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Poetics in Performance:
Paul Agnew's Conversations with Milton, Jonson and Shakespeare

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要　約

パフォーマンスの詩学
ポール・アグニューとミルトン、ジョンソン、シェイクスピアとの「会話」

山田　由美子

ジョン・ラッセル・ブラウンによると、「詩は、理解力と想像力のある読者に恵まれないかぎり、紙切れに刻まれた冷たい碑文にすぎない」。短い詩行には、膨大な意味内容が凝縮されているので、それを朗読や朗誦という瞬時の行為によって再現するのは、ほぼ不可能に近いというのである。

たしかに話し言葉は、不安定で無力なものである。舞台劇でも失望する場合が多いのに、純粋詩の朗読となれば、惨状は目に見えている。曲を付ければ事態は改善されるかもしれないが、それでも、詩の言語は、専門の学者にとっても難解で、楽譜の分析も、労が多いわりには不正確さを免れ得ない。かりに演奏者（歌手）が言葉と音楽の両方を完璧に理解できたと仮定しても、表現という関門が待ち構えている。演奏者が読み取った内容を逐一活字に直せば、何枚もの紙、いや何冊もの本になるだろう。それを、ごくわずかな演奏時間内に、どうやって網羅できるというのだろうか。

ところが、1990年代後半に「革命」が起こった。ルネサンス、バロック歌曲のテノールおよびカウンターテナー、ポール・アグニューは、受賞作のダンとシドニー、およびそれに続くダウランドの２枚のアルバムによって、高度に修辞的な英詩の演奏法を打ち出した。音楽と言葉の深い理解に基づいた空前の表現力は、どの言語を用いても、「雄弁」で「説得力がある」と評価されている。その演奏法は、「会話体」の一言に集約される。それは、人間の語る声であり、ロマン主義以降優勢になった訓練で均一化された歌声ではない。詩を語ることによって、元をたどれば、歌声と話し声が、高低と間隔を除いて、同じだったということをあらためて思い出させてくれるのである。後述するように、話し言葉に近いこの歌唱法が、個々の子音、母音、音符を自由自在に操りつつ詩の全体像を構築するという、高度な表現力を可能にする武器となる。演奏に至るまでには、詩人（作詞家）、作曲家、登場人物、共演者、伴奏者、現実もしくは仮想の聴衆との様々なレベルの会話がある。それが最終的に、無数にある可能性の中から、明確な単一の解釈へと結集されるのである。

アグニューの数ある功績の中から、今回は、ヘンデルのオラトリオ〈快活な人、沈思の人、中庸の人〉を取り上げる。これは、ミルトンの「最も音楽的」な詩と、「パーセルに続く言葉の達人」ヘンデルの稀有な組合せとされてきた。さらに、これをアグニューのジョンソンおよびシェイクスピアの作品と対比させることにより、その演奏が、ミルトンとこの両詩人の関係ならびにそれに対するヘンデルの解釈をどの程度まで再現しているかを考察したい。

1. Poetry and Music

John Russell Brown argued that a poem is nothing but a "cold monument" of words on a piece of paper without an understanding and imaginative reader (*Connotations* 9.1, 1999/2000). Against his pessimistic view, I should like to assert that it is sometimes possible to resurrect poetry from the "dead" print into lively substance through performance. Truly the instability and powerlessness of spoken words has sometimes left audiences frustrated even in drama, causing more disastrous effects on non-dramatic poetry. But poetry was originally sung, so this defect could be overcome by being set to music. It has been pointed out that "Poetry, the harmony of words, which is a rise above prose and oratory, is still exalted by music, the harmony of notes," and that "poetry, or language, gives in return, the music determinate ideas and determinate emotions"—provided "good poetry is justly set to music."[1]

Still an objection may arise, as it is always easier said than done. The words are not easy, even to academic specialists, and musical analysis is painstaking and precarious (Lang 149; Dean 167). Granted that the performer can interpret both, there remains the problem of presentation. How is it possible to convey every detail of all that he or she has read, which would take sheets or volumes of paper to describe, in a short lapse of time?

The music and words have two conflicting demands. Singers tend to choose music over words, in pursuit of the "beauty" or resonance of their voice. In many cases they hover somewhere between, trying to sound abstractly beautiful or impressive; the audience is left to reconstruct in their mind the deeper poetic meaning from their knowledge of music, thus excluding the musically uninstructed.

In the latter half of the 1990s Paul Agnew (1964—), a Renaissance and Baroque tenor/haute-contre, realigned music and words through a highly rhetorical style in English poetry with his award-winning Donne and Sidney (*O Sweet Woods* [Metronome, 1994/1995]) and succeeding Dowland albums (*Flow My Teares* [Metronome, 1995]; *In Darkenesse Let Me Dwell* [Metronome, 1996]).[2]

The conversational quality of his voice reminds us that singing and speaking were originally identical, differing only in pitch and intervals. It is a living, human voice, in stark contrast to the artificial evenness of loudness lauded since the Romantic age. As will be discussed, this allows him freer range of expression and greater command of the individual sounds and notes in accordance with the poem's overall design.

Among his numerous achievements, I focus on the part he played in Handel's oratorio *L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato* (Hyperion, 1999; 1740). This is a most happy match: Milton's "divine Penseroso and l'Allegro have found in Handel a composer worthy of the Poetry."[3] *L'Allegro* is "most musical" in Milton's words (Lang 396), and Handel a master of verbal dexterity, following Purcell (Young 4).

According to T. S. Eliot, Milton's poetry appeals to the ear alone and his involved syntax is deliberately used to make pleasing sounds.[4] Handel knew English well enough to understand the detailed position of single words (Lang 262), and had a discriminating ear for accentuation,

letting in the subtle music of language, within the ambit of more absolute music (Young 4). Agnew successfully marries the latent music of Milton's poems to the inherent poetry of Handel's music, reviving poetry from the "dead" print and music from the mute sheets of scores.

On several occasions Agnew has been depended on as a noted interpreter of Purcell's works,[5] so is at his best in interpreting Handel, an ardent admirer and imitator of Purcell in his English works (Hogwood 224). He has been acclaimed and given awards for the leads he played in Handel's other oratorios: Zadok the High Priest in *Solomon* (Archiv, 1998/1999 [nominated for Gramophone Awards]; 1749), Acis in *Acis and Galatea* (Erato, 1999 [Gramophone Awards]; 1732), Septimius in *Theodora* (Archiv, 2000; 1750), and the tenor in *Messiah* (Quattro, 1996/1997; 1741).

A large part of his success emanates from his correct understanding of humours theory, as manifest in his earlier work on Orazio Vecchi's *L'Humore musicale* (London: ASV, 1989/2000). These musical sketches of humours include "L'humor allegro" and most likely influenced both Milton and Handel.

While Handel's arrangements have been commended for skilful landscape painting, they have been seen as "essentially undramatic" (Herbage 141; Hogwood 162). But every aspect of Agnew's recording makes us suspect that Handel allotted the most crucial role to the tenor soloist: he not only explores Milton's dramatic possibilities but also predicts Handel's own dramatic mastery of actions, character and psychology in his later oratorios.

Let us first examine Agnew's style of performance in relation to Handel's English oratorios to see on which details and to what depth his diction sheds light on the twin poems of Milton's youth.

2. Handel's English Tenor

Handel met antipathy of the English people to the "unnatural" style of opera where the human voice competes with a trumpet for volume and durability of breath.[6] As he shifted his concern from operas to oratorios, he came to trust native voices singing in their native language, and with a few exceptions, to forego the stars of the Italian opera (Hogwood 180). The public rejoiced at "the Merit of Mr. Handel's Composition and English Performances," for they would be "no longer imposed on by Italian Singers, and some wrong Headed Undertakers of bad Opera's."[7]

David Wulstan points out that the present style of singing advocated by Manuel Garcia in the late 19th century severely restricts vocal variety. In order to attain the ideal evenness of loudness on the operatic stage, he recommends making the vowels with the mouth, with the tongue flattened and jaw withdrawn (229, 232). This reduces the frequencies of the vowels and makes them sound heavy and dull rather than brilliant (229). If, on the other hand, the vowels are produced with the tongue, their frequencies are heightened, allowing remarkable agility, clarity, sonorities and variety (229). Prior to the rigorous inflexibility of the Romantic voice, singers used to sing as they spoke, i.e. by producing the vowels with the tongue.[8]

The method of securing high frequency of vowels was most developed in English church music at the time of the Reformation. The English language exhibits rather different vowel

frequencies from French, German, Latin and Italian, and the change from Latin to English caused considerable dulling of the vowel spectrum (Wulstan 229). Its vowel formants demand a dramatic amplification of the higher frequencies of certain vowels; in order to attain this, sixteenth-century writers specified use of the tongue with a moderate lateral opening of the mouth as in conversing with friends, and forward jaw position (229).

It allowed such exploitation of individual vocal tone colour to the English voice as to impress Sagudino, secretary to the Venetian ambassador as "more divine than human" in 1515 (239). On the Continent the treatment of voices was less idiomatic, more attention being concentrated on creating an abstract choral sound (192).

No doubt the English tradition lasted to a certain degree until the time of Handel. Purcell, his admired predecessor, was a chorister from the Chapel Royal, for which he wrote anthems containing *arioso* writing with virtuoso decorations to highlight individual words or phrases that would require not only singing of considerable control, but also great emotional maturity and real understanding of the text.[9]

A prominent Purcellian interpreter, Agnew uses "conversational" diction which allows a free and flexible delivery and attains an amazing variety of sounds. Each note and syllable is painted with innumerable colours, tones, shades and nuances, convincing us of the truth of Cicero's observation that a speaker can command as many tones of voice as colours are available to a painter (*De oratore* 3: 216−17). All comes as natural as speech, and the richer for the music.

"Golden columns," Zadok's aria in Handel's *Solomon* offers one of the best examples to discern Agnew's descriptive power:

<*Air* "Golden columns">

Golden columns, fair and bright,
Catch the mortal's ravish'd sight;
Round their sides ambitious twine
Tendrils of the clasping vine:
Cherubims stand there display'd,
O'er the ark their wings are laid:
Ev'ry object swells with state,
All is pious, all is great. (*Solomon* Act 3)

The verse by an anonymous librettist does not seem inspired, nor is Handel's music here especially sublime.[10] But Agnew's delivery strikes our eyes, first by showing its ground plan with sumptuous details—the serene "fair," the glittering "bright," the ravishing "catch," the "clasping" vine tendrils bearing fine grapes, the celestial sublimity of winged "cherubims," the devoutly "pious" and the stately "great."

We are surprised, a second time, when "every object" begins to "swell" as if we were seeing the construction process. He takes us round the huge columns to see their diameter and height with the "Tendrils of the clasping vine" which twines them to the top; the colossal Cherubims guarding the ark of the covenant of the Lord, with their wings reaching from wall to wall;

and how the whole nation fell in awe, ravished at the magnificence of the inauguration. Decisive is the last "all," which integrates the whole space occupied by the temple, and the full term of seven years spent on building, in celebration of peace and prosperity. If anyone can build the Temple of Solomon with a song, here is the model.

Rather than call up Amphion's mysticism, Agnew's art ought to be ascribed to Vitruvian providence: the brilliant details well-balanced (order or *ordinatio*), fitly assembled (arrangement or *dispositio*), and suitably displayed in their context (proportion or *eurhythmia*), to make appropriate harmony arising out of themselves (symmetry or *symmetria*), faultless ensemble of the work composed in accordance with approved details (*decor*), and with the suitable disposal of supplies and the site, and the thrifty, wise control of expense [of energy] in the work.[11]

Sounds are woven into syllables, syllables into words, words into phrases, phrases into sentences, sentences into verse, to form an organic whole, following the rules of prosody. The accentuation falls on the right places, not with tactless and mechanical beat but with the living pulse of an organic unity—sometimes with stress, sometimes with slowing, sometimes with change of tones—all with infinite varieties, to be integrated in the end. Everything is ready before he starts and nothing is accidental in Agnew.

Although his virtuosity clearly is his own gift, we are tempted to guess whether he has inherited the Tudor tradition through being a chorister of Ex Cathedra in Birmingham and doing choral studies at Magdalen College, Oxford, where Richard Davy's *informator choristarum* awakened Cardinal Wolsey to found his own choir in the 16th century.[12]

Agnew's prominence and background recalls to us Handel's much admired tenor, John Beard, a chorister from the Chapel Royal, hence well-versed in Purcellian anthems. In 1734 he was invited by Handel to sing in operas with Italian singers, guaranteed to "surprise the Town with his performances before the Winter is over."[13] We can readily suppose that he shone in the Opera House of Covent Garden because of his eloquence long-cherished in the English tradition (as Agnew has proved in his Italian recordings) rather than through vacant beauty, showy tricks, bellowing volume or a diver's durability of breath.

A highly cultured, artistic singer with a strong, expressive tenor voice (Muller 47n), he excelled in recitation, as "the jolly president of the Beefsteak Club" (*DNB* "Beard"). Charles Dibdin says "his voice was sound, male, powerful, and extensive. His tones were natural, and he had flexibility enough to execute any passage however difficult" (*DNB* "Beard").

Beard's voice inspired Handel to abstain from the practice of the Italians, who favoured the castrati's virtuoso singing and were not disturbed by the incongruity of a male soprano or alto (Lang 406). In 1743 Handel innovatively cast the hero as a tenor in *Samson*, based on Milton's drama (Hogwood 180). With this Handel changes from writing operas to English oratorios, where the tenor plays the leading part, formerly played by the castrato.

In all probability Handel's decision to keep writing oratorios expressly for Beard had begun earlier, at the latest with *L'Allegro* (in short), "the profoundest tribute Handel ever paid to the land of his adoption" (Dean 320). In setting Milton's poems to music, Handel allotted airs to suit the individual qualities of each soloist (Gardiner 17). By revealing the weight attached to the tenor, Agnew's performance strongly suggests that Handel intended the passages concerning the Allegro deeper spiritual progress for Beard who was near in age to the young Milton.

3 . Hence Loathèd Melancholy?

While Handel's *L'Allegro* has been acclaimed for its skill in turning "Milton's evocation of the English landscape in all its variety, rural and urban, enclosed and expansive, stormy and serene" into powerful evocative music (Dean 320; Hogwood 162), it has been criticised for lacking dramatic interest. But the first thing Handel required in setting Milton's poems was dramatisation. If *L'Allegro* has been regarded as "entirely undramatic,"[14] motionless or lacking an external framework (Dean 317), it was because performers or interpreters have focused too much either on music or on mood.

First, Handel suggested to the librettist, Charles Jennens, reworking it into a debate between the two opposite humours, by exchanging short extracts from each poem. Using 225 of 328 lines in the original, with a few modifications, contractions and repetitions, Jennens arranged them into a two-part dialogue.[15] Handel also proposed adding a final section which would unite the two poems in one moral design; for this Jennens offered his own words *Il Moderato* (Hicks 6). Thus the two humours were to be delicately balanced for the first two parts and resolved in Part 3.

Next came casting the singers, to make it more than a mere dialogue. While the Allegro solos were shared among three male singers—a boy treble, a tenor (John Beard) and a bass (Henry Reinhold), all the Penseroso solos were sung by a soprano (Elizabeth du Parc, known as "La Francesina"). The reconciling Moderato duet was given to Beard and La Francesina (Hicks 7).

The tenor and the soprano in the duet obviously represent the two humours, but how are we to understand the difference of sexes? The tenor is unmistakably the cheerful man, and the soprano is intended to be the melancholic humour personified. In Milton's poems, the two humours are not mere symbols of insubstantial moods but two equally attractive mistresses: Mirth, "fair and free, / In Heav'n yclep'd Euphrosyne" who offers earthly pleasure, and "divinest Melancholy," "sage and holy" who promises celestial bliss. The three poetic genres assigned to the tenor indicate he is a poet.

In his recording Agnew vividly portrays a young poet (Milton's or Handel's alter ego) undergoing a spiritual progress from depression to cheerfulness, through the sensitive construction of the tenor part originally assigned to Beard.[16] Of the two other male singers in the Allegro, the bass sings mainly of his physical activities, and the boy treble plays the part of the goddess Mirth attracting the young man's attention to her/his own charm, with the songs of the lark, the rural landscape, the sound of merry bells, and finally Lydian airs.

The plot of the drama enacted by the tenor is: A youthful poet, depressed by his pensive way of life, strives to quit Melancholy, his former mistress ("Hence loathèd Melancholy"), and asks Mirth for help ("Haste thee, nymph"). Eloping with Mirth and her crew ("Come and trip it as you go"), he wishes to join her by offering her tribute ("If I give thee honour due, / Mirth, admit me of thy crew!"). He makes a pastoral ("Let me wander not unseen"), a court masque ("There let Hymen oft appear"), and stage plays ("I'll to the well-trod stage anon") in honour of Mirth. Thus acquiring her favour, the poet pledges to live with her ever after, leaving

Melancholy alone in religious devotion. All this while Melancholy keeps haunting her former servant with an enchanting melody, which the poet desperately resists.[17]

Thus Handel dramatised Milton's *L'Allegro*—not *Il Penseroso*—at a deeper level, into the spiritual conflict of a poet involved in a deadly struggle between two cardinal humours to dominate the human soul.

Let us follow Agnew's performance for a while.
Part 1 begins with the recitative "Hence loathed Melancholy":

<*Accompagnato* "Hence loathed Melancholy">

Hence, loathed Melancholy,
Of Cerberus and blackest Midnight born,
In Stygian cave forlorn,
'Mongst horrid shapes, and shrieks, and sights unholy,
Find out some uncouth cell,
Where brooding Darkness spreads his jealous wings,
And the night-raven sings:
There, under ebon shades, and low-brow'd rocks,
As ragged as thy locks,
In dark Cimmerian desert ever dwell. (*L'Allegro* 1—10)

Here Agnew's voice reproduces Dante's *selva oscura*, which would expel whatever optimistic fantasy we may have of Melancholy. The individual sounds of Milton moans and groans as "the darkness spreads jealous wings," depicting the inner hell of the young poet occupied by the attendants of Melancholy—"horrid shapes, and shrieks, and sights unholy"—with nightmarish affliction and stomach-convulsing sense of disgust. The poet struggles with all his might to shake himself free from Melancholy, yet the feebleness of the last two words—"In dark Cimmerian desert *ever dwell*"—implies that it is a hard fight.

With "Haste thee, nymph" he calls for the help of Mirth, who nimbly lands from above with the last word, followed by her crew.

<*Air* "Haste thee, nymph">

Haste thee nymph, and bring with thee
Jest and youthful Jollity,
Quips, and Cranks, and wanton Wiles,
Nods, and Becks, and wreathed Smiles,
Such as hang on Hebe's cheek,
And love to live in dimple sleek;
Sport, that wrinkled Care derides,
And Laughter holding both his sides.
Chorus
Haste thee nymph, and bring with thee
Jest and youthful Jollity,

Sport, that wrinkled Care derides,
And Laughter holding both his sides. (*L'Allegro* 25–31)

Here every word of Milton vibrates with vigor, to animate every attendant of Mirth. Even monosyllabic Jest, Quips, Cranks, Nods and Becks are distinguished by their own proper characters and brisk movements. Relaxed by "wreathed Smiles . . . in dimple sleek," and deriding "Care" with "Sport," the poet breaks out into hearty, merry laughter with "ho-, ho-, ho-, ho-, holding both his sides," which arouses the laughing chorus—"the boldest attempt ever made by music" according to Lang (318)—with the implication that the swell of Laughter eventually bursts the fetters of Melancholy.

With the next aria Agnew develops the choreographic qualities of Milton's sounds explored by Handel.

<*Air* "Come and trip it as you go">
Come, and trip it as you [ye] go
On the light fantastic toe!
Chorus
Come, and trip it as you go
On the light fantastic toe! (*L'Allegro* 33–34)

The "fantastic" sensation seems to come from sudden liberation after long imprisonment. Trying to see if he can move at all, the poet begins to dance with Mirth, first clumsily and then more and more actively, eventually to lead Mirth wherever he likes. The enchantment does not seem to lead him to ruin, for his toes touch the ground with every step. The powerful, highly skilful, and kaleidoscopic dance of Agnew's voice bears positive connotations of Mirth's artistic inspiration. He quite literally trips on "trip It, trip It," in a vocal attempt to scale "on"! He finally succeeds and dances away with Mirth and her crew, leaving Melancholy alone in her "even step and musing gait."

The bright tone of the next recitative "Hence, loathed Melancholy! / In dark Cimmerian desert ever dwell" indicates that they are now at a safe distance from Melancholy, probably now on top of a jovial hill.

Listening to the lark and the hounds and horn in the daylight, the poet takes a fancy to Mirth, and courteously asks for her company by offering tribute with the recitative "If I give thee honour due, / Mirth, admit me of thy crew!" (*L'Allegro* 37–38)

His first offering is a pastoral piece. Rambling with her through bucolic scenes, he gathers flowers to adorn her, i.e. the pleasant sounds and rhythms of country life:

<*Air* "Let me wander not unseen">
Let me wander [Sometime walking] not unseen
By hedgerow elms, on hillocks green:
There the ploughman, near at hand,
Whistles o'er the furrowed land,

And the milkmaid singeth blithe,
And the mower whets his scythe,
And every shepherd tells his tale
Under the hawthorn, in the dale. (*L'Allegro* 57–58; 64–68)

The ploughman whistles, the milkmaid sings, the mower whets his scythe with rhythmic movements, the shepherd tells tales—all sing in harmony to show that labour may not be punishment for our sin. Set in Handel's favourite dance form of the *siciliana* (Lang 600), the languishing breeze of Milton's sounds causes a gradual thaw in the poet's veins, which had turned "to marble" under Melancholy's custody. As he walks, joyous tears spring from his eyes. He has now regained human warmth.

The poet celebrates his recovery by joining the villagers in their entertainments "on a sunshine holiday" until "lull'd to sleep" by them, protected from the gloomy sounds of Melancholy.

Agnew's performance shows that Handel's arrangement is far from a mere landscape painting or alternation of two humours. By focusing on Milton's auditory or musical elements, it not only explores the young Milton's dramatic possibilities but also reveals his poetic sensitivity, especially his potential mirthfulness.

Be that as it may, we may justly wonder if Milton would really approve this kind of pleasure-seeking. Placed in Milton's literary career, the moral of the twin poems must be vice versa. *Il Penseroso* was clearly written as a palinode to the exuberance of *L'Allegro*. The pensive man rejects Mirth as "vain deluding Joys" and atones for his "misdeeds" "in holy passion," until he falls "into ecstasies" and sees "all heaven before mine [his] eyes." Milton goes on to tell us the same story against the temptation of worldly pleasure in *Comus* (1634), *Paradise Lost* (1667), *Paradise Regained* (1671) and *Samson Agonistes* (1671).

Handel's Part 1 dealing with the joys of country life might be overlooked, but the extravagance of the court masque and vulgarity of the public theatre in Part 2 in no way conform to Milton's rigorous discipline.

In Part 2 Melancholy begins her counter-attack with "Hence vain deluding joys . . . without Father bred" reminding the poet of Mirth's scandalous birth and company. Instead of their "toys," she offers the immortality of the soul, attained through the mystic rites of Neoplatonism.

Against this, Mirth offers "magic" powers on earth, the "influence" of the "bright eyes" of a "store of ladies" to spellbind "the busy hum of men" in "Populous cities."

<*Air* "There let Hymen oft appear">

There let Hymen oft appear
In saffron robe, with taper clear
And pomp, and feast, and revelry,
With Mask, and antique pageantry,
Such sights as youthful poets dream
On summer eves by haunted stream. (*L'Allegro* 125–30)

Mirth invites the poet to cool himself by a stream, where he dreams of presenting a courtly

entertainment, a most sumptuous nuptial masque led by Hymen. His robe is saffron (also the colour of Bacchus and Venus, the parents of Mirth). Lit up by "taper clear," it dazzles and allures the splendid array of royalty and nobility to join "pomp, and feast, and revelry," the courtly orgies of wine and love (see Brooks-Davies 124). Handel assigned melismas of 16ths to the "saffron robe" of Hymen, and the "haunted stream" to signify the irresistibility of magical power Milton attached to these words; Agnew dexterously incorporates them to suggest how the flickering vision mesmerises the poet into accepting the charm of court patronage.

Afflicted by Mirth's noise and light, Melancholy entreats to "Hide me [her] from Day's garish eye" and allow her to indulge in "some strange mysterious Dream."

Then Mirth leads him onto to the theatre. With the aria "I'll to the well-trod stage anon" the poet runs up on stage to present plays after the manner of two major playwrights, Jonson and Shakespeare. This mimicry exposes him to a storm of applause, which torments already weakened Melancholy.

The excitement of the scenic fury entices the poet and Mirth to allow their wandering souls to transfuse with the soft "Lydian airs," which might awaken Orpheus from his slumber.

Here a trumpet announces the triumph of Mirth over Melancholy. With his last aria "These delights if thou canst give, / Mirth, with thee I mean to live," the poet pledges to give himself entirely to her, leaving the rejected Melancholy to pine away in seclusion.

Thus observed, Part 2 is nothing but a *Paradise Regained* turned upside-down. It is very difficult to believe that Milton would tolerate as much.

In fact Handel was aware of the "danger" in Allegro's character. He had been drawn to Milton through Thomas Arne's revised setting of *Comus*, where Mirth [Euphrosyne] was newly introduced as another seducer of ladies.[18]

Still, Handel allowed Allegro to succumb to the temptation of Mirth, and Agnew's performance leaves a sense of ambiguity as to whether it is morally permissible. In his aria "There let Hymen oft appear," both Handel's music and Agnew's tone of "such sights as youthful poets dream" sound innocent enough to suggest that the poet drinks the water of the haunted stream. Yet we cannot be sure whether it is to defend their dream or to warn against their gullibility. Still more puzzling is the elaborate musical setting for Jonson and Shakespeare in "I'll to the well-trod stage anon." Though they may have meant something to Milton, what is the use of lingering on these proper nouns for Handel's own dramatisation of *L'Allegro*? It seems we are asked to explore a still deeper level before deciding if the final exuberance of the young poet means salvation or ruin.

4. Jonson and Shakespeare

Handel's initial suggestion for Part 3 was something from Milton's *At a Solemn Musick*, but Jennens provided his own sets of recitatives and arias for the Moderato, concluded by the reconciling duet of the two humours (Hicks 6):

<*Duet* "As steals the morn" (soprano, tenor)>

As steals the morn upon the night,

> And melts the shades away,
> So truth doth fancy's charm dissolve,
> And rising reason puts to flight
> The fumes that did the mind involve,
> Restoring intellectual day.

This is largely taken from Prospero's lines in *The Tempest*, where he liberates his captives from his charm. But besides the metre, it differs in details from Shakespeare's original, which reads as follows:

> The charm dissolves apace,
> And as the morning steals upon the night,
> Melting the darkness, so their rising senses
> Begin to chase the ignorant fumes that mantle
> Their clearer reason. (*The Tempest* 5. 1. 64–68)

In both "charms" are dissolved and "fumes" are expelled or put to flight, but while Prospero dissolves his charm and their "senses" saves their "reason" in Shakespeare, "truth" dissolves "fancy's charm," and "reason" saves the "mind" in Handel. "Truth" and "day" are newly introduced in Handel's *Moderato*.

The duet has still another source—Jonson's masque *Hymenaei*. There Reason appeases four cardinal Humours and Affections that rose in revolt, while Truth, who has the sun in her right hand, dissipates "Error, clad in mists" with her fan.

Shakespeare and Jonson bring us back to the stage combat in *L'Allegro*. Is this a mere coincidence? Or considering they are the only two English poets referred to in Milton's poetry, is there any meaning in fusing their works in the reconciling duet?

The Tempest is the most fantastic play of "sweetest Shakespeare, fancy's child," and "Jonson's learned sock" refers to his comedy of humours deriving from Plautine comedy of manners —specifically *Every Man in His Humour* (1598).[19] While *The Tempest* concludes Shakespeare's play writing, the reconciliation of humours attempted in *Hymenaei* was Jonson's life work, beginning with *Every Man in His Humour* and concluded with *The Magnetic Lady* (see *The Magnetic Lady* Induction, 99–111). Handel's duet strongly suggests another reconciliation—of opposite types of poets.

Jonson's *Hymenaei* is also the source of Hymen's "saffron robe and taper clear," the symbol of the corrupt court.[20] In his comedies, Jonson frequently celebrates the triumph of mirth over melancholy by defending youthful "debauchery." "Lydian airs" also have Jonsonian links, in his comedy *Volpone* (1606) and masque *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue* (1616).[21] Milton's Allegro, after all, follows Jonson's spirit of revelry, which he was to attack in his later works (Brooks-Davies 124).

In contrast, the Neoplatonic ideal in *Il Penseroso* is related closely with *The Tempest*. Prospero's masque celebrating Ferdinand and Miranda's chaste love, is the antithesis of Jonson's nuptial masques. Shakespeare carefully excludes Venus and Cupid, who preside over Jonson's

wedding masques—*Haddington Masque*, *Challenge at Tilt*, *Love's Triumph*, and *Love's Welcome*; even Hymen, the nuptial god himself, does not appear in spite of the notice.

Thus the conflict between Milton's two cardinal humours reflects the struggle between the two major poets; Milton, who famously wrote against Jonson's epicurism, appears to side with Shakespeare.

In *Comus*, Milton reworked Jonson's joyful god of the belly in *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue* into a menacing seducer. *The Tempest* prefigures *Comus* in stressing chastity and virtue (Knowles 124). Just as Prospero exercises influence over the young couple towards virtue with his Hermetic art, Sabrina exercises her mystical power over the lady and his brothers (Shawcross 31). And just as Shakespeare confined the lowest level of the human soul in the misshapen Caliban, Milton turned the countenances of people who drank Comus's cup to cure melancholy into those of brutish beasts (*Comus* 810−12).

So far Milton's attitude seems to be clearly against Jonson in favour of Shakespeare. But Shakespeare's Prospero breaks his magic wand in the end, with the words quoted above, and it is caused by Caliban. If that means Shakespeare conformed to the Jonsonian comic principle, how did Milton respond to it?

He did not neglect the problem in *Il Penseroso*:

> Hide me from Day's garish eye,
> While the bee with honied thigh,
> That at her flowe'ry work doth sing,
> And the waters murmuring,
> With that consort as they keep,
> Entice the dewy feather'd Sleep;
> And let some strange mysterious Dream
> Wave at his wings in airy stream
> Of lively portraiture display'd
> Softly on my eyelids laid.
> Then, as I wake, sweet music breathe
> Above, about, or underneath,
> Sent by some spirit to mortals good,
> Or th' unseen genius of the wood. (141−54).

Handel used this passage to empower Melancholy: with it, she secures her fantastic hold. Her "strange mysterious Dream" is safe while the bee drones men into sleep while the sun glares.

The "bee with honied thigh" reminds us of Shakespeare's Ariel, who sings "Where the bee sucks, there suck I," dreaming of when he will be free (*The Tempest* 5. 1. 88−94). Ariel was a winged insect transformed by Prospero's magic into the far more potent "dewy feather'd Sleep," to breed fancy in man's brains with his "sweet music."

The last four lines echo Caliban's remark on the magic music of the island:

> Be not afeard; the isle is full of noises,

Sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight, and hurt not.
Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
Will hum about mine ears; and sometimes voices,
That, if I then had wak'd after long sleep,
Will make me sleep again, and then in dreaming,
The clouds methought would open, and show riches
Ready to drop upon me, that, when I wak'd,
I cried to dream again. (*The Tempest* 3. 2. 135—43)

In his ultra-idyllic, germ-free world of a desert island, Prospero attempts to bring his magical art to a peak with his anti-Jonsonian masque but his charm breaks and all vanishes into thin air, when he thinks of Caliban's revolt. Prospero resolves to quit his magic, and lets Ariel live again "under the blossom that hangs on the bough".

As critics have wondered, why should the potent magus be frustrated by an idiotic, powerless monster?

In his recording of Caliban's lines above, collected in *Sit Fast* (Virgin Classics, 1996/1997), Agnew offers us a key to solving the problem.

<"In Dreaming">

This is sung to Sally Beamish's (1956—) arrangement of Purcell and that of Michael Tippet (1905—) for viol consort. In Prospero's eyes Caliban is "a born devil," "as disproportion'd in his manners as in his shape," mentally retarded and morally unreformable. But Agnew depicts Caliban as standing aloof from human values. Neither ugly nor beautiful, neither evil nor good, he is simply what he is, responding and acting according to his own instinct. He does not so much as reason like Browning's quibbling counterpart. He entrusts himself to the "sounds and sweet airs" because they "give delight." He is defenceless because they seem harmless, yet in fact they hurt him deeply by intoxicating him a while and awakening him in despair. He is betrayed, but repeats it again and again, without knowing what is wrong. Agnew's Caliban gives out a painful cry, which does not so much cause pity but strikes the hearer's innermost part like an acute pain or convulsion in some organ. It is an alarm of nature directed against "The immortal mind that hath forsook / Her mansion in this fleshly nook" (*Il Penseroso* 91—92).

He is "the quintessence of dust" entrapped in a magical cycle of the tantalising hell in Prospero's ideal world of virtue and chastity. Prospero's "paradise" is safe from Caliban's "brutality" while Ariel numbs his senses with "twangling instruments" not unlike the hum and buzz of the bee.

Eventually he rises in revolt with his antic crew. Perhaps it was also Shakespeare's own revolt against himself; he had suffocated his comedy by prohibiting laughter, perhaps reflecting the limitations of his naive dichotomy. His practice of building up an artificially controlled, sterilised world, after all, is foul play, fouler than that of his despised Caliban's or hated antagonists', in violating the law of nature.

Though Prospero accuses them of conspiracies, it was possible to crush or evade them by

using human wit. On the other hand, no mortal can cope with Prospero's supernatural art, still less Caliban, half-witted mooncalf. In attacking the epicurism of Jonson's "learned sock" in the shape of Caliban, Shakespeare was trying to turn into a moral point what belongs to physiology or pathology—neither to be punished nor praised. Awakening to his error, he resolves to "abjure" his art by calling it "rough magic" (5. 1. 55).

The same thing can be said of Milton, who transformed Comus's notaries into wild beasts. Probably Handel suspected that the imperfect spelling of *Il Penseroso*, instead of *Pensieroso*, could be an anagram of Prospero. He would have also known that Milton's title reflects directly or indirectly Orazio Vecchi's (1560−1605) *L'Humore musicale*, which contains *L'humor allegro* among *L'humor malenconico*, *L'humor grave* &c. Vecchi was included in the list of the music books Milton bought during his stay in Italy 1638−39 (Parker 180−81). In this encyclopaedic study of various types of lovers, in all the moods expressible in music, Vecchi aimed to guide and strengthen the hearer even in the most zany or melancholy moments, by making him/her to seek the way to heal their own extremities.[22]

This is not far from what Jonson attempted in his comedy of humours. As the poet most versed in medicine in his own time (Silvette 121), Jonson based it not on moral or religious but on physiological or pathological principles, aiming to cure illness, not punish vice.

Nor does it differ from what Burton tried in his *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), from which Milton culled the theme of his poems.[23] In Burton, the two humours come alternately, with the conclusion "None so divine" as mirth and "Naught so damn'd" as melancholy. Of the two extreme humours it is melancholy that is by far the more harmful to the health, because it can lead people to death. Sometimes vain conceits of mirth have to be constrained by pensive life, but Burton warns this is by no means permissible when proceeding from overmuch study.[24]

What Milton did was to separate this into *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, making the latter reverse the former. As son of a court surgeon, Handel could not have overlooked this breach of the inviolable rule of medicine. In suggesting rearranging Milton's poems into a debate, Handel must have wanted to restore Burton's original form and spirit.

Allegedly, Handel found the bulk of Milton's poetry distasteful (Lang 396). On at least two occasions Handel refused to arrange the more obviously "sublime" *Paradise Lost*, and he disliked *Il Penseroso* as it had too much unbroken grave music (Hicks 6, 7).

Even so, it would be too hasty to ascribe Handel's rearrangement of *L'Allegro* to his own arbitrariness. According to Lang, Handel was primarily attracted to Milton's language (396). Bred in a musical family, Milton understood music from infancy (Lang 316). T. S. Eliot says Milton had an auditory rather than a visual imagination.[25] As mentioned, he would deliberately introduce complex syntax for the sake of pleasing sounds (Lang 396).

No doubt Handel's discriminating ear perceived in Milton's *L'Allegro* the poet's unmistakable acceptance of pleasure. Besides his strict moral and religious standards, Milton may have had an artistic standard of musical beauty—conscious or unconscious—which might overlook certain kinds of transgression. The notion of pleasing sounds is not foreign to Jonsonian comic theory, where pleasure means the conformity to the natural state of mind, and pain the opposite (See Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1. 11. 1). Milton was not unaware of it, for he acknowledges "a kind of delight" to temper certain passions to just measure; only he tried to cure melancholy with

melancholy (*Samson Agonistes* Preface).

Even in *Il Moderato*, Handel is in favour of *L'Allegro*, and often performed *L'Allegro* without *Il Moderato*. His drastic dramatisation of *L'Allegro* at the cost of *Il Penseroso*, after all, is the reconstruction of *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue*, against which Milton wrote *Comus*. Handel may have tried to make Milton acknowledge Comus as his own, just as Shakespeare admits through Prospero who says "this thing of darkness [i.e. Caliban] I acknowledge mine" at the end of The Tempest (5. 1. 276).

The phrase "truth doth fancy's charm dissolve" in Handel's duet connotes that Shakespeare's fancy has conformed with Jonsonian comic "truth," and Agnew's performance of the stage combat in *L'Allegro* already forebodes it.

<*Air* "I'll to the well-trod stage anon">

I'll [Then] to the well-trod stage anon,
If Jonson's learned sock be on,
Or sweetest Shakespeare, fancy's child,
Warble his native wood-notes wild. (*L'Allegro* 131—34)

For "Jonson's learned sock," Handel uses double time gavotte in C major; here Agnew performs high-spirited, brisk and convincing steps ending with a clear-cut descent of an octave, implying he has done his best without using supernatural means. For Shakespeare's "native wood-notes wild" is given a triplet 8th note coloratura in A minor, with which he only shifts from branch to branch, hovering in the air only for a short while; he seems unable to fly higher, either steeped in fancy or overwhelmed by Jonson's lusty lucidity.[26]

In the Moderato's reconciling duet, Handel is said to have wisely concentrated on nature and not attached morality, here an expatiation on mental fumes and the return of "intellectual day" (Dean 322).

<Duet "As steals the morn upon the night">

In this duet, the Allegro tenor represents "the morn," while the melancholic soprano represents "the fumes" of the "night." Agnew convinces us that Handel tried to clear the hearer's mind by showing them through Beard's voice how the rising sun dissipates the shades and fume of night gently, gradually, yet with the force of inevitability.

Thus the brightness of Truth undoes the false Opinion's "charm" in Jonson's *Hymenaei*, but the "witty serpents" at her feet still make us uneasy. This also may have affected Milton's view of Paradise, not unlike Prospero's enchanted island of virtue and chastity, where a serpent's temptation causes "man's first disobedience to God."

5. A Solemn Music

When Shakespeare's Prospero dissolves the charm he exercised on his erstwhile enemies, there comes "solemn music" in its true sense, as opposed to Ariel's unnatural tune, forced by

Prospero's "rough magic."

As stated, Handel's initial suggestion for Part 3 of his *L'Allegro* was Milton's *At a Solemn Musick*, whose title echoes the scene.[27] The subject is the loss of the happy marriage between Voice and Verse, where "undiscording voice" might answer "that "melodious noise" "till our disproportioned sin / Jarred against nature's chime." When he proposed Milton's poem, Handel had justly grasped Shakespeare's idea of Prospero's violence jarring against "nature's chime," for he had suffered jarring sounds on earth.

Handel wrote *L'Allegro* in the winter of 1740, during the severest cold in English history. It was also his time of crisis. His greatest years as an opera composer were over, while his finest oratorios still lay in the future (Gardiner 13). He had suffered the first of several strokes and at one point seems to have considered leaving England (Gardiner 13).

Handel was a Prospero, drifted off to a desert island. Though it began to boast economic prosperity, it was musically the least developed country in Europe (Hogwood 50). Perhaps tired by skirmishing with his German colleagues, he took refuge in Italy, the centre of magnificent art and music; there he cultivated and pursued his own studies for three years. He returned to Germany for a while, yet rather than resume vying with his rivals, he chose to seek his fortune in an untouched field.

Using the art acquired in Italy, he gained riches from the island by exploiting Calibans with his magic tune of Italian opera. Frequently he visited Italy to hunt Ariels, the expensive star singers with acrobatic gullets, especially castrati for the *opera seria*—not unlike Prospero's masque—with a mythological story-line and the convenience of magical conversion (Hogwood 50–52).

It lasted for nearly 25 years, but it was gradually undermined by Caliban revolts. The most fatal was John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* (1728), written against "the seduction of foreign music, the novelty of those unnatural warblers then imported" which "had bewitched the fancy" of the English theatre.[28]

The serious deadlock seemed to press him to quit his magical arts. But unlike Prospero, Handel listened to the Caliban voices to see if there was truth in them. Even after the success of *The Beggar's Opera*, he stayed friends with Gay, who had written the libretto for Handel's *Acis and Galatea* (1719; 1732). Gay said he hated the trend of polite society to regard Senegino, a leading castrato, as "the greatest man that ever lived."[29] Having cherished what the Italians had forsaken under the name of development—their own tradition of keeping prosody in which poetry and music are married in perfect harmony—the English people instinctively rejected the unnaturalness of his magic which made "poetry and music equally hindered by each other."[30]

We should not dismiss Gay's burlesque as musically worthless. Versed in the musical factors of the target of his satire, Gay perfectly knew how to bring together his own words and music (see Winton 41–59). Handel had been interested in folk music, and is known to have noted down London street cries (Lang 595). Two years after Gay's death, he met an ideal mediator between his operas and English song.

While the rival opera company, the "Opera of Nobility", threatened his opera writing with their newly acquired Farinelli, the legendary castrato, Handel happened to find Beard's voice in

the Chapel Royal, which had thunderstruck Sagudino the Venetian as "more divine than human" three centuries before. Beard's "sound, male, powerful, and extensive" voice was flexible enough to prosper both in the Italian opera and Gay's burlesque.[31] It was to impress the Frenchman Rousseau when he heard him during his sojourn in London in 1766; he confessed that he liked him best of all singers (Müller 47).

Here again Agnew's recording guides us to what Handel might have found in Gay's work. It is Jonson's ballad collected in the anthology *Nutmeg and Ginger* (Philips, 1996/1999); well-known in Gay's days as "The Cut Purse," it is sung to the Tudor air "Packington's Pound" in *Bartholomew Fair* ([1614] 3. 5). Gay employed the same music twice: first in his ballad "Newgate's Garland" (with a note "To the Tune of The Cut-purse") and then as an Air 43 "Thus Gamesters united in Friendship are found" in *The Beggar's Opera* Act 3, counting on people associating the tune with Jonson's words and appreciating its relevance.[32]

<"The Cutpurse">

My masters and friends and good people draw near,
And look to your purses, for that I do say,
And tho' little money in them do you wear,
It cost me more to get than to lose in a day;
You oft have been told, the young and the old,
And bidden beware of the cutpurse so bold:
Then if you take heed not, free me from the curse,
Who give you fair warning for and the cutpurse.
Youth, youth, thou hadst better been starv'd at nurse,
Then for to be hang'd for cutting a purse.

In Jonson's comedy the ballad singer Nightingale offers this "Caveat for Cutpurses." His true job is to attract fair visitors while his mate picks their pockets. Agnew's diction realistically suggests that the singer has no musical training or education, but does have a better-than-average, native voice. This urban nightingale is destined to court gulls instead of his mistress, or he has to dance on nothing with his dear accomplice, or perhaps repent and starve. A slight tremble in his voice betrays his hidden fear of death. His refrain "Youth, youth, thou hadst better been starv'd at [by thy] nurse, / Then for to be hang'd [live to be hanged] for cutting a purse" is an admonition coming too late. What strikes us in the comical scene is that he has taught himself to sound most beautiful and cheerful in the filthiest place, and in the most wretched situation.

It is fortuitous that while Handel's opera seria had Shakespearean associations, Gay's low-life opera had a Jonsonian link.[33]

A member of the Burlington House coterie, Handel could not have been ignorant of Jonson, the paragon of the Augustan ideal as the English Horace (Young 3—4; Wood 31). He had provided incidental music revised from the overture of his opera *Rodrigo* for the revival of *The Alchemist* (Abraham 286), which broadly satirised the Hermetic mysticism of Prospero in *The Tempest*.

Written three years after *The Tempest*, Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* punishes three Prosperos

by putting them in the stocks, for their attempt to reform the fallen world according to their fanciful ideals. The chief target is Justice Adam Overdo, who dares to judge others forgetting he is "but Adam, flesh, and blood."

As he read Milton's twin poems in his worst melancholy, Handel must have found his alter ego, another Prospero in *Il Penseroso*. Already steeped in deep melancholy, Milton was beginning to curse the loss of Paradise through "our disproportioned sin." In *L'Allegro*, on the other hand, he found "a pure poet, full of sensitivity, sympathy, admiration for the exuberance of nature, and tender feelings," with "a radiant view of life" (Lang 316).

The prototype of *L'Allegro* dates back earlier, to Milton's Latin elegy "To Charles Diodati." It was written at the age of seventeen, while he was temporarily expelled from Cambridge over trouble with his tutor, William Chappell. There he talks openly of the joys of lady-watching, along with those of walking on the countryside and the city life, including theatre-going and courtly entertainments. Though he is not unaware of their danger of temptation, his soul is still supple enough to show sympathy with the licentious poet Ovid.

The youthful Milton here is a young Edward Knowell, whose conduct is worthy to be defended by the merry Justice Clement against his meddlesome father:

> Your son is old enough to govern himself: let him run his course, it's the only way to make him a stayed man. If he were an unthrift, a ruffian, a drunkard, or a licentious liver, then you had reason; you had reason to take care; but, being none of these, mirth's my witness, an' I had twice so many cares as you have, I'd drown them all in a cup of sack. (*Every Man in His Humour* [1616 F] 3. 73. 7. 86—94)

Though we cannot trace whether Handel knew the elegy, he perceived at least Milton's sounds and rhythm in *L'Allegro*, bursting with joy in life. When he dared to dramatise it at the cost of *Il Penseroso*, he may have admonished himself with Jonson's Justice Clement—in order to conquer his own melancholy.

Handel found Beard's youthful tenor voice fostered in the English tradition, with its infinite powers of expression. It was a human voice, in line with the human body's physiology, suited to dissipating the fume of melancholy "in unreproved pleasure free." In him Handel found a beam of light for future English oratorios.

Now we are ready to hear the last aria of *L'Allegro*.

<*Air* "These delights if thou canst give">

> These delights if thou canst give,
> Mirth, with thee I mean to live.
> *Chorus*
> These delights if thou canst give,
> Mirth, with thee we mean to live. (*L'Allegro* 151—52)

A solo trumpet starts the most exuberant music of "These delights if thou canst give, / Mirth, with thee I mean to live." The potential energy of Milton's "delights" and "give" is fully exploited

by Handel's rapturous melismas. Since Mirth has promised to give him these delights, the poet resolves to give himself entirely to her, pledging "with *thee* I mean to live" nearly ten times. Agnew's performance, too, reaches full exuberance in raptures of joy, but it denotes that the poet's soul still stays safe on earth with his body.[34] It convinces us that however extravagant it may seem, life is not worth living without knowing such a sensation. The instrumental flourish with the chorus announces the triumph of Mirth over Melancholy, youth over age and life over death.

Behind Agnew's "Mirth, with thee, I mean to live," we hear Handel's resolution to live in his land of adoption until the time of his death. It was truly the profoundest tribute Handel ever paid to England, but in fact it did go far deeper beneath the surface than is generally imagined.

In the following year Handel began composing *Messiah*, again with Jennens's arrangement, this time, of the Authorised Version. Handel's setting, however, failed to meet Jennens's ideal of "Religion and Morality." He complained to Edward Holdsworth that Handel abused "Sacred Words," saying, "a Jew would have paid more respect to the Prophets. The name of Heathen will suit him better. . . ."[35]

We may well suspect that Handel composed *Messiah* as a sequel to *L'Allegro*, concentrating again on nature and not attaching morality. As in *L'Allegro*, *Messiah*'s vocal part begins with the tenor, but unlike *L'Allegro*, it begins with delight.

Agnew's recording of *Messiah* (1996/1997) convinces us that Handel had perfectly recovered from his melancholy by this time; he was prepared to extend the spirit of Mirth all over the country, through Beard's voice speaking for the prophet Isaiah.[36]

<*Accompagnato* "Comfort ye my people">

> Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned.
> The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness: Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. (Isaiah 40: 1—3)

The violin accompaniment bespeaks Handel's strong emotion (Jacobi 73), here of reconciliation and forgiveness. With "Comfort ye, my people," Handel's music is personified into Peace by the tenor, which falls from the skies and resounds in the wilderness to pacify all sorts of turmoil within the human mind. In "Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her . . . that her iniquity is pardoned" we hear Handel's declaration of peace with England; he was now willing to embrace the land of his adoption from the bottom of his heart.

The following air "ev'ry valley shall be exalted" is said to be "brimming with the very breath of nature." This is accompanied only with strings (Jacobi 73), no doubt not to disturb Beard, in whose single voice he sought to embody nature's harmony.

<*Air* "Ev'ry valley shall be exalted">

> Ev'ry [Every] valley shall be exalted, and ev'ry [every] mountain and hill [shall be] made low, [and] the crooked [shall be] straight and the rough places plain.
> (Isaiah 40. 4)

In Agnew's recording we see every valley on earth leap with joy with all the creatures living in her, as it is "exalted" to the skies, with the coloratura composed of 8ths and 16ths; every mountain greets the valley as she gently descends from her height, to make one boundless, fertile plain, with the pulse of living nature, quickened with the joy of life. Perhaps deriving from the personal "Laughter holding both his sides" in *L'Allegro*, it now spreads and involves the whole universe in the harmony of mirth. The world shall be thus in Anno Domini, Isaiah prophesies in joy.

We are convinced that this is "nature's chime" desperately sought by Milton in "At a Solemn Musick." It was also Handel's response to Milton's *Paradise Lost*, which he refused to set to music. Suggestively enough Handel ignored the Bishop Elphin's proposal to write a sequel to Messiah called *The Penitent* (Hogwood 179). Though Milton speaks of the rupture between "Voice and Verse" through "our disproportioned sin," God's will has been accomplished. Let us then rejoice that "iniquity is pardoned," rather than weep for the lost Paradise or seek it through penance. It was Handel's English tenor who enabled him to accomplish it.

With *Samson* (1743) Handel innovated by casting his hero as a tenor in this oratorio. Handel abjured his "rough magic" by breaking the Italian opera's wand, making up his mind to become altogether wedded to works in English (Lang 406). Henceforth the tenor will rule in the oratorio, promoted from an accessory role to the eminence heretofore occupied by the castrato (Lang 406). Now Handel was ready to declare that "the English language, which is so expressive of the sublimest Sentiments is the best adapted of any to the full and solemn Kind of Musick."[37]

In *Samson*, Handel is said to have resisted Milton's misogyny and hatred of the Philistines by depicting them as more attractive and persuasive (Lang 396—98). As stated, Milton tried to cure melancholy with melancholy in this tragedy. Yet here, too, Handel must have detected Milton's lyrical possibility behind the musical sounds, and his "involuntary worship of beauty" behind the classicism (Lang 395). Handel tried to reproduce what the poet perceived with his sensitive soul yet refused to see or left unsaid. By thus curing Milton of his melancholy, Handel must have been trying to cure himself.

Agnew's recordings not only reveal Milton's poetic sensitivity and dramatic possibilities. By throwing light on Milton's ambiguous relationship with Jonson and Shakespeare, he contributes a great deal to settling the long-discussed problem of to which humour the young Milton committed himself, and to what degree. By far the greatest achievement is his exploration of Handel's musical interpretation of Milton's prosody, through which we have been allowed to regard *L'Allegro* as a "Solemn Musick," eagerly sought for by the poet himself.

* * * * *

The rupture between "Voice and Verse" was not only a problem for Milton and Handel. Horace tells us man had suffered from the problem for two millennia, in deploring the decay of the art of performance (*Ars poetica* 202—19). As the Roman Empire widened its domain and people were allowed more leisure and license, the performing arts lost their former simple

grace; the style became more and more noisily flamboyant and obscure. Music got lost in dithyrambic instrumental madness, and the sense of words in a Delphic high-flown obscurity through impetuous chanting.

Originally poetry was sung, and formed of rhythm, language, and music (Aristotle, *Poetics* ch. 1). Song and speech were discussed in the same terms, differing only in pitches and intervals. Today music and poetry are considered two separate things, the former lost language and rhythm, and the latter music. Music is now pursued for its own sake; "emancipation" from speech and "regular" rhythm or metre was regarded as a mark of development, along with complex rhythm and notes.

Many performers have lost, in exchange for "beauty" or loudness, variety and construction, either dragged along by or drowned under complicated notes, sounding furious and signifying nothing. Classical music has allowed artists to use their own jargon to show off what they believe to be an artist's sensitivity. Pop music, on the other hand, often relies on the mechanical recurrence of unfluctuating monotony parading as beat or rhythm.

Between the two extremities of snobbish intoxication in exclusive obscurities and tactless discharge of pent-up fury, Agnew stands high and aloof in equilibrium. While they are raving, he is speaking without losing himself, focusing on reconstructing what the poetry has to convey; even when the poetry raves, he conveys it appropriately and to the right degree, considering the effect on the audience.

People say Agnew's Orphée would win Eurydice from Pluto if anyone could (*La descente d'Orphée aux enfers* [Erato, 1995]), and we saw Amphion's art in his Solomon's temple. But observing Agnew's performance, we notice that he speaks in a plain and most basic poetic "language", with unbroken yet not monotonous "rhythm," and providently constructed "harmony."

Horace shrewdly attributed the legends of Orpheus and Amphion to human wisdom which gave rules and laws to things in a chaotic jumble and restrained people from savagery. (*Ars poetica* 394–99) If asked by anyone for his secret, Agnew could cite this Roman poet:

> I shall aim at a style that employs no unfamiliar diction, one that any singer [writer] may hope to achieve, but would sweat tears of blood in his efforts and still not manage it—such is the power of words that are used in the right places and in the right relationships, and such the grace that they can add to the commonplace when so used.
>
> (*Ars poetica* 240–43)[38]

No doubt this was what Handel's Beard also did following the English tradition, in which Purcell showed a greatest care or precision in accentuation and a greatest care for the inflexions of the poet's text. The Italians had forsaken the custom observed in their early Florentine opera (Westrup 164).

Thus observed, Agnew's style is based on what music has discarded under the name of development or evolution. If anything, it is the Renaissance voice revived from the ravages of musical Gothicism.[39] It has also restored the variety and structure long lost in music, making it liveliest in allegro without slips, profoundest in adagio without dragging sluggishness, and most pleasant in moderato without falling into mediocrity.

In defence of his art Leonardo da Vinci said poetry ranked far below painting in representing visible things, and far below music in representing invisible things. It may show harmony by being set to music, the worthy sister of painting, but music is ephemeral in fading away as soon as it is born.[40]

One thing he failed to foresee: the invention of sound reproduction four centuries later, as well as the recording of the image to render his art more popular. The handicap of sound in contrast to images seems to have been overcome technically, as it can now be played repeatedly and sent electronically "through mazes running" (*L'Allegro* 143).

NOTES

* This is the revised version of the paper read at the International Symposium of *Connotations: A Journal for Critical Debate* at Gleimhaus Halberstadt in August 2001.
1 John Dryden, Dedication to *The Vocal and Instrumental Musick of the Prophetesse*; James Beattie, *Essays on Poetry and Music* (Edinburgh, 1776); James Harris, *Three Treatises* (London, 1744), qtd. in Myers 18—20.
2 The three English CDs got "Outstanding" recommendations from *BBC Music Magazine* and the first Dowland album won a Diapason D'or.
Timothy Smithies, the managing director at Metronome, acknowledged Paul Agnew's unprecedented power of expression and sense of interpretation, especially in the English language in the telephone interview, 3 November 2000.
3 William Lisle Bowles ed., *The Works of Alexander Pope, Esq*. (London, 1806) 1: 161, qtd. in Myers 60.
Cookson (1996) examines relationship between text and music in Handel's settings of *L'Allegro*, but makes with no specific examination of the singing parts.
4 Lang's synopsis (396) of T. S. Eliot, *Note on the Verse of John Milton*.
5 A noted interpreter of the works of Purcell, Agnew has been involved in fully-staged and concert hall performances of *Diocresian*, *King Arthur* and *Timon of Athens*, in addition to an award winning series of recordings of the anthems (Liner notes, *Acis and Galatea*, 1999).
6 Jacobi 20. Samuel Johnson, for example, believed that opera was "an exotic and irrational entertainment" (*Life of Hughes*, qtd. in Lang 194).
7 An anonymous letter on 8 March, *Faulkner's Dublin Journal*, March 15, 1743, qtd. in Myers 66.
8 Wulstan (229) quotes G. C. Maffei, *Delle lettre del Signor Gio* (Naples, 1562), which calls the opening of the mouth "no more than that adopted when reasoning with friends."
9 Robert King, Liner notes, *Anthems* 6, 1993.
10 This is not specifically composed for John Beard. The possibility of satirical intention argued by Ruth Smith in the liner notes to *Solomon* (1999) is to be discussed elsewhere for want of space.
11 Slightly adapted from Granger's translation (*Vitruvius* 1. 2. 1—8) of the six components of architecture.
12 Wulstan 239. Fortuitously, Jeffrey Skidmore, the founder of Ex Cathedra and an early instructor of Agnew, had studied music under David Wulstan at Magdalen College, Oxford (Liner notes Vivaldi: *Vespers*).
13 Lady Elizabeth Compton's report to the Countess of Northampton, qtd. in Hogwood 125.
14 Victor Schoelcher, *Life of Handel* 229; "It required all the boldness of genius to attempt a subject so eminently undramatic. Never had music to depend upon herself so entirely" (qtd. in Dean 319).
15 Dean 320. Dean also points out that the omissions are for the most part mythological references and personifications.
16 The three other recording versions of *L'Allegro* do not seem to share his dramatic inspiration.
17 Handel also intended to attract the audience with the prima donna Francesina's "running-division that is surprising" (Mary Delany's letter in 1744, qtd. in Hogwood 194).

18 Myers 48; Lang 317. In 1745 Handel was to supply several songs for an open air performance of this masque (Hogwood 202).
19 As will be discussed, Milton derives the main idea of *L'Allegro* from his own *Elegie to Charles Diodati* (33−34), where he mentions a Plautine comedy, whose setting is very similar to Jonson's *Every Man in His Humour*: "Saepe vafer gnato succurrit servus amanti, / Et nasum rigidi fallit ubique Patris" [often a roguish slave rescues a lovesick son, and at every turn tricks the son's inflexible father]" (English translation is taken from Flannagan 180).
20 In *Hymenaei*, the bridegroom is led by five pages, bearing "fiue tapers of virgin waxe" (44) and Hymen is described as attired "in a saffron-coloured robe" (49).
Brooks-Davies asserts that Milton reflected the corrupt court in *L'Allegro*, and gave a private contemplative ideal as an alternative in *Il Penseroso*. Kerrigan (29) also suggests that Hymen, the presiding deity of Jonson's masque, would turn Milton into a Puritan at the maypole.
21 *L'Allegro* 138−44 reflects *Volpone* 3. 7. 234−35: "where we may, so, trans-fuse our wandring soules, / Out at our lippes, and score vp summes of pleasures" and *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue* 299 ff.: "It follows now, you are to proue the subtlest maze of all: that's *Loue*. . . ."
22 Anthony Rooley, Liner notes *L'Humore musicale*.
23 Thomas Warton pointed out Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* as a principal source in his edition, *Poems upon Several Occasions, English, Italian, and Latin, with Translations, by John Milton* (London, 1785), qtd. in Variorum 231−34.
24 Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy* 2. 2. 4. (2. 71−93).
25 T. S. Eliot, "A Note on the Verse of John Milton," On Poetry and Poets" *Essays and Studies*, 1936, qtd. in *Variorum* 245−46.
26 Lang (319) asserts that Handel is a little sarcastic towards Shakespeare in his coloratura.
27 G. L. Finney also suggests that Milton had in mind the "solemn music" that Prospero calls for in *The Tempest* to evoke spirits and to dissolve his charm in 2. 1, 3. 3, and 5. 1 (*Musical Backgrounds* [1962], 117−18, qtd. in Variorum 179). But it is important to distinguish the former from the latter, which, duly described as "heavenly music," disenchants Prospero himself.
28 Robert Hitchcock, *Irish Stage*, I, 40−41, qtd. in Schultz 134−35.
29 Gay's letter to Swift, 3 February 1723.
30 Saint-Évremond, *Sur les operas* in *Oeuvres* IV (Paris, 1753) qtd. in Lang 192. Since he was a long-time resident in England, his view was generally shared by most English men of letters (Lang 192).
31 Schultz 53, 64; *DNB* "Beard."
32 Roger Fiske, *English Theatre Music in the Eighteenth Century*, 2nd. ed. (Oxford, 1986) qtd. in Winton 77−78. The music is based on an air called "Packington's Pound," by Thomas Paggington, a musician of Henry VII (Schultz 328).
33 Gay wrote his *Three Hours Marriage* inspired by Jonson's *Epicoene* (Winton 56). "Ben Jonson" appears as one of the characters in a parody of *The Beggar's Opera*, *Macheath in the Shades*, *or Bayes at Parnassus*, acted at Covent Garden on 11 March 1735, which included several players who acted the original production (Schultz 52−53).
34 We could make it surer by comparing it with Agnew's part of Acis, where his tone connotes the hero is already a living shade from his first air "Where shall I seek the loving fair"; there is little room for romantic illusion in this penetratingly pathological study of lovesickness. It is based on an accurate understanding of Gay's notion of pastoral, which ought to be totally different from Ambroise Philip's, the target of his satire.
35 Jennens's letters to Holdsworth in 1742, qtd. in Hogwood 183−84.
36 Though *Messiah* was first performed in Dublin, Handel wrote the tenor part of the oratorio expressly for Beard who sang it in the first performance in London. See *DNB* "Beard."
37 Handel's letter to the *Daily Advertiser* (17 January 1745) qtd. in Hogwood 199.
38 The translation is taken from *Horace: On the Art of Poetry*, trans. T. S. Dorsch, in *Classical Literary Criticism*.

39 John Dennis directed heaviest indictment against the fashionable new opera, by remarking that this wretched "Gothic" opera is farthest removed from the beautiful simplicity of ancient tragedy in *An Essay on the Italian Operas* (1706) qtd. in Herrick 86.

40 *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci*, 197—99.

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