

Impact Of Music On John Milton's Poetry Especially On Paradise Lost

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Abstract:

For centuries long many cliques of people of English Literature had appreciated Milton have still been thinking that Milton and his exceptional talent has to be confined only to his way and style of writing and very few knew his depth knowledge about music despite being the son of a musician since we could find a swell and sway to the verse, a delicacy of sound, the famous organ tone in his Paradise Lost. So, the present paper is to establish Milton's acquaintance with music and its very indelible impact upon his poetry.

Keywords: Milton, Poetry, Madrigal, Metrical, Music, Musician, Paradise Lost

Introduction

The two extraordinary talented elements in arts music and poetry go hand in hand in respect to rhythm and sound. These, accordingly, are the musical qualities that can be detected in any poem. Hence, it can be exposed that Milton consciously borrowed from contemporary music for some of the rhythms of his Paradise Lost. And here it can be argued that the music by which he was consciously influenced by is the musical knowledge already hidden in him as bedrock which quality he hereditarily got from his father. Going beyond this somehow further, it can be stated that this theme and variation technique, his use of assonance, syncopation and all the rest is in some way Influenced by his musical background. And here in this aspect it may be noteworthy to mention that his poetry must have been influenced by his own music which quality has been kept aside unnoticed by many literature enthusiasts and here it may be assumed its only because many literature paramours do not have musical knowledge equally too. Despite all kinds of struggles and tribulations that clouded

Milton's life with darkness, his tenacity, concentration and intrapersonal relationship that he maintained with poetry and music could not disturb and deviate him anymore of which Hilaire Belloc stated as "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 inheritance in music, his comprehension of music, belong to Milton the man not Milton the poet".

People used to think that the three arts of dancing, poetry and song in any way were inseparable. Even during the time of King David, who, on one occasion at least, danced as well as sang his psalms before the ark. Seventeenth century witnessed the tremendous and huge impact of music upon almost the total human kind of the planet irrespective of their place and position in the society. Indeed, no one was in a position to claim to be highly- educated one possessed substantial musical skill. Under such circumstances that existed then, it is not too astonishing to notice that Milton's father was a musician who is in fact was a composer of real merit of whom Aubrey opined that he was an

ingenious man: delighted in musique; composed many songs now in print, especially that of Oriana "who got a gold medal from a Polish prince for composing forty parts of an "In Nominee,"

As it is a well-known fact that Milton's father was a musician and as rightly pointed out by Anthony Wood that "Milton himself had a delicate, tuneable voice, an excellent ear, could play on the organ, and bear a part in vocal and instrumental music," where it can be said with noteworthy probability that he was influenced by his musical background in the writing of his poetry especially *Paradise Lost*. Having been influenced by such a father and by paying his regular visits to the services in St. Paul's hearing to the best sacred music the early Milton not only learned to sing a part in a madrigal or psalm at first sight but mastered keyboard instrument also where the organ music left an indelible impact on him as the following well-known lines of "Il Penseroso" testify:

"Then let the peeling organ blow
To the full-voiced choir below
In cervice high and anthem clear
As may with sweetness through mine ear
Dissolve me into ecstasies
And bring all Heaven before my eyes"
Il Penseroso

There can be found another edifying passage in "L'Allegro" in which Milton makes a mention of music married to immortal verse:

"In notes, with many a winding bout
Of linked sweetness long drawn out,
With wanton heed, and giddy cunning;
The melting voice through mazes
running;

Untwisting all the chains that by
The hidden soul of harmony."
L'Allegro

So, the intent of the present paper is to establish Milton's acquaintance with music and its very indelible impact upon his poetry.

John Milton is very brief and enigmatic on the theme of verse technique. His most striking sound on poetic rhythm is the few laconic words

of the note proceeding *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." Related to Milton's own practice this statement has a treasure of meaning. We can make ourselves concern 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 an extensive close, but should be "drawn out." He believed too, that this movement should be achieved "variously." Two important ideologies of poetic rhythm, then, can be inferred from this last phrase of the note to *Paradise Lost*. The first is incessant movement, and the second is variety. Here a significant resemblance can be found to the continuous flow and free-moving rhythms of the madrigal. The connection is predominantly striking when we consider some of Milton's own descriptions of rhythm and contemporary music. His poetic words on rhythm, for instance, of course, a redolent of the English madrigal:

"... muses intricate
Eccentric, intervolved. Yet regular
Then most, when most irregular they
seem:"

Paradise Lost, Book V, Lines 622-624

There were two important musical forms that were very famous and significant during Milton's days. They are English Madrigal and English Metrical Psalter. Madrigal is a short lyrical poem in a strict poetic form that emerged during medieval period which was a complex music composition with polyphonic unaccompanied vocal piece. And the latter is a translation of one of the psalms into rhyming strict-metre verse usually sung as a hymn in worshipping the Lord in Churches. These two important musical forms can be found in the poetry of Milton especially in his great epic poem *Paradise Lost* being highly attributed by him few of which have been discussed hereunder.

To make a mention about of the madrigal as "drawn out" Milton seems to be referring to the method in which the correlation of voices is used to construct an effect of quiet, continuous, forward movement, with one voice taking up the

rhythmic weight 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 regard what Mr. Symonds comments on Milton's verse mentioned below, seems very interesting which is pertinent to 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 preceding lines, so that the strain of the 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 before through concords and affinities of modulated sound." Then coming to the point of incessant movement in the lines given hereunder from Paradise Lost may be the best exemplification for it where there is a continuous flow of rhythm with varied speed and strength of impulse, rising and falling and freely placed the break after any syllable in the line of course at times with two such breaks of which T. H Banks made a mention that "forty percent of full stops in Paradise Lost occur within the line."

At once as far as Angels kenn he views
 The dismal Situation waste and wilde,
 A Dungeon horrible, on all sides round
 As one great Furnace flam'd, yet from
 those flames
 No light, but rather darkness visible
 Serv'donely 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 thir Prison
 ordain'd
 In utter darkness, and thir portion set
 As far remov'd from God and light of
 Heav'n
 As from the Center thrice to th' utmost
 Pole.

Paradise Lost I, 59-74

Then, to make a mention of the music, of English metrical psalters, we can find certain common characteristics. Some tunes are printed not indicating any reference of bars and few notes are also with some unequal lengths. Both semibreves which are whole notes and minims which are also called as half notes are used which seems somehow in a disorganized system as they don't represent the accents of the verse, and some could be divided into equal sections and some other not at all correspond any time-signature which may be out of the choice of tuning that the composer does may be in order to destruct the monotonous swing of the alternate eight and six with accents incessantly recurring in similar positions which to see may be confused but when played can be found that the long and short notes have been adjusted with great care. Sometimes an occasional whole note will intrude into such a sequence of halves and some regularly open and end with a whole note and few of the intervening notes are almost always halves.

So, it can be understood that lack of uniformity of correspondence between length of note and metrical accent established two important principles of which the first is that the speech accent does not influence the length of musical notes in the psalter where a syllable accented by the iambic prosody of the verse may be held by a whole note and the second is that the length of musical note does not repeatedly influence the verse. From this brief observation of the English metrical psalter then, three important factors can be discovered for the purpose of tracing the influence of music on poetry as on of Milton's early biographer also says "David psalms were in esteem with him above all poetry". Milton out of the jubilant and tenacious heart that he had sung many of the psalms of David which Milton's father psalm harmonies like Psalm 114 and 136 and in 1648 Psalm 80 to 88 which his family also sang them at Bread Street, which psalm harmonies were composed by Young John Milton showing the influence of the note-for-syllable principle of the metrical Psalters. And then again with a gap of 25 years, Milton made his debut into psalms and put the first eight of them into verse. So, these

characteristics of English metrical had had an influence on Milton's poetry. 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.

If we bring up now of Paradise Lost, we will be surprised to find the same characteristics in Paradise Lost. The effect of pitch on Paradise Lost is also an evident upon the reading of any long passage including the following the brief quotation and its important contribution should never go unnoticed.

..... Arms on Armour clashing
bray'd
Horrible discord, and the madding
Wheels

Of brazen Chariots rag'd;
Paradise Lost VI, 209-211

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

Paradise Lost X, 867-869

Apart from this, Milton, in his Paradise Lost, makes use of some other rhythmical tricks found in music. Few of the modern music examples like syncopation can be found throughout Paradise Lost as mentioned below Book XI

And over them triumphant Death hus
Dart

Shook, delaid to strike.....
Paradise Lost XI, 491-492

And in Book XI too,

The multitude of Angels with a shout

Loud as from numbers without number
Paradise Lost III, 345-346

Putting the considerations of rhythm aside for a while and observe the poem, we can notice that Milton meticulously made use of onomatopoeia in almost all in his depictions, for instance to say of his mentioning of the Bacchants the following is the one.

.....
the Race

Of that wilde Rout that tore the Thracian
Bard.

Paradise Lost VII, 33-34

in which the violent deed is echoed in
those very words.

Brusht with the hiss of ruffling wings
Paradise Lost I, 768

A kind of the technique in audibility with reverberation principle which is fairly common in music is concentrated by Milton in the lines mentioned below.

.....I fled and cry'd out Death;
Hell trembled at the hideous Name, and

Sigh'd
From all her Caves, and back resounded

Death.

Paradise Lost II, 787-789

Milton's exceptionally talented art is seen at its best in his use of alliteration which makes his lines high sounding and harmonious to understand for which the following opening lines of Paradise Lost are the best example.

Of Man's First Disobedience, and the
Fruit

Of that Forbidden Tree
Paradise Lost I, 1-2

They hand In hand with wandering steps
and slow,

Through Eden took thir solitaire way.
Paradise Lost XII, 648-649

Milton is very clear and clever enough in distributing his alliterative words where the words used with one part of speech i.e., nouns the

same word when used again but with another part of speech i.e., adjectives as can be found in the following lines.

Dire was the tossing, deep the groans,
despair

Tended the sick.....
Paradise Lost XI, 489-490

..... dire was the noise
Of conflict; over head the dismal hiss
Of fiery Darts in flaming volies flow
And flying volted either Host with fire
Paradise Lost VI, 211-214

Milton makes a combination of letters of his alliteration through the timings 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 ends which may found and felt in almost all descriptions in Paradise Lost which mentioned hereunder in which we can notice that the alliteration lies not only in the initial letter, but in the use of liquids, labials at regular intervals.

....and what resounds
In Fable or Romance of Uthers Son
Begirt with British Armoroc Knights:
And all who since, Baptiz'd or Infidel
Jousted in Aspromont of Montalban,
Damasco, or MorocooTribisond
Or whom Biserta sent from Afric shore
When Charlemain with all his Peerage
fell
By Fontarabbia.
Paradise Lost I, 579-587

It can be observed that Milton frequently made a combination of alliteration with resonance. As there is chance for a vowel sound to be pronounced for a longer time than a consonant, they seem to be more effective in producing similarity of sound than while parallely they interfere themselves not as much of upon the observation either of the ear or eye. We may always not be able to recognize assonance unless we search for them as found in the lines from Paradise Lost mentioned below.

Dwelt from Eternitie, Dwelt then in thee,

Bright effluence of bright essence
increate.

Paradise Lost III, 5-6

Of thir great potentate; for great indeed
His name, and great high was his degree
in heaven;

Paradise Lost III, 706-707

We can come across another harmonious effect is secured by presenting like sounds near the beginning and also somewhere in the middle and finally at the end of a sentence. This is undistinguishable with an arrangement recognized to be satisfactory in music where the key-note of the melody is sounded at these places which can more clearly be understood by looking at the following example words.

The letters 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.....

Paradise Lost I, 186-188.

The modulation in music can be found in the following passage when before one series of tone is ended another series is begun. It can now be observed here how the sounds like 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 intermingled together so as to produce a general effect of unity and progress.

..... the
Aire

Floats, as the pass, fann'd with
unnumbered plumes:

From Branch to Branch of the Smaller
Birds with song

Solac'd the Woods and Spread their
painted wings

Paradise Lost VII, 431-434.

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

Followed with acclamation and the sound

Symphonious of ten thousand Harpes
that tun'd

Angelic harmonies: the Earth, the Aire
Resounded, ...

Paradise Lost VII, 558-561

Lastly, the outcome of pitch in Paradise
Lost is apparent upon the reading of any lengthy
passage. Though the following is a brief
quotation that is taken for example of that kind,
its important contribution should never go
unnoticed.

.... Arms on Armour clashing bray'd
Horrible discord, and the madding
wheels

Of brazen chariots rag'd; . . .

Paradise Lost VI, 209-211

Conclusion

After making a careful observation of Milton's
poetry, it is conspicuously understood that a
decent deal and a deep impact of music has been
stirred up by Milton's to be used in his poetry.
Despite being old, Milton's interest and tenacity
was not found coming down as John Aubrey
rightly said that "He had an organ in his house;
He played on that most.... He would be cheerful
even in his gowte-fitts, and sing." Dr. Samuel
Johnson also 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."

So, this paper 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 spirit of music,
though they may be found secondarily in other
arts. The present paper, however, has a deeper
significance than this. It shows, as clearly as
possible, that the influence of madrigal and
metrical psalter are among the sources of
Miltonic rhythm which means that music in some
or the other way influenced Milton the poet.
Purely based on this parameter, then, the other
musical qualities noted in this paper are also, in
an unsettled degree, credited to his knowledge
and interest in music, the reason being that a man
cannot control what he unconsciously derives. If

Milton unconsciously derived certain elements
from the madrigal and metrical psalter, it is
judicious to say that he was undoubtedly
influenced in some degree by other musical
qualities.

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