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The Effect of Music on Paradise Lost

Bernard J. Streicher
Loyola University Chicago

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THE EFFECT OF MUSIC ON PARADISE LOST

by

Bernard John Streicher, S.J.

**A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts**

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LIFE

Bernard John Streicher was born on November 11, 1928 at Toledo, Ohio.

After graduating from Gesu Parochial School he attended Campion High School, Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin for a period of four years ending May, 1946. The following year he matriculated at the University of Notre Dame, South Bend, Indiana.

In August, 1947 he entered the Society of Jesus and continued his studies at Xavier University, Cincinnati, Ohio, receiving the degree of Bachelor of Literature from that University in June, 1951. The following fall he continued his studies at West Baden College of Loyola University.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Musical qualities in Milton's poetry--Milton's musical background--The general argument--Mr. Belloc's objection--Another approach to the general argument--Brief outline of the thesis by chapters.	
II. MUSIC AND POETRY; THEIR RELATIONSHIP	6
Music and poetry in ancient times--Minstrelsy in early England--Music and poetry in the English Renaissance--Later separation of the arts--Music and poetry; temporal arts--Their meaning--Their dependence on the laws of sound--Rhythm--Pitch--Tone quality.	
III. JOHN MILTON, THE MUSICIAN	17
Place of music in seventeenth-century England--Milton's father as a musician--Milton's gift for music--His years at school--Early poems reflect interest in music--Friendship with Harry Lawes--Trip to Italy--Galileo--Frescobaldi--Doni--Milton's conviction that music should be a part of every education--Musical references in Milton's later writings--His technical knowledge of music--Musical occupations in old age.	
IV. THE MUSIC OF <u>PARADISE LOST</u>	28
The madrigal--History of its development--Its chief characteristics--Score of "Fair Orion" written by Milton's father--Milton on verse technique-- <u>Paradise Lost</u> --Continuous movement--Variety--Caesuras--Inversion of feet--The metrical psalter--History of its development--Different versions of the metrical	

psalter--Examples of its music, including one by Milton's father--Chief characteristics of the metrical psalter--Syllabic count--Inversion of feet--Milton's translations of psalms--Paradise Lost--Syllabic count--Inversion of feet--Avoidance of sibilants--Broad Italian a--Contraction of liquid consonants--Hiatus--Monosyllables--Volume and pitch control--Position of accents--Syncopation--Onomatopoeia--Echo principle--Alliteration--Assonance--Modulation.

V. JOHN MILTON, "LIGHT DENY'D" 67

Milton's eyesight in his younger days--Account of his blindness--Symptoms and date of his blindness--Milton's auditory sense--Examples of his sound imagery--A study of his sound references before and after his blindness--The sounds of music.

VI. CONCLUSION 75

Difficulty of the problem--Probability of its solution--Type of argumentation used--Poets and music in general--Thesis restated.

BIBLIOGRAPHY 78

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"Read it, read it again," we were always told, "and read it out loud." Slowly, as we read through Paradise Lost and then Paradise Regained, we began to realize that there was a certain something--a certain majesty and melody--that made Milton, above all other poets, worth reading aloud. There was a swell and sway to the verse, a delicacy of sound, the famous organ tone. On our own time we were coming to realize something that scholars had appreciated for centuries: there is music in Milton. His sonorous tones, the forward surge of his paragraphs make Milton a musical poet par excellence.

But what precisely is this music? Is it something that only the initiated can appreciate? Is it an esoteric bubble that bursts into nothingness when too closely examined? No, it is--quite simply--a delicate use of rhythm and sound. It is for all those who know music and read poetry a thing easily understood and enjoyed, since all poetry is musical. And for all those who have read widely in the world's poetry the unique quality of Milton's "music" is easily appreciated.

But why Milton? Why not Spenser or Jonson or Shelley? Why not a hundred other poets? Ultimately we do not know. Yet, proximately something can be said about the problem, and scholars have said it. Since Milton's father was a musician and Milton himself "had a delicate, tuneable voice, an excellent ear, could play on the organ, and bear a part in vocal and instrumental music,"¹ it can be said with great probability that he was influenced by his musical background in the writing of his poetry. This influence increased as he became blind. Out of these assertions then, grows the present thesis.

The general argument may be put this way: if Milton's marital difficulties, his blindness, his learning, his political and religious beliefs are all reflected in his poetry and supply it with material, it is scarcely possible to believe that his life-long study and love of music did not diffuse their effects very deeply in his work as a poet, particularly at those points where the two arts have a common ground. This argument is certainly a valid one. But is it scientific? Is it conclusive? There are those who would deny it. Mr. Belloc has said as much.

These two things in Milton, his love of music, his poetic art, must, then, be kept separate; the one does not explain the other, and Milton's love of music, his inher-

¹ Anthony Wood, "A Selection from Fasti Oxoniensis," in The Student's Milton, ed. Frank Allen Patterson, revised edition, New York, 1939, xxxi.

itance in music, his comprehension of music, belong to Milton the man not Milton the poet.²

This is an interesting dichotomy. It is justly said that a man brings his own individuality to his art. His environment, his interests, and all the rest shape him to what he is. Milton the musician must certainly have affected Milton the poet because they are both a part of Milton the man.

However, here is another approach. The two arts, music and poetry, overlap in respect to rhythm and sound. These, therefore, are the musical qualities that can be detected in any poem. Now, if it can be shown that Milton unconsciously borrowed from contemporary music for some of the rhythms of his Paradise Lost it can be argued a pari that he was unconsciously influenced by contemporary music in all those other respects where the two arts have a common ground. Now, it can be shown that some of Milton's rhythms derive from the madrigal and metrical psalter. To go beyond this, then, and say that his theme and variation technique, his use of assonance, syncopation and all the rest is in some way influenced by his musical background is not an unwarranted conclusion.

With the problem and general argument now in mind the thesis procedure may be briefly sketched.

2 Hilaire Belloc, Milton, Philadelphia, 1925, 75.

The following chapter, Chapter II, contains a discussion of music, poetry, and their relationship. This relationship must be established, of course, before the main argument can be applied. Similarities and dissimilarities are all important. But most concern must be paid to those points where the two arts overlap. For it is here that the qualities common to both music and poetry are found. And when musical qualities in poetry are spoken of it is these poetic qualities--which can also be found in music--that are meant. In addition, the chapter includes a brief historical account of the relationship between music and poetry. It is very interesting to note, and of some importance to the thesis, that up to the time of Milton the two arts were closely allied. Poetry was meant to be put to music and music to poetry. A definite cleavage between the arts came later.

In the third chapter Milton's knowledge, talent, and interest in music is clarified. The more profound his knowledge and the deeper his interest, the more likely is it that music influenced his poetry. The intent of the chapter then is not merely to establish Milton's acquaintance with music but to put down all available information on the subject so that the degree of Milton's knowledge and interest can be ascertained.

Chapter IV deals with Paradise Lost. All its musical qualities are marshalled together here for close inspection. And when it is shown, as clearly as it can be, that the madrigal and

psalter are among the sources of Miltonic rhythm the thesis is made secure. For it follows then, that the many musical qualities noted in this chapter are all due in greater or lesser degree to Milton's musical background. This holds true because a man cannot control what he unconsciously borrows. If he unconsciously borrows certain rhythms from music it is reasonable to say that he is at least influenced in some degree by other rhythms and other musical qualities.

Chapter V deals with Milton's blindness. This chapter is not essential to the thesis, but it does strengthen it. A blind person, it is generally admitted, develops a keen auditory sense. He is forced to rely on his hearing much more than a person having sight. He lives in a world of sound and is as much influenced by what he hears as an ordinary person is by what he sees. To say then that the blind Milton was influenced strongly by sound, especially his beloved music, is not surprising.

The concluding chapter, Chapter VI, is a brief resume of the entire paper. The conclusion, what it means and what it does not mean, is brought into sharper relief. A few related questions on poets and music are also treated summarily.

CHAPTER II

MUSIC AND POETRY: THEIR RELATIONSHIP

There was a time when the three arts of dancing, poetry, and song were inseparable. It was so, we are told, in the time of King David, who, on one occasion at least, danced as well as sang his psalms before the ark. In Greece, not only lyric but dramatic poetry was chanted and often accompanied by the lyre. The Homeric epics were originally sung to the music of the harp. Lays sung with harp accompaniment were of great antiquity among the Germanic peoples too. Tacitus says that songs were their only historical records,¹ and that Arminius, one of the Germans who conquered a Roman army, was afterwards celebrated in song.²

Although the Roman conquest of England and the introduction of the Roman alphabet made possible a written literature among the inhabitants, minstrelsy was still popular.

What is certain is that if heroic poetry in its present form ever reached a lay audience it must have done so by the old

¹ Tacitus, Germania, 2, Taciti Opera, Oberlin edition, London, 1821, VI, 3237.

² Tacitus, Annalium, II, 88, Taciti Opera, I, 455.

7

method of recitation to the harp, for there is no evidence that reading ever became widespread among the laity.³

The same is true of some of the Celtic inhabitants of the mountain recesses of Wales and Scotland. They do not seem to have possessed a written literature until they were conquered by the Romans, and, as they were isolated from the Continent, they seem to have relapsed into oral literature, their bards continuing to be important members of the community until comparatively modern times.

The same is true of medieval England. Although we know only the manuscript versions of Middle English poems, we should not over-emphasize the importance of reading in their diffusion and ignore their musical accompaniment. Mr. Sisam has put the case judiciously.

Up to Chaucer's day, the greater the popularity of an English poem the less important becomes the manuscript as a means of early transmission. . . . To determine the relative popularity of the longer tales in verse we need, not so much a catalogue of extant manuscripts, as a census, that cannot now be taken, of the repertoires of the entertainers.⁴

As late as the sixteenth century, declamation accompanied by music flourished in England and Italy. The madrigal, the air, the ballad, and the dance held the arts close together. Poets wrote with the object of having their work set to music,

³ Bruce Pattison, Music and Poetry of the English Renaissance, London, 1948, 23.

⁴ K. Sisam, Fourteenth Century Verse and Prose, London, 1921, xxxii, xxxiv.

and musicians, knowing little about purely instrumental music, expected their melodies to be joined with poetry. The psalms of King David too, were still being sung and were very popular with the masses as late as the seventeenth century. Men of letters and musicians of the English Renaissance felt that there was a union between their two arts, and the traditions they inherited helped them to realize the implications of such a union.

But every period carries within it the seeds of a new age. Literary pressure was transforming music from sensuous sound into a romantic medium for the transmission of emotion. The service of poetry had taught music how to absorb into itself some of the emotional appeal of poetry. When it learned that lesson, it no longer needed words to prompt it. The poets on the other hand became impatient that they had to leave their verses rough to allow the composer more scope. The poet began to express nuances of feeling and to polish his verses. Subtle meanings cannot be readily translated into music. The full experience of the poet is inseparable from his words, and to simplify it into a mood suitable for musical treatment would be to distort it beyond recognition. With the advent of opera the breach widened.

The poetry of Dryden and the music of Purcell may join forces for an opera or a song, but each has its own appeal and its own technique. In the style of the classical period of music literary pre-occupations played small part; nor has music anything to do with the poetry of the Augustan age.⁵

5 Pattison, Music and Poetry of the Renaissance, 191.

So through the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the estrangement continued. Music fades away from the works of the poets: Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey are outside its influence. Byron and Keats have little to show for it.

In our own day the separation is complete. The movements of the waltz, the polka, the sonata, the symphony seem to belong to an art so different that it is difficult to conceive that it was once appropriate to speak of ballad poetry because the Italian ballare meant to dance, or of a sonnet because the lute was sounded while poetry was being chanted.

Yet the association of music and poetry down through history is more than accidental. These two arts have a common ground which places them at once in direct antithesis to painting and sculpture and architectural design. They are essentially temporal arts, depending for their apprehension on a fixed and determinate succession. The composition of a picture can be seen as a whole; its details can be studied from right to left or from left to right. But with a melody or a sentence all this is impossible; the experience is not complete, is not even fully intelligible, until the last word or note is reached. The order of occurrence is not reversible. Take the most familiar line of Shakespeare, the most familiar tune of Handel, and try to repeat it backwards: it cannot be done, even if it could it would have no meaning. This implies a resemblance between these arts the importance of which cannot be over-estimated--that they are both

continually throwing attention forward, that at each moment in their course they are rousing anticipation which it is their aim finally to satisfy.⁶

This does not, of course, mean that all great music or poetry is a profusion of climaxes. Everything depends on the unit of attention which may be a stanza or an ode, an eight-bar melody or a symphonic movement. It may be a necessary part of suspense that some passages should be kept at a low pitch. In any case the temporal condition is paramount and the great artist has accepted it and has used it not as a restriction, but as a resource.

On the other side there can be no doubt that poetry is far more precise and direct than music. One of the notable qualities of the great epic writers, especially of Dante or Milton, is their power of presenting the object as it is, of placing it before us in concrete shape and substance. This does not mean that they copy phenomena, any more than the landscape-painter copies nature, but that they crystallize their own ideas around phenomena. Shakespeare understood all the archetypes of human character, and therefore his personages are as real to us as the people we know. Since the phenomenal world is the vehicle through

⁶ William Henry Hadow, Collected Essays, London, 1928, 224-5.

which the poet expresses his ideas and because it is our world too, it brings the poet into close relation with us. From this kind of reality music is excluded. It can suggest, but it cannot narrate; it can rouse our emotions but it cannot specify them. A few sounds and movements in nature can be more or less imitated by its tones or rhythms, but these are of little moment.⁷

Yet with its own domain music has a reality not less than that of any other art. The style of Bach is as perfect as that of Milton, the structure of Beethoven as that of Shakespeare. Bad music is, as Coleridge said, the exact equivalent of nonsense verses. But the significance of music is not related to anything outside itself; it is inherent in the succession of notes, the interweaving of parts, the design of theme material. In all other arts, even in poetry, there is some sort of division between form and content; in the best music there is not; form and content are fused and absorbed into one supreme act of creation.⁸ When we hear the slow movement of the Choral Symphony we are not conscious of any specific joy or sorrow, still less of any scene or event. The spell of that enchantment is beyond the reach of words.

In addition to being temporal arts both music and poetry rely heavily on the laws of sound--though, of course, in different ways. In the case of music the sound is sustained and expresses

7 Hadow, Collected Essays, 229-230.

8 Ibid., 231.

feeling or emotion; in the case of poetry the sound is unsustained or articulated and expresses ideas also. Among the most important effects of these laws of sound are rhythm, pitch, and tone quality.

Rhythm is produced by accenting--sometimes through duration alone, sometimes through force alone, but usually through both in combination--certain tones separated from one another by exactly the same intervals of time. In music these accented tones, as a rule, begin the measure. They are the tones immediately following the bar lines. In poetry, the accents are sometimes at the end and sometimes in the middle of the measure.⁹

Very slight consideration of rhythm makes it evident that it possesses a charm wholly aside from that of intelligible words or melody. What else than the rhythmic effects of mere sound could cause the senseless phrases of so many "Mother Goose's Melodies" to be so popular with children? What else but mere rhythmic sound could cause the satisfaction which people derive from the sound of gongs, drums, castanets and cymbals? What but this makes the negroes of the South and the cowboys of the West clap their hands and feet in unison, and enjoy doing it, in order to provide "music" for their dancers?

Actually poetic rhythm is only a very elementary form of

⁹ George Lansing Raymond, Rhythm and Harmony in Poetry and Music, 2nd ed. revised, New York, 1920, 257.

the elaborate developments of rhythm which when freed from the limitations of accent and etymology are found in music. The Classical poets could work wonders by the counter-change of stress and quantity, but even with them the limit of variation is comparatively narrow. The moderns, who have all but lost this distinction, have attempted to replace it in various ways. Milton in his Samson Agonistes, Coleridge in "Christabel," Hopkins with "The Wreck of the Deutschland," Bridges with his "London Snow" have all contributed greatly to the history of English verse. But when these are compared with their analogues in music--with any page of Bach, Beethoven, Wagner or Brahms there is in evidence not the lesser skill of the poet, for he has gone as far as language can go, but the lesser flexibility of his medium.¹⁰

In both the arts one sound should flow into another in such a way that whole series of sounds seem to be united. This is important in poetry. If the verse manifests too great phonetic variety, it is inconsistent with those results of taste and care and skill which are demanded by the artistic character of poetry. That which in verse charms the ear, fixes attention, remains in memory and passes into a proverb, is usually dependent for its popularity almost entirely upon consecutive effects of sound so arranged as to flow into one another and form a unity. Certainly, in many cases the same thought expressed in sounds less satis-

10 Hadow, Collected Essays, 229.

14
11

factorily arranged, would not be remembered or repeated.¹¹

Probably few have noticed to what extent pitch enters into the effects of poetry. In early modes of communicating, intonations, like gestures, were almost as significant as words; the same is true today. "Changes in pitch are and always must be elements entering into the significance of the poetry itself."¹² The range of musical sound is much greater than that of the speaking voice. Yet the speaking voice is capable of using many more delicate inflections than music--since music is restricted to eighty-eight notes. In our language, as a rule, an accented syllable is sounded on a "key" higher than an unaccented one. The sound of each letter too, has its own peculiar pitch. The pitch of the sounds approximating long u, for instance, is actually lower in tone than that of the sounds approximating the long English e.¹³ The following selection illustrates high pitch as used in poetry:

Haste thee, Nymph, and bring with thee
Jest and youthful Jollity,
Quips, and Cranks, and wanton Wiles,
Nods, and Becks, and wreathed Smiles,¹⁴

No one can fail to perceive in the emphatic elocutionary

11 Raymond, Rhythm and Harmony, 113.

12 George Lansing Raymond, Poetry as a Representative Art, 7th ed. revised, New York, 1899, 95.

13 Ibid., 98.

14 "L'Allegro," 25-28.

rising and falling of the voice that which resembles a melody, nor in the long inflection on a single syllable, like an, beginning with a vowel and ending with a consonant, that which suggests at least the blending of tones in harmony.¹⁵ It should be remembered that the arrangement of words and of their accents so as to produce certain definite kinds of versification and meter, while doing this, gives to the verse at the same time certain definite effects of melody and harmony.

Quality of sound is of extreme importance too. How often have different arrangements of musical compositions become popular due to good orchestration; bad orchestration has been known to kill a good piece of music. Clarinets or trombones are fatal when violins should be used. Certain instruments by their sound suggest certain feelings and emotions. The same is true in poetry. The subtle massing of gutturals or sibilants produces its own proper effect on the reader. When, as in music, the artist is compelled to use sounds that are not distinguishable by articulation, he is obliged, if his effects be aimed above the level of rhythm, to make more of these qualities. In poetry these latter, although necessarily involved in articulation, are accidental and secondary.

This chapter may well be closed with a few words from

¹⁵ Ibid., 103-4.

William Hazlitt. "Poetry in its matter and form is natural imagery or feeling, combined with passion and fancy. In its mode of conveyance it combines the ordinary use of language with musical expression."¹⁶ Yes, poetry is musical language. One would hardly be surprised then to find the effects of musical rhythm, pitch and tone quality in poetry.

¹⁶ William Hazlitt, Hazlitt on English Literature, ed. Jacob Zeitlin, New York, 1913, 265.

CHAPTER III

JOHN MILTON, THE MUSICIAN

The Seventeenth Century was a time of universal participation in music. It was a time when all men, no matter what their station or ability, could in some way be active in the art. In fact no one could claim to be well-educated unless he possessed considerable musical skill. Peacham evidently considered his requirements very modest when he said: "I desire no more in you than to sing your part and at first sight; withall, to play the same upon your Viol, or the exercise of the Lute, or privately to yourself."¹ Thomas Morley's famous treatise on music opens with a dialogue between a scholar and his master. The scholar had been "earnestly requested to sing" a descant at sight at some social gathering, "but when, after many excuses, I protested unfainedly that I could not, everyone began to wonder; yea some whispered to others, demanding how I was brought up."² The music-books of the day were printed with the parts facing in different directions, so

¹ Henry Peacham, The Compleat Gentleman, ed. G. S. Gordon, London, 1906, 100.

² Thomas Morley, A Plaine and Easie Introduction to Practicall Musicke, London, 1597. Reprinted in Shakespeare Association Facsimiles, No. 14, London, 1937, 1.

that the singers could gather round a table and sing all the parts from one book. Various instruments, particularly the conventional "chest of viols," formed a necessary part of a gentleman's household. There was music everywhere.

Tinkers sang catches; milkmaids sang ballads; carters whistled; each trade, and even the beggars, had their special songs; the base-viol hung in the drawing-room for the amusement of waiting visitors; and the lute, cittern, and virginals, for the amusement of waiting customers, were the necessary furniture of the barber's shop. They had music at dinner, music at supper; music at weddings; music at funerals; music at night; music at dawn; music at work; music at play. He who felt not, in some degree, its soothing influences, was viewed as a morose unsocial being, whose converse ought to be shunned and regarded with suspicion and distrust.³

Under the circumstances then, it is not too surprising to discover that Milton's father was a musician--in fact, a composer of real merit. Aubrey tells us that "He was an ingeniose man; delighted in musique; composed many songs now in print, especially that of Oriana."⁴ Aubrey⁵ and Phillips⁶ both speak with admiration of an "In Nomine" of forty parts composed by Milton's father for which he received a gold medal from a Polish prince. The ability of the elder Milton is clearly proved by his place as

³ William Chappell, Old English Popular Music, ed. H. E. Wooldridge, London, I, 59.

⁴ John Aubrey, Brief Lives, ed. Anthony Powell, London, 1949, 68.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Edward Phillips, The Life of Mr. John Milton, in The Early Lives of Milton, ed. Helen Darbishire, 1932, 51.

a composer in the best of the Elizabethan music-books.⁷ Milton's own estimate of his father as a musician is of interest to us. In his Latin elegy, "Ad Patrem," he builds up an elaborate defense of poetry on the ground that it and music are kindred studies:

Nunc tibi quid mirum, si me genuisse poetam
Contigerit, choro si tam prope sanguine juncti
Cognatas artes, studiumque affine sequamur:
Ipse volens Phoebus se dispertire duobus,
Altera dona mihi, dedit altera dona parenti,⁸
Dividuumque Deum genitorque puerque tenemus.⁸

With such a father the young Milton not only mastered keyboard instruments but also learned to sing a part in a madrigal or psalm at first sight as any "complete gentleman" should.⁹ He had a "delicate, tuneable voice" and "an Excellent ear."¹⁰

Frequently attending the services in St. Paul's, he heard the best sacred music of the day. The organ music made an indelible impression as these well-known lines of "Il Penseroso" testify:

Then let the pealing organ blow
To the full-voiced choir below,
In service high and anthem clear

7 Sigmund Spaeth, Milton's Knowledge of Music, Princeton, 1913. His contributions are listed on p. 13.

8 "Ad Patrem," 61-66.

9 Ernest Brennecke Jr., John Milton the Elder and His Music, New York, 1938, 136.

10 Anthony a Wood, from Fasti Oxonienses, in Early Lives, 48.

As may with sweetness through mine ear
 Dissolve me into ecstasies
 And bring all Heaven before my eyes.¹¹

After his years at Cambridge he often journeyed to London to find out what was new in mathematics and music "in which last he became excellent, and by the help of his Mathematicks could compose a Song or Lesson."¹²

Milton's sense for sound is very marked in one of his earliest works, the "Nativity Hymn." The entire poem seems to move upon an undercurrent of music. The first part is a description of universal peace without a discordant note; then follows a description of universal harmony at the Savior's birth. The poem ends with the silencing of pagan rites. "Thus, from beginning to end, the Nativity Hymn is built up on suggestions of sound. Its lyric effectiveness lies largely in this preference of the audible, to the visible."¹³ Another early poem, "At a Solemn Musick," shows that Milton had already "fairly mastered the organ-music of speech."¹⁴ Every line is filled with a delicate sense of sound. In "L'Allegro" music represents the climax of joy while in "Il Penseroso" it consummates the mood of deepest contemplation.

11 "Il Penseroso," 161-166.

12 Wood, Fasti Oxonienses, 36.

13 Spaeth, Milton's Knowledge of Music, 92.

14 Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, Studies in Literature, Cambridge, 1922, 120.

Writing of these poems, Masson mentions their "musical art in expression" and credits much of their appeal to it.¹⁵

Milton's acquaintance with the composer Harry Lawes dates from this time, the Horton period. The musician was fourteen years older than the poet, yet a close friendship, founded upon mutual admiration, sprang up between them. When Lawes was requested to furnish a masque in honor of the aged Countess of Derby, he turned to Milton for the words, himself supplying the music, and the result was "Arcades." In the following year Milton and Lawes once more combined their talents and produced another masque, "Comus." Listen to the song of the Spirit:

Sabrina fair,
 Listen where thou art sitting
 Under the glassie, cool, translucent wave,
 In twisted braids of Lilies knitting
 The loose train of thy amber-dropping hair,
 Listen for dear honours sake,
 Goddess of the silver lake,
 Listen and save.¹⁶

This is the effect which Sir Henry Wootton, Milton's earliest critic, speaks of in a letter to Milton as "a certain Dorique Delicacy in your Songs and Odes, whereunto I must plainly confess to have seen yet nothing parallel in our Language."¹⁷ These dramatic entertainments--usually upon an allegorical or mytholog-

¹⁵ David Masson, The Life of John Milton, 2nd ed., London, 1875, I, 453.

¹⁶ "Comus," 858-865.

¹⁷ Sir Henry Wootton, a letter to Milton, The Student's Milton, ed. Frank A. Patterson, revised ed., New York, 1941, 45.

ical subject and combining poetry, vocal and instrumental music, scenery, dancing, elaborate machinery, splendid costumes and decorations¹⁸--must have strengthened Milton's belief in the unity of the arts. The musical background to his poetry showed him how musical qualities could heighten poetic effect.

In 1638 Milton planned a journey to the Continent. After a brief excursion in France he arrived in Italy where a new world of literature, science, art and music opened before him. He visited the aging, blind Galileo and possibly derived some fresh hints regarding music and mathematics. For Galileo, in addition to his knowledge of astronomy, played the lute, organ and other instruments.¹⁹ Milton then travelled on to Florence where he was made a member of the Academy of the Svogliati. He took part in the regular club meetings, even read some of his Latin hexameters, which were enthusiastically applauded. In Rome he met Cardinal Francesco Barberini, well-known patron of music, who invited Milton to a magnificent musical entertainment at his palace and awaited him at the door.²⁰ It was probably on this occasion that Milton heard the famous singer, Leonora Baroni, for the first time.

¹⁸ William H. Husk, "Masque," Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians, 3rd ed., New York, 1935, III, 342.

¹⁹ Spaeth, Milton's Knowledge of Music, 20-21.

²⁰ John Milton in a letter to Lucas Holstenius, in The Student's Milton, 1083.

Leonora's singing is among the few impressions of the journey which Milton thought worthy of recording in verse. Three extravagant Latin epigrams are addressed to her in the poetical terms current at the time. At this time also, he may have heard the famous Frescobaldi, then organist at St. Peter's and one of the greatest composers in Europe. On a return visit to Florence Milton met Giovanni Battista Doni. Doni was not only an accomplished performer, but a composer of some merit and a distinguished writer on theory, and "we are justified in thinking that he did much to increase Milton's respect for contemporary Italian music."²¹

Before returning home, Milton sent from Venice a number of books which he had collected in his travels, "particularly," as Edward Phillips tells us, "a Chest or two of choice Musick-books of the best Masters flourishing about that time in Italy."²² We may well imagine how the poet exhibited these newly found treasures to his aging father and to his interested friend, Harry Lawes, when he returned home.

During the winter of 1639-40 Milton undertook the education of his two little nephews, Edward and John Phillips. He made music an important part of his instruction. Aubrey says, "He made his nephews songsters, and sing, from the time they were with

21 Spaeth, Milton's Knowledge of Music, 22-23.

22 Edward Phillips, in Early Lives, 59.

him."²³ The boys evidently acquired considerable skill and taste in music, for later in life they were in close touch with the best musical circles in London.²⁴

It was Milton's sincere conviction that music should form an important part in any scheme of education. He wrote in his Tractate of Education in 1644:

The interim of unsweating themselves regularly, and convenient rest before meat, may, both with profit and delight, be taken up in recreating and composing their travailed spirits with the solemn and divine harmonies of music, heard or learned; either whilst the skilful organist plies his grave and fancied descant in lofty fugues, or the whole symphony with artful and unimaginable touches adorn and grace the well-studied chords of some choice composer; sometimes the lute or soft organ-stop waiting on elegant voices, either to religious, martial, or civil ditties; which, if wise men and prophets be not extremely out, have a great power over dispositions and manners, to smooth and make them gentle from rustic harshness and distempered passions.²⁵

From this time on to the end of Milton's life the record of his musical interests must be gathered almost entirely from the allusions in his works. Edward Naylor lists "between thirty and forty musical allusions"²⁶ of some length in Milton's poetry while Sigmund Spaeth catalogues about one thousand references to music

23 Aubrey, Brief Lives, 69.

24 Spaeth, Milton's Knowledge of Music, 23.

25 John Milton, Tractate on Education, in The Student's Milton, 730.

26 Edward Woodall Naylor, The Poets and Music, London, 1928, 55.

in all of Milton's writings.²⁷ These allusions and references are important because they make evident Milton's undying interest in music. Filling his poetry, overflowing into his prose works, they come naturally and spontaneously. For example, in An Apology For Smectymnuus, where there certainly was no need for a musical allusion Milton writes:

Thus far I have digressed, readers, from my former subject; but into such a path as I doubt not ye will agree with me, to be much fairer and more delightful than the roadway I was in. And how to break off suddenly into those jarring notes which this confuter hath set me, I must be wary, unless I can provide against offending the ear, as some musicians are wont skilfully to fall out of one key into another, without breach of harmony.²⁸

Hilaire Belloc, after citing some good and bad references to music in Milton's works, concludes: "When something in a writer's life is spoken of by him not only in the best of his work but in the worst, then may you be certain that that thing is a constant concern."²⁹

Aside from his constant interest in music, these references show Milton's thorough technical knowledge of the field.

The most striking point concerning his references to music, and one which has always been noted by commentators, is his unflinching technical accuracy. Whether it be a matter of the art or the theory of music, whether it has to do with voice or instrument, performance or composition, Milton's allusion

27 Spaeth, Milton's Knowledge of Music, 154-174.

28 John Milton, An Apology For Smectymnuus, in The Student's Milton, 563.

29 Belloc, Milton, 74.

is always technically and minutely correct.³⁰

Here is a good example from Paradise Lost:

. . . his volant touch
Instinct through all proportions low and high
Fled and pursu'd transverse the resonant fugue.³¹

This is generally acknowledged as the best description of a fugue ever written. Every word is just right: "volant" describes the light, fleeting touch of the organist; "proportions high and low" indicates the mathematical relation of intervals and rhythm; "transverse" means crossing and re-crossing in seeming confusion; "resonant" refers to the constant repetition of theme. As we read these lines the whole fugal form rises before us. The involved structure of the fugue form appealed very strongly to Milton because of the mathematical order which lay at the bottom of its sometimes bewildering passages and the demands it made upon the analytic powers of the listener.³²

It is interesting to note that Milton always shows a thorough knowledge of the quality and effect of the tones with which he deals. The tonal quality of certain instruments is distinct and unchanging; they have for him a fixed and definite function. "Few of us seem to have retained that instinctive feeling for the permanence of quality, so characteristic of the older

30 Spaeth, Milton's Knowledge of Music, 83.

31 Paradise Lost, XI, 561-563.

32 Spaeth, Milton's Knowledge of Music, 48.

musicians, and of such discerning music-lovers as John Milton."³³
 Certain instruments fit certain situations--produce certain effects. They cannot be indiscriminately changed about.

During his old age Milton's interest in music did not flag. "He had an organ in his howse: he played on that most . . . He would be chearfull even in his gowte-fitts, and sing."³⁴ Dr. Johnson says that after an hour's exercise from twelve to one o'clock Milton dined, "then played on the organ, and sang, or heard another sing; then studied till six."³⁵ One may perhaps find an allusion to this in the lines of Paradise Regained:

Or if I would delight my private hours
 With Music or with Poem, where so soon
 As in our native Language can I find
 That solace? All our Law and Story strew'd
 With Hymns, our Psalms with artful terms inscrib'd
 Our Hebrew Songs and Harps in Babylon, . . .³⁶

Milton was truly a poet-musician. His life-long interest in both arts makes that abundantly clear. These gifts of music and poetry were mutually helpful to him. His music was of practical value to his poetry in that it gave him a true sense of rhythm and a fine appreciation of melodious sounds. His poetry, on the other hand, idealized his music.

33 Ibid., 39.

34 Aubrey, Brief Lives, 70-71.

35 Samuel Johnson, The Works of Samuel Johnson, 2nd ed. London, 1823, 144.

36 Paradise Regained, IV, 331-336.

CHAPTER IV

THE MUSIC OF PARADISE LOST

Standing at the parting of the ways where the medieval and modern worlds were meeting, the Seventeenth Century is pre-eminently a study in contrasts. In every aspect of its life the two elements mingle. The country squire ruled his tenantry with a feudal touch, but he was beginning to farm his land on modern methods. The scholar breathed the air of a medieval university, but his thought was of the Renaissance, quick and inquisitive and eager for experiment. Tradition in Church and State was dying before the growth of an increasing individualism. In politics it had already provoked a premature experiment in the commonwealth; in religion it had led to a multiplicity of sects. The gaiety of the Cavalier lyrics was touched with the shadow of tragedy; outside the pageantry of the Court lingered the vagrant and the out-cast; while beside the solid prosperity of the merchant must be placed the sufferings of sweated labor. England was just getting its breath after the impact of religious dissension, the Reformation, and the effects of its own Renaissance were still being felt.

In the literature and art of this period the same contrasts are visible. It is the age of Cavalier and Puritan--two more currents of feeling which make this age one of turmoil and contrast. While the worldly-minded Cavaliers were writing with light-hearted and reckless gaiety and the more serious members of their party saw with growing uneasiness all that they loved best in church and state in danger of destruction, the Puritans were pressing with increasing force for the acceptance of their own ideas in government and forms of worship.

In the field of music too, we can point out two contrasting art-forms which parallel the whole structure of Seventeenth Century England. There is the madrigal, a Renaissance form from Italy, light and gay with intricate melodies--a favorite with the Cavalier; and there is the Protestant psalter, a product of the Reformation, slow and majestic with simple melody--an essential part of Puritan life.

John Milton was very much a part of this world. As such he became imbued with many of its contrasting characteristics not the least of which were to be found in the field of music. It will be worth-while then, to take a closer look at the English madrigal and psalter.

In the tenth century a monk named Hucbald discovered the possibility of making a melody harmonize with itself. He called this rough type of harmonizing "organum" which meant forcing a melody to harmonize with itself in a different key, generally a

fourth apart. Advancing through various forms of descants added to the old melodic line, polyphony advanced steadily and logically until it had become both the fascinating plaything and serious pursuit of ecclesiastical and secular musicians alike. Among the various forms of polyphony the madrigal was prominent.

The madrigal is an elaborate form of secular song for several voices in combination which was first introduced by the Flemish composers in Italy towards the middle of the sixteenth century. It was brought to its full development in the same century as the normal type of secular part-song by the Italian and English composers. As a composition for two or more unaccompanied voices singing in combination, all the voice-parts are of equal interest and are mainly designed from the same melodic material. The words are treated in short phrases which are taken up by the various voices one after another in fugal imitation. Each succeeding phrase is introduced usually after two or three repetitions of the previous phrase, commonly overlapping the one it is displacing, with the result that the introduction of a full close was generally avoided. Mr. Fellowes says of the madrigalists:

[They rarely allowed all the voice parts to come to an end simultaneously at any one point except to enforce some well-defined close in the poetry, but by a process of skilful dove-tailing they joined section to section.¹

¹ Edmund Horace Fellowes, The English Madrigal Composers, London, 1921, 52.

No bars were printed in the original part-books; their insertion in modern printed scores is only intended to guide the eye, and they must not be regarded as invariably controlling the rhythmic outline. The subjects dealt with are of every variety, according to the fancy of the composer; many of the madrigals are pastoral in style, but by no means exclusively so; many are set to light lyrics and conventional conceits of an amatory character such as the Elizabethan loved; many also are very serious, and a few of these, without being exactly suited to church use, deal with semi-religious subjects.²

The custom of singing these madrigals in English homes was at least as old as the beginning of Elizabeth's reign, and English part-books containing some of the finest Italian madrigals of that date survive as evidence of the contemporary liking for them. This taste grew as the century advanced. A certain lay clerk of St. Paul's Cathedral, named Nicholas Yonge, had done much to popularize the Italian madrigal in England for some considerable period before 1588. In that year he published a set of part-books, entitled Musica Transalpina, containing a varied and representative collection of Italian madrigals adapted to English words. Yonge made a practice of having music books sent to him at regular intervals from Italy, so that he became familiar with all the most

² Edmund Horace Fellowes, The English Madrigal, London, 1925, 33-35.

recently published works of the kind. Interested musicians used to gather at his house daily to try their hand at the new form. Milton's father probably spent many an evening there.³

With the turn of the century the madrigal and its related forms still kept close to the outlines of a rhythmical song-melody filled out with various degrees of polyphonic elaboration. This contrapuntal texture is especially characteristic of the madrigal in its later development. The voices had rhythmical and melodic independence; in fact rhythmical contrasts among the voices were among the chief points of interest. "You may maintaine points and reuert them, vse triplaes and shew the verie vttermost of your varietie, and the more varietie you shew the better shal you please."⁴ It was this variety among the voices along with its capacity for continuous movement that commended the madrigal to musicians as the form that exhibited the best musical technique of the time. Morley declared that "it is next vnto the Motet, the most artificiall and to men of vnderstanding the most delightfull."⁵

There was no greater master of variety in rhythm than Morley. He was not particularly subtle in portraying the senti-

³ Ernest Brennecke Jr., John Milton the Elder and His Music, New York, 1938, 45-47.

⁴ Morley, A Plaine and Easie Introduction to Practicall Musicke, 180.

⁵ Ibid., 180.

ments of the verse, and he modeled himself on the more orthodox Italians rather than on the bold innovators who were stretching the traditional system to find more picturesque ways of illustrating the text. But his conservatism along with his learning made him alive to all the possibilities of rhythmic contrast among the voices. Wilbye and Weelkes too used cross-rhythms cleverly and consistently to express a variety of ideas in the text. Yet, despite the independence of the voices, there is a basic regularity.

The Elizabethans clearly realized the difference between metre and rhythm. In poetry there is a regular pattern that continues in the mind throughout the reading--the metre; but this implicit pattern is not always evident in the actual sound of the verse, which gains its interest from innumerable variations from the fixed metre. The metre is subconscious most of the time, once the poet has set the mind ticking the right pattern; the rhythm is the tune counterpointed on that subconscious pattern by the natural stresses and quantities of the words. The madrigal, too, has metre behind its rhythmic fluidity. To bar madrigals regularly would be a good way of representing it if one could rid the mind of inevitable overt stress at the beginning of each bar.⁶

A true understanding of the principles on which the English madrigal composers worked in this matter of rhythm forms the only true foundation for the right interpretation of their music. Freedom of rhythm also characterized the polyphonic music of the Flemings, the Italians, and the Spaniards in the sixteenth century, but the English composers undoubtedly worked with even greater freedom. This large measure of freedom in designing

⁶ Bruce Pattison, Music and Poetry of the English Renaissance, London, 1948, 106-7.



O - - ri - an - a, Long
 a, fair O - ri - an - a,
 an - a, Long live fair
 live fair O - ri -
 live fair O - ri - an - a,
 an - - - a Long live fair

live fair O - ri - an - a, fair
 Long live fair O - ri - an -
 O - ri - an - a, fair
 an - a, Long live fair
 Long live fair
 O - ri - an - a, Long live fair

O - - ri - an - - a!⁷
 a, Fair O - - ri - an - - a!
 O - - ri - an - - a!
 O - ri - an - - a!
 O - - ri - an - - a!
 O - ri - an - - a!

Continuous movement and variety among the voices are immediately evident from this illustration. Continuous movement can be judged from the content as a whole--there is never a complete pause in the forward surge of music and words. Variety among the voices can best be seen by following the voices through one at a time. It will be seen that they are completely independent in rhythm, melody and length of rhythmic members.

With this, then, by way of introduction to the English madrigal we can now turn to Milton and his poetry and find some striking resemblances.⁸

7 Brennecke Jr., John Milton the Elder, 166-167.

8 The following discussion was first proposed by Donald Ramsay Roberts, "The Music of Milton," Philological Quarterly, XXVI, October, 1947, 328-344.

Milton is brief and cryptic on the subject of verse technique. His most revealing utterance on poetic rhythm is the few scant words of the note preceding Paradise Lost: "true musical delight . . . consists only in apt Numbers, fit quantity of Syllables, and the sense variously drawn out from one Verse into another."⁹ Related to Milton's own practice this statement has a wealth of meaning. We will concern ourselves here with the last phrase only, " . . . the sense variously drawn out from one verse into another." Milton believed that the "sense" (meaning the line of thought) should not come to a complete close, but should be "drawn out." He believed too, that this movement should be achieved "variously."

Two principles of poetic rhythm, then, can be inferred from this last phrase of the note to Paradise Lost. The first is continuous movement, and the second is variety. Here we see a significant resemblance to the continuous flow and free-moving rhythms of the madrigal. The connection is particularly striking when we consider some of Milton's own descriptions of rhythm and contemporary music. His poetic words on rhythm, for instance, are reminiscent of the English madrigal:

. . . mazes intricate
Eccentric, intervolv'd, yet regular
Then most, when most irregular they seem:¹⁰

9 Milton, note to Paradise Lost, Student's Milton, 159.

10 Paradise Lost, V, 622-624.

Another very enlightening passage is found in "L'Allegro" where Milton talks of music married to immortal verse:

In notes, with many a winding bout
Of lincked sweetnes long drawn out,
With wanton heed, and giddy cunning,
The melting voice through mazes running;
Untwisting all the chains that ty
The hidden soul of harmony.¹¹

No better epitome could be conceived of the character of the madrigal--its delicacy, subtlety, artifice, and gentle movement. In speaking of the madrigal as "drawn out" (the very same phrase he uses apropos of the rhythm of blank verse) Milton seems to be referring to the manner in which the interplay of voices is used to produce an effect of quiet, continuous, forward movement, with one voice taking up the rhythmic burden before it has been dropped by another. It is this effect, so general in the madrigal and well understood by him, that Milton strove to reproduce in the rhythms of his heroic verse. In this respect Mr. Symonds' comment on Milton's verse is interesting; it is also applicable to the English madrigal.

It not unfrequently happens that a portion at least of the sound belonging to a word at the commencement of a verse is owed to the cadence of the preceding lines, so that the strain of music which begins is wedded to that which dies, by indescribable and almost imperceptible interpenetrations. The rhythmic dance may therefore be prolonged through sequences and systems of melody, each perfect in itself, each owing and lending something to that which follows and which went be-

¹¹ "L'Allegro," 139-144.

fore, through concords and affinities of modulated sound,¹²

The following quotation from Paradise Lost is a good example of contiguous movement:

At once as far as Angels kenn he views
 The dismal Situation waste and wilde,
 A Dungeion horrible, on all sides round
 As one great Furnace flam'd, yet from those flames
 No light, but rather darkness visible
 Serv'd only to discover sights of woe,
 Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace
 And rest can never dwell, hope never comes
 That comes to all; but torture without end
 Still urges, and a fiery Deluge, fed
 With ever-burning Sulphur unconsum'd:
 Such place Eternal Justice had prepar'd
 For those rebellious, here their Prison ordain'd
 In utter darkness, and their portion set
 As far remov'd from God and light of Heav'n
 As from the Center thrice to th' utmost Pole.¹³

The rhythm of this passage from Paradise Lost is the characteristic rhythm which Milton attained in his mature verse, and to which he remained faithful as his final mode of expression.

There is a continuous rhythmic flow, varied in speed and strength of impulse, rising, falling, sometimes hesitating briefly, but never wholly losing its forward movement until the period reaches its end. These long periods are peculiar to Milton, and although they have some points of resemblance to the rhythms of the Elizabethans, they have little in common with those of contemporary poets. The harsh, insistent rhythms of the school of Donne and

¹² John Addington Symonds, "The Blank Verse of Milton," Fortnightly Review, London, XXII, 1874, 774.

¹³ Paradise Lost, I, 59-74.

the elegant smoothness of the Jonsonians are alike remote from this rich and subtly complex rhythm. Over and above the admittedly powerful influence of classical example we can see a closer parallel and a nearer source of the Miltonic rhythm in the work of contemporary madrigalists.

Milton also tells us in the note to Paradise Lost that this rhythm should be achieved "variously." This would include variety in the length and in the quality of the rhythmic members. Variety in the length of the rhythmic members is achieved by the careful placing of pauses. Milton freely places the break after any syllable in the line. Sometimes there are two such breaks. T. H. Banks estimates that 40 per cent of the full stops in Paradise Lost occur within the line.¹⁴ His supreme skill in varying the position of the pause gives variety to his poetic rhythm. Mr. Bridges points out that "the variety and severity of the breaks is a distinction of Milton's verse."¹⁵ The line is clearly not the rhythmic unit. What we have is free rhythm, conditioned only by the predominant iambic measure. The emancipation from the single verse as the rhythmical unit in heroic measure is not unique in Milton. What is peculiar to him is the continuous and

¹⁴ T. H. Banks, "Miltonic Rhythm: A Study of the Relation of the Full Stops to the Rhythm of Paradise Lost," PMLA, XLII, 1927, 140-145.

¹⁵ Robert Bridges, Milton's Prosody, revised final edition, London, 1921, 45.

calculated variety in length of the rhythmic members, which is his substitute for the pentameter unit. In the madrigal the standard time signature with bar lines and its corollary of regular and insistent accent, usual in music since Handel's time, is not observed. We have here an exact parallel to Milton's rejection of the line as the metrical unit.

Qualitative changes in rhythm are a secondary implication of Milton's word "variously." Inversion of feet is one kind of change in this connection. Such inversion in Milton is common in the first, third, and fourth foot, rare in the second and in the fifth. Part of the secret of Milton's melodious epic poetry lies in this variety through inversion of accent. A few examples make this clear:

Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace¹⁶

A mind not to be chang'd by Place or Time¹⁷

Before thy fellows, ambitious to win¹⁸

Illumine, what is low raise and support¹⁹

Mr. Fellowes has pointed out the reality of the free rhythms of the composers of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centu-

16 Paradise Lost, I, 65.

17 Ibid., I, 253.

18 Ibid., VI, 160.

19 Ibid., I, 23.

ries.²⁰ Both time setting and rhythm are frequently changed to accord with the spirit of the words being set. Milton, aside from the advantage of variety, seems to be following the same principle in the inversion of feet. His expression is not limited by a set form.

Some other qualitative changes are due to speed. In this connection, it would be a mistake to consider Milton's rhythms accentual and to ignore the very large part that quantity plays. His verse should never be read with strong accents; but a careful attention to sonorous quantities is necessary if the proper effect is to be achieved. In this respect a powerful and immediate parallel with contemporary music can be drawn.

But aside from the madrigal there was another form of music popular in Milton's day. We have already mentioned it: the English metrical psalter. Let us take a closer look.

Ever since the middle of the sixteenth century, large portions of the English population delighted to sing--chiefly in private gatherings--a doggerel, rhymed version of the psalter set to simple hymn tunes. The custom originated among the earliest Protestant sects, including the followers of Wycliffe and Walter Lollard; it flourished especially in Geneva and spread rapidly. It was an exercise that appealed to the musically untaught, when the tunes were sung in unison without harmony; to the moderately

20 Fellowes, The English Madrigal Composers, 124-38.

skilled when harmonized in four parts; and to those with polyphonic prowess when developed contrapuntally. Nor was the music dull or droning.

Furthermore, the tunes themselves that were in use between 1539 and 1638 (and whose composers are for the most part unknown) were in general characterized by a strength, a grace, and a variety that surpass all but the very best that can be offered by the melodies now in popular use throughout our reformed Christendom.²¹

During what one may term the golden age of psalm singing, almost every English composer of note tried his hand at harmonizing these tunes. The result is a body of hundreds of little compositions, fascinating to hear today and extremely valuable as documents in the history of the development of harmony.

Calvin himself supported one of the first metrical psalters, published in Geneva in 1539 with texts by Clement Marot and Theodore Beza. It exemplifies two principles which Calvin urged: the singing should be in unison; and the composition should be syllabic, that is, each syllable should be sung to one and only one note. These two principles were to be of great importance for the later development of the psalters. It is significant to note the considerable variety of meter. As the editor of the psalter remarks,

[a]part from the dignity and beauty of the melodies here preserved, another striking feature of the book is the wealth

²¹ Ernest Brennecke, Jr., John Milton the Elder and His Music, 99.

and variety of its metres. While our English Psalters groan under the weight of the monotonous 'Ballad Metre,' in this book no two tunes are in the same metre save Psalm 111 and the Nunc dimittis.²²

But if the English translators unfortunately did not follow the continental model of metrical variety, what they did do is most interesting. Experiments in translating the psalms into English meter had been made by Sir Thomas Wyatt and by the Earl of Surrey, by Miles Coverdale, by William Hunnis of the Chapel Royal, and by an anonymous journeyman poet whose work appeared in 1549.²³ In the same year appeared the nucleus of what was to be, when complete, the "standard" version of the English rhymed psalter. This was the work of Thomas Sternhold, and it contained nineteen psalms. Before the end of the year a new edition was published containing forty-four, seven of which were by John Hopkins. The Sternhold-Hopkins book became immensely popular. It went through edition after edition, new translations being added from time to time by various hands until 1562 when the work was complete. It contained not only all the psalms, most of them reduced to "common meter," but also a number of "Evangelical Hymns and Spiritual Songs," such as the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, the Veni Creator, the

²² Sir Richard R. Terry, ed., Calvin's First Psalter, London, 1932, vii.

²³ H. E. Wooldridge, "The English Metrical Psalter," Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians, 3rd edition, New York, 1935, IV, 267.

Creed, and a Prayer to the Holy Ghost, all executed in the same style. This psalter held the field without serious competition until 1696. More than two hundred editions were published before 1640.

The tunes to which these verses were sung began to appear in print as early as 1556, when they were published without harmony. Later editions of Sternhold contained in addition "An Introduction to Learn to Sing," for the benefit of the musically unskilled. In 1563 harmony was provided in the form of 141 compositions published by John Day in four separate part-books. The tremendous popularity of this psalter was responsible for locking the psalter metrics and in great measure accounts for the unpopularity of these translations today.²⁴

Among the many printings of the Sternhold and Hopkins version there arises some revision of words, but the outstanding variation is the occasional emergence of new musical settings, as in that of East (1592) and Ravenscroft (1621). Ravenscroft's work proved to be the last significant treatment of the old version. To it Milton's father contributed three arrangements. His best known contribution appears first on page sixty-two. It is a setting for Psalm 27:

²⁴ Waldo Pratt, The Music of the French Psalter of 1562 New York, 1939, 75.

Cantus
Medius
Tenor or
Playnsong
Bassus

The Lord is both my health and light,

shall man make me dis - maid?

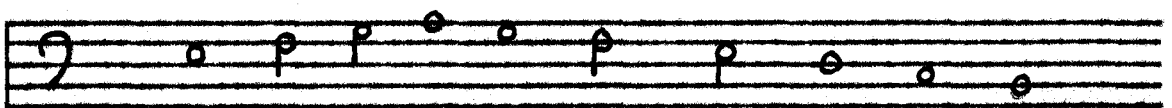
Sith God doth give me strength and might,

(b) 25
why should I be a - fraid ?

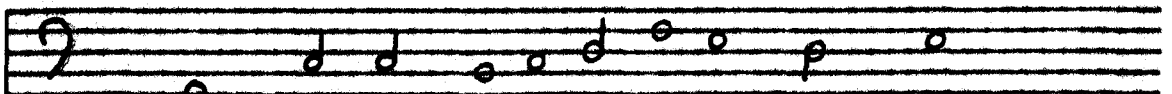
Henry Ainsworth composed a new version for the Pilgrims in 1612. The stanzas of his translation generally follow the pattern of the Sternhold-Hopkins version; yet there are some important changes. He avoids as much as possible the use of feminine endings, though they appear only infrequently in the Sternhold-Hopkins version; presumably the reason for this attitude of Ainsworth is to avoid singing two syllables to one note, as would happen with the extra syllable. Also, the iambic meter is far more frequently varied by substituted trochees; the influence of long musical notes on the poetry would seem operative here. His psalter was sufficiently popular to call for reprints in 1618, 1642, and for two in 1644. The following illustration is taken from one of the stanzas of Ainsworth's Psalm 8:



O Jah our Lord, how excellent great is



thy name in all the earth: thou which has given



thy glorious majestic above the heaven.²⁶

²⁶ William Bridges Hunter, Jr., "The Sources of Milton's Prosody," Philological Quarterly, XXVIII, January, 1949, 137.

All the music of the English metrical psalters have certain characteristics in common. The tunes are printed without bars, and in notes of unequal length. Semibreves (whole notes) and minims (half notes) are both used, but in what seems at first sight so unsystematic a way--since they do not correspond with the accents of the verse--that few of the tunes, as they stand, could be divided into equal sections; and some could not be made to submit to any time-signature whatever. In this respect they resemble the older ecclesiastical melodies. The idea of imitation was, however, far from the composer's mind, and the object of his irregularity was no doubt variety of effect--the destruction of the monotonous swing of the alternate eight and six with accents constantly recurring in similar positions. To the eye the tunes appear somewhat confused; but upon trial it will be found that the long and short notes have been adjusted with great care, and, taking a whole tune together, with a fine sense of rhythmical balance. As to the strict time value of the notes:

[We do not know whether, in actual singing, the values of the notes were made exact. We rather infer that they were kept flexible to the drift of the words and the contour of the phrase as a whole . . .²⁷ Whether the accents were sharp and decisive is not clear.

It will be noticed that each phrase of the music regularly opens and always closes with a whole note; intervening notes are almost

27 Pratt, The Music of the French Psalter, 75.

always halves. An occasional whole note will intrude into such a sequence of halves.

These characteristics of the music had an influence on the prosody of the verse translations. The resultant lack of uniformity of correspondence between length of note and metrical accent established two important principles: first, speech accent does not influence the length of musical notes in the psalters. A syllable "accented" by the iambic prosody of the verse may be sung to a half note; likewise an "unaccented" syllable may be held by a whole note. Second, the length of musical note does not regularly influence the verse. The conclusion then follows that

syllabic count rather than meter becomes the determining prosodic principle, even when the words alone look like very heavy iambic feet. Thus the 1635 Scotch Psalter sets a clear example of iambic meter to what looks like a trochaic melody in Ps. 27. The effect is that, considered in terms of meter, a foot may be reversed at any position; but no trisyllabic feet may be introduced unless they occur in every comparable phrase of succeeding stanzas: the first is always the exact metrical model of all subsequent ones.²⁸

The music, however, did influence the verse in two respects: first, the usual long opening note of a phrase encouraged reversal of the first foot; second, the long closing note permitted two syllables to be sung to it, that is, permitted a feminine ending. With regard to the use of the feminine ending however, slight clarification is needed. Since each musical phrase ended with a

28 Hunter, "Sources of Milton's Prosody," 136.

held note, the extra syllable of such an ending could be sung to it along with the previous accented syllable. On the other hand, the note-for-syllable principle inevitably discouraged this practice; accordingly we find few feminine endings in the psalters. That of Ainsworth is most extreme in this respect; its editor stresses the fact that he tried to avoid this construction.²⁹ Mr. Hunter in his article, "The Sources of Milton's Prosody," adds that "In this period I know of no other English source for this practice."³⁰

From this brief study of the English metrical psalter then, we have discovered three important factors for our purpose of tracing the influence of music on poetry: syllabic count instead of meter becomes the determining prosodic principle, the first foot is frequently inverted, and there is a lack of feminine endings. We can now turn to Milton's poetry and examine it for similar characteristics. For as one of Milton's early biographers says: "Davids Psalms were in esteem with him above all poetry."³¹

Of particular interest is the fact that the earliest extant works of young John Milton the poet were probably composed as an expression of interest in the psalm harmonies written by his

²⁹ Waldo Pratt, The Music of the Pilgrims, Boston, 1921, 11, and his Music of the French Psalter, 74.

³⁰ Hunter, "The Sources of Milton's Prosody," 141.

³¹ John Phillips, The Life of Mr. John Milton, in The Early Lives of Milton, 33.

father and sung with enthusiasm by the family at Bread Street. These are, of course, his paraphrases on Psalms 114 and 136, with which he continued to be so pleased that he included them in the 1645 edition of his poems under the prideful note, "[t]his and the following Psalm were done by the Author at fifteen years old." His first is the paraphrase on Ps. 114. It is interesting to note that five of the sixteen lines contain reversed first feet and the fifteenth either a very heavy trochee or spondee in the same position. Such reversed feet are to be expected under the impact of the long whole note which opens the musical phrase of each line. In Ps. 136 the lines are normally iambic tetrameter, but they frequently show truncation; that is, they often lose their first syllable. This means then, that the line frequently begins with the first syllable accented. The first stanza shows this clearly:

Let us with a gladson mind
Praise the Lord, for he is kind,
For his mercies ay endure,
Ever faithfull, ever sure.³²

The accented first syllable corresponds to the opening whole note of each psalm phrase. Young Milton's paraphrase is eminently singable and one cannot help wondering whether he ever offered it to his father for musical setting.

Twenty-five years later the poet turned to psalmody

32 Psalm 136, 1-4.

again, and in April of 1648 he rendered Psalms 80 to 88 into the singable common meter made familiar to him in his youth by Sternhold and his father. This effect may have been a memorial act of filial reverence, for it took place almost exactly on the first anniversary of the scrivener's death. Here again feet are occasionally reversed, especially the first. And it is particularly important to notice the complete absence of feminine endings, showing the influence of the note-for-syllable principle of the metrical psalters.

Again in 1653 Milton turned to the psalms and put the first eight of them into verse. In translating these psalms (the three groups of translations are the only minor poems which Milton dated accurately, possibly as an indication of his interest) he was surely more concerned with the prosody than with exactness of translation. Each is in a different meter, but only the decasyllabic couplets of the first had been employed in the psalters. The impetus for such metrical experiments suggests a direct interest in the original variety of Calvin's Geneva psalter. There are still very few feminine endings; there are just six such riming sounds in all eight psalms. Most important of all is the extended use of reversed feet, carried at times to such an extreme as to require purely syllabic analysis:

For the Lord knows th'upright of the just
And the way of bad men to ruine must.³³

Turning now to Paradise Lost, we should not be surprised to find these same characteristics in evidence.

Syllabic count. It is well to point out that in Milton's day blank verse was restricted to ten syllables only, set to an iambic rhythm, and did not obey a hard and fast rule with regard to accentuation. However, Paradise Lost cannot be scanned this way unless certain elisions are made in the verse. Accordingly, some have rejected a Miltonic theory of syllabic count. This is unjustified because the elisions are very much in order.

This was fully understood by Wm. Cowper, who in a letter to the Rev. Walter Bagot (Aug. 31, 1786) wrote: ". . . the unacquaintedness of modern ears with the divine harmony of Milton's numbers and the principles upon which he constructed them, is the cause of the quarrel that they have with elisions in blank verse In vain should you or I tell them . . . that for this it (i.e. his verse) is greatly indebted to those elisions. In their ears they are discord and dissonance; they lengthen the line beyond its due limits."³⁴

The various types of elision are discussed at some length by Mr. Robert Bridges in his book, Milton's Prosody.³⁵ These rules of elision generally permit the scansion of Milton's heroic verse as ten syllable lines. This is extremely important since it established a secondary rhythm against which Milton could counterpoint the logical stress-accent of the ideas and thereby gain a wonderful rhythmic effect. As for the elisions, some may seem harsh to

³⁴ Walter Thomas, "Milton's Heroic Line Viewed from an Historical Viewpoint," Modern Language Review, III, 1908, 32-33.

³⁵ Bridges, Milton's Prosody, 9-37.

the ear unless we recall what Mr. Bridges has to say at the beginning of his book.

Since the word elision signifies 'cutting,' there would seem an impropriety in using it to describe the condition of syllabic vowels which are not truly elided or cut out of the pronunciation

In English verse when there is poetic elision of the terminal vowel of one word before the initial vowel of the next word, the sound of it is not lost, the two vowels are glided together, and the conditions may be called synaloepha. For instance the first example of terminal synaloepha in Paradise Lost is

Above th' Aonian Mount, while it pursues. 1. 15

where the final vowel of the is glided into the A of Aonian, it is still heard in the glide, though prosodially asyllabic.

Now since this synaloepha of vowels between two words was historically an imitation of the true Greek elision, that name is convenient and historically correct, and it is commonly used by correct grammarians, and as a matter of fact the first of two such vowels is theoretically 'cut out' of the prosody of scansion.³⁶

With the syllabic interpretation of Milton's verse justified by the use of elisions we have an exact parallel with the syllabic count of the English metrical psalter.

Inversion of feet. Blank verse is typically in rising rhythm; that is, the metric accent is regularly on the even syllables. But the rhythm can be modified. This means that the accent may be shifted onto the odd syllable in any place in the line; it is then said to be inverted. "This inversion in Milton is most common in the first foot, next in the third and fourth,

36 Ibid., 9.

rare in the second and most rare in the fifth."³⁷ Such inversions do not affect the sense, but freshen the rhythm. An example of an inverted first foot:

Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace³⁸

As a general rule, when the first foot is weak, it will strengthen itself by a slight conventional inversion in spite of the sense:

We shall be free; . . .³⁹

This behavior of the initial foot will also account for any inversion which follows a period in the sense.

In all this we have an immediate parallel with the English metrical psalter. For the long opening note of each musical phrase encouraged reversal of the first foot in the verse, and this is exactly what we find most common in Paradise Lost.

Feminine Endings. A normal line of verse rising in rhythm ends on a stressed syllable. If an unstressed syllable is added to a line whose metrical scheme would be complete without it, it is called a redundant syllable, or the line is said to have a feminine ending. Although Milton's predecessors regularly employed the addition of an unstressed syllable to the normal iambic pentameter line, he himself is far more conservative and generally avoids such a construction by the use of elision.⁴⁰ Masson be-

37 Ibid., 40.

38 Paradise Lost, I, 65.

39 Ibid., I, 259.

40 Bridges, Milton's Prosody, 5-6.

believes that lines with feminine endings constitute about one per cent of Paradise Lost,⁴¹ a considerably lower figure than is found in Dante's work or in any of Shakespeare's plays.

Because of the usual long note at the end of each musical phrase we found that the verse translations in the metrical psalter had few feminine endings. Once again in Paradise Lost the parallel is perfect.

These considerations of the metrical psalter--and along with it the madrigal--reveal certain rhythmical characteristics in common with Milton's Paradise Lost. If the psalter and the madrigal influenced Milton in his prosody, it is reasonable to suppose that other musical qualities found their way into his poetry also. Examples of such qualities--less involved than what has gone above but more subtle in their total effect--will be briefly indicated in the following pages.

If we study the poet's vocabulary in Paradise Lost we cannot but notice how carefully he avoids certain letters. The English language, it has often been remarked, tends to accumulate sibilants in passages of some length. To guard against this, Milton seldom uses many plurals or consecutive words ending in s. And as far as he could, he discarded terms containing such combinations as sh or ch. This fastidiousness led to his rejecting

⁴¹ David Masson, ed., The Poetical Works of John Milton, London, 1893, III, 224-5.

a great number of words and, as a matter of fact, he uses fewer on the whole than the Elizabethans, and fewer, by a long way, than Shakespeare.⁴² Thus child, children, childish, etc. are very seldom found while the synonyms son, daughter, offspring, are very frequent. Charm, chase, chill, fetch, short are also rare. But if Milton disapproves of harsh consonants he favors certain vowels such as the broad Italian A and words like sprung and sung in preference to sprang and sang.

We may notice, too, that Milton's words are contracted chiefly in the case of liquid consonants, for example, murm'ring, sev'ral, vi'late, hast'ning, which have no inharmonious effect. And it is no less remarkable that the poet deliberately omits some harsh nouns or substitutes softer ones for them, as river-horse for hippopotamus.⁴³ What minute attention Milton paid to the study of verbal sounds, we see in the case of words that may take one of two endings. Thus he chooses dreamed in preference to dreamt.⁴⁴ The same delicate feeling for harmony accounts for his use of sometime instead of sometimes:

A thing not undesirable--sometime
Superior; . . . ⁴⁵

⁴² Thomas, "Milton's Heroic Line," 240.

⁴³ Paradise Lost, VII, 474.

⁴⁴ Ibid., III, 459; V, 31, 32.

⁴⁵ Ibid., IX, 824-25.

Milton is no less attentive to the effect produced on the ear by an accumulation of vowels and here, too, he does all he can to avoid harshness. The author of Paradise Lost is very chary of hiatuses. He seems loath to admit two of these in the same line. Lines like

May I express thee unblam'd? since God is light⁴⁶
are very uncommon. Out of 742 lines in Book III there are only eleven instances of this and only nine in the 640 lines of Book VII.⁴⁷ The same applies to the crowding of consonants in his verse. Such a repetition of sibilants as "Moab's sons" or "sad drops" is extremely rare with him.

It is curious to notice that the poet avoids accumulating a series of monosyllables in one line, however much they abound in the English language. Indeed, he reacts against the natural tendency of the tongue and, for instance, out of 653 lines in Book VIII only twenty-five lines are formed by ten separate words each.⁴⁸ Even in these Milton places the most important words in such a position that they stand out from the rest and thus guards against the unpleasant effect of a line wholly broken up.⁴⁹ But lines wholly made up of polysyllables are the rarest of

⁴⁶ Ibid., III, 3.

⁴⁷ Thomas, "Milton's Heroic Line," 242.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ cf. Paradise Lost, I, 637; III, 174, 341; VI, 131.

of all. As a rule, we find at least one polysyllable in Milton's heroic line to which the monosyllables lead up. Here is an example:

To us is adverse. Who but felt of late⁵⁰

It may be remarked that, unless for some special purpose Milton happens to accumulate several stresses in one half of his line, he prefers to place a particularly strong one near the middle. Thus the reader, in accordance with the usual rhythm of English sentences, increases the volume of sound from the beginning of the line until he reaches the most important word and then allows it to decrease from that point to the close. On the other hand Milton seems to have noticed the tendency of a reader to drop his voice at the end of a line and therefore frequently concludes with a long word followed by a single monosyllable. This is often the case when an adjective exceeds the accompanying noun in length so that the former is made conspicuous by its size and the latter by its position:

All is not lost; the unconquerable Will
And study of revenge, immortal hate,⁵¹

Or again:

For hot, cold, moist, and dry, four Champions fierce⁵²

Milton evinces the same mastery of technique in the dis-

50 Paradise Lost, II, 77.

51 Ibid., I, 106-107.

52 Ibid., II, 898.

position of accents in his decasyllable. His custom of breaking the iambic rhythm by a trochee at the beginning of the line and after the caesura, while it does not spoil the harmony, helps him to produce a sonorous meter and give variety to the rhythm. This is no less true of his practice of placing an emphatic accent between two slighter ones that act as a foil to it. He now and again adds to this effect by causing the voice to dwell on the polysyllable thus emphasized:

Incenc't with indignation Satan stood⁵³

These considerations are not true of only isolated decasyllables. The charm of so many passages in Paradise Lost as, for instance, the speeches delivered in Pandemonium, is due not only to a careful choice of words but to the artful alternation of strong and weak accents, the careful placing of the most prominent word in each line and the various breaks in the sense made conspicuous by forceful caesuras.

Sight hateful, / sight tormenting! // thus these two
 Imparadis't / in one anothers arms /
 The happier Eden, // shall enjoy their fill
 Of bliss on bliss, // while I // to Hell am thrust,⁵⁴

When Milton adopts slight pauses and places them regularly after the fourth or the sixth sounded syllable, he produces an impression of calm as in Mammon's honeyed speech:

53 Ibid., II, 707.

54 Ibid., IV, 505-508.

As he our Darkness, / cannot we his Light /
 Imitate when we please? / This Desert soile /
 Wants not her hidden lustre, / Gemmas and Gold; / 5

In other passages various caesuras irregularly succeed one another. In these cases they are not only conducive to metrical variety but serve to express the vehement feelings of the several speakers. A good example is Adam's indignant address to Eve after the Fall:

Out of my sight, / thou serpent, // that name best
 Befits thee / with him leagu'd, // thy self as false
 And hateful; // nothing wants, / but that thy shape, / 56

Milton uses other rhythmical tricks also found in music. Examples of what in modern music is called syncopation are found throughout Paradise Lost:

And over them triumphant Death his Dart
 Shook, but delaid to strike, . . . 57

Or again:

The multitude of Angels with a shout
 Loud as from numbers without number, 58

Turning aside from considerations of rhythm we notice that Milton makes use of onomatopoeia in his descriptions. When he mentions the Bacchants as:

55 Ibid., II, 269-271.

56 Ibid., X, 867-869.

57 Ibid., XI, 491-492.

58 Ibid., III, 345-346.

Of that wilde Rout that tore . . . the Race
the Thracian Bard⁵⁹

the violent deed is echoed in the very words. Or, again, notice the suggestive sound in:

Brusht with the hiss of russling wings.⁶⁰

A variant of this technique, audible reverberation or the echo principle common in music, is rendered by Milton in the following:

. . . I fled, and cry'd out Death;
Hell trembl'd at the hideous Name, and sigh'd
From all her Caves, and back resounded Death.⁶¹

And again:

. . . in this we stand or fall:
And som are fall'n, to disobedience fall'n,
And so from Heav'n to deepest Hell; O fall
From what high state of bliss into what woe!⁶²

Milton's art is perhaps seen at its best in his use of alliteration which makes his lines more effective and harmonious.

For instance, Paradise Lost begins thus:

Of Mans First Disobedience, and the Fruit
Of that Forbidden Tree, . . .⁶³

And it ends with:

59 Ibid., VII, 33-34.

60 Ibid., I, 768.

61 Ibid., II, 787-789.

62 Ibid., V, 540-543.

63 Ibid., I, 1-2.

They hand in hand with wandring steps and slow,
Through Eden took thir solitarie way.⁶⁴

Milton very cleverly distributes his alliterative words: at one time they are nouns, at another time adjectives.

Dire was the tossing, deep the groans, despair
Tended the sick . . .⁶⁵

According to Mr. Symonds, who carefully investigated this part of the poet's versification,⁶⁶ Milton has a marked preference for the letters f, l, n, r, and x, and artfully distributes his alliterations in a series of consecutive lines which he thus connects into a whole for purposes of argumentation or description. Thus he uses a reiteration of d and f to depict the war waged in heaven by the angels:

. . . dire was the noise
Of conflict; over head the dismal hiss
Of fiery Darts in flaming volles flew,
And flying vaulted either Host with fire.⁶⁷

Milton combines the letters of his alliteration through periods of "linked sweetness long drawn out" in such a way that the ear is able to trace the windings of the stream of harmony from the beginning of the sentence to its close. This effect, which may be studied in almost any descriptive passage in Paradise Lost, is

64 Ibid., XII, 648-649.

65 Ibid., XI, 489-490.

66 Symonds, "The Blank Verse of Milton," 767-781.

67 Paradise Lost, VI, 211-214.

illustrated in the following passage where it will be noticed that the alliteration lies not only in the initial letter, but in the use of liquids, labials, and dentals at measured intervals:

. . . and what resounds
 In Fable or Romance of Uthers Son
Begirt with British and Armoric Knights;
 And all who since, Baptiz'd or Infidel
Jousted in Aspramont or Montalban,
Damasco, or Marocco, or Trebisond,
 Or whom Biserta sent from Afric shore
 When Charlemain with all his Peerage fell
 By Fontarabbia.⁶⁸

Milton frequently combines alliteration with assonance. As vowels are generally more prolonged in pronunciation than are consonants, they are more effective in producing similarity of sound while at the same time they obtrude themselves less upon the observation either of the ear or eye. We do not always notice assonances unless we search for them. Notice these examples from Paradise Lost:

Dwelt from Eternitie, dwelt then in thee,
Bright effluence of bright essence increate.⁶⁹

Of thir great Potentate; for great indeed
His name, and high was his degree in heav'n;⁷⁰

Another harmonious effect is secured by introducing like sounds near the beginning and also somewhere in the middle and finally at the end of a sentence. This is identical with an arrangement

68 Ibid., I, 579-587.

69 Ibid., III, 5-6.

70 Ibid., V, 706-707.

recognized to be satisfactory in music where the key-note of the melody is sounded at these places. In the following example notice em followed by our, powers, how, en, most, offend, our, and enemy:

And reassembling our afflicted Powers
Consult how we may henceforth most offend
Our Enemy; . . . 71

In the following passage notice that before one series of tones is ended another series is begun. This is known as modulation in music. Here observe how the like sounds of f, b, s, w, and p as allied to b, are introduced in overlapping series. The sounds of the whole passage as a result are blended together so as to produce a general effect of unity and progress.

. . . the Aire
Floats, as they pass, fann'd with unnumbered plumes:
From Branch to Branch the smaller Birds with song
Solac'd the Woods, and spread thir painted wings/2

The same method of transition is used in the following quotation. It has a subtle and artistic music all its own:

Follow'd with acclamation and the sound
Symphonious of ten thousand Harpes that tun'd
Angelic harmonies; the Earth, the Aire
Resounded, . . . 73

Finally, the effect of pitch on Paradise Lost is evident upon the reading of any long passage. Even in the following brief

71 Ibid., I, 186-188.

72 Ibid., VII, 431-434.

73 Ibid., VII, 558-561.

quotation its important contribution cannot go unnoticed.

. . . Arms on Armour clashing bray'd
Horrible discord, and the madding Wheelles
Of brazen chariots rag'd; . . .⁷⁴

This chapter has made it clear that there are certain qualities in Paradise Lost that may be called musical. They are called musical because they are of the essence of music, though they may be found secondarily in other arts. The present chapter, however, has a deeper significance than this. It shows, as clearly as possible, that the madrigal and psalter are among the sources of Miltonic rhythm. This means at once that music in some way influenced Milton the poet. On this ground then, the other musical qualities noted in this chapter are also, in an undetermined degree, attributed to his knowledge and interest in music, the reason being that a man cannot control what he unconsciously borrows. If Milton unconsciously borrowed certain elements from the madrigal and psalter, it is reasonable to say that he was probably influenced in some degree by other musical qualities.

74 Ibid., VI, 209-211.

CHAPTER V

JOHN MILTON, "LIGHT DENY'D"

A good deal of literary interest has been stirred up by the problem of Milton's blindness. Did it affect his later work? And in what respects? The problem here, of course, is to show that Milton's blindness affected the influence of music upon him.

Milton himself has left us some information on the state of his eyes during his childhood and expressed the opinion that his early studies harmed his sight:

my appetite for knowledge was so voracious, that, from twelve years of age, I hardly ever left my studies, or went to bed before midnight. This primarily led to my loss of sight. My eyes were naturally weak, and I was subject to frequent headaches; which, however, could not chill the ardor of my curiosity, or retard the progress of my improvement.¹

Aubrey adds that Milton's "father read without spectacles at 84. His mother had very weake eies, and used spectacles presently after she was thirty yeares old."²

Yet Milton's eyes were not especially bad in the early

1145. 1 Milton, The Second Defence, in The Student's Milton,

2 Aubrey, Brief Lives, 70.

days of his manhood, for "I was wont constantly to exercise myself in the use of the broadsword, as long as it comported with my habit and years. Armed with this weapon, as I usually was, I should have thought myself quite a match for any one, though much stronger than myself."³ His blindness, however, did come on rather early in life as is well known from the opening lines of the sonnet on his blindness:

When I consider how my light is spent,
E're half my days, in this dark world and wide,
And that one Talent which is death to hide,
Lodg'd with me useless, . . .⁴

More exact information as to the date of Milton's blindness is given by Edward Phillips, one of Milton's early biographers:

this his Second Marriage was about Two or Three years after his being wholly depriv'd of Sight, which was just going, about the time of his answering Salmasius; whereupon his Adversaries gladly take occasion of imputing his blindness as a Judgment upon him for his Answering the King's Book, &c. whereas it is most certainly known, that his Sight, what with his continual Study, his being subject to the Head-ake, and his perpetual tampering with Physick to preserve it, had been decaying for above a dozen years before, and the sight of one for a long time clearly lost.⁵

That excessive work led to his blindness was Milton's belief and

³ Milton, The Second Defence, in The Student's Milton, 1139.

⁴ "Sonnet XIX," 1-4.

⁵ Phillips, The Life of Mr. John Milton, in Early Lives, 71-72.

that of his medical advisers. He records the circumstances in which he undertook to write a defence of the republican ideal in 1650:

[Thus, therefore, when I was publicly solicited to write a reply to the Defence of the royal cause, when I had to contend with the pressure of sickness, and with the apprehension of soon losing the sight of my remaining eye, and when my medical attendants clearly announced, that if I did engage in the work, it would be irreparably lost, their premonitions caused no hesitation and inspired no dismay.⁶

A good account of the entire case history is given by Milton himself in a letter dated September 28, 1654 to his friend, Leonard Philaras.

It is, I suppose, about ten years since I first noticed that my sight was growing weak and dull, and at the same time I began to suffer in the spleen and bowels and to be troubled with flatulence; and in the morning, if I began to read, as was my usual custom, I felt sharp pains in my eyes, and was quite unable to go on; but if I took a little physical exercise my eyes felt better A little later, a mist formed on the left side of my left eye (that eye became clouded a few years before the other), and prevented me from seeing anything on that side. And objects in front of me seemed smaller if I closed my right eye. In the course of three years the other eye slowly and gradually failed, and some months before blindness became total everything at which I looked while standing still myself seemed to float about to one side or the other.⁷

The exact date of Milton's total blindness is not known with certainty. Masson holds that it was complete by March or April,

6 Milton, The Second Defence, in The Student's Milton, 1141.

7 Phyllis B. Tillyard, ed., Milton Private Correspondence and Academic Exercises, London, 1932, 31.

1652⁸--and this date is generally accepted. Paradise Lost was not written until years later.

Milton's blindness must certainly have affected his poetry in many ways. Science, as well as common sense, tells us that a person deprived of the use of one of his external senses and forced to rely more heavily upon the others develops these to a high degree. Miss Eleanor G. Brown, who went blind early in her life and who bases her conclusions on her own experience as well as on medical authority, tells us that "it is likely that the senses of odor, touch, and sound, which Milton manifested in his early poetry became even more acute in his blindness."⁹ Of special interest here is the development of his sense for sound. This change is clearly revealed in his imagery.

Images recording the sound of wind or storm are very suggestive. Before Milton's blindness we find only two. The first describes the night of Christ's birth:

The Windes with wonder whist,
Smoothly the waters kist,
Whispering new joyes to the milde Ocean,¹⁰

The second image, a personification of morning "civil-suited" and "Cherchef't," ends in this sharply detailed description:

⁸ Masson, The Life of John Milton, IV, 427.

⁹ Eleanor Gertrude Brown, Milton's Blindness, New York, 1934, 136.

¹⁰ "Nativity Ode," V, 4-6.

While rocking Winds are Piping loud,
 Or usher'd with a shower still,
 When the gust hath blown his full,
 Ending on the ruffling Leaves,
 With minute drops from off the Eaves.¹¹

To put against these early images we have five late images occurring in Milton's poetry after his blindness. The whispering of the wind on flowers and leaves:

. . . then with voice
 Milde, as when Zephyrus or Flora breathes,¹²

. . . the Earth
 Gave sign of gratulation, and each Hill;
 Joyous the Birds; fresh Gales and gentle Aires
 Whisper'd it to the Woods, . . .¹³

The approach of a storm:

Thir rising all at once was as the sound
 Of Thunder heard remote. . . .¹⁴

The downpour of rain or perhaps sleet:

. . . for this day will pour down,
 If I conjecture aught, no drizzling shower,
 But rattling storm of Arrows barbed with fire.¹⁵

and the long continued after-effects:

He scarce had finish'd, when such murmur fill'd
 Th' Assembly, as when hollow Rocks retain

11 "Il Penseroso," 126-130.

12 Paradise Lost, V, 15-16.

13 Ibid., VIII, 513-516.

14 Ibid., II, 476-477.

15 Ibid., VI, 544-546.

The sound of blustering winds, which all night long
 Had rous'd the Sea, now with hoarse cadence lull
 Sea-faring men orewatcht, whose Bark by chance
 Or Pinnacle anchors in a cragge Bay
 After the Tempest: Such applause was heard
 As Mammon ended, . . .¹⁶

Equally suggestive are the images recording the sound
 of water. Not one of these is early; all occur in Paradise Lost¹⁷
 and show a wide range of effects. A cascade in spray and mist:

. . . th' only sound
 Of leaves and fuming rills, Aurora's fan
 Lightly dispers'd, and the shrill Matin Song
 Of birds in every bough; . . .¹⁸

The quiet murmur of a full stream:

. . . as one whose drouth
 Yet scarce allay'd still eyes the current streame,
 Whose liquid murmur heard new thirst excites,¹⁹

This class of images, then, presents strong evidence that after
 his blindness, Milton became more conscious of the sounds of na-
 ture or tended to think more in terms of sound.

As an experiment to check the reliability of this evi-
 dence, Theodore Banks made an analysis of the "non-figurative" re-
 ferences to water in four early poems and three poems after Mil-
 ton's blindness.²⁰ In the early poems the references are almost

16 Ibid., II, 284-291.

17 Theodore Banks, Milton's Imagery, New York, 1950,
 132.

18 Paradise Lost, V, 5-8.

19 Ibid., VII, 66-68. cf. XI, 846-848; VI, 828-830.

20 Banks, Milton's Imagery, 133-134.

entirely visual: "the dimpled brook," "the glassy cool translucent wave," "the wide-watered shore" and the like. The only sound references are: "the barking waves of Scylla and the soft applause of Charybdis," "the water's murmuring," and "the sounding sea." Even when allowance is made for the fact that a writer has a wider choice of sight words than of sound words, it is clear that in these poems the former are used with far more discrimination than the latter.

The late poems are markedly different. The visual references are about the same in quality as before: "the cool crystalline stream," "lucid streams," "silver lakes" and so on. They are, however, far less in quantity while the sound references have increased in number and improved in quality: "the murmuring sound of waters," "the liquid lapse of murmuring streams," "the whispering stream," "the murmuring water's fall," "the purling brook." They are still not equal to the sight references, but they are decidedly better than they were. The "non-figurative" passages, therefore, agree with the images in revealing an increase in emphasis on sound in Milton's works after he became blind.

The point of this chapter can now be clearly brought into focus. Science teaches that a blind person develops a keen auditory sense beyond that of the ordinary person. A study of Milton's imagery before and after his blindness shows this very effect. Now it is reasonable to conclude that music would also affect the blind Milton, since its medium also is sound. His use

of rhythm, assonance, and all the rest must have been perfected with his blindness. For if a blind man is unconsciously affected by the sounds of nature in his use of imagery it can be argued a pari that he is generally affected by sound in all its other forms. And we must always keep in mind that Milton had a life-long interest in music.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

A story is told of an enterprising young man anxious to enlarge his mental horizons. He determined, in such time as he could spare, to attend university lectures beginning with those of the professor of Greek. When he was asked why he made this choice he replied that in other subjects, such as history or modern literature, he might be at some disadvantage confronted with men of greater knowledge than his own. "Here, however," he added with a glance around that included the lecturer, "here I presume we are all much on the same level."

A like sentiment prompted this study of Milton and music. It is a subject about which some very interesting things can be said but a subject about which little is actually known. Modern scholars have little to say about it because it cannot be handled categorically. A scientific age does not care for research punctuated with "ifs".

It is true that the present thesis labors under the opprobrious stamp, highly "probable". Yet to enter into a man's mind and determine precisely what makes him act as he does and

what makes his art the way it is presents a problem not to be resolved by man nor easily perhaps by angels. The musical quality of Milton's verse is unquestioned, but the source of these qualities is questionable. It is just possible that Milton's poetry would have been the same without his interest in music. No one would say this, yet it cannot be disproved.

In writing this thesis, therefore, the difficulty of the subject-matter made it necessary to draw up several a pari arguments in place of a direct approach. After establishing Milton's musical interests and the musical qualities of his poetry it was necessary to show only a few instances of unconscious influence (this was done with the madrigal and psalter) to argue a pari that his other musical qualities were also influenced by his knowledge and interest in music. Again, in the case of Milton's blindness the same argumentation was used. It would have been almost impossible to catalogue all the musical qualities of Milton's poetry before and after his blindness, since these qualities permeate every poem. His poetic images were a much handier yardstick both because they were fewer in number and because they were easily distinguishable. Once Milton's sound-images were catalogued and the increase in their number after his blindness noted it was easily argued a pari that if the sounds of nature bore a greater influence upon Milton after his blindness so too did the sounds of music.

The degree of musical influence has been left undeter-

mined. Such a problem is of no value, no probability, and is only a scholarly waste of time. We have already placed one foot on the periphery of knowledge; the next foot would only lead to an ungracious slip into intellectual chaos.

In concluding, let it be said that the present thesis does not support the facile implication that all poets are influenced by music. Although there is a very definite relation between poetry and music, there is no correlation between poets and musicians. A man like Goethe, the poet of Germany, within whose lifetime fell the entire work of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, and Weber showed only disinterest in music. On the other hand a man like Edgar Allen Poe whose verse has a distinct musical quality was in no way a musician. Only a comparatively few poets, like Milton, Lanier, and Hopkins found a place for it in their poetry.

The intent of this paper then may be briefly put as follows; Milton's musical background very probably influenced the writing of Paradise Lost in those respects where the two arts of music and poetry have a common ground, that is in rhythm and sound.

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APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Bernard J. Streicher, S.J. has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Date

Rev. John B. Conrath, S.J.
Signature of Adviser