The development of Milton's prosody

Grace Eva Hunter
State University of Iowa
THE DEVELOPMENT OF MILTON'S PROSODY

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GRACE EVA HUNTER, B.A.

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   (a) LYRICAL CHORUSES
THE DEVELOPMENT OF MILTON'S PROSODY

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If the elements which compose Milton's style are considered separately, he appears to be largely indebted to predecessors and contemporaries, but not to a further degree than any other great receptive and creative literary artist. Since on his mind all the great imaginative movements in his age converged, the mode of his expression embraced and harmonized the various metrical experiments which other men attempted separately. Prosodically, he was especially indebted to Spenser, Shakespeare, the Fletchers, and Ben Jonson.

The Elizabethan lyric had by 1625 attained perfection. It exhibited the greatest possible diversity of form, as is evidenced by an examination of the collections in the popular song books such as The Gorgeous Gallery of Gallant Inventions 1578, The Passionate Pilgrim 1599, and England's Helicon 1600. The songs of the dramatists vied in wealth of fancy and originality of form with the best work of other lyricists. Before 1590 they partake more or less of the pastoral and sonnet modes. The playwrights, however, early perceived the superior excellence of the shorter and sprightlier metrical forms, and wrote words that almost sing themselves in response to the ever-varying mood. Hence we have the dainty lightness of Lyly, the delicate sentiment of Beaumont and Fletcher, the classical symmetry and nicety of Jonson, and the rich variety of Shakespeare, expressed in the lament for what is
beautiful and evanescent, the hearty drinking song of good cheer and
good fellowship, and the love song with its flashing lights and rich
shadows. The best of the Elizabethan lyrics exhibit the perfection of
lyrical emotion "married to immortal verse!"

Delicate and haunting as is the music of Milton's Minor Poems,
it is simply the Elizabethan lyric stamped with the personality of a new
craftsman who had achieved mastery over it. Not only was there an
established lyric mode, but the themes were commonly love, addresses to
nature, and the praise of country life. There were also traditional
phrases which belonged to the diction of poetry, as, "pale primrose",
"green lap", "comes dancing", "Day's harbinger". Out of this current
material, and remembering a line from Spenser's Astrophiel,

The dawning day, forth coming from the east,
and perhaps also, these from Fletcher's Christ's Victory, which set the
meter,

the lovely Spring
Comes dancing on; the primrose strewes her way
And sattin violet,

Milton wove the Song on May Morning. But Milton's tendency, indeed that
of most Elizabethans, was not to impose the meter rigidly upon the
lines, but to let the music rise out of them. The measure flows
unconsciously from the mood. We have, then, in this song ten lines in
rhyming couplet of five and four beat rhythm, varied from the normal
iambic by the trochaic effect which occurs in the four lines:

Hail bounteous May, that dost inspire
Mirth and youth and warm desire;
Woods and groves are of thy dressing,
Hill and dale doth boast thy blessing.
This is direct address and needs to be especially emphatic. A quality of femininity is suggested by the weak endings in "dressing" and "blessing". As it stands this pleasing lyric might have come out of a Shakespearean play, or from one of Fletcher's pastorals.

The Arcades would be of little interest except as a fore-runner of Comus, were it not for the three lyrics. The first is similar in movement to the lines in the Faithful Shepherdess beginning, "But, behold, a fairer sight". The line, "This, this is she", repeated later in the more emphatic "This, this is she alone", are the only departures from the regular four beat rhythm; but the rhyme scheme is very free. Browne prints the song divided into four stanzas, in only two of which the rhyme arrangement is the same. In the first, the rhymes alternate, concluding with a couplet; in the second and third, there is an enclosed quatraine and a closing couplet; and the last stanza is made up of three couplets. In this song the attention is held by the compelling emphasis placed on important words such as "look" twice in the first line, and "mark" at the first of the third stanza, and interest is maintained finally by the questions in the last.

The second song is as delicate as any of Ariel's in The Tempest. Milton has used great freedom in length of line, but has created unity by employing only three rhymes for the twelve verses. The vowels and consonants add much to the music. The long "e" in "green", "been", "me", is a gliding sound, the impression of which is helped by the liquids in "enamell'd". In the second line, the short "i" and "e" and the "t" sounds give the effect of extreme lightness, and "roof" and "proof" farther on create an airy dome in which the Spirit of the Wood
can rove at will.

There is a third and concluding song which was probably sung by many voices. The solidity of this madrigal is emphasized by its sobriety in keeping to the regular four-beat rhythm, the alternate rhyming of the two sounds in "more" and "banks" in the first six lines, the three couplets which follow, and the repetition at the end of the final words of the preceding song:

Such a rural queen
All Arcadia hath not seen.

Of the lyrics in Comus the Echo Song is unusual for its varying length of line, ranging from the two beat "0 if thou have" to the closing Alexandrine.

Sweet Echo, sweetest Nymph, that livest unseen
Within thy airy shell
By slow Meander's margent green;
And in the violet embroider'd vale,
Where the love-lorn nightingale
Nightly to thee her sad song mourneth well:
Canst thou not tell me of a gentle pair
That likest thy Narcissus are?
0 if thou have
Hid them in some flowry cave,
Tell me but where,
Sweet queen of parley, daughter of the sphere;
So may'st thou be translated to the skies,
And give resounding grace to all Heav'ns harmonies.

Milton's rhyming must here be observed. Practises which were later greatly extended in Lycidae are found here: the wide separation of the rhymes "shell" and "well", and the freedom in rhyming lines not of the same length.

Tell me but where,
Sweet queen of parley, daughter of the sphere.

Though they may have been perfect according to seventeenth-century pronunciation, half of the rhymes in this address to the very Genius of Sound are imperfect now, as, "pair-are", "have-cave", "where- sphere",
"skies-harmonies"; but this does not destroy the melody of the lyric even for modern ears.

Jonson's song from Cynthia's Revels, "Echo's Dirge for Narcissus", is similar in structure in that it uses the same variety of line and closes with an Alexandrine.

Slow, slow, fresh fount, keep time with my salt tears;
Yet slower, yet, O faintly, gentle springs;
List to the heavy part the music bears,
Woe weeps out her division when she sings.
  
  Drop herbs and flowers,
  Fall grief in showers,
  Our beauties are not ours;
  O I could still,
  Like melting snow upon some craggy hill,
  Drop, drop, drop, drop,
  Since nature's pride is now a withered daffodil.

Jonson intertwines the first four lines on two rhymes as Milton does his first six on three, and rhymes lines of unequal length, but he does not separate rhyme words widely. This song is almost as lovely as Milton's and is noteworthy for having the daring unrhymed line,

Drop, drop, drop, drop,

with compensatory pause. This pause is used for emphasis by Milton in the Sabrina Song, but less boldly:

Sabrina fair,
  Listen where thou art sitting
Under the glassy, cool, translucent wave;
  In twisted braids of lilies knitting
The loose train of thy amber-dropping hair;
  Listen for dear honour's sake,
Goddess of the silver lake,
  Listen and save.

Here the omission of the light syllable before "Listen" in each instance seems to be the poise with held breath before the word is uttered. The initial trochee in the line, "Under the glassy, cool, translucent wave" delicately suggests the submergence of the nymph, while the feminine
rhymes "sitting" and "knitting" help to form a picture before which one is inclined to linger.

The octosyllabic portion immediately following is beautified by proper names, as in these lines:

By Leucothea's lovely hands,
And her son that rules the strands,
By Thetis' tinsel-slippered feet,
And the songs of Sirens sweet.

This use of the names of classical mythology was not unknown to the Elizabethans. Barnfield and Breton used them, and Jonson has some lines in which English place names sound:

All the grass that Rumney yields,
Or the sands in Chelsea fields,
Or the silver drops in Thames.

This "science of names" has come to be called Miltonic, because he later developed it to such dignity and power in the epics.

The long lyric close in which two more exquisite songs are embedded shows Milton's study of the dramatists.

Thus I set my printless feet
suggests And ye that on the sands with printless foot,
from the Tempest; and,

Thrice upon thy finger's tip,
Thrice upon thy rubied lip;

are like these from Browne's Inner Temple Masque:

Thrice I charge thee by my wand;
Thrice with moly from my hand.

The Spirit's epilog is in the same mood and rhythm as Ariel's song:

To the ocean now I fly,
And thou happy climes that lie
Where day never shuts his eye,
Up in the broad fields of the sky:
There I suck the liquid air.
There is even the same rhyme sound:

Where the bee sucks, there suck I;  \[14\]
In a cowslip's bell I lie;
There I couch till owls do cry.
On a bat's back I do fly
After summer merrily.

The idea of "There I suck the liquid air" is the same as Ariel's

I drink the air before me and return.
Or ere your pulse beat twice.

Fletcher's influence is seen in

But now my task is smoothly done,
I can fly, or I can run
Quickly to the green earth's end,
when compared with this from the Faithful Shepherdess;

I must go, I must run.
Swifter than the fiery sun.

A double touch of Shakespeare is given in the lines:

And from thence can soar as soon
To the corners of the moon,
which might replace these from Oberon's song:

We the globe can compass soon,
Swifter than the wandering moon.

Hecate's speech in Macbeth also contributed:

Upon the corners of the moon
There hangs a vaporous drop profound.

The masque slopes to a close with the lines which Milton once wrote in an autograph album as expressive of his own innermost spirit.

Love Virtue; she alone is free;
She can teach ye how to climb
Higher than the sphery chime;
Or if Virtue feeble were,
Heaven itself would stoop to her.

It is no wonder that Sir Henry Wotton wrote to Milton: "I should much
commend the tragical part, if the lyrical did not ravish me with a
certain Doric delicacy in your songs and odes, whereunto I must plain-
ly confess to have seen yet nothing parallel in our language".

In a group of early poems Milton imitates the rhyme royal which Spenser had used in the *Four Hymns on Heavenly Love and Beauty;* Milton used an Alexandrine instead of the normal pentameter final line. Browne points out that this is really the Spenserian stanza with the omission of the sixth and seventh lines. The first of these poems was *On the Death of a Fair Infant* written in 1626. Four years later Milton used the same stanza for *The Passion,* but "nothing satisfied with what was begun, left it unfinished." Two lines will suffice to explain Milton's dissatisfaction from a prosodic standpoint:

Or should I thence hurried on viewless wing,

and

He sovran priest, stooping his regal head.

In neither line is there any justification for the placing of the stress where it falls. These pieces show no very marked deviation from the forms of verse perfected by other men. They exhibit a cultivated mind working in conjunction with a student's care in the structural development of foot, verse, and stanza.

The four stanzas of the *Introduction to the Nativity Hymn* are in the Alexandrine-tipped rhyme royal with which he had experimented in *On the Death of a Fair Infant.* The hymn proper then begins in a stanzaic form for which no exact correspondence has been found. The rhyme scheme, a a b c c b d d, is identical with the first eight lines of several pieces in the *Harleian MS,* notably "Ne mai no lewed lued libban in londe," which has ten additional lines; "Mosti ryden by rybbersdale,"
which concludes with a pair of couplets; and the familiar "Lenten ys 29
come with love to towne", which ends with an enclosed quatrain. These
illustrations are not entirely satisfactory because the stanza is
incomplete without the additional lines. In an eight-line stanza of a
long poem we find precisely the same rhyme arrangement:

Jesu Crist, al folkes red,
That for us alle tholede ded
Upon the rode tre,
Leve us alle to be wys,
Ant to ende in his servys,
Amen, par charite!
God begining maketh god endyng,
Quoth Hendyng.

Milton may not have known this, but the coincidence is at least
interesting. A closely similar stanza was used by Drummond in the
following madrigal:

Poore Turtle, thou bemones
The Losse of thy deare Love,
And I for mine, send foorth these smoaking Grones,
Unhappie widow'd Dove,
While all about doe sing,
I at the Roote, Thou on the Branche above,
Even wearie with our Mones the gaudie Spring,
Yet these our Plaints wee doe not spend in Vaine,
Sith sighing Zephyres answere us againe.

It is to be observed, however, that Drummond never used the stanza forms
of these madrigals in an extended poem.

Whether or not Milton knew the rhyme scheme of Quoth
Hendyng and applied it to the madrigal quoted above, the stanza he
created is a happy one artistically, for it brings exact rhyme cor-
respondence between long and short lines. Thus we have first a three-
beat couplet, and then the five-beat third and sixth lines enclosing
a three-beat couplet again. Drummond concludes with three pentameter
lines. Milton suppresses one of these and instead of the closing heroic
couplet one might expect, he uses a four-beat line and compensates for
the loss of the foot by the final Alexandrine with fine climactic
effect. We then have out of the combination of old elements into a
new whole, a stanza which meets the emotional requirements, and from
the metrical standpoint is a real achievement.

The lonely mountains o'er,
And the resounding shore,
A voice of weeping heard, and loud lament;
From haunted spring and dale
Edg'd with poplar pale,
The parting genius is with sighing sent.
With flower inwoven tresses torn
The nymphs in twilight shade of tangled thickets mourn.

The atmosphere of other-worldliness which is thrown over the
poem is achieved mainly by prosodic means. Almost without exception the
two opening lines end with a monosyllable, and the exceptions are more
apparent than real: "amaze-gaze", "sound-around", "Baalim-dim".
Substitutions of any kind are rare. In an irregular stanza they are
not necessary for variety, and the sustained iambic gives a stately
quality to the movement of the verse.

Milton's use of feminine rhyme is interesting here. The
Elizabethans had a decided preference for the single or masculine rhyme,
but the double rhyme was occasionally used to vary the effect, even in
the organism of the stanza itself. It is noticeable that all but two of
the seven feminine rhymes used in the Hymn end in "ing", and that five
occur in precisely the same place in the stanza, that is, in the third
and sixth long lines which enclose the short medial couplet. In this
position they emphasize the structure of the stanza and it is likely that
Milton used them for this purpose, though there is a more subtle reason
in the suggestive, almost onomatopoeic effect achieved by this means.
In the third stanza:

She crown'd with olive green, came softly sliding
Down thru the turning sphere
His ready harbinger,
With turtle wing the amorous clouds dividing,

the unaccented syllable leaves, in the first instance a trail, in the next a cleft in the clouds. In stanzas ten and nineteen, sound is suggested. In the first the sound is pleasing, and the words "thrilling" and "fulfilling" are the rise and fall of waves that penetrate to the remotest distance the human ear can hear, and beyond. In nineteen "deceiving" and "leaving" echo and reecho with sinister effect. In

Time is our tedious song should here have ending:
Heav'n's youngest teemed star,
Hath fixt her polisht car,
Her sleeping Lord with handmaid lamp attending.

the song does not end abruptly, but its strains float away like the angelic music he is hymning. "Attending" suggests continuity of service. These fine effects would be ruined by the decisiveness of masculine rhyme. Corson points out that double rhymes are not infrequently employed for emphasis in serious poetry.

Such is the case in:

And with your nine fold harmony
Make up full consort to th' angelic symphony.

The double epithet, "flower-inwoven tresses", "sable-stoled sorcerer", the peculiarly powerful phrase which has come to be called Miltonic, "With that twice batter'd God of Palestine", and the science of names which is surely prosodic,—all these are present and presage still greater poetry in the future. Saintsbury sums up the Nativity
Ode in one sentence, - "Everything works together for a steady rise in each stanza, and from stanza to stanza through the whole poem like volumes of incense rising higher and higher."

No type of poetry was more common and popular with Milton's predecessors and contemporaries than the four-beat iambic for pastoral poetry. Milton had used this meter in the Epitaph on the Marchioness of Winchester, in which he imitated Ben Jonson. During the Horton period he continued the study of it in L'Allegro, which "pirouettes" on either foot, iamb or trochee, with equal facility, and the dignified, predominantly iambic Il Penseroso. The idea for the two poems may have been suggested by the Dialog between Pleasure and Pain which was prefixed to Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy, and it is probable that he found further stimulus in a song in Beaumont and Fletcher's play entitled Nice Valour. It begins in the strain of Il Penseroso, and contains details which Milton seems to have expanded in the latter poem:

Hence, all you vain delights,
As short as are the nights
Wherein you spend your folly!

Welcome, folded arms and fixed eyes,

Fountain heads and pathless groves,
Places which pale passion loves;
Moonlight walka, when all the fowls
Are warmly housed, 'save bats and owls.'
A midnight bell, a parting groan,
These are the sounds we feed upon.
Then stretch our bones in a still gloomy valley;
Nothing's so dainty sweet as lovely Melancholy.

While it is easy enough to trace Milton's indebtedness for apt adjectives and picturesque phrases to other productions such as Fletcher's Purple Island, Barnfield's Affectionate Shepheard, and Breton's Passionate
Shepheard, which his wide reading and creative receptivity made his own, it is in the tripping fairy measures of *Midsummer Night's Dream* and Fletcher's pastoral songs that Milton finds his best technical models. There is monotony in Breton's end-stopped lines which Shakespeare and Fletcher do not have. They had mastered the secrets for making music of the octosyllabic couplet: the easy alternation of full iambic lines with those where a monosyllabic foot at the beginning turns that cadence to trochaic; some equivalence; the over-running of the line and couplet; and a full stop at the end of the first line of a couplet, which relieves the variety of the verse paragraph.

The pastoralists for the most part possessed sure artistry only in comparatively short pieces. Fletcher and Shakespeare used octosyllabics as a relief from the blank verse or heroic couplet, but Milton set the same verse pattern for two long poems full of subtle musical variations. It is impossible to explain the difference in:

\[ \text{Come, and trip it as ye go} \\
\text{On the light fantastic toe,} \]

which precisely describes the meter of *L'Allegro*, and,

\[ \text{Come, but keep thy wonted state,} \\
\text{With ev'n step, and musing gait,} \]

for that would be to touch the very source of poetic activity. In "So buxom, blithe and debonair", Milton repeats almost exactly a line from *Pericles*, "So buxom, blithe and full of face". "Sober, steadfast, and demure", forms a similar contrast. The difference in mood is felt.

The effect may be achieved by vowel sounds, but it is really too elusive to be explained.

The shift from iambic to trochaic lines gives a light, buoyant
effect to the verse and sends it on with elastic freshness whenever it is in danger of becoming lifeless. It is never introduced arbitrarily, but always in response to the inner prompting of mood.

Sometimes with secure delight
The upland hamlets will invite,
When the merry bells ring round,
And the jocund rebecks sound
To many a youth and many a maid,
Dancing in the checker'd shade;
And young and old come forth to play
On a sunshine holiday,
Till the livelong daylight fail;
Then to the spicy nut-brown ale,
With stories told of many a feat,
How faery Mab the junkets eat.

The passage contains also the substitution of anapests for the normal iambic foot. Other instances are:

That own'd the virtuous ring and glass,
To walk the studious cloister's pale,
His shadowy flail hath thresh'd the corn,
Or if the earlier season lead.

Not much can be done with pause in these short lines, but Milton does what he can. With the caesura elsewhere than at the middle or the end we have, inevitably, run-on lines, and the result is something like a long sentence. Milton develops this still further into the verse paragraph in Lycidas and his later blank verse. These lines from L'Allegro form such a paragraph on music. They serve to show runover lines and the shift of pause.

And ever against eating cares
Lap me in soft Lydian airs,
Married to immortal verse;
Such as the meeting soul may pierce,
In notes with many a winding bout
Of linked sweetness long drawn out;
With wanton heed, and giddy cunning,
The melting voice through mazes running;
Untwisting all the chains that tie
The hidden soul of harmony,
That Orpheus' self may heave his head
From golden slumber on a bed
Of heapt Elysian flowers; and hear
Such strains as would have won the ear
Of Pluto, to have quite set free
His half-regained Eurydice.

A passage from Fletcher's *Faithful Shepherdess* has the same freedom of movement:

But, behold, a fairer sight!
By that heavenly form of thine,
Brightest fair, thou art divine,
Sprung from great immortal race
Of the gods; for in thy face
Shines more awful majesty
Than dull weak mortality
Dare with misty eyes behold
And live.

The Anglo Saxons used alliteration to bind the verse together, but in Milton's time it had become an ornament and not an organic part of the verse. He varies its use by employing it in unaccented syllables, with syllables other than the initial one, and by the use of consonants similar but not identical in sound. The use of cognate consonants is more noticeable in *Paradise Lost* than in the earlier poems, but even there are found these lines:

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Sweetest Shakespeare, Fancy's child,
Warble his native wood-notes wild;
Sweet bird that shunn'st the noise of folly,
Most musical, most melancholy;
and
Lap me in soft Lydian air,
Married to immortal verse.
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One further characteristic of this group needs comment,—Milton's use of the spondee, which was rare in any except dramatic verse. This is especially valuable in *Il Penseroso* to sustain the
height of mood in which the poem is conceived. It occurs a few times in L'Allegro:

The mountain nymph, sweet liberty,

and

Where the great Sun begins his state, Rob'd in flames, and amber light.

Here also, the strong accent on "Rob'd" following accented "state" holds the cadence to the high plane on which it belongs when he is talking of the sun. The same thing appears in Il Penseroso in the lines,

And let some strange mysterious dream Wave at his wings in airy stream, Of livley portraiture display'd,

where "dream" and "wave" are both accented. There is a great deal of force in the spondee

And made Hell grant what Love did seek,

and magnificence in

Or that starr'd Ethiop queen that strove.

The last lines of these two poems recall the close of Marlowe's lyric:

If these delights thy mind may move, Then live with me and be my love,

and the corresponding part of Raleigh's clever rejoinder:

Then these delights my mind might move To live with thee and be thy love.

With a rich background of pastoral poetry, which in spite of its music and charm was often marred by conceits, conventional stiffness, and unreality, Milton combined and assimilated classical and English art, and with true creative sympathy interpreted Nature through the medium of mood in a way which has never been surpassed.
Just as Milton had found the forms of the lyric perfected by the Elizabethans before him, so he received at the hands of the dramatists the blank verse which he used for the masque of *Comus*. This early blank verse does not have the characteristics which we usually consider Miltonic,—the involved periods and profound harmonies which prevail in the epics. It is simply clear and flowing narrative verse, passing easily to the heights of pure lyrical passion in the songs and the closing movement. He is indebted for the plot of *Comus* chiefly to Jonson's masque, *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue*, George Peele's *Old Wives Tale*, *the Odyssey*, Browne's *Inner Temple Masque*, *the Faerie Queen*, and for the verse to Fletcher's *Faithful Shepherdess*, and some of Shakespeare's plays, particularly *Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*.

*Comus* has fine periods, but not the splendid verse paragraph structure of the late blank verse. It has in places the singly moulded effect characteristic of Marlowe and the older dramatists. Here is a passage which is not complete until the period is reached:

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60
methought it was the sound
Of riot, and ill-manag'd merriment;
Such as the jocund flute or gamesome pipe
Stirs up among the loose unletter'd hinds,
When for their teeming flocks, and granges full,
In wanton dance they praise the bounteous Pan,
And thank the gods amiss.
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**Contrast** with this the singly moulded lines, almost any of which might be removed without injury to the context:

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61
Th' express resemblance of the gods, is chang'd
Into some brutish form of wolf, or bear,
Or ounce, or tiger, hog, or bearded goat,
All other parts remaining as they were;
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And they, so perfect is their misery,
Not once perceive their foul disfigurement,
But boast themselves more comely than before;
And all their friends and native home forget,
To roll with pleasure in a sensual sty.

The distinguishing feature of Fletcher's verse is the constant use of feminine endings. This is a part of the general tendency of the time to bring blank verse nearer to conversational prose. Milton experiments with light endings in *Comus*:

> Of my most honour'd Lady, your dear sister.
> And stole upon the air, that even Silence.
> Fixes instead, unmoulding reason's mintage.

Milton has several ways of giving variety to the verse. In the conversation between Comus and the Lady he is imitating the stichomythia of the Greek tragedy, but it is not satisfactory in English for the single lines have a stiff, artificial effect.

> Comus  What chance, good Lady, hath bereft you thus?
> Lady   Dim darkness, and this leafy labyrinth.
> Comus  Could that divide you from near-ushering guides?
> Lady   They left me weary on a grassy turf.

He makes only slight use of the broken verses which were a means of such great variety in the hands of Shakespeare. One instance is peculiar because of the trisyllable at the caesura:

> Spirit  And crumble all thy sinews.
> El. Br.  Why prithee, shepherd,

and again it is in the first two places in the broken lines immediately following:

> El. Br.  As to make this relation? Care and utmost shifts.

Another illustration of an anapest at the caesura is:
And earth's base built on stubble. But come, let's on.

In fact, the anapest may occur anywhere. Here it is in the last foot:

or as Daphne was

Rootbound, that fled Apollo.

Fool, do not boast,

and in:

To quench the drouth of Phoebus, which as they taste.

Frequently he interchanges iambic with trochaic beginnings

as he did in L'Allegro and Il Penseroso:

I knew the foul enchanter though disguis'd,

Enter'd the very lime-twigs of his spells.

A peculiarity for which the precedent occurs many times in

Shakespeare's plays is the lapse of the blank verse into couplets

like those in the conversation between the elder brother and Thyrsis.

Sometimes the regular five beat verse is varied by an Alexandrine as in:

Soon as the potion works, their human count'nance,

and

The sea o'erfraught would swell, and th' unsought diamonds.

Then there are the curious lines which do not conform to the prosodists

normal scansion:

Th' All-giver would be unthank't, would be unprais'd,

and

Bore a bright golden flow'r, but not in this soil:

Unknown, and like esteem'd, and the dull swain Treads on it daily with his clouted shoon.

It seems clear that in these lines Milton was experimenting and the results were not entirely successful.

The pause is shifted so as to occupy any place in the line.

Sometimes there is no pause except at the end.

When the fresh blood grows lively, and returns Brisk as the April buds in primrose-season.
It is for homely features to keep home
They had their name thence; coarse complexions
And cheeks of sorry grain will serve to ply
The sampler, and to tease the huswife's wool.

Again there is more than one pause in the line:

But with besotted base ingratitude
Crans and blasphemes his feeder. Shall I go on?

It is noteworthy that Milton has placed some of the finest
poetry in the mouth of Comus. Thus in describing the Echo Song of the
Lady he says:

How sweetly did they float upon the wings
Of silence, through the empty-vaulted night
At every fall smoothing the raven down
Of Darkness till it smil'd.

This might have been written by Shakespeare, as might also the
description Comus gives of the brothers:

Their port was more than human, as they stood;
I took it for a faery vision
Of some gay creatures of the element
That in the colours of the rainbow live,
And play i' th' plighted clouds. I was awe-strook,
And as I past, I worshipt; if those you seek,
It were a journey like the path to Heav'n,
To help you find them.

All the technical marks of late Elizabethan blank verse are here:
"vision" as a trisyllable, the redundant syllable, the colloquial
abbreviation of "in the", and the fanciful vein of the whole passage
which might lead one to look for it in the dramas of the time. The
exaggeration of the Elizabethans is echoed in the elder brother's
praise of virtue:

if this fail,
The pillar'd firmament is rottenness,
And earth's base built on stubble.

A passage which illustrates the diffuseness of Milton's early
style in contrast to the restraint of the later blank verse is in the
Attendant Spirit's description of the Lady's singing:

At last a soft and solemn-breathing sound
Rose like a steam of rich distill'd perfumes,
And stole upon the air, that even Silence
Was took ere she was ware, and wish't she might
Deny her nature, and be never more
Still to be so displac't. I was all ear,
And took in sounds that might create a soul
Under the ribs of Death.

This description of pure song which flows through the air
without displacing the element in which it moves, is in marked contrast
to the description of the "barbarous dissonance" which assaults and
twists the air into hideous shapes of grotesquerie. Milton is keenly
aware of the differences in sounds, and his fine power of expression
enables him to convey them to others. In Paradise Lost there is a
similar contrast in the sounds made by the opening of the doors of
hell and the heavenly gates. Another instance of sound and sense join­
ing is in the last line of the following passage where the combination
of liquids and long vowels is almost the beam of light itself:

some gentle taper,
Though a rush-candle from the wicker hole
Of some clay habitation, visit us
With thy long levell'd rule of streaming light.

A subtle effect of sound which Milton obtains by the repetition of words
in another line in almost the same arrangement but with a changed mean­ing
is used here, and often in the epics. The Lady says:

Was I deceiv'd, or did a sable cloud
Turn forth her silver lining on the night?
I did not err, there does a sable cloud
Turn forth her silver lining on the night,
and one feels through the repetition the ebb and flow of the wave of
emotion which possesses her.

In spite of the freedom and personality displayed in the control of blank verse in *Comus*, Milton is still writing under the influence of the Elizabethans. He varies the verse with redundant syllables, substitutes anapests and trochees for the normal iambic foot, shifts the pause, uses an occasional Alexandrine, lapses into couplets, and contrasts the singly moulded line with the period or verse paragraph. *Comus* is infused with the high moral seriousness which is characteristic of him, but there is not the pent-up, inner compulsion which gives the verse of the epics such stately dignity and magnificent power.

We have seen how Milton's work in the lyric was based on Elizabethan models; the pieces in rhyme royal were like Spenser; *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* were in the favored pastoral octosyllabics; the couplets of *Arcades*, the *Shakespeare Epitaph*, and the *Vacation Exercise* were established forms; and the blank verse of *Comus* followed the work of the dramatists, especially Fletcher, Marlowe, and Shakespeare. Yet there is always about the poetry of Milton a supreme originality which arises out of the perfect assimilation of the materials of his art. In the *Nativity Hymn* we saw him creating a carol-like form which he sustained through twenty-seven stanzas of varying beauty.

In the irregular short poems *On Time*, *At a Solemn Music*, and *Upon the Circumcision* he develops a metrical form like the Pindaric ode, freely in accordance with the demands of the emotion. The meter is the iambic pentameter combined with occasional three beat lines. *On Time*
begins with an alternately rhymed quatrain followed by an enclosed quatrain. The central portion is made up of couplets, and the poem ends with an enclosed quatrain, the final line of which is an Alexandrine. *At a Solemn Music* has four lines rhymed alternately to begin with, and proceeds in couplets to the Alexandrine close with the exception of the lines:

```
With saintly shout, and jubilee;
Where the bright seraphim in burning row
Their loud up-lifted angel trumpets blow,
And the cherubic host in thousand quires
Touch their immortal harps of golden wires,
With those just spirits that wear victorious palms,
Hymns devout and holy psalms
Singing everlastingly.
```

In this the rhyme sound of "jubilee" is held up for seven lines; but the constant expectation of its satisfaction makes it like the dominant chord on which a musical cadence begins, then wanders off on "alien ground", and finally returns to the dominant again.

In *Upon the Circumcision* the rhymes are more involved. In stead of having the simple enclosed or alternately rhymed quatrains, Milton follows Spenser's practise of adding a line, as:

```
Now, mourn; and if sad share with us to bear
Your fiery essence can distil no tear,
Burn in your sighs, and borrow
Seas wept from our deep sorrow.
He who with all Heav'ns heraldry whilere.
```

In this the internal rhyme of the first line is unusual. Here is a passage from the *Epithalamion*:

```
Now lay those sorrowful complaints aside;
And having all your heads with girlonds crownd,
Helpe me myne owne loves prayses to resound;
Nor let the same of any be envide:
So Orpheus did for his owne bride.
```
These free strophic forms were apprentice work for *Lycidas*, the structure of which is unique in English verse. It stands mid-way between the form of the strict ode with set stanzas, lines of fixed length, and rhymes of fixed occurrence, and the complete lawlessness of the so-called Pindaric ode invented by Cowley. Samuel Johnson remarks that Milton owed the peculiar metrical structure of the poem to the Italians. Hanford thinks that this is entirely probable. He says:

"The irregular introduction of short lines and the irregular rhyme scheme are characteristic of the choruses of the *Aminta* and the *Pastor Fido*, and they occur but rarely, if at all, in English poetry before *Lycidas*." Saintsbury believes that Milton had the choruses of Greek tragedy in mind, but more important than these, were the less rigidly concerted odes of various English predecessors, especially Spenser's splendid *Epithalamion* and *Prothalamion*. He points out that passages possess similar rhythmical arrangement, but the stanzas, or "free musical paragraphs" as Masson terms them, are less uniform. Milton discards the refrain which tips Spenser's long stanzas. He uses the shortened line which gives the choric or odic effect, but less frequently than Spenser. In the matter of rhyme, Spenser intertwines them with regularity, and Milton suits the rhyme to the exigencies of the individual paragraph, except in the Vergilian close where the rhymes are interlaced in the ottava rima.

Though printed without definite breaks, *Lycidas* has eleven distinct sections or paragraphs of varying length. These are composed like his own *On Time* and *At a Solemn Music*, and like Spenser's *Prothalamion* and *Epithalamion*, of iambic five foot lines, varied by
the introduction of lines of three feet. There are fourteen such lines in *Lycidas*. Milton has four ways of rhyming these short lines. In nine out of the fourteen instances a short line is rhymed with the preceding long line, as,

```
I come to pluck your berries harsh and crude,
And with forc'd fingers rude.  
```

There are two passages in which a long line intervenes between the rhymes as it does in the following:

```
Smooth sliding Mincius, crown'd with vocal reeds,
That strain I heard was of a higher mood:
But now my oat proceeds.  
```

In just one case two short lines are rhymed:

```
As killing as the canker to the rose,
Or taint-worm to the weanling herds that graze,
Or frost to flowers, that their gay wardrobe wear,
When first the white-thorn blows.  
```

The following arrangement occurs only once:

```
Now thou art gone and never must return!
Thee, Shepherd, thee the woods and desert caves,
With wild thyme and the gadding vine o'ergrown,
And all their echoes mourn.  
```

Here the two couplets come together which is unusual:

```
Hence with denial vain, and coy excuse:
So may some gentle Muse
With lucky words favor my destin'd urn;
And as he passes turn.  
```

Spenser always repeats the rhyme sound of the short line:

```
There, in a meadow, by the river's side,
A flocke of nymphe I chance and to espy,
All lovely daughters of the flood thereby,
With goodly greenish locks all loose untyde,
As each had bene a bryde.  
```

Milton does this in only two places. In the eighth paragraph the first
six lines have only two rhyme sounds:

Next Camus, reverend Sire, went footing slow,
His mantle hairy, and his bonnet sedge,
Inwrought with figures dim, and on the edge
Like to that sanguine flower inscrib'd with woe.
"Ah! who hath reft", quoth he,"my dearest pledge?"
Last came, and last did go.

The other occurs in the ninth paragraph, but the rhymes are not repeated until the closing couplet, and seventeen lines intervene.

This shows one of the most interesting features of the poem, namely, the wide separation of rhymes. He has perfected the experiment first made in *At a Solemn Music*.

One of the musical devices which Milton used to increase the harmony was the prolongation of a single rhyme sound through a whole passage. This is found in the opening paragraph. There are only five rhyme sounds and one of these occurs six times. Spenser had usually used at least eight rhymes in his eighteen or nineteen line stanzas, and had never repeated any more than four times. The repetition of a single rhyme sound, however, is characteristic of the Italian, the influence of which must not be forgotten.

Yet once more, O ye Laurels, and once more
Ye myrtles brown, with ivy never sere,
I come to pluck your berries harsh and crude,
And with forced fingers rude
Shatter your leaves before the mellowing year.
Bitter constraint and sad occasion dear
Compels me to disturb your season due;
For Lycidas is dead, dead ere his prime,
Young Lycidas, and hath not left his peer.
Who would not sing for Lycidas? he knew
Himself to sing, and build the lofty rhyme.
He must not float upon his watery bier
Unwept, and walter to the parching wind,
Without the meed of some melodious tear.
The most unusual feature of *Lycidas* is the introduction of blank lines which have no rhymes to answer them. The first and thirteenth lines of the opening passage illustrate this. There are nine such lines throughout the elegy. They increase the poignancy of the music by introducing a momentary dissonance, which is so embedded in the wealth of harmony that it is like the suspension and resolution of a chord in music.

Other devices are the use of epithetted nouns, proper names, and spondees. In the first sometimes the noun is monosyllabic and the epithet dissyllabic, and again the values are reversed. Examples are:

96

Sleep'st by the fable of Bellerus old,  
Where the great vision of the guarded Mount    
Looks toward Namanco and Bayona's hold.

This illustrates, also, the use of proper names. A fine effect is obtained by the use of spondees:

97

Together both, ere the high lawns appear'd,  
Batt'ning our flocks with the fresh dews of night,  
Clo'sd o'er the head of your lov'd Lycidas?

The spondee serves to emphasize the awful obscurity in the expressions:

100

Blind mouths! that scarce themselves know how to hold,  
But that two-handed engine at the door.

The arrangement of pause is similar to that of blank verse, modified, of course, by the presence of rhyme.

The ultimate sources for *Lycidas* are Greek and Latin pastoral poetry, especially, as Hanford has shown, the first idyl of Theocritus, and the fifth and tenth eclogues of Vergil. Indebtedness can also be
traced to English poets, and as usual, Spenser is of first importance.

Astrophel contains the lines:

Young Astrophel, the pride of shepherds praise,
Young Astrophel, the rustic lasses love.

From the Faery Queen we have:

Sad Amaranthus, made a flower but late,
Sad Amaranthus, in whose purple gore.

Milton uses the repetition of names in:

For Lycidas is dead, dead ere his prime,
Young Lycidas, and hath not left his peer.

The refrain of the November Lament for the Death of Dido, "The mantled medowes mourn", is echoed just once in Lycidas, - "And all their echoes mourn". Again in the Lament we find:

Sing now, ye shepheard's daughters, sing no moe.

Milton has:

Weep no more, woeful shepherds, weep no more.

This is also like Shakespeare's:

Sigh no more, ladies, sigh no more.

From Thomas Middleton's play, A Game at Chess, we get:

Dropt from the opening eyelids of the morn.

Milton repeats this except for the first two words:

Under the opening eyelids of the morn.

This is of course also the marginal reading of Job 3: 9. The last line:

Tomorrow to fresh woods and pastures new,

shows that Milton had read Phineas Fletcher's Purple Island, for we find there:

Tomorrow shall ye feast in pastures new.
To cull passages of similarity like this is only of minor importance, but it does show how they helped to establish the rhythm of particular lines.

Repeated reading of *Lycidas* increases one's inclination to agree with Mark Pattison when he says that in *Lycidas* we have reached the high water mark of English poesy.

During the period of twenty years from 1638 to 1658, when Milton was actively engaged in public life and the writing of prose pamphlets, the sonnets constitute the only poetic expression he allowed himself. They form a link between the rich poetry of his youth and early manhood, and the greater poetry of his declining age.

Wyatt had introduced the sonnet into England. He followed the regular Italian bipartite structure, of course, but used the form of sestet with the concluding couplet. On this point Courthope says: "Wyatt was evidently unaware of the secret principle underlying the extremely complex structure of the Italian sonnet; and being unfortunately misled by his admiration for the strambotti of Serafino, which sums up the conclusion in a couplet, he endeavored to construct his sonnets on the same principle, thereby leading all sonnet writers before Milton on a wrong path."

Surrey tried the Italian sonnet as introduced by Wyatt, but soon devised a variation, and wrote a majority of his sonnets in the new form. In this the divisions are not octave and sestet, but three quatrains with alternate rhyme, and a couplet. It produces, therefore, an effect quite distinct from the legitimate Italian sonnet. Nine out
of the sixteen sonnets by Surrey which are printed in Tottel's Miscellany are in the English form. Sidney followed Wyatt in closing the sestet with a couplet. Spenser used the English form in 56 out of 177 sonnets which he wrote. Drummond, who was a sonneteer of great skill, employed many original combinations of rhyme schemes, some forty in all. Surrey's form seems more in accordance with English taste because of the simplicity of rhyme structure. Since Shakespeare's adoption of it, the English sonnet has remained a favorite side by side with the more correct original.

As usual, Milton went to models more remote than those of Elizabethan England. His form of expression may be no better than the best of the Elizabethans, but he wrote with greater exaltation of mood and higher seriousness of purpose. Instead of the artificiality of the Elizabethans, Landor says he

Caught the sonnet from the dainty hand
Of Love, who cried to lose it, and he gave
The notes to glory.

The strict Italian sonnet consists of the octave, or first eight lines rhymed a b b a a b b a, and the sestet rhymed c d c d c d or c d e c d e. The rhymes in the sestet must not be on the same combination of consonants, nor even on the same vowel assonances as those in the octave. Double rhymes which are the rule in the Italian language are prohibited in English. While the sonnet must have unity, there must also be a clear break between the octave and sestet.

Milton always observes the rules for rhyming the octave in accordance with the Petrarchan system, but he varies the sestet
occasionally, and even goes so far as to close the sonnet to *Cromwell* with a couplet. Crosland considers this unpardonable. The use of a couplet in the sestet is a melodic defect, because three couplets have already been used. Milton sometimes permits the sense of the octave to overflow into the sestet, as in the sonnet *On His Deceased Wife*, or the turn occurs before the octave is concluded, as it does in the middle of the seventh line in *To the Nightingale*. In only seven out of the eighteen English sonnets does Milton have a perfect performance of rhyme and turn. Crosland says that Milton, in common with other sonnet poets, "suffered from that grave infirmity of sonnet poets, namely, a disposition to the tolerance of purely formal or technical lapses in their work".

The sonnets naturally group themselves according to content into three groups, those to friends, those on public affairs, and those which are personal and autobiographical. Of these the sonnets to friends yield the largest number of perfect specimens, five out of the six observing turn and rhyme according to the Italian system. Monotony is avoided by the variation of pause, run-on lines, and an occasional anapest as in the line from *To a Virtuous Young Lady*, "No anger find in thee, but pity and ruth". They are not without defects, however. In the same sonnet Milton rhymes "Ruth" and "ruth". It was a fixed principle in Italian and Spanish, Portuguese, and French poetry that words the same in spelling but differing in sense might rhyme, but such rhymes have always been avoided in English. In *To the Lady Margaret Ley* the octave has the defect of the weak rhymes, "treasury-fee-victory-liberty". *On the Religious Memory of Mrs. Catherine Thomson* is marred
with conceitfulness, and Milton has used "e" rhymes in all but the two couplets of the octave, and one of these is certainly imperfect.—"God-load-trod-rod". In several of these friendly sonnets Milton begins with direct address. It has an arresting effect. As he had done in Lycidas, Milton has harked back to the best Italian models, and even his faults, apparent as they are in English, are characteristic of his models, and would not have been considered imperfections in the land whose poets he was following.

In the group on public affairs the piece On the New Forcers of Conscience is not properly a sonnet in the English sense, though the sonnetto colla coda had long been used by the Italian poets for satire and burlesque. He has intensified the scorn in it by a touch of colloquialism in the diction. The two sonnets on Tetrachordon are in the same vein. In a sonnet which is plainly satirical and humorous such rhymes as "Tetrachordon-por'd on- word on- Gordon", and the split of "Mile-End Green" at the hyphen may be excused. He is fighting here with the bitter rudeness and blind irritation of his pamphleteering mood. It is interesting to contrast this sonnet with On the Late Massacre in Piedmont as to sound. With practically the same number of vowels and consonants Milton has conspired to make the consonant sounds predominate in Tetrachordon. It is rugged and harsh with the passion of scorn. In the other sonnet the consonants are suppressed by the overpowering sonorousness of the vowel sounds. These two sonnets show what different effects an artist in words, compelled by a strong emotion, can achieve.
In the sonnet to Cromwell the wave of feeling overflows into
the sestet, and the turn occurs after the fine pause following, "And
Worcester's laureate wreath". The sestet is further marred by the use
of two couplets, one of which is final. Similarly, On the Late Massacre
is irregular, but here the octave is short by a metrical foot.

Avenge, O Lord, the slaughter'd saints, whose bones
Lie scatter'd on the Alpine mountains cold;
Ev'n them who kept thy truth so pure of old
When all our fathers worshiped stocks and stones
Forget not: in thy book record their groans
Who were thy sheep, and in their ancient fold
Slain by the bloody Piemontese that roll'd
Mother with infant down the rocks. Their moans
The vales redoubl'd to the hills, and they
To Heav'n. Their martyr'd blood and ashes sow
O'er all th' Italian fields, where still doth sway
The triple tyrant; that from these may grow
A hundredfold, who having learnt thy way,
Early may fly the Babylonian woe.

The exact Italian rhyme scheme is preserved; the sounds throughout are
long "o" and long "a". The first four lines are complete in themselves.
They are a prolonged appeal, but he follows them up with the simple
words, "Forget not", which are effectively opposed to what has gone
before in sound. It is impossible to prolong the "t" sound, and the words
fall with incisive definiteness. The remaining lines with run-overs and
pause are a succession of animated trumpet blasts which "redouble" in
the mind of the reader as the actual sounds might in the Alpine
mountains. With this and the sonnet to Cromwell before one, it is easy
to justify Milton's irregularities. The rules reason impose upon the
sonnet form are swept away before the flood of passionate emotion.

Turning to the personal sonnets, it is interesting to note
the lightness and cool precision in each line of the sonnet on his
birthday and the one on the Nightingale. They are Elizabethan, clear and fluent in expression. The Cromwell and Piedmont pieces are akin to the involved periods of his epic verse. When the Assault Was Intended to the City is interesting prosodically, for it is a perfect performance in rhyming, structure, and turn. The rhyme sounds are varied, and the sestet has several anapests. It is stronger than the sonnet To the Nightingale, but not so rugged as the pieces on public events.

The two sonnets on his blindness are among the finest Milton wrote. The first one has the innovation of conversation. The second is addressed directly to his friend, Cyriack Skinner. On his Deceased Wife is presumably the last of the sonnets, and is also one of the best. It begins in a low strain, really the quiet of sleep. Each line is complete in itself, and only the last has even a pause.

Methought I saw my late espoused saint,
Brought to me like Alcestis from the grave,
Whom Jove's great son to her glad husband gave,
Rescu'd from Death by force, though pale and faint.

As he goes on the stress of his emotion breaks the lines more and more.

yet to my fancied sight
Love, sweetness, goodness in her person shin'd
So clear, as in no face with more delight.
But 0 as to embrace me she inclin'd,
I wak'd, she fled, and day brought back my night.

The pause between "I wak'd, she fled" is the catch of a sob, and the closing monosyllables, "and day brought back my night", are a return to loneliness as inevitable as the touch of Hermes upon the "half-regained Eurydice". It seems futile in the face of an expression of emotion like this to point out that the octave overflows its bounds, and that the whole sonnet is constructed on only two rhymes.
In the long period of twenty years during which the sonnets were the only poetic activity he allowed himself, Milton was learning to build the lofty line of *Paradise Lost*. The meter is the same, "the sense is variously drawn out from one verse to another". All that he needs to do is to discard the "jingling sound of like endings", and his verse is ready for the sustained flight of the epics.

Milton's poetic activity can be arranged conveniently in three periods: the first period extends to the time of the Italian journey in 1638. He began with fixed verse forms. The rhyme royal of Spenser's *Four Hymns on Heavenly Love and Beauty* provided the metrical structure for the poems, *On the Death of a Fair Infant* and *The Passion*. The *Nativity Hymn* is an original stanza form designed like the old carols, of long and short lines subtly combined by rhyme, to celebrate the birthday of Christ.

The popular heroic couplet was used in the *Vacation Exercise*, the *Epitaphs on Hobson*, the *Shakespeare Epitaph*, and the solid part of *Arcades*. In using the octosyllabic couplet for the *Epitaph on the Marchioness of Winchester*, he modelled his verse on Ben Jonson's epitaphs. *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* carry on the pastoral tradition. He varied the verse here, and in the lyrical parts of *Arcades* and *Comus*, by the interchange of iambic and trochaic rhythm, by occasional substitutions of anapests for iambs, and by run-on lines and the shift of pause.

*Comus* is Milton's first attempt at writing blank verse. Although he is following Elizabethan dramatic models, he begins the practises which make his later blank verse so powerful, namely,
redundant syllables, substitution, and the variation of pause. The songs which brighten the blank verse of *Comus* and the couplets of *Arcades* are Elizabethan in expression and sentiment.

A group of poems, *On Time*, *The Circumcision*, and *At a Solemn Music* are made up of long and short lines arranged in no regular order, with the rhyme scheme varied. They suggest Milton's acquaintance with the Pindaric ode. *Lycidas*, the last poem of the early period, is unique in English verse. The arrangement of lines of three and five beats into verse paragraphs of unequal length, variously rhymed, is probably influenced by Italian verse forms and by Spenser's two marriage odes. The introduction of blank lines into the complex rhyme scheme is most unusual.

The second period covers the twenty years from 1638 to 1658. During this time the sonnets were the only poetry Milton wrote. In these he follows the Italian bipartite structure, but he does not always obey the law of the break between the octave and sestet, and the strict rhyme scheme of the sestet.

The greatest poetry, that which is truly Miltonic, was written in the third period. It closes with the publication of *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes* in 1671. If Milton had ceased to write with the production of *Lycidas*, he would still rank as one of the first prosodists, in virtue of the remarkably varied octosyllabic couplets of *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, the stanza form of the *Hymn*, and the unique strophes of *Lycidas*. It is because of his introduction of blank verse for non-dramatic use, and his variations of it which are now to be described, that Milton is regarded as one of the
greatest masters of English prosody.

Blank verse had been introduced into England by Surrey and Wyatt along with the sonnet. It was first used by Surrey in a translation of the *Aeneid*, which was printed in 1557. Its career in the drama was started by Sackville and Norton in the first regular English tragedy, *Gorboduc*, in 1561. Marlowe recognized it for dramatic purposes in *Tamburlaine* in 1587. According to the *New English Dictionary* the term "blank verse" is first found in Nash's preface to Greene's *Menaphon*, 1589, where he speaks of the "swelling bumbast of bragging blank verse".

Shakespeare has: "And the lady shall say her mind freely, or the blank verse shall halt for't". Up to Milton's time, no one had ventured to use it in original work outside the drama.

The characteristics of the normal blank verse line were stated by Johnson in the eighteenth century. He declared that the English ten-syllable iambic measure is only pure and regular when the accent rests upon every second syllable through the whole line. A superfluous syllable at rare intervals, or an initial trochee in place of an iamb would be permissible. Judged by this standard, the blank verse of Surrey, Sackville, Greene, and Peele is correct, since they hesitated to depart from syllabic regularity. Marlowe, the earliest poet of creative genius who applied himself to its cultivation, found the line monotonous, monosyllabic, and divided into five feet of tolerably regular iambic meter. He left it various in form and structure, sometimes redundant by a syllable, sometimes deficient, enriched with unexpected emphasis and changes in the beat. There had been no attempt at periods; one line succeeded another with...
insipid regularity, and all were made after the same model. He grouped his verse according to the sense, allowing the thought to dominate the form. This extraordinarily emotional passage shows him at the height of his power:

The stars move still, time runs, the clock will strike,
The Devil will come, and Faustus must be damned.
O, I'll leap up to my God! who pulls me down?
See, see where Christ's blood streams in the firmament!
One drop would save my soul-half a drop! ah, my Christ!
Ah, rend not my heart for naming of my Christ!
Yet will I call on him! O spare me Lucifer!

Shakespeare gradually dispensed with all restraints not absolutely necessary to the retention of the general rhythm of the line.

The line of demarcation between very free blank verse and prose is slight. By neglecting to keep the normal standard at least persistent in the background, the later dramatists allowed blank verse to go to pieces in the hands of Davenant, Suckling, and lesser men in the last fifteen years before the closing of the theatres. After the Restoration it was stigmatized as "too mean for a copy of verses" outside the drama. It finally lost hold of the drama itself when Dryden, influenced by Waller, chose the heroic couplet as his medium of expression.

Milton is the first to use blank verse for non-dramatic poetry, and he justifies himself by citing the examples of "Italian and Spanish poets of prime note. He probably referred to Trissino who had composed his epics, Sophronisbe and Italia Liberata in versi sciolti, or verses freed from rhyme. Milton defines his verse thus: "The measure is English heroic verse without rhyme, the true
musical delight of which "consists only in apt numbers, fit quantity
of syllables, and the sense variously drawn out from one verse into
another". In achieving the "true musical delight" of which he
speaks, Milton uses three ways of varying the normal iambic pentameter
line. The number of syllables in the line is altered by the
substitution of trisyllabic feet for the iambic, or by the addition
of an unaccented syllable at the end of the line or at the caesura;
the iambic, or rising rhythm is changed to the trochaic or falling
rhythm; the pauses are placed freely within the line following the
requirements of the thought.

An examination of Milton's blank verse shows an increasing
tendency to use feminine endings. He began this in Comus as we have
seen. In 750 lines there are 40 with additional unaccented syllables.
The epic verse begins with only occasional feminine endings. Book
Nine of Paradise Lost has 1189 lines of which only 13 have weak final
syllables. Book Four of Paradise Regained has 635 lines and 21
feminine endings, and of 1284 lines of blank verse in Samson Agonistes,
148 are lengthened by this means. Here are lines from each:

120 Fixcs instead, unmoulding reason's mintage,
121 For solitude sometimes is best society,
122 Suffering, abstaining, quietly expecting,
123 And such a son as all men hail'd me happy.

Sometimes the additional syllable occurs at the pause.

124 To quench the drouth of Phoebus; which as they taste
125 Of high collateral glory: him Thrones, and Powers,
Though ravenous, taught to abstain from what they brought:
Before the God of Abraham. He, be sure.

Occasionally, the extra syllable has an accent, and the line becomes an Alexandrine.

Soon as the potion works, their human count'nance,
No ingrateful food: and food alike those pure
Shook the Arsenal and fulmin'd over Greece
Nothing of all these evils hath befall'n me.

Trisyllabic feet are common in all Milton's verse, although the prosodists have for years endeavored to force them into regular iambic rhythm by the fiction of elisions.

That he, the Supreme good, t' whom all things ill
And rapture so oft beheld? those Heav'nly shapes
Abominable, inutterable, and worse,
How quick they wheel'd, and flying behind them shot,
By worse than hostile deeds, violating the ends.

It is clear, then, that one of the chief sources of beauty is in the variation of the number of syllables.

The second way in which Milton's blank verse departs from the normal line is in the change from the iambic to the trochaic rhythm. Milton's use of the trochee is so audacious that he allows it to occur in any place in the line. The normal line is, of course,

Restore us, and regain the blissful seat,

Bridges has worked out the matter of inversions very carefully. They are most common in the first foot, as,
Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace.

These are plentiful in *Comus*:

Swift as the sparkle of a glancing star.

In the second foot inversion is rare. In this, and in all cases of inversion except in the first foot, the rhythm is so disturbed as to call attention to the word which carries the irregular stress. A powerful emphasis is achieved in this way.

Me, me only just object of his ire.

A mind not to be chang'd by time or place.

Inversion occurs many times in the third and fourth places. Examples in the third foot are:

For one restraint, lords of the world besides?

Which tasted works knowledge of good and evil.

Saintsbury calls the result of inversion in the fourth foot a "choriambic syzygy". These are most frequent in *Paradise Regained*.

Of enemies, of aids, battles and leagues.

Their enemies, who serve idols with God.

Home to his mother's house private returned.

Athens, the eye of Greece, mother of arts.

It seems best to explain the last two feet in the following lines as anapests:

Burnt after them to the bottomless pit.

With them from bliss to the bottomless Deep.

Some of these lines have only four stresses. It is best to consider them as variations, inevitably occurring in any poem of such length.
as the epic, simply as a relief from the monotony of the five stress lines.

Inversion in the fifth foot is very rare, and does not so much emphasize the word which carries it, as it imparts strangeness to the sentence.

Beyond all past example and future. Saintsbury does not agree with Bridges on this line. He accents the last syllable of "future", for he says we may imagine that the Latin "futurus" was sitting diabolically at Milton's ear.

Sometimes the first two feet are both inverted.

Universal reproach, far worse to bear.

After forty days fasting had remain'd

Shoots invisible virtue even to the deep.

That invincible Samson, far renown'd.

These peculiarities of rhythm caused by inversion are the most marked feature of the lyric portions of Samson Agonistes.

The third chief cause of variation in the blank verse is the shift of pause which may occur anywhere in the line. Milton's avowed object was to "compose periods with the sense variously drawn out from one verse to another". For this purpose he united all the artifices of his predecessors. His sentences are often as long as Marlowe's. The opening sentence of Paradise Lost extends over sixteen lines. These long sentences are broken by an endless variety of sections and pauses so that each verse contains not only the essential rhythmical pause, but also a grammatical one as well. The result is that, owing to the
removal of rhyme, the stress of rhythm is made to depend increasingly on the sense. A short passage from Paradise Lost will show how the sense determines the place of the pause. It describes Satan just recovered from the confusion of his descent from Heaven:

round he throws his baleful eyes
That witness'd huge affliction and dismay
Mict with obdurate pride and stedfast hate:
At once as far as angels ken he views
The dismal situation waste and wild;
A dungeon horrible on all sides round
As one great furnace flam'd; yet from those flames
No light, but rather darkness visible
Serv'd only to discover sights of woe,
Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace
And rest can never dwell, hope never comes
That comes to all; but torture without end
Still urges, and a fiery deluge, fed
With ever-burning sulphur unconsum'd.

Following Symond's suggestion that no line can be separated from its context, but must always be considered in relation to what precedes and follows, it is possible to reconcile practically all the verses which, taken alone, have caused the prosodists so much confusion. Such a line as the third below is clear when in its place in the context. We must remember that it is "The golden sun in splendor" which,

\[\text{to each inward part}\]
With gentle penetration, though unseen
Shoots invisible virtue even to the deep.

It gives the effect of long continued, though invisible movement.

Another difficult line is the third below:

\[\text{Rejoicing, but with awe}\]
In adoration at his feet I fell
Submiss: he rear'd me, and, "whom thou sought'st I am",
Said mildly, "Author of all this thou see'st
Above, or round about thee, or beneath.\]
The alliterative system disappeared with Langland, but alliteration never ceased to influence the structure of English verse. In the last quarter of the sixteenth century, writers "hunted the letter mechanically". Milton's alliteration owes as much to the medial and final as to initial consonants, and to an admixture of cognate letters, as "p" or "t" in structures where "b" or "d" predominate.

In the following passage "b", "p", "r", "m", "t", and "d" are combined:

and what resounds
In fable or romance of Uther's son,
Begirt with British and Armoric knights;
And all who since, baptiz'd or infidel
Jousted in Aspramont or Montalban,
Damasco, or Morocco, or Trebisond;
Or whom Biserta sent from Afric shore
When Charlemain with all his peerage fell
By Fontarabbia.

There is much less alliteration in Paradise Regained. Here is a passage in which "l" predominates:

And ladies of th' Hesperides, that seem'd
Fairer than feign'd of old, or fabled since
Of fairy damsels met in forests wide
By knights of Logres, or of Lyones,
Lancelot, or Pelleas, or Pellenore.

Closely connected with these are the passages where the sound is made to seem an echo to the sense. Milton's sensitivity to sound has already been noted in the study of Comus.

Heav'n open'd wide
Her ever-during gates, harmonious sound,
On golden hinges moving, to let forth.

On a sudden op'n fly.
With impetuous recoil and jarring sound,
Th' infernal doors, and on their hinges grate
Harsh thunder, that the lowest bottom shock
Of Erebus.
In the first, the vowel sounds predominate to produce a pleasing sound; in the second, the explosive consonants make for harshness. These passages also show Milton's use of proper names.

Another feature which is characteristic of the epic poem is the repetition of words and phrases in significant places. The artist makes his appeal doubly powerful by this means. A line which occurs again and again is one of the stateliest:

Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Virtues, Powers.

The proximity of final and initial spondees enhances the repetition in the following lines:

Thus at their shady lodge arriv'd, both stood,
Both turned; and under op'n sky ador'd.

In Book Three of Paradise Regained, Milton repeats the word "glory" thirteen times in thirty-four lines. Still more significant in effect are the two passages in the conclusion of Book Ten in Paradise Lost. In the repetition, the phrases which made a question in the first instance, are an affirmation.

What better can we do, than to the place Repairing where he judg'd us, prostrate fall Before him reverent? and there confess Humbly our faults, and pardon beg, with tears Watering the ground, and with our sighs the air Frequenting, sent from hearts contrite, in sign Of sorrow unfeign'd and humiliation meek.

they forthwith to the place Repairing where he judg'd them, prostrate fell Before him reverent, and both confess'd Humbly their faults, and pardon begg'd, with tears Watering the ground, and with their sighs the air Frequenting, sent from hearts contrite, in sign Of sorrow unfeign'd, and humiliation meek.

The blank verse shows consistent development. Comus, the
earliest attempt, is dramatic, and shows the influence of the Elizabethans. Milton used some redundant endings, changed from iambic to trochaic rhythm, and substituted anapests for iambics whenever the sense required it. Pause was subordinated to sense. When he came to write *Paradise Lost*, Milton, though blind, was at the height of his powers. He introduced the use of blank verse for general poetic purposes, and in doing so perfected the verse paragraph, and extended the practices which he had begun in *Comus*. In *Paradise Lost*, the period, not the line, is the musical unit. Clauses and phrases are linked together with steady progress to the point of emphasis. *Paradise Regained*, because of the limitation of the subject, is dryer and more severe in form than *Paradise Lost*. Some of the lines are not rhythmical, as,

And with these words his temptation pursu'd,

Thy pompous delicacies I contemn,

Cowper, who had made a careful study of Milton's verse, writes thus of these apparent cacophanies: "When the sense requires it, or when for the sake of avoiding a monotonous cadence of lines, of which there is always danger in so long a work, it shall appear to be prudent, I still leave a verse behind me that has some uneasiness in its formation. It is not possible to read *Paradise Lost*, with an ear for harmony, without being sensible of the great advantage which Milton drew from such a management......Uncritical readers find that they perform a long journey thru several hundred pages without weariness; they find the numbers harmonious, but are not aware of the art by which that harmony is brought to pass, much less suspect that a
violation of all harmony on some occasions is the very thing to which they are not a little indebted for their gratification".

The most salient features of the blank verse of *Samson Agonistes* are its clarity and directness which make it fitter for conversation, and the more frequent use of feminine endings. The fact that the verse is the emotional, dramatic utterance of individuals makes a difference in the structure. It is more simple and progressive. The epic verse is complex and stationary. Symonds aptly compares them to music and architecture.

*Samson Agonistes* contains Milton's most mature and artful verse. Thus far critics are agreed, but no one has yet given an entirely satisfactory explanation of its lyrical portions. In Milton's introduction to the tragedy he says: "The measure of verse used in the chorus is of all sorts, called by the Greeks *Monostrophic*, or rather *Apolyphemon*, without regard to Strophe, Antistrophe, or Epode,—which were a kind of stanza framed only for the music, then used with the Chorus that sung; not essential to the poem, and therefore not material".

The lyrical beauty of the choral odes in a Greek tragedy depended much on their division into corresponding parts which were accompanied by music and dancing. The singers moved to one side during the strophe, retraced their steps during the antistrophe, and stood still during the epode. Milton freed himself from the restraint of strophe and antistrophe, and the measures of his chorus are entirely arbitrary. This irregularity has a certain grandeur, but not the grandeur proper to a tragedy on the Greek model. It is rather the sublimity of some
of the bursts of eloquence in the Hebrew prophets.

Swinburne says of Milton's attempt to follow Greek tragedy:

"It is hard to realize and hopeless to reproduce the musical force of classical meters so recondite and exquisite as the choral parts of a Greek play. Even Milton could not; though with his godlike instinct and his godlike might of hand he made a kind of strange and enormous harmony by intermixture of assonance and rhyme with irregular blank verse." Courthope believes that Milton introduced into Samson Agonistes many rhythmical movements which are not to be found in Paradise Lost, but that he did so on the authority of Shakespeare's example, because dramatic verse enjoys a larger liberty than epic.

Bridges' explanation has the virtue of simplicity. Following his theory, we are to consider the choruses as written in iambic meter, with the exception of 19 lines which are in trochaic meter. We have seen how, in the blank verse, inversion may take place in any of the five feet. The combinations of rhythmical effects which may be achieved by the artful manipulation of inversions are very numerous, and Milton has taken advantage of all of them. Bridges says:

"Where the iambic system seems entirely to disappear it is maintained as a fictitious structure and scansion, not intended to be read, but to be imagined as a time-beat on which the free rhythm is, so to speak, syncopated as a melody."

The first lyrical out-burst of Samson contains practically all of the metrical peculiarities. The first line is the regular iambic pentameter, but it is made very intense by the repetition of the
dark, dark, dark, amid the blaze of noon.
The first two feet of the next line are inverted, the third is an anapest, and the fourth is inverted.

Irrecoverably dark, total eclipse.
The intensity of the emotion is represented by the irregularity of the meter. This is carried on in the next line which has a spondee in the second foot.

Without all hope of day!
The following lines are regular with the calm one experiences when he loses the sting of his own personal grief in the contemplation of the vastness of Deity. There is a spondee in the last foot of the first line, and the initial word of the next line is accented as it would be in giving a command.

O first created beam, and thou Great Word,
'Let there be light,' and light was over all.

In the question the accent naturally comes on the first word:

Why am I thus bereav'd thy prime decree?
The next seven lines are regularly iambic with the exception of one initial trochee:

The sun to me is dark
And silent as the moon
When she deserts the night,
Hid in her vacant interlunar cave.
Since light is so necessary is to life,
And almost life itself, if it be true
That light is in the soul.

These lines lead up to the passionate question, which gains in emphasis because the fourth foot is inverted just after the caesura.
She all in every part; Why was the sight
To such a tender ball as th' eye confin'd,
So obvious and so easy to be quench't?
And not, as feeling, through all parts diffus'd,
That she might look at will through every pore?
Then had I not been thus exil'd from light.

Milton has used feminine endings more extensively in the
verse of *Samson Agonistes* than in any other poem. When combined with
the irregular rhythms of the choruses, it suggests the weariness and
depression which pervades the whole piece. In describing Samson's
condition as a prisoner of the Philistines, he says,

> As one past hope, abandon'd,
> And by himself giv'n over.

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*Made arms* ridiculotis, useless the forgery
Of brazen shield and spear.

Contrast with this the account of Samson when in the prime of his
strength. Here the endings are masculine.

> Can this be he,
> That heroic, that renown'd,
> Irresistible Samson? whom unarm'd
> No strength of man, or fiercest wild beast could withstand.

Moody has suggested the *aesthetic* reasons for the irregular-
ities of the verse. The prevailing mood of the drama, he says, is
one of somber dejection. To establish this the monotonous iteration
of the iambic rhythm is essential. But this mood is broken in upon
by the out-bursts of Samson or the chorus. By preserving the fiction
of the iambic rhythm, and syncopating upon it half lyric strains,
which rise above the norm with a certain effort and sink back into it
with relief, Milton kept the integrity of the mood and made the
The melancholy deepest at the very points where the lines seem to strive most to throw off their burden.

The same artistic motive prompted the spasmodic use of rhyme, and the manipulation of the length of line. A line of any given length kept up without interruption creates an effect of composure and solidity, the very obverse of the impression Milton was seeking. We have seen in the epic verse that Milton did not confine a thought to a line, and the idea may have occurred to him of casting away altogether the bondage of a line of fixed length.

Below is one of the rare choruses where rhyme is allowed. It enriches the verse, but for that very reason Milton only admits it occasionally. It is impossible in this chorus, not to feel that the weary patriot and singer, the man who had done things "unattempted yet in prose and rhyme", was speaking for himself.

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God of our fathers, what is man!
That thou towards him with hand so various,
(Or might I say contrarious?)
Temper'st thy providence through his short course,
Not evenly, as thou rul'st
The angelic orders, and inferior creatures mute,
Irrational and brute.
Nor do I name of men the common rout,
That wand'ring loose about,
Grow up and perish as the common fly;
Heads without names, no more remember'd;
But such as thou hast solemnly elected,
With gifts and graces eminently adorn'd
To some great work, thy glory,
And people's safety, which in part they effect:
Amidst their height of noon,
Changest thy countenance and thy hand with no regard
Of highest favors past
From thee on them, or them to thee of service.
NOTES

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1. Spenser, Astrophel, 34.
2. Fletcher, Christ's Victory in Heaven, stanza 27.
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7. Ibid, 875-878.
8. The Forest, VI.
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10. The Tempest, Act V sc. I.
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19. Macbeth, Act III sc. I.
22. Ibid, p. XXXVI.


32. On the Morning of Christ's Nativity, 181-188.

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43. *Il Penseroso*, 32.


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46. Ibid, 156.


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104. Faery Queen, III 6:45.

105. Lycidas, 8-9.

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