L'Allegro - Il Penseroso : Pre-Election Poems

William F. King

Loyola University Chicago

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_theses

Part of the English Language and Literature Commons

Recommended Citation


This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at Loyola eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of Loyola eCommons. For more information, please contact ecommons@luc.edu.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License.

Copyright © 1955 William F. King
L'ALLEGRO - IL PENSERO: PRE-ELECTION POEMS

by

William F. King, 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

February
1955
LIFE

William F. King, S.J., was born in Akron, Ohio, May 27, 1926.

He received the first six years of his primary education at St. Vincent's Parochial School, Akron. The last two years of primary school were spent at St. Sebastian's Parochial School, Akron, and in the primary department of Assumption College, Windsor, Ontario, Canada. In the fall of 1940 he enrolled at Campion High School, Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, where he graduated in December, 1943. In February of 1944 he entered the Society of Jesus at Milford Novitiate, Milford, Ohio, an institution which is affiliated with Xavier University, Cincinnati. In September of 1948 he transferred to West Baden College of Loyola University, Chicago, where he was granted the A.B. degree in June, 1949. He began graduate work at Loyola that same year.

During the scholastic years of 1951 to 1954 he taught Latin and English at St. Ignatius High School, Chicago, Illinois.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. ARGUMENTS EXTRINSIC TO THE POEMS' TEXT</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. UNITY OF SPIRIT BETWEEN L'ALLEGRO AND IL PENSIERO</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. DISPARITY OF SPIRIT BETWEEN IL PENSIERO AND THE LATER GREAT POEMS</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Chapter I. INTRODUCTION**

Fact of contrast in spirit between Milton's earlier and later works universally admitted—Time of change debated—Denial of view that *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* mark the moment of election of spirit of later poems—Importance of this denial—Originality of approach in this thesis—Reasons of proponents of elective theory in outline—Extrinsic to poems' text—Intrinsic to poems' text—Order of refutation.

**Chapter II. ARGUMENTS EXTRINSIC TO THE POEMS' TEXT**

Argument from time of the poems' composition—Answer—Argument from *Il Penseroso*’s greater length—Answer—Argument from the "preferential printing" of *Il Penseroso*—Answer—Meaning of "melancholy."

**Chapter III. UNITY OF SPIRIT BETWEEN L'ALLEGRO AND IL PENSIERO**

Critics who find opposition in spirit between *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* and affinity between *Il Penseroso* and later epics—Method of rebuttal outlined—Similarity between "two poems" and avowedly capricious *First Prologue*—Parallel structure of "two poems" an apt vehicle for unity of spirit—Positive arguments for unity of spirit—Unity of tone defined as presupposing unity of spirit—Unity of tone demonstrated—Critics' concurring opinions cited.

**Chapter IV. DISPARITY OF SPIRIT BETWEEN IL PENSIERO AND THE LATER GREAT POEMS**

Thought less ponderous in *Il Penseroso*—Demonstration by examples—Emotional quality lighter in *Il Penseroso*—Examples—Friendlier attitude to reader found in *Il Penseroso*—Examples—Milton’s certain—
ly serious purpose in writing the later epic contrasted to his "doubtful" purpose in composing Il Penseroso—Summary—Johnson's comment that Milton espoused the spirit of L'Allegro in the "twin poems."

V. SOME FINAL THOUGHTS AND CONCLUSION

Summary of arguments—Value of conclusion—Three further difficulties in opponents' arguments—Conclusion.

BIBLIOGRAPHY
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Literary critics enjoy few things more than noting and explaining evolution in the thought and emotional processes of authors, whenever such evolution can be noted and explained. The works of John Milton furnish abundant material in this field. Milton as a youth wrote in the tradition and spirit of Spenser. His early writings are marked with something of the light, though carefully wrought art, of the author of Faerie Queene. As all the world knows, however, the Milton who wrote Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained, and Samson Agonistes is hardly a member of the Spenserian school. The Milton who wrote

\[
\text{Haste thee nymph, and bring with thee}
\text{Jest and youthful Jollity,}
\text{Quips and Cranks, and Wanton Wiles,}
\text{Nods, and Becks, and Wreathed Smiles,}^1
\]

is a different man

from the Milton who wrote

Of Man's First Disobedience and the Fruit
Of that Forbidden Tree, whose mortal tast

---

Brought Death into the world, and all our woe,
With loss of Eden, till one greater man
Restore us, and regain the blissful Seat,
Sing Heav'nly Muse.2

This contrast between the spirit of Milton's earlier work and that of his later work is commonly explained by the fact that his later years found him a zealous devotee of Puritanism, serious therefore and on the impersonal side. On this point the critics seem to agree. The further query, "When did Milton change from the spirit of Spenser to that high seriousness which marks his later work?" has, on the other hand, met with varying response.

Among Milton's early poems stand two, L'Allegro and Il Penseroso, which to some critics furnish an easy answer to the question. These poems are interpreted as the turning point in Milton's poetic career. The writing of them, it is maintained, was for Milton the making of an election between the spirit of his earlier works and that of his later great opera, an election which was resolved in favor of that high seriousness of Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained, and Samson Agonistes, for which Milton is best remembered.

It will be the purpose of this thesis to deny this position. Such a denial, if it can be established, will be of no inconsequential significance in the field of Miltonic criti-

2 Paradise Lost, I, 1-6, op. cit., 160.
cism. Rather it will be a contribution that is both valuable and original.

It will be valuable to establish that the twin poems, L'Allegro and Il Penseroso, do not have this high significance because it will dispel the notion that Milton, unlike the majority of his fellow human beings who have undergone a change in mental outlook, found his new mind not by a gradual evolution of thought but rather by a rather unnatural, almost instantaneous, change of heart. It would seem to restore to Milton the ordinary psychological pattern in such cases whereby men do not so much decide to change in a cool and calculated way as find that their outlook has been modified over the years by the sum total of their experiences. The objection that men have been known to change their mental outlook almost overnight because of some single momentous experience does not apply here because up to the time of his composition of L'Allegro and Il Penseroso Milton had had no such revolutionary experience.

While it might, at first glance, seem to ascribe even new genius to Milton to say that he changed very radically over a very short period of time, it would make the poet rather unintelligible to the greater part of humanity and almost seem to deny to him not merely some degree of that humanity which we should like to see common to all men but almost to deny that he shares humanity with the rest of mankind even in quality. Man does not change radically, without reason, overnight. It can be said
then that this thesis is also conceived in part as a defense of Milton as "man and thinker," to borrow Saurat's apt phrase.

On the other hand, to disallow sudden, unmotivated change of human attitude, even in so exceptional a human being as Milton, might seem to some at first as utterly unnecessary. To dismiss a priori the case of those Milton critics who seem to hold something akin to this would, however, be to close one's eyes to argumentation whose intent is far from facetious and whose effect might well be to engender conviction.

While those Milton critics who regard L'Allegro and Il Penseroso as poems of election have met with scattered opposition prior to this, it yet remains for someone, first of all, to bring the contrary arguments together and to put them in order. Secondly, most of these arguments have been set down only in embryo form. It remains to develop them and establish their validity. The present paper will attempt to do all these things as well as to give arguments which, as far as research has been able to establish, are entirely original.

Before going on to detail the procedure which will be followed in treating the problem at hand, it will be necessary to point out some of the reasons why those who invest L'Allegro and Il Penseroso with critical significance in Milton's life are led to do so. First of all, it cannot be denied that L'Allegro and Il Penseroso are poems of contrast. L'Allegro, Italian for "gay man," is contrasted with Il Penseroso, Italian for "contemplative
man." The pleasures which delight the "gay man" are set in some kind of contrast with those which delight the "contemplative man." The catalog of pleasures in each case is preceded by a dismissal of the other, and each is followed by a declaration of preference:

These delights, if thou canst give,
Mirth with thee, I mean to live. 3

These pleasures Melancholy give,
And I with thee will choose to live. 4

Moreover, the poems have always appeared in print opposite one another, even from the very first. Secondly, the twin poems were written during the early period of Milton's poetic career. Though it is not known exactly when they were written, it is certain that they first appeared in print in 1645, long years before the appearance of Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained, and Samson Agonistes. The fact that the time of the poems' composition is uncertain, it should be noted, has been an important factor in the controversy under discussion in this paper. By 1645 Milton's years of lighter writing were fairly well ended, and he was immersed in the central period of his writing career, the apologetical period. The uncertainty of the date of the composition of the poems enables those who would understand them

as constituting at once an envoi to the period of Spenserian influence and a launching into the deep of Puritan seriousness and high earnestness to date the poems as the last of Milton's earlier period.

The arguments of those who defend _L'Allegro_ and _Il Penseroso_ as poems of election can be conveniently divided into two groups, arguments extrinsic to the poems, and arguments which find their basis in the text of the poems themselves. It should be remarked that this division is, however, merely general and cannot preclude all overlapping.

Extrinsic to the poems are the arguments 1) that Milton wrote nothing but serious poetry after he had composed _L'Allegro_ and _Il Penseroso_; 2) that _Il Penseroso_ is longer and therefore preferred by Milton, an argument, as will be seen, which verges upon those intrinsic to the poems themselves; 3) that _Il Penseroso_ is always printed in second place, a place which is looked upon as a position of preference, the last word on the matter, as it were.

The following arguments are derived from the text of the poems: 1) the spirit of _L'Allegro_ is different from and opposed to that of _Il Penseroso_; 2) the spirit of _Il Penseroso_ is akin to that of the later great poems, _Paradise Lost_, _Paradise Regained_, and _Samson Agonistes_. Therefore the latter are the progeny of _Il Penseroso_.

It will be the plan of this paper to take up the arguments against the thesis at hand in the order suggested above, to mention them in detail in their turn, and finally to refute them at such length as will be thought necessary or proper.
CHAPTER II

ARGUMENTS EXTRINSIC TO THE POEMS' TEXT

Critics who have favored the view that L'Allegro and Il Penseroso are poems of election have been rather strongly influenced in their view by the presumption, handed down over the years from one Milton scholar to another that L'Allegro and Il Penseroso were composed by Milton during his residence at his father's country estate of Horton following upon his graduation from Cambridge. Lacking certain knowledge of the actual date of writing, they have turned to "intrinsic evidence" in their attempt to establish the date of the poems' composition. The presence in L'Allegro and Il Penseroso of description of country scenes has moved these scholars to link them especially with the Horton period. Proceeding, then, from this basis, one which it will be noted places the poems closer to the composition of the great epics—though still at least seventeen years and a polemic period away—, these critics interpret the opposition posed between L'Allegro and Il Penseroso as marking the critical point in Milton's career when he once and for all decided to forsake the Spenserian vein of his youth for the epic cadence and Purit-
tan tone of his later work. Thinking of these poems as having been written at the end of the Horton period, these critics can argue that Milton wrote no further light poetry after L'Allegro. This of course lends particular support to their interpretation of the poems' critical significance in Milton's literary career.

The question indeed begs inquiry. When did Milton write L'Allegro and Il Penseroso? The majority of those who support the theory of the poems' critical importance say or imply that it was at Horton.

A. W. Verity, sometime scholar of Trinity College, Cambridge, aligns himself with those who read autobiographical significance of the type described into the work. He writes, "The dates of the early pieces - L'Allegro, Il Penseroso, Arcades, Comus, and Lycidas - are not all certain; but probably each was composed at Horton before 1638."

The opinion of William Trent of Columbia University is an interesting one on this matter. As will be seen later, Trent gives some excellent reasons for denying that L'Allegro and Il Penseroso were written at Horton. While Trent would not, probably, see these poems as poems of election, he tends to see in them an autobiographical significance similar to that seen by

---

the other critics to be cited. This is as good a place as any to point out his opinion in the matter.

Finally it was about this time that he was seriously weighing the reasons pro and con with regard to his choice of profession, and it might naturally occur to him to contrast in poetic form the pleasures of the more or less worldly and the more or less secluded, studious, and devoted life.2

Mrs. Byse, prominent Milton lover of Victorian England, was relying heavily on the "fact" that L'Allegro and Il Penseroso were written toward the end of Milton's stay at Horton when she wrote:

These poems, then, mark precisely the TURNING-POINT between his early lyric poetry and his more sober career of struggle and disappointment.

Well might he pause before leaving Fairy Land, well might he assemble in one poem all the laughing images to which he meant to say a sad farewell, and turn his steps resolutely toward duty, however melancholy the prospect! He felt he ought not to abandon, in a crisis of so much danger, his country and his fellow Christians; he saw that a way was opening for the establishment of real liberty and that the foundation was being laid for the deliverance of mankind from the yoke of slavery and superstition; and he did not hesitate to sacrifice, in the cause of Liberty of the Press, his very eyesight.3

R. C. Browne, an associate of King's College, London, speaking of the suspicious nature of Puritanism and of its expression in Milton, talks of the twin poems as autobiographically

---


3 Mrs. Fanny Byse, Milton on the Continent, A Key to L'Allegro and Il Penseroso, London, 1903, 73.
significant. His opinion, it would seem, derives comfort from the supposition that the poems were composed during Milton's sojourn at Horton.

The same scrupulous suspicion examined the details of daily life; and as it grew stronger it proscribed most things that made the life of that day pleasant, as being either wrong in themselves, or capable of being turned to wrong account. Traditional usages met with as little mercy at the hands of Puritans as traditional liberties at the hands of courtiers. When *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* were written, this jealous precision had not been pushed to the perilous extreme of the later period; but there was enough to indicate to an open and sensitive mind, as was Milton's, that a crisis was not far distant. Was he to walk with those who cheerfully plodded on, and took what came of sunshine or of storm, using his superior culture as his solace and delight; or with those other spirits, more sombre and more stern, who "scorned delights and lived laborious days"?

The well-known English Milton scholar, Mark Pattison, seems to align himself in the same camp.

The two short idylls are marked by a gladsome spontaneity which never came to Milton again. The delicate fancy and feeling which play about *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* never reappear, and form a strong contrast to the austere imaginings of his later poetical period. These two poems have the freedom and frolic, the natural grace of movement, the improvisation, of the best Elizabethan examples, while both thoughts and words are under a strict economy unknown to the diffuse exuberance of the Spenserians.


Frank Allen Patterson of Columbia University does not give his reasons for believing that the poems are critical in Milton's poetic career; but his opinion, too, probably leans heavily on the presumption that the poems were written at Horton. He writes:

Milton seems to be weighing and deciding one of the problems of his life - what kind of poet he shall become? In Elegy VI and in Ad Patrem he had written of certain phases of poetry and the life of the poet; he now asks if he is to be a poet, whether he shall devote his life to light, gay, careless, but innocent poetry, or to that which has all the seriousness of the finest art. For he already believes that the true poet must be the true poem. His decision is to emphasize the high seriousness of Il Penseroso.

Tudor Jenks fairly well summarizes:

The two poems, "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso" are, of course, companion pieces and have been variously interpreted. . . . But some have seen in the two poems a reflection of Milton's state of mind when he was yet hesitating in regard to future career. An English editor thus puts the question which the young poet is believed to have had before his mind: "Was he to walk with those who cheerfully plodded on and took what came of sunshine or of storm, using his superior culture as a solace and delight, or with those other spirits, more sombre and more stern, who 'scorn delights and live laborious days'?"

This is not to say that Milton was in doubt whether to cast in his lot with the Puritans, for, in raising the question he had rather in view the purpose to which he was to devote his own life and his poetical powers. The discussion in his own mind has given rise to a fair comparison of the two lives he had proposed to himself, and it is

---

their respective delights which he considers in the two poems we have mentioned.

It is by now apparent that any denial of the autobiographical significance of the poems must cope with the presumption, and it is one of long-standing in Milton scholarship, that the poems belong to the Horton period. In denying that the poems were written at Horton, E. M. W. Tillyard, the very well-known contemporary Milton scholar, leads the way.

The social tone of the poems is far more appropriate to Cambridge than to Horton. Milton's last years at college were, with the possible exception of his Italian visit, the period of his early life when such a tone is most to be expected. At first he had not been popular and had thought poorly of his fellows, but by the time of the Sixth Proclamation, July, 1628, the situation had changed. He says that the old hostility toward him has just changed to friendship and generosity. Moreover, he could not have been invited to take the chief part in so important an affair as this Vacation Exercise had not his talents been appreciated. It is plain that he responds warmly to the change of opinion and that he was conscious of the social obligations that resulted from it. It is pretty certain that from the summer of 1628 till he took his M.A. in 1632 he was an important person at the University, and that he enjoyed being one. The confidence bred of an appreciative audience and the desire to requite appreciation by considering that audience's likes and dislikes seem to me to be the precise accomplishment to which the aims of L'Allegro and Il Penseroso are set. . . . The assumption then that Milton had an academic audience in mind when he wrote L'Allegro and Il Penseroso seems to me completely justified.

7 Tudor Jenks, In the Days of Milton, New York, 1907, 92-93.
Tillyard then goes on to remark:

In style they belong to what I have elsewhere called the poems of Milton's early maturity; those less ambitious poems beginning with the Song on a May Morning, written after the ambitious failure of The Passion.9

Tillyard summarizes:

It has been shown that the supposed evidence for connecting the poems and Horton amounts to nothing: first because Milton's main preoccupations at Horton are not the main preoccupations of the poems, second because their rusticity would fit equally well with some vacation spent by Milton in the country. Indeed, within the poems there is no evidence for fixing the date: the passages of other authors which Milton undoubtedly imitates or refers to are all too early to affect the issue. Against the poems' belonging to the Horton period is their absence from the Trinity Manuscript, in which the undoubted poems occur. It is an inconclusive piece of evidence but not negligible, and it has encouraged Professor Hanford acutely to conjecture that L'Allegro and Il Penseroso belong to the very beginning of the Horton period or even 'go back to some vacation interval in Milton's university life.'10

Tillyard was not the first to question Horton as the scene of the composition of L'Allegro and Il Penseroso. As has already been noted, William Trent expressed the same opinion many years before Tillyard. It is true to say, however, that Tillyard "leads the way"11 on the point, for Trent's opinion

9 Ibid., 25.
10 Ibid., 7-8.
11 v. supra, 13.
seems to have been lost to Milton scholarship, while that of Tillyard has changed the whole attitude of Milton scholarship on the point. The note in Poems of Mr. John Milton by Cleanth Brooks and John Edward Hardy is typical of recent criticism.

Much discussion has been printed concerning the date of "L'Allegro - Il Penseroso." The present editors are inclined to accept the view of E. M. W. Tillyard in The Miltonic Setting that the tone of the opening passages indicate an appeal to an academic audience and consequently a date late in the University period, (Tillyard argues for the long vacation of 1631) rather than during Milton's residence at his earlier country home at Horton (1632-1638), as earlier commentators have supposed.12

Trent's opinion, while that perhaps of "a voice in the wilderness," is not, for that, less interesting or to the point.

The genesis of "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso," perhaps the best known and most heartily admired of all Milton's compositions, is involved in considerable obscurity. They were not printed before 1645, and they do not exist for us in manuscript; we are therefore compelled to rely upon inferences and internal evidence in determining their time and place of composition. The consensus of critical opinion gives 1632-33 as the time, and Horton as the place. Professor Masson assigns them to the latter half of 1632. There are, however, reasons that incline me to think that they should probably be placed earlier. The autumn of 1632 seems to be selected because Horton is usually assumed as the place of composition, and Milton went to reside there in July, 1632. He would naturally, argue the critics, be so impressed with the charms of the spot that he would turn to verse and "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso" and the "Song on May Morning" (1633?) would be the outcome.

12 Poems of Mr. John Milton, the 1645 edition with essays in analysis, Eds., Cleanth Brooks and John Edward Hardy, New York, 1951, 27.
But there is no proof that the poems were not written at Cambridge or in London as reminiscential tributes to the pleasures of a vacation spent in the country; and we know from a Latin proclulsion or oration delivered, Masson thinks, either in the latter half of 1631 or the first part of 1632, that Milton spent "the last past summer, amid rural scenes and sequestered glades," and that he recalled "the supreme delight he had with the Muses." This vacation of 1631 may have been spent at Horton, for there is no proof that the elder Milton had not then acquired that property, and the young poet may have written his poems under the elms that so fascinated him, or have composed them on his return to college. I incline to the former supposition. As we shall see, he was unquestionably supplied with hints for both his poems by Burton's "Anatomy," surely a book for a student like Milton to take with him on a vacation. Again, no one can read the "Proclamation on Early Rising," almost certainly Milton's, without thinking that much of the raw material of the two poems was in his brain and being expressed during his university life; nor can one read the other proclusions without seeing that Orpheus, the music of the spheres, and Platonism were filling much of his thoughts. Besides, about 1630 Milton was evidently to some extent occupied with Shakespeare, whose genius is honored in the poems, and a year later he was experimenting with the octosyllabic couplet in the "Epitaph on the Marchioness of Winchester."

While it must be admitted that the arguments from Tillyard and Trent do not prove conclusively that L'Allegro and Il Penseroso were written while Milton was still at Cambridge, they do certainly cast considerable doubt on the supposition that they were written at Horton, especially in view of the fact, as has already been indicated, that Milton scholars since Tillyard tend to agree with Tillyard on the

---

point. Any argument denying critical significance to the poems which has as its basis the opinions of Trent and Tillyard, therefore, can have no higher note than one of probability. It does not, for all that, however, seem inconsequential to state such an argument. The proposal in the present instance is to compare the spirit of Comus, a work which Milton certainly composed at Horton, with that of Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained, and Samson Agonistes and to show that the spirit of Comus is one with the earlier poems and essentially different from that of the later great epic poems.

First it must be established that Comus belongs to the Horton period, which, it will be remembered, dates from 1632. Hanford gives us the facts of the case. "Comus, entitled by Milton simply A Maske, is dated 1634 in the Cambridge manuscript and in the editions."\(^{14}\)

Rather than compare Comus line for line with the epics, it will be sufficient to establish the Spenserian quality of Comus. If Comus reveals Spenserian flavor, it is assuredly essentially different, as all will admit, from the spirit of Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained, and Samson Agonistes.

Hanford proves the Spenserian touch in Comus beyond

---

It is, however, to Spenser that Comus is most deeply indebted in its poetic essence. In his elaboration of the fiction, as in the quality of his emotion, Milton has been influenced by his master's romantic allegory of chastity in the third book of Faerie Queene. This is clearest, so far as plot incident is concerned, in the parallel between the rescue of Amoret in Book III and the freeing of the Lady at the close of Comus. In both works the enchanter is surprised as he stands before his enthralled victim endeavoring to subdue her will to his lust. In Spenser the rescuer (Britomart) strikes him down but is told that only he can undo the spell which he has worked. She then forces him "his charms back to reverse." In Milton the brothers, after having put Comus to flight, are informed by Thyrsis that they should have secured him as the instrument of the Lady's release.

Without his rod reversed
And backward mutters of dissevering power
We cannot free the Lady that sits here.
The identity of phrase and of idea is quite conclusive of Milton's indebtedness at this point. He undoubtedly received modifying suggestions for the plot from other sources, but nothing so essential as he derived from the Faerie Queene. The relationship here is one which extends to the fundamental philosophy and poetic method.

It is not by any means confined to this one episode. Britomart, the central figure in Book III, is Spenser's symbol of what Milton calls the sun-clad power of chastity. The martial conception underlies such passages as Comus, 1440 ff. The idea that chastity draws down Heaven to its defense, which is the dominant motive in the whole of Comus, is set forth by Spenser in the episode of Proteus's rescue of Florimel attacked by the lustful fisherman, with the poet's comment, so much in the spirit of certain passages in Comus,

See how the heavens, of voluntary grace
And sovereign favour toward chastity
Doe succor send to her distressed case.
So much high God doth innocence embrace.

A more specific suggestion came to Milton from the description of the Garden of Adonis in Canto VI.
I have already alluded to his introduction of Cupid and Psyche, with the mention of their allegorical descendants, Youth and Joy, as an instance of his Platonizing mythography. The immediate pattern of Milton's description is Spenser, who introduces as symbols of the Platonic creative principle first Venus and Adonis, then Cupid and Psyche, endowing the last two with a daughter, Pleasure.15

Osgood and Fletcher concur in the opinion of Hanford on the point of Spenser's influence upon Milton in the writing of Comus.

The other was Comus, a masque. It employs all the features of the masque—songs, ballets, spectacle, machinery, grotesque antimasque, allegorical myth, mingling of the cast with the audience. But being Milton's, it is more. Again he shows many masters, particularly Jonson, and above all Spenser, whose guidance is felt in phrase, temper, idea, and in most of the plot furnished from the Faery Queen.

A number of writers have recently pointed out that the style and tone of Comus are largely Elizabethan and non-Miltonic. Mr. Hanford rightly insists that the paramount influence on Comus was Spenser.17

If, then, Comus was written after L'Allegro and II Penseroso, and if Comus retains the spirit that some critics insist Milton forsook with the writing of II Penseroso, the quality of resolution in favor of the serious vein found in

the great epics, which they see as consequent upon the writing of *Il Penseroso*, must have been weak indeed. This is so much the case that it seems good to reject *Il Penseroso* as a poem of election. Yet because it must remain uncertain that Milton actually did write *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* while still in his studies at Cambridge, the other arguments favoring the theory that the twin poems were poems of election must be dealt with.

An argument that is difficult to gainsay is that which points to the fact that *Il Penseroso* is physically longer than *L'Allegro* by twenty-four lines and that these lines place the spiritual pleasure inherent in the spirit of *Il Penseroso* into the balance.

But let my due feet never fail,  
To walk the studious Cloysters pale,  
And love the high embowed Roof,  
With antick Pillars massy proof,  
And storied Windows richly dight,  
Casting a dimm religious light.  
There let the pealing Organ blow,  
To the full voic'd Quire below,  
In Service high, and Anthems clear,  
As may with sweetness, through mine ear,  
Dissolve me into extasies,  
And bring all Heav'n before mine eyes.  
And may at last my weary age  
Fine out the peacefull hermitage,  
The Hairy Gown and Mossy Cell,  
Where I may sit and rightly spell,  
Of every Star that Heav'n doth shew,  
And every Herb that sips the dew;  
Till old experience do' attain  
To somthing like Prophetic strain.  
These pleasures *Melancholy* give,
And I with thee will choose to live. 18

Kingsley, Huntington, and Browne have noted these lines and seem to give them critical significance.

It is evident from the last ten lines of Il Penseroso that the poet's sympathy is with the contemplative man; for, after looking at life from these two points of view, he reaches the conclusion, evidently, that in his old age he will prefer the delights of Melancholy to those of Mirth. 19

But the Penseroso closes with the wish - which, not paralleled in the Allegro, makes us know that Milton preferred the pensive to the mirthful temper - that he may live on into old age, the contemplative life.

Till old experience do attain,
To something like poetic strain. 20

There is nothing sour or fanatical in his mode of testing the opposing principles. They are weighed in the balance of pleasure, the balance being held high enough, out of reach of mere animal instincts or coarse enjoyments. What 'delights' does each promise? Milton has tried to be fair in his comparison, and with so much success as might lead us, after cursory examination to suppose the poems to represent convertible phases of the same mind. But on a nearer view we shall find that the judge is not wholly impartial. Easily and without offense, had Milton so willed, might the cheerful spirit have been carried into these higher regions here reserved for the exclusive possession of her rival.

________________________

19 M. E. Kingsley, Outline Studies in Literature, Boston, 1905, 10.
By casting Thought into the scale of Melancholy, Milton sufficiently indicates the inclination which will guide his ultimate decision. His 'fixed mind' could not be filled with pleasures of which the exercise of its higher powers formed no part.21

Mrs. Byse, one of those who considers the poems to be the turning point in Milton's career, feels that she cannot make use of the above arguments. Her argument, rather clever in its concept, points to the fact that Milton did not approve of some of the joys mentioned in L'Allegro at any time. Did he, therefore, she asks, necessarily approve all the joys mentioned in Il Penseroso, especially the sacred ones last mentioned?

His comprehensive mind might unite all images of happiness in L'Allegro, even if he did not approve of all. He did not approve of the loves of Bacchus - even the 'spicy nut-brown ale' was no ideal of his - yet they are in L'Allegro. Did he advocate the morals of Saturn's reign, or fasting, or false gods? Did he believe in the demonology of Plato? If, then, he seems to approve cathedral choirs and the hairy gown of the hermit, these must only be taken decoratively; the object is to group together merry images or sad ones, not to preach polemics.22

Mrs. Byse's discounting of the value of the "sacred" passages at the end of Il Penseroso seems to be inspired by the fact that the Puritan Milton was to become would certainly have nothing to do with the Catholic trappings mentioned in Il Pen-


22 Mrs. Fanny Byse, A Key to L'Allegro and Il Penseroso, xiii.
seroso. If *Il Penseroso* is to be elective of the sober Puritan spirit of Paradise Lost, etc., how can one explain the "Catholicity" of the closing lines of *Il Penseroso? One must, if he is to be logical, follow Mrs. Byse's lead here.

Tillyard, too, discusses the passages under observation here. He sees in it no more than the convention of the times. "The 'Hairy Gown and Mossy Cell' are quite impersonal, a polite fiction as truly social as their supposed sentiment is anti-social. The eighteenth century was constantly praising the joys and virtues of blameless retirement." 23

Tillyard later takes up the same theme. The thought here is in line with his view of the poems as being of Cambridge vintage.

At the end of *Il Penseroso*, the prayer for the 'peaceful hermitage' in 'weary age,' how charmingly callow, how perfectly appropriate to an audience of boys (one must not forget how young they went to college in those days)! It fits far less well the lips of a man who has retired into studious quiet already. 24

Last of the "extrinsic arguments" mentioned in the introductory chapter is "that *Il Penseroso* is always printed in second place, a place which is looked upon as a position of preference, the last word on the matter, as it were." This

---


24 Ibid., 24.
argument is rightly reserved for the last place here because it has not been seriously advanced. Masson, Milton's classic biographer, alludes to it and dismisses it. It will be good for the sake of completeness and perhaps also of forestalling its future use to give Masson's opinion on the point.

So closely is the one poem framed on the model of the other, that it would be impossible to say, on mere internal evidence, which was written first. Most probably the idea of two such companion pieces was in Milton's mind before he wrote either, and he fulfilled that idea by writing them in the order in which they now stand, and in which they were originally published by himself. This is a case in which a writer, describing two moods or doctrines, would place the one last which, on the whole, he favored most, and to which he meant to lend his weight. So fairly is the question stated, however, and with such real liking for both sides, that, but for this matter of the arrangement, all signs of ultimate preference may be said to be removed. Perhaps combination was the lesson intended. Thinking of Milton's whole life, we identify him most naturally with II Penseroso; but may we not have forgotten how much of L'Allegro there was in him potentially, at all events in his youth?

The "extrinsic arguments" having been dealt with, perhaps this is the point to discuss a question common to both the "intrinsic" and "extrinsic" arguments. As was noted in the introduction, Milton certainly intended some kind of contrast between the Cheerful Man, L'Allegro, and the "Melancholy" or Con-

templative Man, Il Penseroso. Those who call the twin poems the turning point in Milton's poetic career may in some instances be lead to intensify that contrast by their understanding of the word "Melancholy," which is often used to translate "Penseroso.

The following comment of Lawrence Babb in Studies in Philology should enlighten their understanding and perhaps lead them to a less serious interpretation of the contrast in L'Allegro and Il Penseroso.

The Renaissance, then, held simultaneously two conceptions of melancholia. According to the Galenic tradition, melancholia is a most ignominious and miserable condition of mind; according to the Aristotelian tradition, it is a most admirable and enviable condition of mind.

No two literary pieces could better illustrate the dualism of the concept melancholy as it existed in the Carolinian period than "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso." In the first, melancholy is associated with hell and midnight, with "horrid shapes, and shrieks, and sights unholy," is banished to an "unsouth cell" in a dark and forbidding desert; is rejected as utterly loathsome. Milton is exorcising the crucifying melancholy madness of the Galenic tradition. In "Il Penseroso," on the other hand, the poet personifies melancholy as a "pensive Nun" of sober and stately beauty, a "Goddess, sage and holy...divinest Melancholy." And he invites her to be his companion and the ruling influence of his life. This is melancholy in the tradition of Aristotle and Picino. The melancholy which Milton rejects in "L'Allegro" is not the same thing at all as that which he accepts in "Il Penseroso."
CHAPTER III

UNITY OF SPIRIT BETWEEN L'ALLEGRO AND IL PENSEROSO

If the "extrinsic" arguments supporting the opinion that Milton in writing L'Allegra and Il Penseroso was detailing the points for an election between light and serious writing have been found to be weak, only small headway can be said to have been made in the over-all task of showing that no such critical significance can be attached to the poems. For these "extrinsic" arguments do no more than support the main arguments of the proponents of this theory. These latter arguments look to an intrinsic opposition of spirit between the two poems. They regard L'Allegra as expressive of surrender to gayety and lightsome spirit, Il Penseroso of surrender to high seriousness and melancholy. They regard Milton as posed between incompatibles, about to choose one, incapable of choosing both. One critic put it this way, "They represent something like a weighing in poetry of two alternatives, either but not both capable of full development."

1 Donald C. Dorian, "The Autobiographical Significance of 'L'Allegra' and 'Il Penseroso'", Modern Philology, XXXI (1933-34), 177.
Further, proponents of the "elective theory" see in the spirit of *Il Penseroso* a harbinger of that of *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, and *Samson Agonistes*. This they find excellent reason for asserting the elective nature of the poems.

It will be necessary to detail here arguments of those who find opposition of spirit between *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, and of those who find affinity between the spirit of *Il Penseroso* and that of the later great Puritan epics.

Dorian writes of the matter at greatest length.

If, then, Milton was not depicting any single day, he was depicting the typical occupations, the habits, of a carefree man and of a pensive man; and the interpretation of the poems as autobiographical is significant is consistent with the sense and structure of the lines. Furthermore, the two lives pictured are to some extent inconsistent with each other, contradictory and mutually exclusive. The man who is admitted to the "crew" of Mirth, to live with her, to enjoy the company of the rustics in their simple delights, to be pleased with "pomp, and feast and revelry," seems not to be the same man who asks Melancholy to grant him long hours of night study in solitude, to hide him "from Day's garish eye," and to lead him finally to "the peaceful hermitage." The degrees of happiness and pensiveness represented seem too extreme to be reconciled in one individual, at least at one period of his life; and the "contrasting moods" depicted seem to be habitual moods. Nevertheless, as Professor Hanford remarks, "*L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* are equally Milton." To explain this apparent contradiction,

---

it is only necessary to point out that L'Allegro is a self-portrait of a Milton who might have been; Il Penseroso, of essentially the Milton who was to be. In depicting himself as either, Milton carefully carried the characteristics of two different aspects of his nature to extremes they had not yet reached, since the model was not himself as he was, but himself as he would be after eliminating either his solemnity or his lightheartedness for the fuller development of the other. It seems to me one of the most perfect artistic accomplishments in these two poems that he could project himself so completely into the mood depicted in each that he revealed only his potential gaiety or pensiveness, and excluded conflicting elements in his personality. He was not creating dramatic characters; he was reproducing, in clear and perfect focus, selected characteristics of his own.

I would suggest then, that L'Allegro and Il Penseroso have, in addition to their artistic excellence and descriptive charm, this significance: they may be regarded as a valuable autobiographical record of an important step in Milton's development—his consideration of the question whether he should suppress either the lighter or the more serious side of his nature, as man and as poet, for the fuller development of the other.

Kingsley's opinion follows closely upon that of Dorian.

The modern reader would not describe the two speakers by the terms mirthful and melancholy, but would call them social and unsocial. One loves to associate with people; the other is retiring. One is light-hearted, the other grave. The one finds his amusements in the life around him; the other in communion with his own thoughts. The life portrayed in Il Penseroso is the life after which

3 Dorian, "Autobiographical Significance," 177-178.
Milton ever aspired. 4

Frank Allen Patterson writes of the matter in much the same spirit.

All critics unite in praising the charm, attractiveness, and beauty of L'Allegro and its companion piece, Il Penseroso. They are not agreed, however, in interpreting the deeper significance of the poems. Masson sees in them the records of two ideal days of 12 hours each; Tillyard (Pamphlet No. 82 of The English Association, July, 1932) sees a study of the contrast between day and night, discovering in the First Prolusion the origin of the idea; the others have seen the two dominating moods of the century, Cavalier and Puritan, represented here. The present editor feels that they do not tell the whole story, but, that there is some truth in all these views. Milton seems to be weighing and deciding one of the problems of his life - what kind of poet he shall become? In Elegy VI and in Ad Patrem he had written of certain phases of poetry and the life of the poet; he now asks if he is to be a poet, whether he shall devote his life to light, gay, careless, but innocent poetry, or to that which has all the high seriousness of the finest art. For he already believes that the true poet must be the true poem. His decision is to emphasize the high seriousness of Il Penseroso. 5

William Vaughan Moody, while not regarding the poems as elective, sees the same opposition of spirit between them as do the others.

L'Allegro and Il Penseroso are a kind of summing up of these two possible attitudes toward life.
Milton was not prepared to champion either attitude

4 Kingsley, Outline Studies, 12.
5 Student's Milton, ed., Patterson, 49.
in a partisan spirit. He felt the appeal of both in his own nature; they were the two sides of a balanced life. Yet he must have recognized the practical impossibility of combining them in their perfect fullness, and have felt a certain personal satisfaction in setting forth clearly, though in a poetic guise, the rational claims of each upon his sympathy. The problem, if such it can be called, was of course still rather remote and unreal; he did not foresee the solution which circumstance was soon to thrust upon him, in the shape of a life lived for ideal ends through days of dusty publicity.

Thus far the critics on opposition in spirit between the poems. The function of the present chapter will be to assert a fundamental unity of spirit between L'Allegro and Il Penseroso, and in this way remove a formidable argument in favor of the critical significance of the poems. The procedure will not be entirely direct. The similarity between the twin poems and Milton's avowedly capricious First Prolusion will be advanced, first of all, by way of reducing the probability that a true opposition in spirit exists between L'Allegro and Il Penseroso. Then it will be pointed out that the poems exhibit a remarkable parallelism of structure, a structure which will be looked upon as an apt vehicle for unity of spirit, something on the order of matter waiting to be inspired with form. Finally positive arguments will be advanced probative, it is hoped, of a true

---

unity of tone and spirit existing between the two poems. In the following chapter it will be shown that the spirit of II Penseroso is not akin to that of Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained, and Samson Agonistes. While this point might be held to be a logical consequence of unity of spirit between the twin poems, it seems good to attempt an independent proof of the point by way of forestalling attempts to identify the unified spirit of the twin poems with that of the later great Puritan epics.

With regard, first of all, to the similarity existing between Milton's avowedly capricious First Frolusion and L'Allegro - II Penseroso, the following arguments suggest themselves.

The first point to be considered - and it is one that has received very little attention in Miltonic criticism - is that Milton's works are characterized by the "debate." Satan and his cohorts are represented in Paradise Lost exchanging verbal parries, arguing the pros and cons of various modes of procedure. Samson Agonistes derives its essential dramatic element from the conflict within Samson with respect to submission to the divine plan, and this conflict is externalized by means of the "debate." Witness the counters between Samson and Delilah especially. In Comus we see the Lady pleading the motives of temperance against its opposite as expressed by the Lord of Sensual Revel. Nor are these the only instances of the "debate" that might be cited from Milton's works. We can validly infer
from the prominence of the "debate" in Milton's major works that Milton delighted in employing this device, that he loved the debate, that his habits of thought, and therefore of expression, reflected this delight.

The next point to be made is that Milton saw much of the "debate" during his pensionership at Christ's College. Rhetorical exercises to be delivered on stated occasions in the college or university were a regular requirement of academic discipline. "Now," as Professor Tillyard remarks, "an academic disputant had to be ready to support either side of a question set for debate." A "debate," then, in Milton's time had much the same meaning as does a debate of today. Today a debater may or may not be convinced of the truth of his arguments. His objective is to make his side appear the more plausible whether he is convinced it is so in reality or not. It would be insidious to infer from the conditions of debate at Cambridge that wherever the "debate" is found in Milton's works there is also found a lack of real concern for the truth of what is enunciated. It seems correct to suggest, however, that the subjects discussed in the Cambridge prologues might not have been matters of real concern to Milton. Milton tells us himself in his seventh pro-

illusion, On the Merits of Learning and Ignorance, that he first intended to champion Ignorance but had been requested to change sides.

Accordingly, hardly master of myself, I undertook the rash design of praising Ignorance, which would certainly involve none of these commotions, and I advanced the proposition for debate: Which of the two, Knowledge or Ignorance, would render its devotees the happier?

I do not know what happened; either my Fate or my Genius did not wish me to depart from my early love of the Muses. Nay, even Blind Chance herself, become suddenly as it were prudent and foresighted, seemed likewise not to wish this. More speedily than I had supposed, Ignorance has found her champion; to me is left the defence of Knowledge.

Now if this suspicion of Milton's real concern for his subject is verifiable in any of the prolixions, it certainly is so in the first, in the discussion Whether Day or Night Be the More Excellent. The very subject of the first prolixion suggests the line of argument that is being pursued here. It appears readily that such a topic as this bears striking resemblance to that of L'Allegro and Il Penseroso. If it can be shown that Milton did attach little objective importance to the subject of his first prolixion, and if it can be shown that the poems which he subsequently composed are, in a large sense, the direct and legitimate descendants of that prolixion, it can cer-

---

tainly be concluded that too much credence should not be given any school of criticism which would regard the poems as expressive of a definite crisis in Milton's poetic career.

There are many indications in the first prolation that Milton attached little objective importance to this piece. There is lacking to it, first of all, that high earnestness which is found in those pieces of literature which have persuasion as their object. Compare, if you will, the first prolation with any of the great works of oratory, with some of Burke, Webster, Clay, Patrick Henry. Compare the first prolation, as a matter of fact, with the "debate" as found in Comus, Paradise Lost, Samson Agonistes. The difference is at once apparent. The presence of light, academic humor, of what Tillyard has called "a rather artless and engaging form of burlesque humor;" the presence, too, of mythological allusions, genealogies and what not, obviously as part of the expected display of classical learning further illustrate a lack of serious concern in the piece. A mere reading, finally, is certainly sufficient to convince the reader of the justice of what has been asserted. The following excerpts from the piece will illustrate the point.

Milton, as he begins, speaks of his fear lest the prejudices of the audience on the question whether day or night be

9 Tillyard, The Miltonic Setting, 16.
the more excellent should render them obtuse to his defense of
day. Can it truly be felt that he really feared this?

To what desperate straits am I reduced this day? I, who at the very beginning of my speech fear lest I
may advance something not at all worthy of orators and
lest I should have deviated unavoidably from the pri-
mary and principal duty of a speaker; indeed, how can
I expect your goodwill, when, in this great assembly,
I perceive almost as many persons hostile to me as I
behold with my eyes? Hence it is that I seem to come
as an orator to those who are inexorable.10

In the following eulogy of day there is certainly
something of the mock heroic.

Even the birds cannot hide their delight, but leave
their nests at peep of dawn and noise it abroad from
the treetops in sweetest song, or darting upwards as
near as they may the Sun, take their flight to wel-
come the returning day. First of all these the wake-
ful cock acclaims the sun's coming and like a herald
bids mankind shake off the bonds of sleep and rise
and run with joy to greet the new-born day. The kids
skip in the meadows, and beasts of every kind leap
and gambol in delight. The kids
skip in the meadows, and beasts of every kind leap
and gambol in delight. The sad heliotrope, who all
night long has gazed toward the east, awaiting her be-
loved Sun, now smiles and beams at her lover's approach.
The marigold too and rose, to add their share to the
joy of all, open their petals and shed abroad their
perfume, which they have kept for the Sun alone, and
would not give to Night, shutting themselves up with-
in their little leaves at fall of evening. And all
the other flowers raise their heads, drooping and
weighed down with dew, and offer themselves to the
Sun, mutely begging him to kiss away the tear-drops
which his absence brought. The Earth too decks her-
self in lovelier robes to honour the Sun's coming,
and the clouds, arrayed in garb of every hue, attend

10 Whether Day Is More Excellent Than Night, The
Student's Milton, 1097.
the rising god in festive train and long procession.

Finally, in his peroration, he has rhetorical abuse for any who would dare defend night over day. Were Milton serious, he would never have used such a strong language for so trivial an offender.

Who, therefore, if not a swindler, if not a burglar, if not one accustomed to spend whole nights among bands of strumpets and to pass entire days snoring; who, I say, except such a man would undertake to defend a cause so unseemly and so abominable in itself?

So much for the prologue in itself. It remains to point out the resemblances between the prologue and the poems that followed. Tillyard points out the parallel structure that obtains between them.

The First Prologue cannot come later than July 1628. It therefore comes well before any date the critics have assigned to L'Allegro and Il Penseroso. Concerned with the subject whether Day or Night is the more excellent, it advocates the superior excellence of Day. It begins with an elaborate inquiry into the mythical genealogy of Night and Day; goes on to describe the dawning of day and the glory of the sun; and ends by praising day and abusing night. L'Allegro and Il Penseroso both begin with mythical genealogies, of Mirth and Melancholy respectively, with less elaboration than the prologue but (in view of other resemblances) in undoubted imitation of it. The mythology finished, L'Allegro like the prologue, goes on to describe

11 Ibid., 1100.
12 Ibid., 1102.
the day-break, and in such similar terms as to leave no doubt that here the Prolusion is its original. Here is the prose account:13, . . . In L'Allegro the lark who sings 'From his watch tower in the Skies' corresponds to the birds in the passage quoted which 'dart upwards as near as they may to the Sun.' And in both the cock is mentioned immediately after the birds. The Cheerful Man,14 in the poem, comes to the window and bids good morrow to the dawn; in the prose, mankind is bidden to 'shake off the bonds of sleep, and rise and run to greet the new-born day.' Closest of all are the descriptions of the clouds attending the rising sun; compare the last words of the prose passage with

Wher the great Sun begins his state,
Rob'd in flames, and Amber light,
The clouds in thousand Liveries dight.

Later in the Prolusion Milton pictures the world's predicament if bereft of day and says:

In vain would the earth bring forth in abundance vines twining in many a winding trail, in vain nobly towering trees.

It may be that

Through the Sweet-Briar, or the Vine,
Or the twisted Eglantine,

and

Bosom'd high in tufted Trees,

echo this.

There remains one important detail of resemblance. The first lines of L'Allegro, already quo-

13 Tillyard here quotes the passage from the First Prolusion quoted under Note 11 of this chapter.

14 (Tillyard's note) If he, and not the lark, is the subject of com in line 45 of L'Allegro. The corresponding passage in the Prolusion might help to settle the question.
ted and found so puzzling, are derived from one or
two passages in the First Prolusion.

And a little lower down Milton speaks of "Cimmerian
darkness." The resemblance of these passages to the
opening of L'Allegro is too strong to need proving
in detail; Milton must have had them in mind when he
began the poem.

I hope the case for deriving L'Allegro and Il
Penseroso from the First Prolusion has been made con-
vincing. Here is the last piece of evidence. When
Milton wrote the First Prolusion he had already con-
neted its subject with poetry, for he says:

The question whether Day or night is pre-
ferable is no common theme of discussion,
and it is now my duty, the task meted out
to me this morning, to probe the subject
thoroughly and radically, though it might
seem better suited to a poetical exercise
than to a contest of rhetoric.

L'Allegro and Il Penseroso are the 'poetical exer-
cise' on this theme.15

There is, then, a striking and significant resemblance
between the prose prolusion and the poetic opera on the same sub-
ject which followed, significant because it seems greatly to re-
duce the probability that the poems had the critical significance
in Milton's literary career that some critics would like to give
them. If both L'Allegro and Il Penseroso were looked upon by
Milton as something of a tour de force, it seems less likely that
there be a truly serious opposition of spirit between the poems.

To go on, a certain "unity of parallel structure" can
be readily seen between L'Allegro and Il Penseroso. For almost

every part of L'Allegro there is a passage in Il Penseroso which closely corresponds to it. The progress of argument in both poems follows the same pattern. The fact is beyond dispute. Yet it will be useful to delineate here the parallel structure obtaining between the poems with the purpose of calling attention both to the union of sorts which any parallelism of structure creates between literary pieces and to a corollary which seems to flow from this fact in the case of the parallel poems presently under discussion. While it cannot be maintained that the mere "unity of structure" involved in L'Allegro - Il Penseroso makes of itself for an essential unity of spirit, it can nonetheless be argued with some sort of plausability that true unity of spirit would not feel out of place if expressed in terms of unified parallel structure. In a word, it is intended here to delineate the parallel structure (and the extrinsic unity flowing therefrom) in L'Allegro - Il Penseroso that the reader will feel that the very fineness of the balanced structure found in the poems deserves to be the body of something more than disunity of spirit.

It has been said that it is impossible to deny that there is a definite parallelism of structure between the two poems. Not only does Miltonic criticism stand solidly behind this statement, but close study of the poems by any reader would result in the same conclusion. Yet it may be useful to examine
statements of one or the other Milton critic on the point, if for no other purpose than to have some rather clear definition or description of terms. Masson, Milton's classic biographer, expresses himself briefly and definitely, "So closely is the one poem framed on the model of the other, that it would be impossible to say, on mere internal evidence, which was written first."16

Cleanth Brooks notes the point in a slightly longer passage.

The cheerful man's day is balanced by the pensive man's day at every point: a cheery dawn scene played off against a somber evening scene; Elizabethan comedy balanced against Greek tragedy; Lydian airs in antithesis to

Such notes as warbled to the string,
Drew iron tears down Pluto's cheek.

There is no need to detail them here; they are charming and everyone knows them.17

Samuel Johnson is more detailed in his commentary and covers much of what might be said on the point.

The cheerful man hears the lark in the morning; the pensive man hears the nightingale in the evening.

The cheerful man sees the cock strut, and hears the horn and hounds echo in the wood; then walks, not unseen, to observe the glory of the rising sun, or listen to the singing milk-maid, and view the labours of the plowman and the mower; then casts his eyes about him over scenes of smiling plenty, and looks up to the distant tower, the residence of some fair inhabitant; thus he pursues rural gaiety through a day of labour or of play, and delights himself at

night with the fanciful narratives of superstitious ignorance.

The pensive man, at one time, walks unseen to muse at midnight; and at another hears the sullen curfew. If the weather drives him home, he sits in a room lighted by glowing embers; or by a lonely lamp outwatches the North Star, to discover the habitation of separate souls, and varies the shades of meditation, by contemplating the magnificent or pathetic scenes of tragick or epick poetry. When the morning comes, a morning gloomy with rain and wind, he walks into the dark trackless woods, falls asleep by some murmuring water, and with melancholy enthusiasm expects some dream of prognostication, or some musick played by aerial performers.

Perhaps the fullest exposition is to be found in Moody's introduction to the poems in the Cambridge edition of Milton's poetry. It is his that will be followed to a greater or lesser extent here. Quotations from and paraphrases of Moody's text will be given at times. More often than not, though, original animadversions, and, often enough, appropriate confirmatory citations from L'Allegro and II Penseroso themselves will be brought forward.

"L'Allegro begins," Moody tells us, "after the pre-

18 Here, as Warton justly observes, "Johnson has confounded two descriptions!" The melancholy man does not go out while it rains, but waits till -

The sun begins to fling
His flaring beams. (Editor's note, signed "J. B.").


20 Milton's Complete Poems, ed., Moody, 24-25. All quotations, save those from the text of the poems themselves, are
liminary verses in banishment of melancholy and the invocation of mirth and her companions with the lark's song at dawn." It is Moody's plan to treat the structure of L'Allegro completely before turning to that of Il Penseroso, but it will be more to the purpose at hand to examine the parallelisms as they occur. Hence:

The second poem answers the first, part to part. There is the preliminary banishing of Joy, and in the same measure of alternate pentameters and trimeters, followed by an invocation of Melancholy with her appropriate train of attendants. The "ideal day" opens here at evening.

L'Allegro:

Then follow, in swift succession, typical glimpses of morning life in the country, the crowing of the cock, the baying of hounds, and the winding of the hunter's horn, the milkmaid singing across the sunrise fields, the shepherd counting his sheep as they come from the fold.

We are then referred to a similar catalogue of sounds in Il Penseroso, of that of the nightingale in the woods, the curfew roll across the water; we find Il Penseroso watching the midnight moon as he walks across the mowed hayfields.

L'ALLEGRO

To hear the Lark begin his flight
And singing startle the dull night,

IL PENSEROSO

Thee Chautress oft the Woods among;
I woo to hear thy seven-song;

from this source throughout the remainder of the argument on parallel structure.
From his watch-towre in 
the skies,
Till the dappled dawn doth 
rise;
Then to com in spight of 
sorrow,
And at my window bid good 
morrow,
Through the Sweet-Briar, or 
the Vine,
Or the twisted Eglantine,
While the Cock with lively 
din,
Scatters the rear of dark- 
ness thin,
And to the stack, or the 
Barn dore,
Stoutly struts his Dames 
before,
Oft list'ning how the 
Hounds and horn 
Chearly rouse the slumb- 
ing morn,
From the side of som Hear 
Hill
Through the high wood 
echoing shrill.
Som time walking not un- 
seen
By Hedge-row Elms, on Hil- 
locks green,
Right against the Eastern 
gate,
Wher the great Sun begins 
his state,
Rob's in flames, and Amber 
light,
The clouds in thousand Liv- 
eries light,
While the Flowman neer at 
hand,
Whistles o'er the Furrow'd 
Land,

And missing thee, I walk 
unseen 
On the dry smooth-shaven 
Green,
To behold the wandring 
Moon,
Riding neer her highest 
noon,
Like one that had bin 
led astray
Through the Heav'ns wide 
pathless way;
And oft, as if her head 
she bow'd,
Stooping through a fleecy 
cloud.
Oft on a Flat of rising 
ground,
I hear the far-off Curfeu 
sound,
Over som wide-water'd 
shoar,
Swinging slow with sul- 
len roar:21
And the Milkmaid singeth blithes.
And the Mower whets his sithe.
And every Shepherd tells his tale
Under the Hawthorn in the dale.22

In L'Allegro Milton next gives a detailed description of "mountains, meadows, brooks, and battlemented towers." He proceeds to "the picture of Corydon and Thyrsis at their dinner of herbs," to that of "merry-making on the green of some upland hamlet," and finally to the "nut brown ale and the goblin tales by the fire." In Il Penseroso we find:

Or if the Ayr will not permit
Som still removed place will fit,
Where glowing Embers through the roon
Teach light to counterfeit a gloom
Far from all resort of mirth,
Save the Cricket on the hearth,
Or the Belmans drousie charm,
To bless the dores from nightly harm;
Or let my Lamp at midnight hour,
Be seen in som high lonely Towner,
Where I may oft out-watch the Bear,
With thrice great Hermes, or unspeare
The spirit of Plato to unfold
What Worlds, or what vast Regions hold
The immortal mind that hath forsook
Her mansion in this fleshly nook;
And of those Daemons that are found
In fire, air, flood, or under ground,
Whose power hath a true consent
With Planet, or with Element.
Som time let Gorgeous Tragedy
In Scepter'd Fall com sweeping by,
Presenting Thebs, or Pelops line;

Or the tale of Troy divine.
Or what (though rare) of later age,
Emnobled hath the Buskind stage.

But, O sad Virgin, that thy power
Might raise Musaeus from his bower,
Or bid the soul of Orpheus sing
Such notes as warbled to the string,
Drew Iron tears down Pluto's cheek.
And made Hell grant what Love did seek.

Or call up him that left half told
The story of Cambuscan bold,
Of Camball, and of Algarsife,
And who had Canace to wife,
That own'd the vertuous Ring and Glass,
And of the wondrous Hors of Brass,
Of which the Tartar King did ride;
And if ought els, great Bards beside,
In sage and solemn tunes have sung,
Of Turneys and of Trophies hung;
Of Forests, and enchantments drear,
Where more is meant than meets the ear.

Thus night oft see me in thy pale career,
Till civil-suited Morn appeer,

At this point the cheerful man is faced with the blackness of the night and the contemplative man with the brightness of day. Each adjusts himself to his new milieu in spite of the apparently ready conflict that each should find in the situation. L'Allegro discovers the bright things of night; II Penseroso finds the more meditative aspects of the day. L'Allegro retires to a dream world of splendor; his inner eye beholds

. . . the busie humm of men,
Where throngs of Knights and Barons hold,
In weedes of Peace high triumphs hold,
With store of Ladies, whose bright eies
Rain influence, and judge the prize
Of Wit, or Arms, while both contend
To win her Grace, whom all commend.

23 II Penseroso, 77-122. Ibid., 27-28.
There let Human oft appear
In Saffron robe, with Taper clear,
And pomp, and feast, and revelry,
With mask, and antique Pageantry,
Such sights as youthfull Poets dream
On Summer eves by haunted stream.  

He then betaketh himself to the world of the theatre, delights
in the comedies of Jonson and Shakespeare, then to the world
of sweetest music,

The melting voice through mazes running
Untwisting all the chains that ty
The hidden soul of harmony. 

Till in final apostrophe to Mirth he says,

These delights, if thou canst give,
Mirth with thee, I mean to live. 

II Penseroso meanwhile has been finding his meditative
self in the midst of day-brightness. He finds dawn

...Cherchef't in a comly Cloud,
While rocking winds are Piping loud,
Or usher'd with a shower still,
When the gust hath blown his fill,
Ending on the russling Leaves,
With minute drops from off the Eaves.
And when the Sun begins to fling
His flaring beams, me Goddes bring
To arched walks of twilight groves,
And shadows brown that Sylvan loves
Of Pine, or monumental Oak,
Where the rude Ax with heaved stroke,
Was never heard the Nymphs to daunt,
Or fright them from their hallow'd haunt.

24 L'Allegro, 118-130, Ibid., 25.
25 L'Allegro, 142-144, Ibid., 25.
26 L'Allegro, 151-152, Ibid., 26.
There in close covert by some Brook,
Where no profane eye may look,
Hide me from Day's garish eye,
While the Bee with Honied hive,
That at her flowry work doth sing,
And the Waters murmuring
With such consort as they keep,
Entice the dewy-feather'd Sleep;
And let some strange mysterious dream,
Wave at his wings in Airy stream,
Of lively portrature display'd,
Softly on my eye-lids laid.
And as I wake, sweet musick breath
Above, about, or underneath,
Sent by some spirit to mortals good,
Or the unseen Genius of the Wood.

This brings us down to the last section of the Il Penseroso, beginning

But let my due feet never fail,
To walk the studious Cloysters pale, etc. 28

It is the only part of the Il Penseroso which has no counterpart in L'Allegro. This circumstance has already been treated in this paper. 29

All in all, there is an over-all and convincing parallelism of structure between L'Allegro and Il Penseroso. Granted this parallelism of structure, this external unity resulting from similarity of structure, it would seem antecedently a bit more probable that such a structure be the external body of a

27 Il Penseroso, 125-154, Ibid., 28-29.
28 Il Penseroso, 155-176, Ibid., 29.
29 Pages 20-23.
spirit that is one.

Having established similarity between Milton's admittedly capricious *First Froluson* and *L'Allegro-Il Penseroso*, and having noted a remarkable parallelism of structure that may be thought of as an apt medium for a spirit of unity between the twin poems, it remains to attempt a demonstration of the unity of spirit which these two factors render probable. The purpose of such demonstration, it need hardly be said, bears essential relation to the question whether the twin poems are poems of election or not. For there is no room left for choice when one is confronted with unity. The question, it will be remembered, is not moot. *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* have been regarded as elective by some critics largely because they believe that they see a real dichotomy of spirit between the poems.

The argument here will be *a fortiori* in kind. The attempt will be to prove a fairly specific "unity of tone" existent in the poems, a sort of unity which would not be possible were a more generic "unity of spirit" lacking.

"Unity of tone" seems to signify a greater unity than does "unity of spirit" if the latter term is accepted in its most ready connotation. "Unity of spirit" has a certain aura of generality about it. Essentially diverse elements could never have unity of spirit, but unity of spirit could be had between literary pieces which are not one at all points. A certain unity of
spirit may, for instance, be said to run through all of Shake-
speare's works. Such diverse plays as Macbeth, Merchant of Ven-
ice, and Midsummer Night's Dream meet and are one in the fact
that each is written from the same integrated viewpoint. Each
depicts life as seen from the same vantage point. The events
of each testify that their author was a man of one stable set of
values. Unity of tone, on the other hand, seems to indicate an
essential sameness of atmosphere or mood. Othello and Hamlet
might be said to blend into a certain unity of tone; King Lear
and Merry Wives of Windsor never.

The first inspiration for the notion that L'Allegro and
Il Penseroso have such a unity of tone as has been described came
from Cleanth Brooks in his essay, "The Light Symbolism in L'Al-
legro-Il Penseroso."

I have remarked that the mountain nymph and
the cherub tend to merge into the same figure.
One can easily see why. The more serious pleasures
of Il Penseroso are so obviously "unreproved
pleasures free" that the poet does not even need to
point out that they are unreproved; yet, on the
other hand, they are hardly more "contemplative"
than those which delight L'Allegro. The happy man,
too, is the detached observer, gliding through his
world, a spectator of it, and preserving a certain
aesthetic distance between it and himself. It is
true that the spectator as the happy man emphasizes
the spontaneity, the effortless freedom of his
pleasures; and that the more austere observer is
more consciously the man dedicated to the contemp-
lative life. But here, as elsewhere in these poems,
Milton's oppositions tend to come together.\(^{30}\)

While the Milton reader who reads \textit{L'Allegro} and \textit{Il Penseroso} in the light of this observation of Professor Brooks will probably see its justice rather readily, it will not be out of place to point out more specifically some of the contemplation that is discoverable in \textit{L'Allegro} and some of the lightness which is found in \textit{Il Penseroso}.

In \textit{L'Allegro}, after the dismissal of Melancholy and the invocation of Mirth — an invocation, be it admitted, which does incorporate the giddy, carefree spirit of gayety — Milton at length injects the strictly personal element into his song, and at that same moment we sense a change in spirit; a note of contemplation is at once seen to be present. Forgotten is the hubbub gayety of the invocation. In the fore are peaceful pastoral scenes, landscapes, figures. These Milton, "the detached observer," as Brooks labels him here, regards from afar with quiet, uncommunicated enjoyment. In the soft, light-colored pattern of nature Milton finds that peaceful communion with self which is the contemplative's delight.

\begin{verse}
To hear the Lark begin his flight, 
And singing startle the dull night, 
From his watch-tower in the skies, 
Till the dappled dawn doth rise;
\end{verse}

\footnote{30 Gleanth Brooks, \textit{The Well Wrought Urn}, New York, 1947, 52.}
Then to com in spight of sorrow,
And at my window bid good'morrow,
Through the Sweet-Briar, or the Vine,
Or the twisted Eglantine.

Som time walking not unseen
By Hedges-row Elms, on Hillocks green,
Right against the eastern gate,
Wher the great Sun begins his state,
Rob's in flames, and Amber light,
The clouds in thousand Liveryes light.

Streit mine eye hath caught new pleasures
While the Lantskip round it measures,
Russet Lawns and Fallows Gray,
Where the nibling flocks do stray,
Mountains on whose barren brest
The labouring clouds do often rest;
Meadows trim with Daisies pide,
Shallow Brooks, and Rivers wide. 31

Later, as he observes the folk of the countryside in
their revels, the aesthetic distance, though kept as always, is
permitted to lose some of its peace-giving effect. The account
of the tales told by firelight makes us forget the teller and
the contemplative mood is lessened. But soon after the full
Milton is restored. To the theatre we go, but to the idylls of
Shakespeare, to the land haunted with

Such sights as youthful poets dream
On summer eves by haunted stream. 32

In fine the very gayety of L'Allegro is not of the extreme or

31 L'Allegro, 42-48; 57-62; 69-76. The Student's

32 L'Allegro, 129-130, Ibid., 25.
raucous variety. "Gayety" is hardly descriptive of the mood. It is rather that variety of joy which regards life with that light-hearted, lightly traced smile which betokens the inner man completely at peace with himself and all the things that are.

Il Penseroso has something of the same mood to it. It provokes that same peaceful countenance founded in inward peace that was found in L'Allegro. The peace it engenders is more profound, it is true, than that found in L'Allegro; but it is generically the same. In the sense that there is this same tone in Il Penseroso as was found in L'Allegro can the "gayety" of the latter be found in the former. The tone one would expect to find in Il Penseroso is that of both poems, by and large. Both poems are poems of meditative men. As many critics have stated, L'Allegro and Il Penseroso are the same man enjoying, in the first instance, the contemplative in daylight nature, and secondly, the contemplative in the realms of the night. Johnson phrases the idea rather succinctly: "No mirth can, indeed, be found in his melancholy; but I am afraid that I always meet some melancholy in his mirth."33

Therefore, as has already been noted in this paper,34 Milton's "Melancholy" in Il Penseroso is not to be understood as

33 Johnson, Works, VI, 157.
34 Page 25.
"dejected sadness," "oppression of spirit" or anything of the
sort. Could either of these definitions apply to the spirit
that is expressed in such lines as these?

There in close covert by som Brook,
Where no profaner eye may look,
Hide me from Day's garish eie,
While the Bee with Honied thing,
That at her flowry work doth sing,
And the Waters murmuring
With such consort as they keep,
Entice the dewy-feather'd Sleep;
And let som strange mysterious dream,
Wave at his Wings in Airy stream,
Of lively portrature display'd,
Softly on my eye-lids laid.
And as I wake, sweet musick breath
Above, about, or underneath,
Sent by som spirit to mortals good,
Or th' unseen Genius of the Wood.35

Rather, cannot L'Allegro be seen in these lines, albeit in
slightly different dress?

In brief, is there not a "unity of tone" to be found
in L'Allegro and Il Penseroso which binds the two poems together?
Is it anything more than fitting, then, by a simple a fortiori
argument to predicate of L'Allegro and Il Penseroso a more fun-
damental and generic unity of spirit? It would seem that any
argument in defense of an opposition between the spirit of L'Al-
legro and that of Il Penseroso must deny the facts of the case.

This conclusion seems to be supported by not a few

Milton scholars. The point is important enough to bring their authority to bear on the case.

Albert Perry Walker’s opinion is quite to the point.

The poet does not set before himself the alternative of living wholly with either the "goddess fair and free" or the "goddess sage and holy"; what he does intend is, in his livelier moods to shun "vain, deluding Joys, the brood of Folly," and in his more serious moods to avoid that "loathed Melancholy" which is attended by "horrid shapes and shrieks and sights unholy." "With thee, Mirth," he declares, "and also with thee, Melancholy, if ye can give these delights and these pleasures, I intend to live."  

Charles Grosvenor Osgood in The Voice of England deplores the tendency to see opposing moods in the two poems.

The well-known pair, L’Allegro and Il Penseroso, have been too often contrasted as expressions of opposite moods, or even different personalities. There is, however, the same person and mind behind both; each is corollary of the other, like morning and afternoon. Each is a string of most delicately wrought miniatures strung upon artfully varied octosyllabics of Jonson’s kind, but wrought in that greatest of all schools of poetic jewel work, the idylls of Theocritus. Various English poems Milton may have had in mind, but the art is that of the best Greek idyllism.

Huntington, whose opinion on the "churchy" ending of Il Penseroso might tend to comfort proponents of the elective

38 See page 21 of this paper.
theory, speaks rather strongly on the unity of spirit obtaining between the two poems.

The "Penseroso" and the "Allegro," notwithstanding that each piece is the antithesis of the other, are complementary rather than contrary, and may be, in a sense, regarded as one poem, whose theme is the praise of the reasonable life. It resembles one of those pictures in which the effect is gained by contrasted masses of light and shade, but each is more nicely mellowed and interfused with the qualities of the other than it lies within the resources of pictorial skill to effect. Mirth has an undertone of gravity, and melancholy of cheerfulness. There is no antagonism between the states of mind depicted; and no rational lover, whether of contemplation or of recreation, would find any difficulty combining the two. 39

Daiches and Charvat in their Poems in English 1530-1940 imply as much as the others cited when they write, "Note that both L'Allegro and Il Penseroso treat of kinds of happiness: Il Penseroso is not a pessimist, but a man who finds happiness in the serious, contemplative life." 40

Hanford, taking Moody specifically to task, 41 aligns himself strongly with those who favor unity of spirit in the poems.

Equally absurd is Moody's description of the poems as a kind of summing up of two possible atti-


40 Poems in English 1530-1940, ed., with critical and historical notes and essays by David Daiches, with the assistance of William Charvat, New York, 1950, 670.

41 See pages 29 and 30 of this paper for Moody's opinion.
tudes toward life, which Milton, while feeling the appeal of each, must have recognized the practical impossibility of combining, or his suggestion that [Il Penseroso] reflects the advancing shades of Puritanism and, in Milton, the giving away of the exuberance of youth to the sobriety of manhood. In point of fact [Il Penseroso] is quite as much Elizabethan in mood as L'Allegro and as little touched with Puritanism, while the cheerfulness of the latter poem is anything but the exuberance of youth. The two pieces taken together are, indeed, the evidence of a carefully disciplined and completely self-possessed maturity of aesthetic cultivation and of a mind free for the moment from temperamental bias of any sort. The poems are studiously objective, even the effects of his reading being represented as elements in an impersonal experience. . . .

But Milton's sojourn in the realm of purely idyllic beauty could not, given his nature and education, be very long. For him the writing of poems like L'Allegro and Il Penseroso, however exquisite the result, was in a sense a tour de force.  

Hanford repeated his opinion in the following words in a later work.

Interpretations of the companion pieces have been various, but the need of any deeper explanation disappears if we regard the idea of two persons, the cheerful and the pensive man, as a mere poetic fiction and take the pieces together as an enthusiastic description of all the delights which a cultivated and responsive spirit can derive from nature, society, books, theatre, music, meditation. They are two moods rather than two individuals, and Milton knew them both, for even L'Allegro is more contemplative than he is social. He does not himself join the country dancers, and his smile as he views the stoutly strutting cock or listens to the huntsman's horn, comes short of hearty laughter. It is to be noted, on the other hand, that

Milton keeps his more serious and earnest thoughts out of both poems. \textit{Il Penseroso} reads Spenser and Greek tragedy but not scripture, history, or the Church Fathers. If he turns to Plato, it is not the \textit{Republic} but the more fanciful \textit{Timaeus} that he chooses, and he passes from that to the fascinating but irresponsible speculations of Hermes Thesmegistus. 43

Masterman seems to say much the same as the others, though his closing words in which he speaks of Milton "in different moods" might possibly indicate a failure to perceive full unity of spirit between the poems.

The two poems are not so much antithetical as complementary of each other. \textit{L'Allegro} opens with a spring morning, with the sound of country life waking the poet and calling him forth to share the happiness of rustic labour or sport, idealized by his poetic fancy. Then evening comes, and the delights of romance or drama, and music lulling to repose. \textit{Il Penseroso} opens with an autumn evening, when the corn is cut and the nightingale has fled, with the embers glowing through the room, teaching "light to counterfeit a gloom." The vigil of the student, deep in love of Plato, or spell-bound over some gorgeous tragedy, is followed by a gusty and showery morning, by noon-day slumber, and by evensong in some great cathedral, where organ and choir combine to "bring all Heaven before the eyes" of the poet as he listens. The happiness of \textit{L'Allegro} is as far removed from the boisterous gaiety of the Cavalier gallant, as is the more sober contemplative life of \textit{Il Penseroso} from the moroseness of the extreme Puritan. Both are unmistakably Milton in different moods. 44

---


The following remark of Mark Pattison would seem to be based on an understanding of L'Allegro and Il Penseroso as being unified in spirit. "These two short idylls are marked by a gladsome spontaneity which never came to Milton again. The delicate fancy and feeling which play about L'Allegro and Il Penseroso never reappear, and form a strong contrast to the austere imaginings of his later poetical period." 45

Finally, Tillyard's opinion that the poems manifest "the perfect social tone" 46 seems to indicate that he regards L'Allegro and Il Penseroso as being of more or less the same spirit.

So much then for the defense of a unity of spirit between L'Allegro and Il Penseroso. The overall thesis that these poems are not poems of election, poems critical in Milton's writing career, needs now only to be guarded against the argument that the unified spirit of the two poems does not differ essentially from that of the later great Puritan poetry, notably Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained, and Samson Agonistes, and that the two poems, now taken as a unit, may be regarded as that turning point in Milton's life when he forever forsook the Spenserian

46 Tillyard, The Miltonic Setting, 11.
vein of his youth for the serious grandeur of his later great works. It will be the purpose of the following chapter to point out that there is a true disparity of spirit between L'Allegro—Il Penseroso and the later poems.
CHAPTER IV

DISPARITY OF SPIRIT BETWEEN IL PENSEROSO

AND THE LATER GREAT POEMS

A comparison between Il Penseroso and Milton's later serious poetry, that poetry which is best known to English literature as "Miltonic," reveals the fact that Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained, and Samson Agonistes in general differ distinctly in spirit from Il Penseroso. If this is the case, it would seem to reduce the likelihood that Milton's writing of Il Penseroso was the "turning point" in his career — to use Byse's phrase — that some have considered it to be.

Every good poem will be found to have thought and emotion. Thought is what the poet says; it is his subject matter. Emotion is that quality of feeling which the poet's subject matter inspires in him. Closely linked to both thought and emotion is the meter which the poet chooses to convey both. Lurking too in, or at least behind, each poem is the poet's purpose in composing it. And manifest through all is the attitude which the poet takes toward his reader.

1 Byse, A Key to L'Allegro and Il Penseroso, 73.
It will be the purpose now at hand to compare *Il Penseroso* with the later great poems in terms of thought, emotion, meter, purpose, and attitude toward the reader or what Tillyard has called "tone."

Milton's thought or subject matter in *Il Penseroso* is not nearly so ponderous or serious as that of *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, or *Samson Agonistes*. Can the lightness of thought of the following lines in *Il Penseroso* be matched by anything in the three later great poems?

```
Sweet Bird that shunn'st the noise of folly,
Most musickall, most melancholy!
Thee Chauntress oft the Woods among,
I woo to hear thy seven-Song;
And missing thee, I walk unseen
On the dry smooth-shaven Green,
To behold the wandring Moon,
Riding neer her highest noon,
Like one that had bin led astray
Through the Heav'ns wide pathles way;2
```

Or the following?

```
There in close covert by som Brook,
Where no profaner eye may look,
Hide me from Day's garish eie,
While the Bee with Honied thie,
That at her flowry work doth sing,
And the Waters murmuring
With such consort as they keep,
Entice the dewy-feather'd Sleep;
And let som strange mysterious dream,
Wave at his Wings in Airy stream,
Of lively portrature display'd,
```

Softly on my eye-lids laid.
And as I wake, sweet musick breath
Above, about, or underneath,
Sent by some spirit to mortals good,
Or the unseen Genius of the Wood.3

Milton writes of Christ's birth, the event that has
been the joy of Christian centuries, in the following terms in
Paradise Regained.

But contrary unweeting he fulfill'd
The purpos'd Counsel pre-ordain'd and fixt
Of the most High, who in full frequence bright
Of Angels, thus to Gabriel smiling spake.

Gabriel this day by proof thou shalt behold,
Thou and all Angels conversant on Earth
With man or mens affairs, how I begin
To verify that solemn message late,
On which I sent thee to the Virgin pure
In Galilee, that she should bear a Son

Great in Renown, and call'd the Son of God;
Then toldst her doubting how these things could be
To her a Virgin, that on her should come
The Holy Ghost, and the power of the highest
O're-shadow her: this man born and now up-grown,
To shew him worthy of his birth divine
And high prediction, henceforth I expose
To Satan;4

Even when he depicts Mary describing the events of his
very early life to the Christ Child and when Milton in so de-
picting seems to paraphrase the Gospel story itself, he does
not have the lightness of touch found in Il Penseroso.

3 Ibid., 139-154, 28-29.
4 Paradise Regained, I, 126-143, The Student's
Milton, 367.
These growing thoughts my Mother soon perceiving
By words at times cast forth inly rejoic'd,
And said to me apart, high are thy thoughts
0 Son, but nourish them and let them soar
To what highth sacred vertue and true worth
Can raise them, though above example high;
By matchless Deeds express thy matchless Sire,
For know, thou art no Son of mortal man,
Though men esteem thee low of Parentage,
Thy Father is the Eternal King, who rules
All Heaven and Earth, Angels and Sons of men,
A messenger from God fore-told thy birth
Conceiv'd in me a Virgin, he fore-told
Thou shouldst be great and sit on David's Throne,
And of thy Kingdom there should be no end.
At thy Nativity a glorious Chare
Of Angels in the fields of Bethlehem sung
To shepherds watching at their folds by night,
And told them the Messiah now was born,
Where they might see him, and to thee they came;
Directed to the Manger where thou lais't,
For in the Inn was left no better room;
A Star, not seen before in Heaven appearing
Guided the Wise Men thither from the East,
To honour thee with Incense, Myrrh, and Gold,
By whose bright course led on they found the place,
Affirming it thy Star new grav'n in Heaven,
By which they knew thee King of Israel born,
Just Simeon and Prophetic Anna, warn'd
By Vision, found thee in the Temple, and spake
Before the Altar and the vested Priest,
Like things of thee to all that present stood.

Milton describes Christ's final triumph over the
temptations presented to him by Satan in the following way.
Note the completely rational approach which he manifests toward
his subject. Anticipating for the nonce comparison of the
later with the earlier poems on a basis of emotion, notice too

5 Ibid., I, 227-258, 368-369.
the lack of a sense of personal sharing in Christ's triumph. There is little love here, little inward rejoicing on Milton's part. Christ's triumph, if it is here made intellectually interesting, does not seem to be, certainly, personally interesting, interesting, that is, to the heart as well as to the mind.

So Satan fell and strait a fiery Globe
Of Angels on full sail of wing flew nigh,
Who on their plumy Vans receiv'd him soft
From his unseasie station, and upbore
As on a floating couch through the blithe Air,
Then in a flowry valley set him down
On a green bank, and set before him spread
A table of Celestial Food, Divine,
Ambrosial, Fruits fetcht from the tree of life,
And from the fount of life Ambrosial drink
That soon refresh'd him wearied, and repair'd
What hunger, if aught hunger had impair'd,
Or thirst, and as he fed, Angelic Quires
Sung Heavenly Anthems of his victory
Over temptation, and the Tempter proud.

True Image of the Father whether thron'd
In the bosom of bliss, and light of light
Conceiving, or remote from Heaven, enshrin'd
In fleshy Tabernacle, and human form,
Wandering the Wilderness, whatever place,
Habit, or state, or motion, still expressing
The Son of God, with Godlike force indu'd
Against the Attempter of thy Fathers Throne,
And Thief of Paradise; him long of old
Thou didst debel, and down from Heav'n cast
With all his Army, now thou hast aveng'd
Supplanted Adam, and by vanquishing
Temptation, hast regain'd lost Paradise,
And frustrated the conquest fraudulent;
He never more henceforth will dare set foot
In Paradise to tempt; his snares are broke:
For though that seat of earthly bliss be fail'd,
A fairer Paradise is founded now
For Adam and his chosen Sons, whom thou
A Saviour art come down to re-install.
Where they shall dwell secure, when time shall be
Of Temptor and Temptation without fear.6

There seems to be little need to cite further pas-
sages from the later poems as probative of the comparatively
greater lightness and gayety of subject matter in the earlier
Il Penseroso. It will be noted that an attempt has been made
to quote the later Milton when he should be expected to be
gayest, namely in his description of Christ's birth and of
Christ's conquest over Satan in Paradise Regained. If the
spirit of his later poetic effort even at such moments cannot
match the spirit of Il Penseroso for lightness of thought and
attitude, then it seems fair to conclude that the later opera
can hardly look to Il Penseroso as their forbearer. It would
seem that Il Penseroso was not the decisive moment in Milton's
poetic career, the moment when he decided to put off "vain de-
luding joyes"7 forever; for there certainly seems to be more
joy in Il Penseroso than can be found in Paradise Lost, Para-
dise Regained, or Samson Agonistes, even in their lightest
moments.

This conclusion seems to be confirmed when attention
is turned to comparison of the quality of emotion found in Il


Pen-sero-so with that of the later poems. There is a lightness of spirit betrayed in the former that does not appear in the latter. The measure of the respective poems is a key to this. While all four poems involved in the comparison are characterized by the iambic foot, *Il Penseroso* has regularly four metric feet to a line, whereas the later three great poems have five. The result is that the later poems move more slowly, more majestically, more solemnly. They are written in what poetry calls "heroic verse," iambic pentameter.

As was pointed out above, there is a love for the objects which the poet mentions in *Il Penseroso* which is simply lacking in the later poems. While it is impossible to quote the later poems exhaustively on this score because of their very great length, it is possible to point out the love which Milton manifests in *Il Penseroso*. It seems fair to let the already quoted examples from *Paradise Regained* which have to do with subjects which could reasonably be expected to inspire the emotion of love in their author, namely the Incarnation and Nativity of Christ and his triumph over Satan's wiles in the temptations in the desert, stand as representative of that emotion, such as it is, in the later monumental poems. Before citing passages from *Il Penseroso*, let it be remarked that love is the language of choice, of preference. If Milton manifested a heart interest in the objects of his contemplation in *Il Penseroso*, and if *Paradise*
Lost, Paradise Regained, and Samson Agonistes were to be considered as the rightful progeny of II Penseroso, then it seems fair to ask why the quality of personal heart interest is lacking in the later poems. The easiest solution to that dilemma seems to be in a refusal to regard II Penseroso as the point in Milton’s career when he chose to become the sober Puritan poet that he reveals himself to have become in his later works.

There is love for Philomel, the songstress of the night, in the following lines.

"Less Philomel will daign a Song,
In her sweetest, saddest plight,
Smoothing the rugged brow of night,
While Cynthia checks her Dragon yoke,
Gently o’er th’accustom’d Oke;
Sweet Bird that shunn’st the noise of folly,
Most musical, most melancholy;
Thee Chauntress oft the woods among,
I woo to hear thy eeven-Song;"  

There is love for the glowing embers of the hearth when the night outdoors is unfriendly.

"Or if the Ayr will not permit,
Som still removed place will fit,
Where glowing Embers through the room
Teach light to counterfeit a gloom,
Far from all resort of mirth,
Save the Cricket on the hearth,
Or the Belmans drousie sharm,
To bless the dores from nightly harm;"

8 Ibid., 56-64, 27.
9 Ibid., 77-84, 27.
There is certainly love, to quote a last example, in Milton's regard of the following beautiful pastoral scene.

And when the Sun begins to fling
His flaring beams, me Godes bring
To arched walks of twilight groves,
And shadows brown that Sylvan loves
Of Pine, or monumental Oak,
Where the rude Ax with heaved stroke,
Was never heard the Nymphs to daunt,
Or fright them from their hallow'd haunt.
There in close covert by som Brook,
Where no profaner eye may look,
Hide me from Day's garish eie,
While the Bee with Honied thie,
That at her flowry work doth sing,
And the Waters murmuring
With such consort as they keep,
Entice the dewy-feather'd Sleep;
And let som strange mysterious dream,
Wave at his Wings in Airy stream,
Of lively portrature display'd,
Softly on my eye-lids laid,
And as I wake, sweet musick breath
Above, about, or underneath,
Sent by som spirit to mortals good
Or th'unseen Genius of the Wood. 10

Mark Pattison summarizes this attitude toward the thought and emotion in the earlier poems of Milton. "The delicate fancy and feeling which play about L'Allegro and II Penseroso, . . . form a strong contrast to the austere imaginings of his later poetical period." 11

E. M. W. Tillyard, the British Milton scholar, sug-

10 Ibid., 131-154, 28-29.
11 Pattison, John Milton, 27.
gests another difference between the earlier and the later poems when he remarks: "I fancy that L'Allegro and Il Penseroso are the most popular of Milton's poems because of their subtle friendliness of tone." Tillyard tells us that following Dr. I. A. Parker's lead in his Practical Criticism, he defines tone as "an attitude to his listener."

It can be fairly remarked, it would seem, that the complex of any poem will reveal a certain attitude of the writer toward his reader. It will be to the point here to continue the contrast begun between Il Penseroso and the later poems, now on the point of tone, as defined by Parker and Tillyard.

For this comparison it will be good to choose one or the other passage in the later poems that describe nature. So much of Il Penseroso is a description of nature that Milton's attitude to his reader can be best compared in this way.

Eve speaks as follows to Adam in Book IV of Paradise Lost.

With thee conversing I forget all time,
All seasons and their change, all please alike.
Sweet is the breath of morn, her rising sweet,
With charm of earliest Birds; pleasant the Sun
When first on this delightful Land he spreads
His orient Beams, on herb, tree, fruit, and flour,

12 Tillyard, The Miltonic Setting, 11.
Glistening with dew; fragrant the fertile earth
After soft showers; and sweet the coming on
Of grateful Evening mild, then silent Night
With this her solemn Bird and this fair Moon,
And these the Gems of Heav'n, her starr'd train;
But neither breath of Morn when she ascends
With charm of earliest Birds, nor rising Sun
On this delightful land, nor herb, fruit, flour,
Glistening with dew, nor fragrance after showers;
Nor grateful Evening mild, nor silent Night
With this her solemn Bird, nor walk by Moon,
Or glittering Starr-light without thee is sweet. 13

Earlier in the same book is given a florid description
of the Garden of Eden. The passage is too long to quote in its
entirety, but the following will suffice to sketch the spirit
found therein.

Thus was this place,
A happy rural seat of various view;
Groves whose rich Trees wept odorous Gumma and Balme,
Others whose fruit burnish'd with Golden Rinde
Hung amiable, Hesperian Fable true,
If true, here onely, and of delicious taste;
Betwixt them Lawns, or level Downs, and Flocks
Grasing the tender herb, were interpos'd,
Or palmie hilloc, or the flourie lap
Of som irriguous Valley spread her store,
Flours of all hue, and without Thorn the Rose;
Another side, umbrageous Grots and Caves
Of coole recess, o're which the mantling Wine
Layes forth her purple Grape, and gently creeps
Luxuriant; mean while murmuring waters fall
Down the slope hills, disperse, or in a Lake,
That to the fringed Bank with Myrtle crown'd,
Her chrystall mirror holds, unite thir streams.
The Birds thir quire apply; aires, vernal aires,
Breathing the smell of field and grove, attune
The trembling leaves, while Universal Pan
Knit with the Graces and the Hours in dance

13 Paradise Lost, IV, 639-656, The Student's Milton.

Lines 131-154 of II Penseroso, quoted earlier in this chapter, 15 can again be referred to here as standing in contrast with the lines just cited from Paradise Lost. It is difficult to prove the point at hand in words. Something as elusive as the attitude which a reader feels an author to have toward him is difficult to capture in words. It is really necessary to essay more here than to ask whether the reader does not share Tillyard's experience in the matter? Does he not feel that Milton in his earliest poem is telling an experience to him far more than he is in the later poem? Does he not find a certain remove from the plane on which man communicates with his fellow man in Paradise Lost? Does he not find, in a word, that Milton in his later poem is too ethereal to be humanly warm? If he does, can it not be again asked how II Penseroso can be called that point in Milton's career when the poet forever forsook the spirit of his earlier poems in favor of that high muse who inspired him in his later years?

Finally, poetry has purpose. How do II Penseroso and the epic poems compare on this point? The purpose of Paradise Lost is declared early in the work:

14 Ibid., IV, 246-268, 215.
15 Page 68.
And chiefly Thou O Spirit, that dost prefer
Before all Temples th' upright heart and pure,
Instruct me, for Thou know' st; Thou from the first
Wast present, and with mighty wings outspread
Dove-like satst brooding on the vast Abyss
And mad' st it pregnant; What in me is dark
Illumine, what is low raise and support;
That to the hight of this great Argument
I may assert Eternal Providence,
And justify the ways of God to men.16

Since the entire point at issue in this paper is the purpose of
L'Allegro and II Penseroso, it does not seem fit to state it
categorically here. Milton, unfortunately, has not told us his
purpose in so many words. It does not seem entirely facetious
nor utterly beside the point to remark here, however, that
Milton certainly was not trying "to justify the ways of God
to men" in II Penseroso. The point here can only be, however,
that the purpose of Paradise Lost was certainly serious; the
purpose of II Penseroso - it would begin to seem - only doubt-
fully so.

The foregoing arguments seem eminently fair to those
Milton critics who maintain that II Penseroso was the turning
point in Milton's career. Readers of Paradise Lost and Para-
dise Regained will recognize the fact that those passages in
these poems have been quoted here which actually come closest
to the spirit of II Penseroso. They will note that there is

16 Paradise Lost, I, 17-26, The Student's Milton.
much in the later great epics that is more ponderous, more charged with the ominous ring of timelessness than are the passages cited. An a fortiori argument, therefore, suggests itself here. If even the lightest sections of the later poems are heavier than *Il Penseroso*, then, assuredly, the latter can hardly be called the forbearer of the former.

Hilaire Belloc seems to confirm this conclusion, though in an oblique way. He tells us that, in his opinion, *Il Penseroso* does not measure up to *L'Allegro* as poetry. It is not hard to imagine, arguing from this, that he would concur in the opinion that *Il Penseroso* is not written in the same great spirit as the later great epics. At all events, his comment deserves citation.

The *Penseroso* is both a trifle too long, and not so strong on the wing as the *Allegro*; but at its best it touches the mark of the best in the *Allegro*. Moreover, its ending does not entirely justify the half-tediums and unworthy lines that come before.

There is perhaps less reason for placing the following argument derived from a comment of Samuel Johnson on the twin poems in this chapter. It is an argument, interesting though perhaps not too weighty in itself, which would hold that Milton manifested a preference for the spirit of *L'Allegro* in

the text of the twin poems. If this be the case, it would tend to argue that the writing of Il Penseroso was not the critical moment in Milton's literary career when he once and for all forsook the spirit of L'Allegro for that of Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained, and Samson Agonistes. While this does not directly deny a disparity of spirit between Il Penseroso and the epic poems, it does seem to do so by indirection. At all events, this seems as likely a place as any for taking it up.

Johnson's comment is on the following lines in L'Allegro and Il Penseroso.

That Orpheus self may heave his head
From golden slumber on a bed
Of heart Elysian floweres, and hear
Such streins as would have won the ear
Of Pluto, to have quite set free
His half regain'd Eurydice.18

But, O sad Virgin, that thy power
Might raise Musaeus from his bower,
Or bid the soul of Orpheus sing
Such notes as warbled to the string,
Drew Iron tears down Pluto's cheek,
And made Hell grant what Love did seek.19

Of these passages Johnson says, "Both his characters delight in musick; but he seems to think that cheerful notes would have obtained from Pluto a complete dismission of Eurydice.

---

19 Il Penseroso, 103-108, Ibid., 28.
of whom solemn sounds only procured a conditional release."

Johnson's point is clever, and rather hard to gainsay. While
these lines are only parts of the greater whole, they do none-
theless afford an opportunity to turn the tables on the op-
ponents of the present thesis and say that Milton with the
writing of L'Allegro-II Penseroso actually chose to espouse the
spirit of L'Allegro! There is the argument for what it is
worth. It was too tempting to omit. With it the argument on
the disparity of spirit between II Penseroso and Paradise Lost,
etc., may be brought to a close.

---

20 Samuel Johnson, The Works of Samuel Johnson,
LL.D., London, 1823, VI, 155.
CHAPTER V

SOME FINAL THOUGHTS AND CONCLUSION

The case against those who would claim that the writing of L'Allegro and Il Penseroso was the point in Milton's literary career when he forever forsook the light Spenserian vein of his youth rests. Their arguments have been dealt with one by one; and it would seem that they are, at the very least, inconclusive. When they have asserted that Milton wrote no further light poetry after L'Allegro, it has been shown that their argument rests on what is in high probability an incorrect judgment on the time of the poems' composition. When they have argued that the "church" ending of Il Penseroso manifests preference for the highly serious mood that was later to mark Milton's great Puritan epics, it has been pointed out that such ecclesiastical adornment of poetry was the vogue of the day; moreover the probability that this pious ending was a catering to the aesthetic tastes of the poet's fellow undergraduates at Cambridge has been urged. When the critics of the thesis of this paper have alleged that Il Penseroso is invested with an entirely different spirit from that of L'Allegro, that there is to be found here an oppo-
sition of spirit which would be proper to poems of election, it has been demonstrated that there seems rather to be a unity of spirit between the poems. When, finally, they would infer that an identity of spirit between *Il Penseroso* and the later great epics, in the face of difference of spirit between Milton's other early poems and the epics, argues for the elective nature of the twin poems, it has been shown that the spirit of *Il Penseroso* is not at all that of *Paradise Lost* or *Paradise Regained*.

All this seems to assure Milton of the possibility of a gradual evolution of thought and attitude over the years, an evolution more normal, it would appear, than the rather sudden change in outlook which the investing of the twin poems with elective nature would postulate, especially since the period of his life in which he wrote *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* is not marked by any event sufficiently outstanding enough to be considered precipitant of such a change. It would seem to restore the psychology of mankind to Milton in quality, without, of course, denying him mental and emotional powers unusual in degree.

So much for the arguments of the adversaries. This paper ought not be brought to a close, however, without suggesting briefly two or three further points that seem to further undermine their position.

First of all, one cannot resist asking the question
whether Milton might not have been expected to make it clear beyond cavil that he was setting down the points of an election in *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* if he was indeed doing so. While a "not necessarily" response to this query is certainly not out of order, the question does seem worth the asking.

Again, it might be observed, not perhaps without justice, that the great Milton - as great he undoubtedly was - might have been acute enough to realize the import of the old Latin adage, "Virtus in medio stat" - *et veritas*, it might be added. Should he not, in other words, have been keen enough to realize that he was not posing irreconcilables to himself in *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*?

Finally, this very difficult question might be posed to opponents of this thesis. Why is it that, if the writing of *Il Penseroso* really marked an election in favor of the spirit of the later great epics, seventeen entire years elapsed before they were written! Why is it that Milton's years at Horton, the supposed scene of the writing of *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* in the minds of these critics, were followed not by a great devotion to great poetry but rather by a highly unaesthetic period of polemic warfare? Of Milton's literary activity during this polemic period Browne could write:

But the political strife of the time was an uncongenial element to Milton. In this warfare he had but the use of his left hand, and often hastily took up the readiest, not the fittest weapon. His rage
is often more violent than mighty or noble, and in the later stages of his controversial career his sense of fairness, his characteristic love of truth, occasionally forsake him.

This dogmatism of the schoolmaster overshadows all. His satire is as the throwing of brickbats, outrageous, ponderous, and smashing. The savage recklessness of his onslaughts, the paltry witticisms in which he vies with the meanest pedants at their wretched trade, the want of temper and of scope in his handling of the great problems of his day; - all prove that he had forsaken his true vocation for an employment that brought into strong relief all that was faulty in his mind and character.

Mark Pattison seems to have been vividly aware of the fact that neither the twin poems nor any other works of Milton's early career mark an espousal of the great spirit of Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained, and Samson Agonistes. He writes commenting on Milton's youthful pledge to himself to "leave something so written to aftertimes as they should not willingly let die";

Between the publication of the collected Poems in 1645, and the appearance of Paradise Lost in 1667, a period of twenty-two years, Milton gave no public sign of redeeming this pledge. . . . Nor was it that, during all these years, Milton was meditating in secret what he could not bring forward in public; that he was only holding back from publishing because there was no public ready to listen to his song. In these years Milton was neither writing nor thinking poetry. 2

1 Browne, Poems of John Milton, lvii-lviii.
With the above, this thesis may truly be brought to a close. May it serve to bring a debated aspect of Milton's early life into clearer focus.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

I. PRIMARY SOURCE


II. SECONDARY SOURCES

A. BOOKS

Brooke, Stopford A., Milton, New York, 1903.
Jenks, Tudor, In the Days of Milton, New York, 1907.


Milton, John, Milton, Complete Poetical Works, edited by H.F. Fletcher, Boston, 1941.


Poems in English 1530-1940, edited with critical and historical notes and essays by David Daiches, with the assistance of William Charvat, New York, 1950.


Sharp, Robert, From Donne to Dryden, Chapel Hill, N.C., 1940.


**B. ARTICLES**


APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Mr. William F. King, 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.

August 19, 1954

Date

Signature of Adviser