that these dread ministers of divine vengeance appear. Only, when deeds of a deeper darkness are done, do these daughters of primeval Night (for so Aeschylus symbolizes their pedigree) issue forth from their subterranean caverns. There is something volcanic in their indignation, whose eruption is too terrible to be common. They chiefly frequent the paths, that are dabbled with blood. A murdered father or a murdered mother especially, were never known to appeal to them in vain, even though Jove's own prophet, Appollo, add his sanction to the deed."

"An Orestes may not hope to escape the bloody chase, which the "winged hounds", invok'd by a murdered Clytemnestra, are eager to prepare--the sacred precincts of an oracular Delphi may only repel their intrusion--the scent of blood "laughs in their nostrils," and they will not be cheated of their game. Only one greatest goddess, in whose hands are the keys of her father's armory of thunder, may withstand the full rush of those vindictive powers. Only Pallas Athena, with her panoply of Olympian strength, and her divine wisdom of reconciliation can bid them be pacified. Like an unclean leper among the Jews, the man polluted with human blood wandered from land to land, as with a Cain's mark upon his brow, and every fellow-being shrank from his touch as from a living plague." So it was with Orestes. But there was purification.

"Under the ban of such a social excommunication as this the first act of readmission into the fraternity of human society was performed by the sprinkling of swine's blood on the exile."---Other pure libations were also necessary, especially water from the sacred stream of Achelous, in which stream alone purification could be found from the deeply-engrained guilt of matricide. "All this, however, availed only to remove the unhallowed taint, with which human blood had defiled the murderer. It was necessary, further, that he should be tried before a competent court, and formally acquitted, as having performed every atonement and



given every satisfaction that the nature of the case required. According to the consustudinary law of Athens, there were various courts in which different cases of murder and manslaughter were tried; but of all the courts that held solemn judgment on shed blood, none was more venerable in its origin, or more weighty in its authority, than the famous court of the Areopagus; and here it is accordingly, that, after being wearied out by the sleepless chase of his relentless pursuers, Orestes, with the advice and under the protection of Apollo, arrives to gain peace to his soul by a final verdict of acquittal from the sage elders of Athens, acting by the authority and with the direction of their wise patron-goddess, Athena."(1)

Such is the *Κάθαρσις*, Orestes is cleansed from guilt by the vote of the Aeropagites, and sent away free with the blessing of the goddess, Pallas Athena, and the promise of happiness and success in the future. Then the Goddess appeases the Furies, wins their favor, gains their promise of protection for the injured, gives them her blessing, receives their co-operation and sends them in peace of mind to their subterranean temple, conducted thither in festal pomp, with "beamy-twinkling torches."

No such *Κάθαρσις* in "Les Érinnyes". No such escape and forgiveness and freedom, from guilt for Orestes. After performing his last duty to his dead father and defiled ancestral house, even though prompted and advised by the god in the act, like the victim of "le mal du siècle", like the "Romantic hero" ~~h~~assesssed by inevitable, blind fate, driven on, ever on, he is haunted by the bloody eye of his murdered mother, "Les Érinnyes" howl around him, they rise up on all sides of him, he starts this way, that way, they throw themselves upon him, they bar the way. "Le sort s'accomplie." There is no escape!

"En verité, c'est un fourmillement

De spectres! et je suis traqué comme une proie!

L'épouvante me prend à la gorge et la broie!

(1) J. S. Blackie--Lyrical Dramas of Aeschylus. Pg. 135-6

Non, ce n'est point un songe, et je suis là debout,  
 Eveillé! Malheureux! C'est cela, je sais tout:  
 Ce sont Elles, ce sont les Chiennes furieuses  
 De ma mère!.....Pourquoi rester silencieuses?  
 A qui me montrez-vous de vos doigts décharnés,  
 O Louves de L'Hadès? Je vous attends, venez!  
 Vous ne vous trompez pas. C'est moi! Je l'ai frappée!  
 Voyez ce sang. La terre en est toute trempée.  
 Il m'inonde les pieds, il me brûle les mains,  
 Mais, quoi! vous le savez, ô Monstres inhumains,  
 Elle a tué mon père. Eh bien! J'ai fait justice:  
 La voici morte. Que l'abîme l'engloutisse,  
 Avec sa trahison, sa haine et sa fureur!  
 Ah! Ah! vous vous taisez, Monstres!

Horreur!

Horreur!"(1)

There is much more that might be said of "Les Érinnyes" in comparing it with its Greek models. It has been necessary to do little more than mention the general effect of the shortening of the drama, the cutting out of choral parts and the other changes necessary to make its playable on the French stage. Little has been said about the melodrama in it and its relation and similarity to the Romantic plays. It has of course been the main purpose to point out the Hellenistic elements and to show Leconte de Lisle's broad line of departure with respect to Nemesis and Fatalism. These characteristics it is believed have been made sufficiently clear. In leaving "Les Érinnyes" let us quote a few lines from Prof. Vianey's comment upon it in his "Les Sources de Leconte de Lisle."  
 "Moins familier, plus pompeux, plus uniforme dans sa couleur, plus uniforme aussi dans son mouvement, ce style rappelle surtout celui d'Eschyle par sa plasticité

(1) Poèmes Tragiques--Les Érinnyes--Pg. 233e234



et sa sonorité. Mais il a ces qualités, si importantes dans la poésie eschyléenne, à un degré merveilleux, et rien, dans notre littérature dramatique, ne vaut peut-être pour la grande allure du vers certains couplets des 'Érinnyes'.(1)

Thus we have the realization of Leconte de Lisle's ideal, "la Poésie dans sa vitalité, dans sa plénitude et dans son unité harmonique."(2)

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(1) Les Sources de Leconte de Lisle, by Joseph Vianey, Montpellier, 1907  
Coulet et Fils Ed. Pg. 317.

(2) Derniers Poèmes, Préface des Poèmes Antiques--Pg. 218.

#### IV.

We have seen that in spite of the pessimistic fatalism which is so fundamental and predominant in "Les Érinnyes" that we have nevertheless a work which is thoroughly Hellenistic; that we have in this work a praiseworthy representation of Greek primitive civilization and an exemplified expression of some ideals of poetic art and beauty. But it is to L'Apollonide, written some years later, where Leconte de Lisle is less occupied with pessimistic fatalism, that we must turn to find his more complete, more perfect, fuller panegyric of Greek life, civilization, art and setting forth of the Greek ideal of beauty. Let us consider for a time this lyrical poem. The reasons why Leconte de Lisle went to the "Ion" of Euripides for the source of his "L'Apollonide" are well expressed by M. Vianey.

"Si j'abords l'étude des poèmes grecs de Leconte de Lisle par celle de son 'Apollonide', c'est qu'il y a donné les raisons de cette admiration jamais lassée pour le génie hellénique qui, jusqu'à la fin de sa carrière, le ramena si souvent à l'école de la Grèce."

"L'Apollonid<sup>e</sup>" est imité de l'Ion d'Euripide, poète à qui l'on ne s'attendait guère que Leconte de Lisle empruntât un sujet. Euripide avait sans doute un titre à sa sympathie, celui d'avoir été un contempteur des dieux; mais les dieux contre qui Euripide exerça sa verve malicieuse sont les seuls dieux qui aient trouvé grâce aux yeux de Leconte de Lisle. Et quelles différences entre les deux génies! Euripide est le plus pathétique des poètes anciens, et Leconte de Lisle a horreur de la passion qui s'étale. Euripide se moque de la composition, faisant lui-même à l'occasion la critique de ses pièces, et Leconte de Lisle ne prend rien plus sérieux que son art. Euripide met souvent sa personne en scène dans un genre qui prescrit pourtant au poète de s'effacer derrière ses héros, le genre dramatique, et Leconte de Lisle, même dans un genre qui semble pourtant exiger ces confidences, le genre lyrique, s'ingénie à dérober les secrets de son cœur. Il ne semble donc pas qu'on puisse découvrir entre les deux poètes

de bien grandes affinités. Mais aussi, quand il a emprunté à Euripide le sujet "d'Ion", Leconte de Lisle a-t-il été attiré par la légende elle-même, et non par la façon dont son modèle l'avait traitée."(1) Thus there are great differences between Euripides and Leconte de Lisle in manner of handling of the legend (subject matter).

The story is about as follows. Creusa, daughter of Erectheus, king of Athens, was seduced by Apollo, by whom she had a son. She abandoned the child whom the god rescued and had reared at Delphi in his temple. Later she married Xuthus, grand-son of Aeolus; he was a stranger but his arms had saved Athens. They have no children, and have come to consult the oracle at Delphi in the hope that Apollo will give them an heir. Apollo makes the promise to Xuthus, that the first person who meets his eyes upon leaving the temple shall be his son. This happens to be Ion, whom Xuthus with overflowing joy claims as a son, supposing him to be the result of some illegitimate relationship which he had had at Delphi on some previous feast occasion. But Creusa fearing this same thing, enraged with grief at the thought of the loss of her own divine son and the passing of her kingdom into stranger hands secretly plans to kill Ion. This she plots with an old man one of her former husband's faithful attendants. Between them it is plotted to poison Ion at the feast which is to be given in his honor at his departure. The old man gains entrance, and under pretense of honoring the new house of Ion, offers a toast to him, and pours the wine into the special cup for him to drink. Meanwhile the sacred doves from the temple, Ion's friends and daily companions, fly around. One drinks from the cup,--falls dead--a tumult is at once rampant--the old man and Creusa are seized at once and condemned to death. Meanwhile, Ion seeks to kill Creusa, his would-be assassin. He hunts her to the temple where she takes refuge. But as he is about to lay hands on her the "Python Goddess of the

(1) Les Sources de Leconte de Lisle, par M. Joseph Vianey. Pg. 298-9

Oracle" interposes. She speaks to mother and son and places before them the "child relics" and bids them search. They do so,--Creusa recognizes "Ces Souvenirs d'enfance" as they are taken out of the basket where they have been kept so long. Thus mother and son claim their own and find happiness. A strange light appears in the temple. The sanctuary opens, the twelve muses are visible and then the glorification of Athens, and the future of the race of Ion.

Such then, is, in the main, the story of Ion as told by Leconte de Lisle and before him by Euripides and other Greek writers. It has been suggested that Leconte de Lisle went to Euripides for the legend and not because Euripides' purpose and manner of recounting it were especially to his liking. They were not. But he did find in the Ion of Euripides a legend which he could handle to express admirably well his glorification of and admiration for the Greek race, and his conception of "La Beauté" as exemplified in the Hellenistic civilization. It was to Aeschylus rather than to Euripides that Leconte de Lisle turned for his model of form and we shall find as we continue that although the legend is borrowed from Euripides the form follows that of Aeschylus.

That Euripides was out of grace with Leconte de Lisle is quite evident from his words in the "Préface des Poèmes Antiques"; and the reasons why will become clear from a brief consideration of Euripides' position among the Greek poets. We will investigate the "Préface" to determine his attitude and then Euripides' time for the cause and justification of that attitude.

We find in the "Préface" these words;---"Depuis Homère, Eschyle et Sophocle, qui représentent la Poésie dans sa vitalité dans sa plénitude et dans son unité harmonique, la décadence et la barbarie ont envahi l'esprit humain. En fait d'art original, le monde romain est au niveau des Daces et des Sarmates; le cycle chrétien tout entier est barbare." And in this period of decadence Leconte de Lisle puts Euripides. He goes on to tell, speaking of

the various writers since Greek times, how, ignorance of mythical traditions and the positions of special characters in their successive epochs have led to radical mistakes. Greek and Latin theogonies have been confused, and, finally ---"Des idées et des sentiments étrangers au génie homérique, empruntés aux poètes postérieurs, à Euripide surtout, novateur de décadence, spéculant déjà sur l'expression outrée et déclamatoire des passions, ont été insérés dans une traduction dialoguée du dénouement de l'Odyssée; tentative malheureuse, où l'abondance, la force, l'élévation, l'éclat d'une langue merveilleuse ont disparu sous des formes pénibles, traînantes et communes, et dont il faut faire justice, dans un sentiment de respect pour Homère." Here we have Leconte de Lisle's estimate of Euripides' grievance, the source of his disapprobation and his invective against him. And it is not without grounds. But let us see just what was Euripides' position and what were the causes of his innovations and short comings.

As seen before, to Aeschylus, the setting forth of the working of "Nemesis" was fundamental and all important. To him "the presentation of the moral law conceived by him is of even more importance than the exhibition of the characters of men controlled by it," says Symonds. This is not the case with Sophocles. He fixes our attention upon the *ἁμαρτία*, or error of the guilty man, interests us in the qualities by which he was betrayed into sin, and makes us feel that suffering is the inevitable consequence of arrogant or wilful acts. The weakness of the offender is more prominent in Sophocles than the vengeance of the outraged deity. Thus, although there is the sternest religious background to all the tragedies of Sophocles, our attention is always fixed upon the humanity of his heroes.---It is quite impossible by any phrases or mere criticism to express the admiration which every student of Sophocles must feel for the profundity of his design, for the unity of his art, and for the firmness with which he has combined the essential religious doctrines of



Greek tragedy with his own ethical philosophy.

In passing to Euripides we feel how much we have lost. The religious foundation has been broken up; the clear intuitive morality of Sophocles has been exchanged for sophistry, debate, hypothesis, and paradox. In the delineation of character he wavers; not because he could not create well-sustained types, since Medea, Hippolytus, and many other Euripidean personages display sublime and massive unity;-but because, apparently owing to the rapid development of the dramatic art and the speculative ferment of the age in which he lived, he was more interested in the creation of plots and situations, in the discussion of vexed questions, and in the critical rehandling of apparently exhausted motives, than in the exhibition of the truly tragic *ἦθος*. The praise bestowed on him by Aristotle as being *τραγικώτατος*, proves that his contemporaries had recognized this source of both his weakness and strength.

But Euripides was a true product of his age, and if we seek to comprehend his position in relation to his predecessors, we must consider the changes which had taken place in Athens between the period of the Persian war and that in which he flourished. --- Between Aeschylus and Sophocles there is a wide chasm in religion, politics, and art; between Sophocles and Euripides, again, there is a chasm in religion, politics, art, and philosophy.---In the first place, Athens had become the center of progressive thought. Teachers of rhetoric and reasoning made her wrestling-grounds and gardens the scene of their disputes and lectures.---Sophists who taught the arts of life for money and philosophers who subjected morals to ingenious analysis, and explained away on scientific principles the ancient myths of Greek nature worship, combined to disturb ethical and religious traditions. Thus we see, in many respects, a close parallel to Leconte de Lisle's own age, which he so despised. ----A more solid, because more reasoned, morality was springing up perhaps. A purer monotheism was being inculcated. But meanwhile the old Hellenic customs and the



fabric of mythic theology were undermined. It could not but be that the poets of the day should participate in these changes.

In the second place, the Athenian populace had grown to be supreme in two departments--the high parliament of State and the law-courts. 'Every Athenian was now far more than formerly an orator or judge of orators, an advocate or judge of advocates. Two passions possessed the popular mind: the passion for the assembly with its stormy debate and pompous declamation; the passion for the dikastery with its personal interests, its problems of casuistical law, its momentous tragedies of private life, its studied eloquence. Talking and listening were the double function of an Athenian citizen. To speak well on every subject, so as to gain causes in the courts;--to criticise speeches with acumen, so as not to be deluded by specious arguments: these were the prime accomplishments of an Athenian youth of promise. It is obvious that a very peculiar audience was thus formed for the tragedian--an audience greedy of intellectual subtleties, of pathetic situations, of splendid oratory, of clever reasoning--an audience more appreciative of the striking than the true, of the novel than the natural.

Finally, and even more decadent from the Greek ideal of moderation in all things, and therefore more repulsive to Leconte de Lisle, the Athenians had waxed delicate and wanton since the Persian war. When Aeschylus began to write, the peril of utter ruin hung like a stone of Tantalus over Hellas. That removed, the Greeks breathed freely. The Athenians, growing in wealth and power, neglected the old moderations of their ancestors. Youths who in earlier days would have fared hardly now drove their chariots, backed their fighting-cocks, and followed their own sweet will.---The poet of the day could no longer be austere like Aeschylus, or sedate like Sophocles.---In all these changes Euripides partook. He belonged essentially to his own day. As far as a tragic dramatist can be the mouthpiece of his age, Euripides was the

mouthpiece of Athenian decline. For this reason, because he so exactly expressed the feelings and opinions of his time, which feelings and opinions produced a permanent national habit of mind, Euripides became the darling of posterity. Aeschylus was the Titanic product of a by-gone period; Sophocles displayed the pure and perfect ideal; but Euripides was the artist who, without improving on the spirit of his age, gave it a true and adequate expression.

Thus it was that Euripides, a poet of very distinguished originality, saw that he must adapt his dramatic style to the new requirements of his audience and give them what they liked even though it were not good for them. The sophistic arguments, the strained situations, the law-court pleadings, the pathetic touches, the meretricious lyrics, the philosophical explanations, the sententious epigrams, the theatrical effects, which mar his tragedies, were deliberate innovations on the old pure style. Euripides had determined to bring tragedy home to the hearts and understandings of the spectators. All the peculiarities of his art flow from this one aim. This is the secret of what may be described as his romantic realism, his two fold appeal to sympathy by the invention of startling incident and by the faithful delineation of vulgar life and common character.(1)

Such was the age of Euripides. And because he found in Euripides the expression of the Athenian decline it was to Aeschylus that Leconte de Lisle turned for pure, unadulterated art. He saw in the decadence of the age of Euripides a parallel to his own age. And as he turned from his age to that of the Greeks so he turned to Aeschylus and not to Euripides to find his perfect norm of guidance. Thus we can account for the changes which Leconte de Lisle introduced into his "Apollonide" and see why though borrowing his legend from Euripides he chose to use it in his own way, to express by it his own particular ideal. Because in Aeschylus he found the representation and the realization of

(1) This sketch has been taken in substance from J. A. Symonds' "Greek Poets" Vol. II. Pg. 2, 3, 5, 6, 7 and 8.

that ideal it was to him he turned for his model.

What has previously been said concerning the form of "Les Érinnyes" can be said with almost equal truthfulness about "L'Apollonide". The correspondence in action and story between the "Ion" and "L'Apollonide" is very close. Leconte de Lisle follows almost act for act and scene for scene the Greek model, and many times even speech for speech. In final plot or legendary incidents he is true to the Greek model. Only in the attitudes of some characters, namely Creusa and Ion did Leconte de Lisle make some alterations to make them conform more closely to his ideal. In Euripides it is the old man who first works up Creusa's wrath. She is already perplexed, grieved, and at her wit's end and calls to the old man, her husband's faithful servant, "What must I do? The wretched can devise no wholesome counsel." To which he replies, "On the God who wronged you first wreak your vengeance" and "slay at least the boy." It is he who urges her on when she is weak or in doubt. While in Leconte de Lisle's "L'Apollonide" it is Creusa who subtly spurs on the old man by an appeal to his honor and his love for her father's and ancestor's house and race.

"Quoi, vieillard! je verrais, d'une âme lâche et vile

Cet Étranger, siégeant, sceptre en main dans ma ville!"

This change gives Leconte de Lisle an opportunity to make of Creusa the kind of character he wants. And soon we find in her a more compassionate, a more changeable, a more human Creusa than in Euripides. Perhaps we may say a more modern Creusa. She repents her rash action, has compassion on the innocent boy and wishes she had not plotted his death. The thought of the Erinnyes, too, seems to recall her to reason.-----

"Ce meurtre est lâche,

Il mettra sur mon nom une longue souillure."

We find no such repentance in Euripides, no return to reason. Creusa is relentless and full of hate and curses. The chorus sings on the guilt of

Xuthus and Creusa's wrath. So too, in *Leconte de Lisle* it is a nobler, more moderate, less passionate, Ion than in Euripides. True he sought to kill his mother because he thought her guilty, because he felt it his duty, because the gods commanded. But above all he was Greek and not Romantic. See him in Euripides.

"Cephisus, O thou awful sire, who bear'st  
The semblance of a bull, what viper's this  
Thou hast begotten, or what dragon darting  
Flames most consuming from her murderous eyes!

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Seize her! Parnassus' rocks shall tear away  
The graceful ringlets of her streaming hair,  
When headlong from its summit she is thrown."

No such inordinate outburst of passionate rage from the Ion of *Leconte de Lisle*. Such a one would have been like the Romantic hero whom he so despised.

Furthermore, *Leconte de Lisle's* use of the chorus in *L'Apollonide* is very splendid and in this he is Aeschylean. From the time of Aeschylus down, the position and predominance of the chorus diminished as plot and other innovations grew in import. With Euripides the function of the chorus was very much curtailed. In *Leconte de Lisle* it has regained much of its traditional importance. He has been felicitous indeed, in the very beautiful and effective use of the chorus singing counter-parts to Ion. This is especially true of the opening scene, part one, and scene seven part three, as well as many others. In these we find too in the lyrics of Ion, "le lyrisme dans sa pureté." Scene seven, part three is surprisingly well done. It seems to me *Leconte de Lisle* has far outdone Euripides, who has employed a long speech by Mercury. *Leconte de Lisle* is more Greek than Euripides himself. Throughout this work he has gained beauty, and "vitality, fulness and harmony" the three-fold requisite

which he found in Aeschylus, Homer and Sophocles, replacing many of Euripides' dialogues with exquisite lyrical passages. We may repeat, that though borrowing his story from Euripides he has modeled his form and verse after his purer and more perfect ideal, Aeschylus, and thus has been able to make Ion more nearly the personification of his ideal of Greek beauty, simplicity, consistency strength, grandure, as exemplified in "Things Greek."

Ion was the son of a God, and that God was Apollo, and as such he is the personification of "le génie Grec."

Troisième Sacrificateur.

"Le quadrigé hennit, l'éclair sort de l'essieu,  
Et tout flamboie, et tout s'illumine d'un Dieu,  
Les monts, la mer joyeuse et sonore, les plaines,  
Les fleuves et les bois et les cités Hellènes!

Choeur des Sacrificateurs

Strophe

Toi qui mènes le choeur dansant  
Des neuf Muses ceintes d'acanthés,  
Iô! Salut, Resplendissant!  
Prophètes aux lèvres éloquents!

Antistrophe

Sur le monde immobile encor  
Dormait l'Obscurité première:  
Iô! La vie et la lumière  
Ont ruisselé de tes yeux d'or!

Épôde.

Tu vois naître et mourir les races fugitives,  
Tu fais chanter l'oiseau dans son nid parfumé,  
Et sous les antres frais germer les sources vives.

Salut, Roi du ciel enflammé!" (1)

In the words of Ion as he performs his morning duties in the sacred temple of Loxias Apollo we have a panegyric of Greek plastic art, of Greek beauty "chaste et pure."

Strophe

"O Laurier, qui verdis dans les Jardins célestes  
 Que l'Aube ambrosienne arrose de ses pleurs!  
 Laurier, désir illustre, oubli des jours funestes,  
 Qui d'un songe immortel sais charmer nos douleurs!  
 Permits que, par mes mains pieuses, ô bel Arbre,  
 Ton feuillage mystique effleure le parvis,  
 Afin que la blancheur vénérable du marbre  
 Eblouisse les yeux ravis!

(Il suspend le rameau de laurier au-dessus des bandelettes et va puiser de l'eau dans une des roches creuses, avec la coupe d'or.)

Antistrophe.

O sources, qui jamais ne serez épuisées,  
 Qui fleuez et chantez harmonieusement  
 Dans les mousses, parmi les lys lourds de rosées,  
 A la pente du mont solitaire et charmant!  
 Eaux vives! sur le seuil et les marches Pythiques  
 Epanchez le trésor de vos urnes d'azur,  
 Et puisse aussi le flot de mes jours fatidiques  
 Couler comme vous, chaste et pur!"(2)

(Il fait une libation sur les marches du Temple.)

Everything in this scene seems to bespeak the chastity and purity and whiteness of the temple and the marble. And Ion too, in "et puisse aussi le flot de mes jours fatidiques, couler comme vous, chaste et pur!", expresses the golden mean

(1) Derniers Poèmes, L'Apollonide Pg. 90  
 (2) " " " Pg.92-93



of Greek moderation.

For lyric passages, hardly excelled in their "vitalité, plénitude et harmonie"; their serenity, smoothness, effulgent beauty; for stage settings admirably adapted to the possibilities and limitations of the theatre of Aeschylus, we need not go farther than to L'Apollonide. We regret we can only indicate here, a few of such passages of which there are many more; each one radiant with that "génie" and "beauté" which Leconte de Lisle so emulated and so successfully reproduced for us. Part two, scene one, entire.--Crausa and the Old Man. She tells him the story of how the God Apollo seduced her in her youth; of the birth of Ion.

J'allais, foulant les herbes douces,  
Éveillant l'oiseau dans les mousses  
Avec mes rires ingénus;  
J'entrelaçais en bandelette  
L'hyacinthe et la violette;  
Dans l'eau vive qui les reflète  
Je baignais mes pieds blancs et nus."

Part two, scene four.---"Les Juges Pythiques, Nymphes Créades, à courtes tuniques vertes, couronnées de fleurs sauvages; Hommes, Femmes et Jeunes Filles de Pythô" gather to say farewell to Ion and to sing their last praises to him.

"La fleur de l'aubépine aux fronts,  
Cher jeun homme, nous accourons  
Du sommet des monts solitaires,  
Du fond les bois pleins de mystères  
Où bondissent nos pieds errants,  
Du bord des lacs et des torrents  
Où boivent les grands cerfs nocturnes  
Qui brament aux cieux taciturnes.

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Salut! et que le choeur dansant des Oréades

Rejoisse tes yeux une dernière fois!"

Ion is the ideal and the favorite of the temple, the object of love and veneration of the judges, the nymphs, the birds, the women, the men and the "Jeunes filles" of Pytho.

Part two, scene five.---All the above characters are gathered in "la tente du festin" beautifully and elaborately decorated and adorned for the festival. The farewell ceremonies are held. Ion is crowned with ivy. They drink his health, The old man offers him the cup in honor of his house. The temple-doves fly around his head. He says farewell and addresses them.

"Doux oiseaux, colombes fidèles,  
Qui veniez, au matin, de vos battements d'ailes  
Effleurer mon front endormi,  
Salut! N'espérez pas qu'un temps si cher renaisse.  
O compagnes de ma jeunesse,  
Vous ne verrez plus votre ami."

And later, after the poisoning trick has been discovered,---

"Oh Loxias! rends-moi la paix de tes autels!  
Garrantis-moi du thrône et des honneurs mortels!  
Rouvre tes bras divins, et que je vive et meure  
Sans haine et sans regret dans ta sainte demeure!"

Part three, scene one.---Creusa and her women in the temple of Pytho. Creusa bemoans her miserable fate and longs for her sacred Hellas.

"Salut, ô beau ciel, ô lumière,  
O collines de la Hellas!  
Et toi qu'abrita la première  
Le Bouclier d'or de Pallas,  
Qui resplendis parmi les hommes

Du nom sacré dont tu te nommes.  
Athènes, salut! Je t'aimais,  
Berceaux des aïeux, Ville sainte!  
Que les vents te portent ma plainte!  
Je t'ai quittée, et pour jamais."

Do we not feel these words of Creusa coming longingly and passionately from the lips of Leconte de Lisle himself? Do we not find in this apotheosis, all the veneration, the passion of feeling, the intense and ever acute longing of the poet himself for that ever beloved Hellas?

Part three, scene five.---Creusa and Ion in the temple examine the humble "corbeille" of Ion's infancy. Ion discovers his mother, and, Creusa her son.

Part three, scene seven, (entire)---Ion and Creusa in the temple look forward to a new life.---"Une lumière rose emplit peu à peu le Sanctuaire." Ion perceives the strange and wonderful light. "Le temple frémit doucement." An ambrosial perfume of lilies and myrrh is in the air.---"Va-t-il nous apparaître un Dieu?" "Les neuf Muses, vêtues de blanc, coiffées de mitres d'or et de couronnes de laurier, apparaissent, planant dans une nuée éclatante." Ion asks,---

"Qu'êtes vous, ô formes sublimes?

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Que vous êtes grandes et belles!

Salut, pleines de majesté!"

The first Muse replies,---

"Nous sommes les Vierges sacrées,  
Délices du vaste univers,  
Aux mitres d'or, aux lauriers verts,  
Aux lèvres toujours inspirées."

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Ephemeral and anxious man is everywhere illuminated by our flames, and sometimes we rejoice, with our immortal songs, even dark Hades and her souls. Ion trembles with respect. The second muse speaks.---

"A travers la nue infinie  
 Et la fuite sans fin des temps,  
 Le chœur des astres éclatants  
 Se soumet à notre harmonie.  
 Tout n'est qu'un écho de nos voix:  
 L'oiseau qui chante dans les bois,  
 La mer qui gémit et qui gronde,  
 Le long murmure des vivants  
 Et la foudre immense et les vents,  
 Car nous sommes l'âme du monde!"

"La lumière s'accroît. Le fond de la scène s'ouvre. Peuple de Pythô. Armée de Kouthos. A l'horizon, vision éclatante d'Athènes, telle qu'elle sera dans l'avenir: Acropole, Parthenon et statue géante de Pallas, la lance en main. Temples, Port, Trirèmes."

Ion sees it in wonder and astonishment. The third Muse speaks.---

"Enfant! tu vois la Fleur magnifiques des âges,  
 Qui s'épanouira sur le monde enchanté,  
 La Ville des héros, des chanteurs et des sages,  
 Le Temple éblouissant de la sainte Beauté.  
 Tu donneras ton nom à ces races nouvelles;  
 Et, dans un chant divin qui ne doit plus finir,  
 Apollonide Ion! Nos lèvres immortelles,  
 Diront ta jeune gloire aux siècles à venir.

Salut, Rayon tombé de la Lumière antique,  
 Aïeul des Rois futurs, Éphèbe aimé des Dieux!

Poursuis, Enfant sacré, tes destins glorieux,  
 Et, délaissant ton nid, loin du Rocher Pythique,  
 Jeune Aigle, envole-toi vers de plus larges cieux!"

Of the entire play this last scene is the most important, and perhaps there is nothing in Leconte de Lisle's entire work which so clearly states his high veneration for art, "L'art pour l'art," --beauty, poetry, the Muses; the purpose and position of poetry with respect to mankind, his evaluation of Hellas, and her gift to mankind and to all ages. This scene is hardly surpassed for its delicacy of conception and lyric beauty. The Muses are sublime, sacred, grand, beautiful, full of majesty;--the delight of all times and all the universe. Their inspired lips give to the otherwise ephemeral works of mankind the spark which makes them ring out and live and become immortal. Without the muses, without inspiration there is no poetry; all works are ephemeral. Across the flight of time and the limitless universe the choir of the "ast~~ers~~ éclatants" is submitted to their harmony. All poetry, all music, all song, all inspiration, whether of the birds, the sea, the storm, the winds or the voice of mankind is but the echo of their voice. "The Muses are the soul of the World."

As for Hellas, sacred Hellas. She is the Flower of the ages, which will blossom for all time o'er the enchanted world. Hers is the city of Heroes, of Singers, of Sages, Hers the Temple resplendent of Sacred Beauty. And what is her destiny? She will give her name to other and new races. Apollonide Ion, the personification of Greek genius, all times will sing in song divine your glory, and your renown. Immortal lips with song unceasing will proclaim it to the future centuries. Your glorious destinies are not for one age, one people, one time, but for all times, all peoples, all ages. Your name is for larger skies, for Immortality.---Such, then, is Leconte de Lisle's high estimate of the function of the muses, and the place of art and beauty. Such is his exalted conception of Greece's gift to the world and all peoples.

Leconte de Lisle followed directly upon Hugo's banishment. Hugo was the great formulator and master of the Romantic school. Leconte de Lisle was the leader of the Parnassians, and between the two there were very great differences. The three fundamental tenets of the Parnassians were impersonality, return to antiquity, and stress of form. As Abry gives it in his "History of French Literature,"--"Ce nom, Les Parnassiens, était donc, à l'origine, plutôt une étiquette fortuite, que le signe de ralliement d'une école. Pourtant ces poètes très divers reconnaissaient pour leur maître Leconte de Lisle, et il y avait, dans leur façon de comprendre l'art, certains traits communs. I. L'Impersonnalité Relative. D'abord, au contraire des Romantiques, ils ne voulaient pas donner leur cœur en pâture à la foule. II. L'Art et La Science. A l'inspiration lyrique et sentimentale ils substituent une inspiration savante et intellectuelle. Ils sont capable de s'intéresser à la nature pour elle-même, et non plus uniquement par rapport à eux. Un paysage n'est pas seulement un état d'âme; il a sa réalité propre. Le passé qui, pour les Romantiques, était souvent une vision hâtive de l'imagination, est l'objet d'une reconstitution probe et exacte d'après les données de l'histoire. III. Le Souci de la Forme. Le poète se distinguera du savant parce qu'il poursuivra le beau en même temps que le vrai. Les Parnassiens veulent l'art impeccable jusque dans les moindres détails de la technique. C'est à ce culte de la forme qu'on pense surtout lorsqu'on parle des Parnassiens."

These three points are of importance to remember in this paper; first,-- because they are fundamental with the Parnassians and Leconte de Lisle was chief of the Parnassian school; second,---because all three elements, as has already been pointed out and illustrated, are repeatedly brought out in Leconte de Lisle's poetry which contains the Hellenistic elements which show his return to antiquity. Impersonality and stress of form are pure Greek and are



apparent in almost every poem Leconte de Lisle wrote.----And here it may be well for the sake of clearness to say just a word about this impersonality and what the author of this paper intends the word to connote. There can be little doubt to any careful student of French poetry what the word is to mean when used in connection with Leconte de Lisle. Used in speaking of Greek art it may be less clear. With Leconte de Lisle, impersonal verse was that verse which through the most rigid exaction allowed as little as possible of the poet's feelings, emotions, passions, sensual life to find expression in his works; this as paradoxically opposed to the inordinate assertion and exploitation of the "ego",---of the poet's "moi" as practised by the Romanticists. With respect to the Greeks, although not going as far as this, it means much the same. The Greeks to whom Leconte de Lisle turned for his ideal, sought the golden mean in all things. The ideal could not be immoderate, excessive, inordinate. It was the realization of the mean in art as well as in life. Such an ideal, of necessity leads to impersonality in art and poetic expression. It admitted of no exploitation of the "moi". It lead to calm, rigid, moderation, restraint, and thus to impersonality. The Greek art "par excellence" was sculpture. Their admiration for this form of art was reflected in their poetry which in turn became sculptural and plastic in form and thus more impersonal. It is such an "impersonality" that we must understand in this paper.-----

But to resume,---the return to antiquity is evident in many poems, in addition to Greek impersonality and perfection of form, through the Greek subject matter, the expression of Greek ideals, the poetic imitation of Greek art, and the emulation of Greek life and "things Greek" in general.

Thus we see that the three fundamental tenets of the Parnassian school, whatever other art they may have reflected, were first of all Greek. Those poems of Leconte de Lisle which do not express Greek ideals, reveal Greek life or deal with Greek subject matter are, in large part, nevertheless,

Hellenistic through their attention to perfection of form, or because they are Hellenistic in their impersonality. This is beyond a doubt true of a large number, indeed most of the poems from Indian sources, which though, as indicated, take the material for their subject matter from India are nevertheless largely Hellenistic in form, impersonality and manner of handling.

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VI.

Although we find an expression of Leconte de Lisle's Hellenism throughout his works perhaps it is nowhere so complete as in "Les Poèmes Antiques", which we can read, shut our eyes and think we are away from "Les Siècles Maudits" and back in reality as well as imagination to the past ages, the Golden Ages of Greek and Latin predominance of culture.

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Perhaps we find no better expression of Leconte de Lisle's idealization and worship of Beauty than in his poem Hypatie. Hypatie, the virgin heathen philogopher of Alexandria, equally famous for her wisdom and beauty was torn to pieces by the Christian rabble in 415 A. D. This poem exemplifies Leconte de Lisle's worship of beauty. "Beauty", says Renan, "is a gift so superior that talent, genius, virtue itself, are nothing in comparison with it."

(Souvenirs Ch. VI. 6)

"Dors, ô blanche victime, en notre âme profonde,  
Dans ton linceul de vierge et ceinte de lotus;  
Dors! l'impure laideur est la reine du monde,  
Et nous avons perdu le chemin de Paros.

"Les Dieux sont en poussière et la terre est muette:  
Rien ne parlera plus dans ton ciel déserté!  
Dors! mais vivante en lui, chante au coeur de poète.  
L'hymne mélodieux de la sainte Beauté!

"Elle seule survit, immuable, éternelle.  
La mort peut disperser les univers tromblants,  
Mais la Beauté flamboie, et tout renaît en elle,  
Et les mondes encore roulent sous ses pieds blancs!"

Here we have the expression of the place of beauty. Beauty is sacred,

sainted. After all else is dead she alone survives and will continue to survive, unchangeable, eternal. Death may disperse the trembling universes, which are after all unsubstantial, temporal, ephemeral; but Beauty, "Sainte Divine, Sacrée Beauté", blazes forth after all else; everything is reborn in her and the worlds again roll under her white feet.

But it would seem that Leconte de Lisle found the fullest, the most perfect expression of his ideal of Beauty in the Greek art and culture which, (as we have said before), he so much admired and loved, and exploited and eulogized to such a degree, especially in his "Poèmes Antiques". For Leconte de Lisle, the Venus of Milo (that famous and remarkable statue from the island of Delos, Greece, which he must have often seen in its auspicious location in the Louvre galleries,) seems to embody his ideals of Greek Beauty and in this poem is taken as a symbol of such.

"Marbre sacré, vêtu de force et de génie,  
 Déesse irrésistible au port victorieux,  
 Pare comme un éclair et comme une harmonie,  
 O Vénus, ô beauté, blanche mère des Dieux!

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"Tu n'es pas Aphrodite,.....  
 Tu n'es pas Kythérée,.....  
 Et tu n'es pas la Muse,.....  
 La pudique Vénus, ni la molle Astarté.

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"Du bonheur impassible ô symbole adorable,  
 Calme comme la mer en sa sérénité,  
 Nul sanglot n'a brisé ton sein inaltérable,  
 Jamais les pleurs humains n'ont terni ta beauté.

Then Leconte de Lisle bursts forth in an impassioned cry of regret for

the past centuries of Greek glory, Greek culture, Greek beauty and purity.

"Îles, séjour des Dieux! Hellas, mère sacrée!  
 Oh! que ne suis-je né dans le saint Archipel  
 Aux siècles glorieux où la Terre inspirée  
 Voyait le Ciel descendre à son premier appel!

Then man was in harmony with the Heavens, the Gods. The Gods were attuned to man's ideal of beauty. The first call of man's poetic genius was answered by the Gods and man and Gods together united their genius to produce for all, in lasting Parian stone, a symbol, of their ideal of Beauty and Purity and Perfection. But these things are no more. No more is there the harmony between Gods and man. No more do the Gods answer man's first call. But as a symbol to man of his fall,---as a remembrance of what once was, there remains spotless and unstained in her purity and beauty the "Vénus de Milo."

"Si mon berceau, flottant sur la Thétis antique,  
 Ne fut point caressé de ton tiède cristal;  
 Si je n'ai prié sous le fronton attique,  
 Beauté victorieuse, à ton autel natal;

"Allume dans mon sein la sublime étincelle,  
 N'enferme point ma gloire au tombeau soucieux;  
 Et fais que ma pensée en rythmes d'or ruisselle,  
 Comme un divin métal au moule harmonieux."

Thus as a consolation for his lot the poet entertains the hope that, in him at least, the sublime spark of poetry may be kindled; that his worship of the beautiful, the perfect, the sublime, may spare his glory from the anxious tomb, and even that his thought may flow in rhythms of gold as the Divine metal in the harmonious mould. Thus his worship and admiration for the Greek ideal, his harmony of feeling for Greek beauty he hopes, may lead him to some production worthy of Divine approbation, worthy of the eulogy of the Goddess.

Leconte de Lisle did not see in Hellenism the goal that can be reached, but rather an ideal which one may cling to as a consolation, even though one's yearnings be over-hung with the tragic consciousness of unfulfillment. It was in reaction against the present age and that religion which created it that "de Lisle" turned to the beauty of Greece and the perfection of its arts.

Leconte de Lisle's style is sculptural and the results which are produced are like plastic works of art. With the ancients beauty for beauty's sake in art, and art for art's sake, had always been a worthy aim. We find Gautier following the Greek tradition in his *Émaux et Camées*. The very name suggests the form. In his *Premier Sourire du Printemps* his flowers are like flowers of jade in vases of onyx. In *L'Art*, a poem of marble, in form, we have the expression of the whole principle, "L'Art pour L'Art." Leconte de Lisle followed and out-did Gautier and his plastic verse. As Prof. Petit de Julleville says, "Leconte de Lisle est un 'ouvrier' difficile, patient et consommé. Fermée peut-être au moins aux mélodies légères, son oreille a surtout aimé le son plein et grave, le noble eurythmie de l'alexandrin. Statuaire amoureux de la ligne, de la forme pure, il enferme l'idée dans un contour sans défaut." This is Greek, I believe. "Rappelons-nous", he goes on to say, "sans qu'il soit besoin de la citer ici, car elle est partout, la pièce classique de Midi:

"Midi, roi des Étés, épanou sur la plaine." "Ciseleur attentif, et méticuleux, il ne souffre ni la négligence, ni l'à peu près, ni les bavures. On retrouve chez lui, mais avec autrement d'ampleur et de beauté, quelque chose de la bonne conscience, de la poésie et de la prosodie rigoureuses de Malherbe. Peintre, il s'acharne et il réussit à saisir, à mettre en valeur le détail expressif et juste qui donne seul la couleur et la note vraies.

We have not far to look to find this perfection of verse and form in Leconte de Lisle. It is everywhere, in every poem, regardless of the subject matter. Whether he tells of *Le Sommeil du Condor*, or *La Panthère Noire*;



whether he writes of nature, the universe, as in *Midi*, *Juin* or *Nox*; whether he describes *Dies Irae*, *Les Siècles Maudites*; whether he is cursing the Middle Ages; whether he is exploiting Brahman philosophy and longing for a Nirvana; whether he is telling of the Norse heroes or picturing an Indian jungle; whether he is falling full-force with his fiery invective upon the Christian religions or simply reveling in Greek mythology or among the Greek Gods and Heroes we have the same classic, the same Hellenistic impersonality, the same perfection of verse, the same poetic exactness of form and expression.

We have Gautier's *Émaux et Camées* reproduced and multiplied in Leconte de Lisle's *Poèmes Antiques*, the majority of which are Greek both in form, inspiration, ideal and subject matter. The nine poems of "*Odes Anacréontiques*" are poems of the cameo type. Delicate little poems of nine to twenty lines each they are like a case of rare jewels, sparkling with brilliancy; cameos of various colors and shades of berl, onyx, jade or coral; like a case of ivory carvings, or a shelf of Greek Tanagras. Again they seem like nine paintings, miniatures, in delicate colors, or of white ivory. Notice the names:--  
*Les Libations*, *La Coupe*, *La Tige D'Oeillet*, *Le Souhait*, *La Cavale*, *Le Portrait*, *L'Abeille*, *La Cigale*, *La Rose*.

"Prends ce bloc d'argent, adroit ciseleur.  
 N'en fais point surtout d'arme belliqueuse,  
 Mais bien une coupe élargie et creuse  
 Où le vin ruisselle et semble meilleur.  
 Ne grave à l'entour Bouvier ni Pléiades,  
 Mais le chœur joyeux des belles Mainades,  
 Et l'or des raisins chers à l'œil ravi,  
 Et la verte vigne et la cuve ronde  
 Où les vendageurs foulent à l'envi,  
 De leurs pieds pourprés la grappe féconde.

Que j'y voie encore Évoé vainqueur,  
 Aphrodite, Éros et les Hyménées,  
 Et sous les grands bois les vierges menées  
 La verveine au front et l'amour au coeur." (La Coupe.)

Here we have not only fourteen lines of classic French verse in perfect sculptured form, but a series of pulsating pictures of Greek life. Greece lives for us again in her charm. As Professeur Petit de Julleville says "Leconte de Lisle donne à ses restaurations laborieuses toutes les apparences, tous les signes extérieurs de la vie." That is exactly what he has done here. We do not seem to see static, motionless, lifeless Greece, an unearthed Greece, but rather a resurrected, a living Greece. "On lui a reproché, à tort, croyons-nous" says Professeur Julleville again speaking of de Lisle, "d'y mettre plus d'art que d'émotion." There is much art here. We accept that. But the emotion, because it is quiet and sweet and restrained is none the less sincere and profound.

Again in *Le Vase*, an exquisite little poem, Leconte de Lisle gives us a whole series of pictures of Greek life and gives the whole a realistic modern setting. The traveler has received a Greek vase from a shepherd and as in admiration he turns the vase, he tells us of the life there represented. A moving picture, a panorama display, a gallery of miniatures of Greek life, all on the curves of a Greek vase. The traveler having told his story receives his "chef-d'oeuvre", at the price of a great fresh cheese, and a full goat, and goes on his way rejoicing. Notice the simple beauty of the lines and the pictures.

"Reçois, pasteur des boucs et des chèvres frugales,  
 Ce vase enduit de cire, aux deux anses égales.  
 Avec l'odeur du bois récemment ciselé,  
 Le long du bord serpente un lierre entremêlé

D'hélichryse aux fruits d'or. Une main ferme et fine  
 A sculpté ce beau corps de femme, oeuvre divine,  
 Qui, du péplos ornée et le front ceint de fleurs,  
 Se rit du vain amour des amants querelleurs.  
 Sur ce roc, où le pied parmi les algues glisse,  
 Trainant un long filet vers la mer glauque et lisse,  
 Un pêcheur vient en hâte; et, bien que vieux et lent,  
 Ses muscles sont gonflés d'un effort violent.  
 Une vigne, non loin, lourde de grappes mûres,  
 Ploie; un jeune garçon, assis sous les ramures,  
 La garde; deux renards arrivent de côté  
 Et mangent le raisin par le pampre abrité,  
 Tandis que l'enfant tresse, avec deux pailles frêles  
 Et des brins de jonc vert, un piège à sauterelles.  
 Enfin, autour du vase et du socle Dorien  
 Se déploie en tous sens l'acanthé Korinthien.  
  
 "J'ai reçu ce chef-d'oeuvre, au prix, et non sans peine,  
 D'un grand fromage frais et d'une chèvre pleine.  
 Il est à toi, Berger, dont les chants sont plus doux  
 Qu'une figue d'Aigile, et rendent Pan jaloux."

As we read on in Leconte de Lisle's *Poèmes Antiques* we can imagine ourselves going through the Louvre galleries. There seems to be no end of pictures, of objects of art and indeed we seek no end, only time to go on. We proceed with expectancy, each turn, each unexplored gallery brings us upon something new, and refreshing and delightful. In "*Médailles Antiques*" we are examining with pleasure the surfaces of a case of Greek medals. Leconte de Lisle has even gone so far as to imitate in name the Greek and Roman forms in his *Buccolliastes* and *Églogue* where he has reproduced quite truthfully the ancient

spirit. In "Études Latines" we are again in the gallery of exquisite miniatures. Now we are sure Leconte de Lisle has been reading Horace and Tibullus when he writes verses entitled *Lydie*, *Lyde*, *Glycère*, *Néere*, *Pyrrha*, *Lydia* and the others.

"Lydia, sur tes roses joues,  
Et sur ton col frais et plus blanc  
Que le lait, coule étincelant  
L'or fluide que tu dénoues.

"Le jour qui luit est meilleur:  
Oublions l'éternelle tombe.  
Laisse tes baisers de colombe  
Chanter sur tes lèvres en fleur.

"Un lys caché répand sans cesse  
Une odeur divine en ton sein:  
Les délices, comme un essaim,  
Sortent de toi, jeune Déesse!

"Je t'aime et meure, ô mes amours!  
Mon âme en baisers m'est ravie.  
O Lydia, rend-moi la vie,  
Que je puisse mourir toujours!"

Reading this it would not be hard to believe you were reading Horace or Tibullus himself.

It seems that no study of the Hellenistic elements in the poetry of Leconte de Lisle would be quite complete without some mention of the Alexandrian poets in whose works Leconte de Lisle must have found very much to delight him. As M. Vianey says, "S'il est un poète chez qui l'on ne s'étonne point que, Leconte de Lisle ait beaucoup puisé, c'est assurément ce Théocrite qu'il est devenu banal de comparer à nos Parnassiens. Cet amour si vif de la nature qui est comme

l'âme de ses idylles, son sentiment du réel, son art épris de concentration qui sait ramasser tant de choses dans un cadre restreint, l'ingéniosité de ses plans, tout attirait vers lui Leconte de Lisle, et notre poète a bien souvent cédé à cet attrait." Indeed, some fifteen or twenty of "Les Poèmes Antiques" are more or less inspired by Theocritus. Of this number we will here mention only seven which are hardly more than translations. "Le Vase, Les Plaintes du Cyclope, L'Enfance d'Héraklès, La Mort de Penthée, Héraklès au TMAureau, Le Retour d'Adonis, and Symphonie."

Perhaps even more clearly has Symonds in his "Greek Poets", described the charm of these Greek idyllists. "I cannot refrain from once more recommending all lovers of pure verse and perfect scenery to study the Greek idyllists upon the shores of the Mediterranean. Nor would it be possible to carry a better guide-book to the statue-galleries of Rome and Naples. For in the verses of Theocritus, Bion and Moschus, the aesthetic principles of the Greeks in the age to which our relics of their statuary for the most part belong, are feelingly and pithily expressed; while the cold marble, that seems to require so many commentaries, receives from their idyllic coloring new life." It was just this "pure verse and perfect scenery" that attracted Leconte de Lisle and it was his desire to recreate the life of these "Idyllists" that led him to translate their verse and endeavor to fuse into his own, those same "aesthetic principles", that same "feeling and idyllic coloring", and this is what he has done for us in his "Poèmes Antiques".

It is perhaps in some of his longer poems that we find a fuller expression of Leconte de Lisle's understanding of the Greek ideal and his expression of Greek life. Indeed in his "Préface des Poèmes Antiques", we find Leconte de Lisle making special mention of three of these longer poems, in the following words,---"Trois poèmes, 'Hélène, Niobé et Khirôn,' sont ici spécialement consacrés à l'antiquité grecque et indique trois époques distinctes....."

'Hélène' est le développement dramatique et lyrique de la légende bien connue qui explique l'expédition des tribus guerrières de l'Hellade contre la ville sainte d'Ilios. 'Niobé' symbolise une lutte fort ancienne entre les traditions doriques et une théogonie venue de Phrygie. 'Khirôn' est l'éducateur des chefs Myniens. Depuis le déluge d'Ogygès jusqu'au périple d'Argo, il assiste au déroulement des faits héroïques." "But poetry can hardly live in an atmosphere of mere negation," says John Bailey, (in his book on the Claims of French Poetry), speaking of Leconte de Lisle's bitter, invective against the peoples and religions of the Middle Ages and his own age. "And it is pleasant to turn from all this to another side of the poet's work in which again like Arnold, his fine culture found its utterance, not in scorn of the present, no longer in anything negative at all, but in the nobly positive task of creating for his own day what he knew and loved so well, the serene and beautiful life of the ancients. For Leconte de Lisle the classical idyll is, like the Southern and Eastern landscapes, a way of escape from Europe and the nineteenth century. And here he is a master on his own ground, and if he had only known it, his most effective criticism of the life of his contemporaries is not to be found in any of his attacks on them, but in those returns to the antique, in which he indirectly shows them a simpler and more excellent way. Perhaps there is nothing so Greek in modern literature except the Hellenics of Landor."

Leconte de Lisle lived much among the Greeks and thus was able sympathetically to interpret their life and this the more because he loved it. His beautiful Glaucé and still more beautiful Khirôn have the reserve of fine sculpture. These two Greek idylls are so beautiful in sound of verse and so graceful in the interpretation of our debt to Greece that they can never want readers. Glaucé is the familiar tale of the sea nymph who prays the shepherd to share her immortality; but he is the servant of Pan and Cybele and has escaped all the darts of Eros.



"O Nymphe! s'il est vrai qu'Éros, le jeune Archer,  
 Ait su d'un trait doré te suivre et te toucher;  
 S'il est vrai que des pleurs, blanche fille de l'onde,  
 Étincellent pour moi dans ta paupière blonde;  
 Que nul Dieu de la mer n'est ton amant heureux,  
 Que mon image flotte en ton rêve amoureux,  
 Et que moi seul enfin je flétrisse ta joue;  
 Je te plains! Mais Éros de notre cœur se joue,  
 Et le trait qui perça ton beau sein, ô Glaucé,  
 Sans même m'effleurer dans les airs a glissé.  
 Je te plains! Ne crois pas, ô ma pâle Déesse,  
 Que mon cœur soit du marbre et sourd à ta détresse,  
 Mais je ne puis t'aimer: Kybèle a pris mes jours,  
 Et rien ne brisera nos sublimes amours.  
 Va donc! et, tarissant tes larmes soucieuses,  
 Danse bientôt, légère, à tes noces joyeuses!...  
 Nulle vierge, mortelle ou Déesse, au beau corps,  
 N'a vos soupirs divins ni vos profonds accords,  
 O bois mystérieux, temples aux frais portiques,  
 Chênes qui m'abritez de rameaux prophétiques,  
 Dont l'arome et les chants vont où s'en vont mes pas,  
 Vous qu'on aime sans cesse et qui ne trompez pas,  
 Qui d'un calme si pur enveloppez mon être  
 Que j'oublie et la mort et l'heure où j'ai du naître!  
 O nature, ô Kybèle, ô sereines forêts,  
 Gardez-moi le repos de vos asiles frais;  
 Sous le platane épais d'où le silence tombe,  
 Auprès de mon berceau creusez mon humble tombe,

Que Pan confonde un jour aux lieux où je vous vois  
 Mes suprêmes soupirs avec vos douces voix,  
 Et que mon ombre encore, à nos amours fidèle,  
 Passe dans vos rameaux comme un battement d'aile!"

"One might be looking, as one reads these lines," says Mr. Bailey, "at such a picture as the 'Arcadian Shepherds moving their flocks by night' of that fine and most Hellenic artist, Edward Calvert. There is, indeed, an added something of sympathetic tenderness, rarer among the Greeks than in a world which cannot escape from Christianity: and the poem is rather Alexandrian than Attic, as modern imitations of Greek generally are: but, for the rest, it is Greek in its simplicity, in its atmosphere, as it were of primary emotions, in its beautiful directness, ease and distinction."

Leconte de Lisle has left a good many of these idylls; *Kybèle*, *Niobé*, *L'Enfance d'Héraklès*, *Thyoné*, *Hylas* and others. The finest of all is perhaps *Khiron*, where we have a picture that might come from one of Pindar's Odes, of Orpheus sent by the Argonauts to the aged Centaur to ask him to join them in their voyage. Orpheus finds him in the cave of Pelion, with the young Achilles at his side. Chiron tells Orpheus of his youth before he sinned against the Gods and how he has since sought to expiate the fault. Orpheus is then told of the outcome of that famous voyage and his own approaching fate and so he returns to those that sent him. Then we have their reception of him, his hero's blessing and disappearance. Some critics think one can hardly find anything parallel to this in the same order of beauty.

Our handling of "Les Poèmes Antiques" would hardly seem complete if in leaving them some mention were not made of Leconte de Lisle's translations of the Greek and Latin classics. At various times throughout his life from 1861 to 1885 he translated the works of Theocritus, and Odes Anacréontiques, Homer, Hesiod, and Hymnes Orphiques, Aeschylus, Horace, Sophocles, Bion, Moschus and

Euripides. These works remain not only as a faithful testimonial of his industry, his true and unreserved love for these artist creations from the unsullied sources of literary art which he so continually and laudably refers us to, but as a distinct gift and contribution to the literary treasures of his people and all peoples. Such is the opinion of most critics.

It has been objected by some, however, that his translations were not sufficiently literal. No poet of Leconte de Lisle's greatness could restrict himself to a slavishly literal translation such as is so often the work of unimaginative, unpoetic pedants. He has done something far better and greater than this and something more truly representative. Alexander Fraser Tytler in his "Essay on the Principles of Translation" has thus defined a good translation. "That in which the merit of the original work is so completely transfused into another language, as to be as distinctly apprehended and as strongly felt, by a native of the country to which that language belongs, as it is by those who speak the language of the original work." Thus though compelled in his work at times by abject need, yet was Leconte de Lisle never untrue to his ideal, or his poetic genius, and in giving to the world translations such as the above he has brought to his own and our time the unsullied source and made Greece live again in her youthful splendor, her naturalness, simplicity and beauty.

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## VII.

The pessimism in the poetry and the life of Leconte de Lisle is so closely and inseparably linked with the various other elements that it cannot be neglected. It forms an integral part of his complete philosophy as expressed nearly everywhere in his works. Furthermore its importance can still better be appreciated when we remember that in spite of the fact that it was the worship of the beautiful and the ideal, as he found them in his Hellenistic sources that continually saved him from the inevitable, ultimate, and logical out-come of his nefarious pessimistic "nihilism", yet, through a misinterpretation of a certain fundamental Greek element, namely "Nemesis", Leconte de Lisle did find ample food for feeding his fatalistic tendency which is after all only one form or one stage in the development of a complete "Nihilistic Philosophy" such as he expressed so unceasingly.

If there were time here to trace the origin and complete development of Pessimism in Leconte de Lisle's life and the parallel expression of this tendency in his works as I believe it might be worth while to do, we might follow some such out-line as this:----

I. Pessimism, Fatalism, Nihilism, Nirvanaism in Leconte de Lisle. (see many poems for illustration.)

1. Youthful impressions and predispositions.

- a. Île de Bourbon.
- b. Youthful sorrows.
- c. Not understood by parents and associates.

2. Early tendencies towards pessimism.

- a. College at Dinan.
- b. First expression of dislike for society.
- c. Return to Île de Bourbon.

3. Life in Paris. Further pessimistic tendencies.

- a. Materialism of his age.
  - b. Social and Civil revolutions.
  - c. Bitter disappointments, loss of faith.
4. Indian Philosophy--expressive of Leconte de Lisle's feelings, strikes a note in harmony with his experience.
  5. Greek Fatalism plus the philosophy of Taine and his time, finds ultimate and complete expression in the Nihilistic philosophy of the Buddhists, "Nirvanaism."
  6. The "End" of such a Philosophy.
  7. The "Saving Grace".
    - a. The Ideal of Beauty.
    - b. This latter, Hellenistic.
  8. Leconte de Lisle more of a Greek than a Buddhist.
  9. Conclusion.
    - a. "Pluralité des Moi dans l'individu.
    - b. Life of Action and Idealism does not lead to suicide in reality even though a Nirvana is sought sincerely in metaphysical speculation.

There is, however, hardly time for such an extensive discussion as the following of this outline in all its parts would involve. It must here suffice to touch only the main points of importance, those perhaps which bear a particular relation to the Hellenistic elements.

There can be little doubt of the influence of certain childhood impressions and predispositions upon Leconte de Lisle's later pessimism. In later years when asked to write down certain points which might serve in a way as a guide to the understanding of the formulation of his "Poetic Muse", Leconte de Lisle in his reply particularly emphasized the importance of the "Milieu". Thus his milieu being of a most brilliantly unusual nature, we are sure it exerted a

profound influence on his works. Leconte de Lisle, we have reason to believe was misunderstood as a child, and this led to youthful sorrows. He was not, therefore, a companionable sort of child and was thus wont to spend much time alone and with Nature. Witness the reflexion of this tendency in his later life in many ways, in his dislike for society, in his remarkable and unparalleled nature poems in his love of the free exultant love of Nature in the Greeks. It was also the contemplation of a tropical nature, vast, wild, majestic, which at the same time that it brought him close to God, took him away from humanity, and caused that depreciation of the value of the individual much as we find it in the Buddhistic philosophy.

We find the first expression of Leconte de Lisle's pessimism and his dislike for society perhaps in the words of a letter from his uncle, Le Maire de Dinan to his father at Bourbon. "Charles était accusé d'affecter un mépris sauvage pour tout ce que l'on est convenu de respecter dans la société; son caractère est froid, inégal." It must be borne in mind that these are the words of a proud mayor of a small city, a man little sympathetic with the young Charles. There are, however, other evidences of this tendency. But to believe that Leconte de Lisle was at once the thorough-going pessimist that we find him in his later works such as "L'Illusion Suprême" is a most severe mistake which unfortunately some pretenders to the title of literary critic are wont to make. Indeed, an investigation of his life as a student at Rennes shows very plainly that in spite of the above statement from his uncle Leconte de Lisle did go out into society not a little, that he was an ever frequenter of the theatres and concerts and that he enjoyed these acts of a social being very much. We have already observed that many of Leconte de Lisle's most noble verses are absolutely free from pessimism. This is notably true of a large proportion of his "Poèmes Antiques" and also of "L'Apollonide." That he was in early life a firm believer in Christianity, Social Justice, Liberty and



Charity, his own words and actions testify. Indeed, in 1840 he went so far as to found a review, "La Variété", to champion Christianity, and called upon Chateaubriand to aid him and his "rédacteurs". As M. Tiercelin has said, "Les Marches de l'autel, on le voit, furent ainsi les premiers degrés que franchit le jeune poète pour arriver au fouriérisme, au buddhisme, au panthéisme et au naturalisme. La charité et la fraternité chrétiennes furent son premier idéal; il a aimé le catholicisme autant qu'il devait le haïr plus tard, et cela servirait à justifier ses amis et ses exécuteurs testamentaires d'avoir voulu l'ombre de la croix pour sa tombe et pour son oeuvre, puisqu'ils lui firent des obsèques religieuses et qu'ils ont publié son poème "La Passion". Ne faut il pas ajouter aussi que ses haines s'étaient bien atténuées à la fin et que, dans ses derniers vers, Jean Dornis, a voulu voir 'un acte de foi'. On peut dire sans exagération que "La Variété" fut, de toute manière, un véritable acte de foi religieuse". (1) And again M. Tiercelin says, "Quand j'ai parlé du Catholicisme de Leconte de Lisle, je n'aurais pas eu le droit d'être aussi affirmatif, si je n'avais pu que lui prêter les croyances que voulait défendre sa Revue; mais j'en trouve à toutes les pages l'expression personnelle, sans qu'il soit possible d'en nier la sincérité. Ce qui frappe dans tous ses poèmes de cette époque, ce sont ses convictions religieuses, très ardentes. Pour Leconte de Lisle, alors le progrès de l'humanité est lié au christianisme; c'est des yeux de Jésus qu'a jailli 'l'aurore du monde'; c'est 'son sang sacré qui a fécondé l'avenir'; c'est lui qui a doté 'la frêle humanité',---

Des rayons de l'amour et de la liberté

Et de l'immortelle espérance.

Les mots 'Dieu, ange, prière, foi, espoir divin, impiété, soleil de Dieu, espérance, azur divin, âme immortelle, but sacré, oeuvre divine, temps religieux,' tombent tout naturellement de sa plume. La prose de Leconte de Lisle

(1) Louis Tiercelin, Bretons de Lettres. Pg. 119, 121-123. Paris, 1905, Honoré Champion, Ed.

est plus nette encore que ses vers et trahit la ferveur de son christianisme."(1)

M. Tiercelin in the first of the above quotations made mention of "La Passion" of Leconte de Lisle. It is important in this connection and especially for an understanding of his pessimism, before going on to a further development of which, let us consider it briefly. We find prefaced to the publication of "La Passion" in "Derniers Poèmes", the following note.---"La Passion fut composée par Leconte de Lisle, à la demande d'un peintre de ses amis, pour accompagner les quatorze tableaux d'un chemin de la croix. Le Poète adopta les divisions consacrées, et soumit son oeuvre impersonnelle aux exigences religieuses." As we study "La Passion" we must ask ourselves just how impersonal this poem was and how rigidly he submitted it to religious exigencies. Let us turn for instance to the fifth "station" entitled "Simon le Cyrénéen aide Jésus à porter sa Croix". It seems almost entirely unbelievable that Leconte de Lisle could have written this "Cinquième Station" of "La Passion" had he been the pessimist, the believer in nihilism that he is claimed to be. The philosophy of Nihilism and Fatalism is absolutely and diametrically opposed to the "Doctrine of Redemption". In matters so personal as the acceptance or the non-acceptance of Redemption it seems quite unlikely that even Leconte de Lisle could have been sufficiently impersonal to write the verses beginning--

"Simon! toi qui prêtais ton épaule et tes bras  
 Au Rédempteur du monde,---  
 Heureux es-tu, Simon,---  
 Car nul ne peut toucher à la croix éternelle  
 Sans que Grâce ou Vertu s'éveille et sort d'elle!"(2)

to the end of the fifth "station".

These are not ordinary verses. The sentiment is in no wise ordinary. It

(1) Louis Tiercelin, Bretons de Lettres. Pgs. 119, 121-123. Paris, 1905. Honoré Champion Ed.

(2) Derniers Poèmes. La Passion. Page 188.

is an impassioned, personal expression of the meaning, of the significance of Redemption and the Cross to an individual. There is nothing dogmatic about it. Furthermore Leconte de Lisle would not have had to write these verses. They are added and are not essential to the story of Simon the Cyrenean. Thus it seems there is reason to believe that this is not as impersonal as the Editors suggest it may be, and is an argument against a fundamentally Nihilistic Philosophy in Leconte de Lisle's thinking. It is an argument for a kindlier, more sympathetic, more humanitarian character, and manner of thought. And such a humanitarian, kindly man those who knew Leconte de Lisle best, knew him to be. That we have Nihilism and much of it in Leconte de Lisle no one would successfully attempt to deny. The documentation is against it. That Nihilism and Fatalism predominate in much of his works I would not deny. But to say that there is little or nothing else in his poetry, as many writers would lead the casual reader to think, is wholly and absolutely false. There is much, very much else and if we would fairly comprehend Leconte de Lisle we cannot discount it or ignore it.

If we turn to the "sixième station",---"Une femme pieuse essuie le visage de Jésus", here in what contrast to Simon the Cyrenean, do we not find the pious woman Berenice. Simon, though little understanding and not voluntarily he aided the Christ, yet was he blessed because he helped in the time of suffering, because he brought aid to the Lord and bore his Cross with Him. How much more blessed shall you be Berenice! How much fuller and sweeter shall not your blessing be, for,---

"Tu courus, Bérénice!

Tes faibles bras, reidis par ton saint dévouement,

Écartèrent les flots de ce peuple écumant;

Parmi les chevaliers qu'irrite ton audace,

Ardente, irrésistible, enfin tu te fais place!"(1)

(1) Derniers Poèmes, La Passion. Page 183.

"Oh woman, who among this ungrateful and traitorous people, alone, dared to wipe the forehead of the Divine Master,---Bérénice before, but in the Heavens Véronique! Blessed be the transport of your heroic soul. ---You shared half of the burdens of your God."(1)

"Dès lors, le Rédempteur bénissant ton courage,  
A ce voile pieux attacha son image."(2)

"You did without fear for your dying Master  
What no other of them all had yet dared to do."(3)

"Elle brûlait en toi, cette flamme sacrée  
Qui remonte plus vite à Celui qui la crée!" (4)

And again,---

"L'Amour, l'amour sauveur, l'ardente charité  
Te couronne aujourd'hui dans l'immortalité,  
O courageuse femme, et t'inonde de gloire,  
Et l'homme de ton nom parfume sa mémoire."(5)

These are not the words of an atheist. These are not the feelings of a rank pessimist, nor is this the spirit of an ardent nihilist. Neither can these verses be wholly impersonal. They are not impersonal. I cannot believe them to be other than sincere. Leconte de Lisle was above all else sincere. He could not, even for the sake of a series of tableaux, have written anything which rings as true as does this and yet, was impersonal, insincere, in short, contrary to his convictions. There is but one explanation. When Leconte de Lisle wrote these verses he was not yet the thorough-going pessimist and nihilist which he later became. He was still more fully under the spell of his worship of beauty and especially of Greek beauty which was his ideal. The

(1), (2), (3) Derniers Poèmes, La Passion. Page 184.

(4) Ibid., Page 185.

(5) Ibid., Page 185.

Revolution of 1870 was not yet. Leconte de Lisle was still hopeful. In the worship of beauty was idealism, and in the ideal there was always hope. Nature was the supreme artist, the supreme Master of beauty and the ideal,--and God was the source and ruler of nature,---and Christ his Son, the Saviour of man from himself. There was a God and a Christ. There was nature and beauty and immortality. Life was not all nothingness. The hereafter was not yet a void. Still, there was beauty and hope. -- I don't mean to suggest that up to this point we find no pessimism, no nihilism in Leconte de Lisle. By no means. We find some, indeed, much almost from the very first. But there was still at this time this something else and it was extremely important. I wish only to point out this other side.

"Les Poèmes Antiques" was the first volume of Leconte de Lisle's to be published. In this volume which appeared in 1852, we find perhaps less of this nihilistic pessimism than in any other of his larger works. "Poèmes et Poésies" came out in 1855. Although in such poems as "Le Derniers Souvenir" we find such expressions as, "Oh nuit! Nuit du néant, prends-moi! --La chose est sûre!" --yet, most of the poems are of nature and animals, and some personal ones such as "Christine", "Le Manchy", "Le Colibri" and others. At this time may we not assume that Leconte de Lisle was still rather hopeful about life. "La Passion" was first published in the complete edition of the Poet's works in 1858. It was cut out, by the author, of all later editions of his works published by Alphonse Lemerre et Cie. With the Civil Wars of 1870-71 came disappointments and grief for Leconte de Lisle and he became more and more embittered against his age. Now he may more than ever have allowed free sway to his native tendencies towards pessimism and nihilism. It need not seem strange that, for a man with such predispositions, Christianity had failed, that this life was little worth while, that the Gods had indeed been found wanting, that after all, this life was but a poor, miserable, weak interruption of the "Great Néant"



from which we had come and to which we were hastening, but too slowly, to return no more.

And if given free sway to what end would not this pessimism take Leconte de Lisle? The Prussians and Germans were outside the State threatening to come in and actually coming in and the Civil war was within burning and destroying such works of art as Les Tuileries. His tendencies led then, to a pessimism more and more deleterious, more and more destructive and demoralizing. We do not pretend to excuse such a very great weakness in the make-up of an otherwise strong character. But this weakness, admitted, is not incomprehensible or extremely unusual. Thus it is not strange that Leconte de Lisle should have cut out "La Passion" from his later works, that poem which could have been sincere at the time of its writing, but could not be so fifteen years later when for Leconte de Lisle Christ, and the Redemption and the Passion had all failed. Nor is it wholly strange that in the three volumes which follow the "Poèmes et Poésies", namely "Poèmes Barbares", "Poèmes Tragiques" and "Derniers Poèmes", we find an expression of a never waning and ever increasing pessimism in such poems as "Les Damnés, L'Anathème, Le Nazaréen, L'Astre Rouge, La Lampe du Ciel, L'Illusion Suprême, Le Talion, L'Holocauste, Les Siècles Maudits, Si l'Aurore, La Maya, La Paix des Dieux, La Fatalité, Les Yeux d'Or de la Nuit and Soleils ! Poussière d'Or."

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In Maurice Spronck's article on Leconte de Lisle in his "Artistes Littéraires" we find the following paragraph, -- "Parmi les hommes qu'il rencontrait habituellement dans son entourage d'amis intellectuels, plusieurs fois il eut occasion de voir et d'entendre un écrivain d'assez médiocre envergure, aujourd'hui complètement ignoré, et dont le nom, même à cette époque, n'avait pas franchi un cercle très restreint. Par sa valeur personnelle, Ferdinand de Lanoye était donc hors d'état d'exercer une action quelconque sur un grand esprit, encore



hésitant, déjà formé néanmoins. Mais élève de Burnouf, grâce à ces études sur L'Inde, grâce à l'enthousiasme avec lequel il les avait conduites, il détenait quelques-uns des secrets d'une civilisation immense, séparés de la nôtre par des divergences fondamentales, et qui pourtant, depuis un siècle, semble tendre à s'infiltrer peu à peu dans notre monde gréco-latin. Pour le poète qui nous occupe, cette civilisation fut la dernière éducatrice, la plus importante peut-être qui ait pesé sur son avenir philosophique et littéraire; elle lui donna le sujet de plusieurs ouvrages que l'on ne compte pas parmi les moins élevés; elle lui montra surtout la direction définitive où sa pensée, libre d'entraves, devait se développer et se mouvoir." (1) In reading this passage I am forced to ask the following questions: Was this Buddhistic influence after all of so much importance as M. Spronck believes it to have been? How much of what seems in Leconte de Lisle to come from the Hindoos really came from this source rather than from his own century or the philosophy which he borrowed from the Greeks? These are indeed difficult questions to decide. Of this much we are at least certain, - that Leconte de Lisle did find in the nihilistic philosophy of the Hindoos an expression, to some extent, of his own thought.

We cannot here discuss further the problem of the influence of this Indian philosophy save to give in leaving it a short resumé of its probable importance. I believe we may say, with some limitations which will at once be made clear, that Leconte de Lisle's philosophy of Nirvanaism and Nihilism could have come as much through the Greeks as from the Indians. Leconte de Lisle lived much with the Greeks. He doubtless read much of their philosophy. The Greek philosophy of Stoicism, carried to its full, was only another name for Nirvanaism. The ultimate goal of the Stoic philosophers was absorption into nothingness and the Divine, --forgetfulness and impassibility, in this life, and ultimate reduction to nothingness as its close. This is Nirvanaism and the Greeks got the germ for it from

(1) Maurice Spronck, *Les Artistes Littéraires*, Pg. 200. Paris, Calmann Lévy Éd, 1889.

the Orient. Sophocles thought that the best thing was never to have been born, and the next best, to die as soon as possible. The Younger Seneca wrote, "Porta patet, proficiscere!" So when Leconte de Lisle expressed a pessimistic, discouraged out-look on many aspects of this life and desired a Nirvana, though forgetting his Greek Ideal, he was in the broadest sense still consistently Greek and was following and expressing one phase of Greek life.

May we not say that Leconte de Lisle could have had all his Fatalism without ever having known anything Hindoo; that Fatalism may have been purely Hellenistic or modern, or both; but that he could not have gone to absolute Nihilism with Hellenism alone; that when he seeks "annihilation" as the "goal of all" he leaves what is Hellenistic in the strictest sense in which he wished us to understand it, and takes over the Hindoo philosophy. Thus the Greeks believed that there is no such thing as ultimate happiness on this earth for mortals. Only the Gods are wholly blessed and happy. The Greeks accepted and believed in a fatalistic Nemesis, a kind of blind inevitable Destiny, but they clung to life, they enjoyed life, they wanted to live. While the Greek goes on in life constrained and compelled by "La force des choses", and with the sombre resignation of the sage, the Hindoo believer on the other hand goes forward with the enthusiasm of the mystic, as to the accomplishment of his dearest hopes. For him the Nirvana is not the inevitable end of the soul but rather the recompense of the chosen few, the refuge of beatitude reserved for the scrupulous observers of the Law, given after long trials and painful sufferings of this life.

Here then we see the abyss which separates the two civilizations, even though they seem almost to touch. But in Leconte de Lisle who was so dominated, or perhaps rather, who has to such an extent so accepted both civilizations, so found his philosophy in harmony with both and who had so imbued himself with both, we find such a mixing and fusing and blending of both trends of philosophical thought, and these with the Greek idea of Nemesis, that we can only

with difficulty and rarely say, this is Hellenistic, this is Hindoo. Rather, through-out Leconte de Lisle's works, in his "Poèmes Antiques", "Barbares", "Tragiques", and "Derniers Poèmes", for we find it everywhere, is there such a blending of what he got from the Greeks, the Hindoos, his own time, and what was innate, that we cannot say, this is Fatalism, this is Hellenistic; this is Nirvanaism, this is Hindooistic,--this pessimism comes from Leconte de Lisle's time; but we are compelled to say this is Leconte de Lisle. And if compelled to define that quality which is neither wholly and simply Hellenistic and Fatalistic or Nirvanaistic and Hindoo, or something else we should be obliged to admit that it is something of all of these and more,--that it is Leconte de Lisle-ism, that it is Leconte de Lisle-istic.---And if the hearer or reader knew Leconte de Lisle he would understand what you were talking about.

Did Leconte de Lisle himself believe in Nirvanaism; did he believe that the goal of all was nothingness; was he so pessimistic about life as to look towards annihilation as its blessed goal? Or was he more Hellenistic in his attitude and rather accepted a blind inevitable fatalism because of the very hard fact that it did seem to him inevitable,--but still clung to life? I believe he did the latter. It seems reasonable to believe this, that he was more of a Greek than a Hindoo; that his tendency for Nirvanaism was rather an insurmountable obstacle of his which came to him when he realized the inconsistencies of life, the difference between the ideal and the real. Pessimism is after all a weakness, however logically we may arrive at it, if we allow ourselves to be dominated by it. So Nirvanaism with Leconte de Lisle was a weakness. He was too much dominated by it. But that he was more of a Greek than a Hindoo, that he was more Hellenistic than Buddhistic we cannot but believe, because along with the Fatalism and Nirvanaism we always find "Beauty". Leconte de Lisle had an ideal, he was idealistic, and this a thorough-going pessimist has ceased to be. The realization of the difference between the ideal and the real leads to pessimism but when the

real, the dark side is wholly dominant then the ideal is lost sight of and pessimism is supreme. With the loss of hope for the ideal, and the passing from sight of the ideal, strife for it and belief in it goes and pessimism dominates and becomes supreme;--then Nirvanaism comes in, "We are nothing, we come from nothing, nothing is our goal." But it may be argued, Nirvanaism, pessimistic though it is, is the ideal of the Hindoo. Annihilation is the ideal itself. This is true. Annihilation is the goal, but the ideal must be something positive. A philosophy which has Nirvana as its goal is negative. A philosophy negative in its entirety can have no ideal. The ideal must have the semblance of probability, it must be positive.

It is here that Leconte de Lisle though too much dominated by Nihilism escapes absolute pessimism. He was idealistic, he believed in an ideal and so long as he did this he kept his faith and kept on the safe side, and in spite of all held out for a positivistic philosophy. It was Leconte de Lisle's "Ideal of Beauty" as Absolute, Dominant, Supreme, Divine, which saved him, which made him a Greek, a Hellenist. This pervades all his work, is the subject and inspiration of the largest number of his poems and whether in content or only in form is evident in everything Leconte de Lisle wrote. Even when most disconsolate, when most discouraged and displeased and absolutely bitter over his generation, still this Ideal of Beauty buoyed him up and saved him and saved his poetry. It seems to have been something innate, something fused with his very being, something which he could not help but put into his works and even when writing about pessimism or fatalism itself still in the composition, in the versification, in the form, this "beauty", this perfection is evident and remains to tell us, "He was a Greek," to say "this is Hellenistic", and it is from this element most that we say, "Leconte de Lisle is a Hellenist."(1)

(1) In this rather long discussion of the pessimism in Leconte de Lisle and its relation to Hellenism I have not quoted any passages illustrating this pessimism.

On page 71 of this thesis I cited several poems of importance. I would like to mention again "L'Illusion Suprême" and add to the list, "Dies Irae", "Ultra Coelos" and "L'Ecclésiaste" and also refer the reader to Maurice Spronck's essay, previously mentioned, Part III. pages 199 to 218. I wish to quote here for obvious reasons "L'Ecclésiaste."

"L'Ecclésiaste a dit: Un chien vivant vaut mieux  
 Qu'un lion mort. Hormis, certes, manger et boire,  
 Tout n'est qu'ombre et fumée. Et le monde est très vieux,  
 Et le néant de vivre emplit la tombe noire.

"Par les antiques nuits, à la face des cieux,  
 Du sommet de sa tour comme d'un promontoire,  
 Dans le silence, au loin laissant planer ses yeux,  
 Sombre, tel il songeait sur son siège d'ivoire.

"Vieil amant du soleil, qui gémissais ainsi,  
 L'irrévocable mort est un mensonge aussi.  
 Heureux qui d'un seul bond s'engloutirait en elle!

"Moi, toujours, à jamais, j'écoute, épouvanté,  
 Dans l'ivresse et l'horreur de l'immortalité,  
 Le long rugissement de la Vie éternelle." (Poèmes Barbares", L'Ecclésiaste .)

If this is Leconte de Lisle's point of view he is even worse off than the Hindoo. For the believer in Nirvanaism, death was annihilation. If Leconte de Lisle was sincere in the above passage then death which for him brought eternal life might well be contemplated with dread and terror. Notice the apparent unmistakable sincerity of the lines, and the tremendous hatred of life. If Leconte de Lisle had followed these opinions and this philosophical position to the logical conclusion there would have been but one outcome and that suicide. But a life of



action and idealism do not lead to suicide in reality even though a Nirvana is sincerely sought in metaphysical speculation and as I have said before, it was Leconte de Lisle's high attachment to plastic beauty, and beauty in all its forms, when he had only gone part way on the road to Nirvanaism, absolute Nihilism, that saved him.

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### VIII.

I have often heard and read this statement:--Leconte de Lisle is interesting chiefly because of his position as leader of the Parnassian, a school of poetry of minor importance in French literary history, but aside from this fact and that of his contribution of some rather good, but too impersonal animal poems his position and his works are of little importance. In short, Leconte de Lisle's works are a sort of menagerie which self-evidently cannot have any large influence.

It seems hardly necessary to discuss the error of such an opinion. I believe I have already indicated its falsity through-out this thesis. I would only like to add, that had Leconte de Lisle of a truth been of no other importance than that resulting from these animal poems,--and had he made no other contribution to world literature and French literature than these poems, yet might his place well be assured, yet might his importance be significant, and his position an enviable one. For perhaps better than any other writer did he succeed in understanding and interpreting animal psychology and the great incomprehensible spirit and magnitude and sublimity of nature. To have been able to do this is no ordinary gift. To do it as did Leconte de Lisle is rare indeed, and the world should be proud of the author who has so enriched her treasures.

Leconte de Lisle's poems of nature are of their kind the finest in the French language and as perfect as any such poems in any language. Perhaps in none of his works do we have such a rigorous, rigid impersonality as in poems like *Le Sommeil du Condor*, and yet in few do we feel the Poet's presence more keenly. In it we have a kind of intellectual and artistic quietism and even this is Greek. The very impersonality of this poem, as well as its perfection of verse and form, and its beauty and repose is Greek. "Perhaps his two most famous poems", says Mr. Bailey, "are *Midi* and *Le Sommeil du Condor*". And with these are a whole series of almost equal power, among them, *La Panthère Noire*, *Le Jaguar*, *L'Albatros* and others. Besides these there are *La Fontaine aux Lianes*, *L'Aurore*, the fine reserve of such poems as *Juin* and *Midi*, and *Nox*, silent and self-forgetting in the presence of

Nature. Poetry has very few pure landscapes of finer quality than *Midi*. And to go back to *Le Sommeil du Condor* and *Midi*, Mr. Bailey continues, "Often as they have been quoted, no study of *Leconte de Lisle* can omit them. They are his most absolutely perfect work. His imagination never takes such complete possession of its subject as it does here, and his art never seconds it with more consummate craftsmanship. It is always the artist's difficulty, sometimes his agony, that his work does not realize his conception. He can never say 'this is finished' because he is always conscious of something wanting. Even we, who merely see or read his work, can often detect inequalities, things we wish away, things we find lacking. There is one image in a poem, one word in a sonnet which just prevents our using the word 'perfect'. But here artist and critic must alike feel that the thing the poet set out to do has been done. There are many greater things in literature than *Le Sommeil du Condor*, but a thing more perfect it would not be easy to find anywhere."

"Par delà l'escalier des roides Cordillères,  
 Par delà les brouillards hantés des aigles noirs,  
 Plus haut que les sommets creusés en entonnoirs  
 Où bout le flux sanglant des laves familières,  
 L'envergure pendante et rouge par endroits,  
 Le vaste Oiseau, tout plein d'une morne indolence,  
 Regarde l'Amérique et l'espace en silence,  
 Et le sombre soleil qui meurt dans ses yeux froids.  
 La nuit roule de l'Est, où les pampas sauvages  
 Sous les monts étagés s'élargissent sans fin:  
 Elle endort le Chili, les villes, les rivages,  
 Et la mer Pacifique et l'horizon divin;  
 Du continent muet elle s'est emparée:  
 Des sables aux coteaux, des gorges aux versants,  
 De cime, en cime, elle enfile en tourbillons croissants,

Le lourd débordement de sa haute marée.  
 Lui, comme un spectre, seul, au front du pic altier,  
 Baigné d'une lueur qui saigne sur la neige,  
 Il attend cette mer sinistre qui l'assiège:  
 Elle arrive, déferle, et le couvre en entier.  
 Dans l'abîme sans fond la Croix australe allume  
 Sur les côtes du ciel son phare constellé.  
 Il râle de plaisir, il agite sa plume,  
 Il érige son cou musculeux et pelé,  
 Il s'enlève en fouettant l'âpre neige des Andes,  
 Dans un cri rauque il monte où n'atteint pas le vent,  
 Et, loin du globe noir, loin de l'astre vivant,  
 Il dort dans l'air glacé, les ailes toutes grandes."

"What an air of vastness there is about it all! Everything is large and strange and remote; the Andes, and the Pacific, and the Southern Cross, and this great bird poised between earth and heaven. And yet with what serene assurance the poet takes us there! We rise on the wings of his imagination, our voyage is one of unruffled ease, effortless and sure of its goal, and when we come back we have seen what he saw, felt what he felt, and realized the sensation of the grandiosity of Nature, as the South knows it and as Europe can never know. With Nature on this scale one cannot be intimate as one may be with a robin or a violet; but in these august heights and depths it is not intimacy of detail that we ask of a poet; it is the visible impression of a great experience; and Leconte de Lisle in his measure is as assuredly a man who has come from a strange country as Dante is the man who has been in Heaven and Hâ l."(1)

To attempt to give any additional survey of Leconte de Lisle's works scarcely seems requisite. Indeed this entire thesis cannot have done otherwise than to

(1) The Claims of French Poetry, by John C. Bailey, 1907, Page 262.

point out the range and variety of his contributions. A glance at a table of his complete publications will serve at least to suggest the wide scope of subjects, incidents and characters which his complete works comprehend. He has given us a kind of "Légende des Siècles", a rather truthful compendium of incidents and characters drawn from many ages and many countries and from all walks of life. His four volumes of poetry, "Poèmes Antiques", "Poèmes Barbares", "Poèmes Tragiques" and "Derniers Poèmes" contain episodes from Greek, Latin, Spanish, Indian, Finnish, Middle Age and other sources. He has delved deep into the wells of legend and mythology, into the works of many times and many peoples, Indian, Egyptian, Scandinavian, Finnish, Hebrew, Celtique, Italian, Latin, Greek, Spanish and "Le Nouveau Monde", and has drawn therefrom incidents of unique interest. These he has molded with incomparable skill and finesse so that they come to us fresh from the artist's hands still bearing the imprint of his fingers;--exhaling an essence of their original source, but fresh and new and pulsating, the incarnation of the genius of him who has but molded them.

Leconte de Lisle's animal and nature poems we have surveyed. They bear reading and re-reading and ever thus take on new value and significance. His translations of the classics are a distinct contribution. Much that is complementary could be said of them. His "Poèmes Antiques, Tragiques and Barbares", most of them we have discussed at length. Leconte de Lisle's prose, "Catéchisme Populaire Républicain", "Histoire Populaire du Christianisme", "Histoire Populaire de la Révolution Française", his two "Préfaces", "Histoire du Moyen Âge", and "Les Poètes Contemporains" have a poignancy, directness, and force of presentation which reveal at once the pen of the master and place them among the best prose works in the French language.

In leaving this discussion I would like to say a few words about some statements which have been made in regard to the personal poems of Leconte de Lisle. Although throughout his works for the most part he maintains that kind of

"haute impersonalité" with which he nearly always is credited yet he has given us some poems of quite a different nature. Mr. Spronck has said, "Les idyles, les églogues et les récits amoureux ont moins pour but de décrire l'amour que de peindre les formes harmoniques de vierges et d'éphèbes, qui passent au milieu de paysages presque divins." There can be no doubt of the truth of this statement as applying to many poems such as the "Scotch Ballades", "Odes Anacréontiques" and some others. But there are some poems which do not conform to such a generalization. And these are of such importance that to neglect them shows either ignorance of their existence or lack of appreciation of their sentiments. I can hardly believe that because the emotion in such poems as "Le Parfum Impérissable", "Le Manchy", "Toi par Qui J'ai Senti" and others, is not so violent, unrestrained, inordinate as is common for the expression of emotion among the Romanticists, that it is any the less sincere and deep-rooted. Logic seems to suggest quite the contrary.

"Toi par qui j'ai senti, pour des heures trop brèves,  
 Ma jeunesse renaître et mon coeur reflourir,  
 Sois bénie à jamais! J'aime, je puis mourir;  
 J'ai vécu le meilleur et le plus beau des rêves!

Et vous qui me rendez le matin de mes jours,  
 Qui d'un charme si doux m'enveloppez encore,  
 Vous pouvez m'oublier, ô chers yeux que j'adore,  
 Mais jusques au tombeau je vous verrai toujours."

(Derniers Poèmes, "Toi par Qui J'ai Senti.")

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## IX.

It hardly seems necessary to discuss any further than has already been done what must from the first have seemed an obvious truism; namely, the purpose of this thesis. Indeed the title, the "Hellenistic Elements in the Poetry of Leconte de Lisle" at once indicates in a general way what that purpose is. Let us briefly resume the various phases dealt with. We have first seen the general attitude of Leconte de Lisle to his time, which caused him to turn to antiquity for the source of poetic inspiration, and what he sought in antiquity as his ideal. We have seen how in his various works he strove to realize and work out the expression of that poetic ideal and that ideal of Greek genius. Throughout his "Apollonide" and "Poèmes Antiques" we have observed his emulation and representation of "la poésie dans sa vitalité, dans sa plénitude et dans son unité harmonique", and above all "Le Génie Grec." I have indicated the development and expression of this "thesis", as worked out in all Leconte de Lisle's work and the influence it had as manifested in everything he wrote. Furthermore I have discussed, particularly with respect to "Les Érinyes", Fatalism in its relation to the Hellenistic elements. I have indicated the same relationship with respect to the widespread Pessimistic elements. Finally I have discussed briefly from the same point of view the animal and nature poems and the personal poems of Leconte de Lisle. Throughout this thesis the relation between the life of the Poet and the expression of it in his works has been traced,--the psychological relation between native tendencies coupled with environment and the parallel expression in verse.

As indicated before, in his "Préface des Poèmes Antiques" Leconte de Lisle has referred us to Homer and Aeschylus as his ideal "qui représentent la Poésie dans sa vitalité, dans sa plénitude et dans son unité harmonique." Again in his "Préface des Poèmes et Poésies" he speaks of "L'ordre, la clarté et l'harmonie", as "les trois qualités incomparables du génie hellénique." Leconte de Lisle was the "maître" of the Parnassian school whose fundamental tenets were (1) imperson-



ality, (2) attention to form, (3) return to antiquity, (4) union of art and science. Leconte de Lisle worked out and exemplified in all his works all the tenets of the Parnassian School. I believe that all the tenets of the Parnassians are either purely Greek or are fundamental in and supported and substantiated in Greek literature and that Leconte de Lisle found them there. To show this then and in what way Leconte de Lisle emulated these qualities, the five mentioned above, the Greek genius par excellence of plastic art, and the Greek civilization as a whole,--exemplified and recreated them in his art, is the purpose of this thesis; to indicate what influences hindered, and what aided and to evaluate these influences and show how and to what extent in consideration of and in spite of them all Leconte de Lisle was a Hellenist, has been the purpose of this thesis.

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It is difficult to place an estimate upon the work and genius of such a unique poet as Leconte de Lisle. Professor Henning says he will always rank very high, surely as the greatest French poet since the death of Victor Hugo. It is quite unlikely that Leconte de Lisle will ever be a popular poet. "His erudite archaism embarrasses his readers; his ideal of art is too high to be reached by the vulgar; his intellectual aristocracy holds all mediocre minds at bay," says Georges Pellissier. "But for real lovers of poetry, from his 'rare balance of critical and creative faculties', his power of thought, his splendid images and descriptions, his mastery of form, his sincerity, his restrained, but poignant emotion, he will always rank very high," says Professor Henning.

"Leconte de Lisle is an artist rather than a creator, a poet rather than a prophet, a scholar rather than a thinker, a temperament rather than a force. He lives not by the strength of his personality but by the quality of his art. His home is in the still life both of nature and of humanity. He is a master of landscapes, the still life of nature, and of the idyll, the still life of man. In both he fails, sometimes through a certain volubility, to convey the impression of a massive strength held in reserve which is always felt behind the work of his

great pupil Heredia. But in receptivity of all the influence of Nature, in a kind of delicate intimacy with his subject, in a power of lying perfectly passive under a great impression, in that sort of stillness of the whole being which in another sphere seemed to the great Mystics the condition of Illumination, he need fear few rivals anywhere. It did not fall to him to move the world, or to give a new interpretation to life: his part was simply to be so quiet himself that the very silences of nature were audible to him, and to keep the instrument of his art in such faultless tune that nature's lightest breath upon it called forth an answer of exquisite verse."(1)

As M. Spronck has said in his essay on Leconte de Lisle, "Quel que soit d'ailleurs le destin réservé à l'oeuvre que nous venons d'étudier, quelle que soit même sa signification réelle que nous avons essayé d'établir sans pouvoir cependant nous déclarer possesseurs de l'absolue certitude, il reste en tous cas, à son auteur l'indéniable mérite d'une prodigieuse puissance plastique. 'Çuna-gepa', 'Khirôn', 'Kaïn', 'Le Coeur de Hialmar', 'Le Corbeau', nous fussions-nous complètement trompés sur leur compte au point de vue de la pensée inspiratrice, n'en demeureraient pas moins d'admirables manifestations du génie poétique à notre époque et à toutes les époques. On ne peut parler comme du marbre grec connu sous le nom de 'Vénus de Milo'. Que représente-t-il exactement? Nul ne le sait; et les érudits en sont réduits à des conjectures plus ou moins vraisemblables. Mais que l'artiste ait voulu modeler un Aphrodite, une Victoire Aptère ou une Polyxène, la question n'a en définitive qu'une importance de seconde ordre. Ce qui est certain, c'est que, dans ce corps de femme aux lignes admirablement pures et aux contours harmonieux, dans ce visage d'une sérénité plus qu'humaine, il a laissé à travers les âges une des expressions les plus hautes de la Beauté idéale."(2)

"Tendencies pass, but great works endure; and in the history of literature

(1) The Claims of French Poetry, John C. Bailey, Leconte de Lisle Pp. 278-9, 1917.  
 (2) Maurice Spronck, Les Artistes Littéraires", Pg 286-7. Paris, Calmann Lévy, Ed. 1889.

and of art, those are the real masters whose works outlive the tendency. Leconte de Lisle is such a one. Marked out for immortality from the instant of their first appearance, the "Poèmes Antiques" and "Poèmes Barbares" remain unmarred by time.

"Les ans n'ont pas pesé sur leur grâce immortelle;"

or, not to sacrifice the exactness of the phrase to the pleasure of quoting a last line from the poet; it were better said that time has neither tarnished their lustre nor diminished their solid worth. No doubt all are not of equal value, and the future will make its choice. But what may be asserted today is, that no one has given us in French, neither Ronsard in his "Odes", nor above all, in his "Hymnes", nor Chénier in his "Idylles", a more vivid and accurate picture of Grecian beauty than the author of the "Plainte du Cyclope" or "Héraklès au Taureau."(1)

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(1) Ferdinand Brunetière, in "The Contemporary Review." Leonard Scott Pub. N. Y. Vol. 66, 1894. Pg. 908.

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March 21st, 1922.

Malcolm F. Farley.

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