

AN OBJECTIVE STUDY OF THE VARIATION OF STYLE OF  
VERSIFICATION IN MILTON'S BLANK VERSE

by

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## THE PROSODIC THEORIES OF MILTON AND HIS PREDECESSORS

### Characteristics of the Period

It was during the Elizabethan era that literary criticism began to develop as an independent form of expression. With the growth of criticism, there grew a consciousness that a more or less formal science of versification was needed. While the poets of the late Middle Ages had written in very strict forms and were evidently quite conscious of a definite system of versification, the poets of the period from 1500 to 1575 had come to disregard balance in stanza construction and the principle of uniformity within the line. Although natural accent and rhythmic accent often did not coincide and almost any combination of words was forced into the pattern of the iambic. Gascoigne made this statement about the poetry of his time: "And surely I can lament that wee are fallen into suche a playne and simple manner of writing, that there is none other foote used but one."<sup>1</sup>

The critics of the time knew that the poetry was unsatisfactory but did not know just why. Being greatly influenced by the Renaissance return to the classics, they decided that the fault with the poetry of the day was its disregard

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<sup>1</sup>George Gascoigne, "Certain Notes of Instruction," in Elizabethan Critical Essays, edited by Gregory Smith, Oxford University Press, London, 1904, vol. I, p. 50.

for the classic laws of quantity. The problem of quantity in English verse then became the main subject of discussion. All of the reasonable Elizabethan critics experienced difficulty in fitting these rules of quantity to English accentual verse. The works of Stanyhurst, Webbe, and Puttenham contain very strict but unreasonable systems of versification by quantity. Carrying the classic tradition further, they condemned rhyme as a feeble makeshift to hold bad lines together. Several of the critics traced the introduction of rhyme to the Huns and Goths and recommended that it be discarded completely as a poetic device. Most of these advocates of the classic laws of versification either admitted or avoided mentioning that most of the complicated classic feet were not adaptable to English poetry.

As Saintsbury said<sup>2</sup>, most of the elements of the controversy were settled once and for all by the observations of Campion and Daniel. These two laid the foundation for the theory of versification which held sway for the next two centuries. Campion and Daniel both agreed that English poetry should be based on accent rather than quantity. Campion still held to the idea that rhyme was unworthy of good poetry while Daniel succeeded quite well in reestablishing rhyme as a legitimate device.

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<sup>2</sup> George Saintsbury, A History of English Prosody, Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1908, vol. II, p. 183.

Milton's theory of versification is a direct development of the tenets of Campion and Daniel. That he had a very definite system is apparent from his consistent adherence to set rules concerning elision and extra-metrical syllables. All of the major controversies had been thrashed out by his predecessors, and most of the characteristic devices which Milton developed were already in embryo before his time. The path that Milton followed had been marked by men before him.

#### The Advocates of Classic Principles

Roger Ascham was evidently the first to introduce the system of quantity and to advocate the disuse of rhyme.<sup>3</sup> In the last book of The Scholemaster, Imitatio, he praised the poetic style of the ancient Greeks and Romans and insisted that the only true works of literary art must come from the imitation of these ancient examples. His attack on the "fault of ryming" is very severe. "Surelie to follow the Gothes in Ryming than the Greekes in trew versaifyng were evsn to eate ackornes with swyne, when we may freely eate wheate bread amonges men."<sup>4</sup> A little later in the essay, Ascham admitted that the iamb was about the only classical foot that fitted well into the English language quantitatively: "And

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 171.

<sup>4</sup> Roger Ascham, "Of Imitation," in Elizabethan Critical Essays, edited by Gregory Smith, Oxford University Press, London, 1904, vol. I, p. 30.

although Carmen Exametrum doth rather trotte and hoble than runne smothly in our English tong, yet I sm sure our English tong will receiue carmen Iambicum as naturallie as either Greke or Latin."<sup>5</sup>

Stanyhurst was an uncompromising classicist with regard to quantity. In the preface to his translation of the first four books of the Aeneid, he attempted to show that English words may be used in poetry just as Latin and Greek may be used; but to a modern ear, this gives rise to many awkward pronunciations.<sup>6</sup>

William Webbe in his Discourse of English Poetrie, published in 1586, attributed the revival of rhyme to the barbarians, and although he did not "disallow" it, he believed it was detrimental to good verse. He stated his poetic creed in the following paragraph from the Discourse:

There be three speciall notes necessary to be obserued in the framing of our accustomed English Ryme. The first is, that one meeter of verse be answerable to an other, in equal number of feete or syllables, or proportionable to the tune whereby it is to be reade or measured. The second, to place the words in such sorte as none of them be wrested contrary to the naturall inclination or affectation of the same, or more truly the true quantity thereof. The thyrd, to make them fall together mutually in Ryme, that is, in wordes of like sounde, but so the wordes be not disordered for the Rymes sake, nor the sence hindered.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Stanyhurst, "The Translation of the Aeneid," in Elizabethan Critical Essays, edited by Gregory Smith, Oxford University Press, 1904, vol. II, pps. 141-147.

<sup>7</sup> William webbe, "A Discourse of English Poetrie," in Elizabethan Critical Essays, edited by Gregory Smith, Oxford University Press, London, 1904, vol. I, p. 269.

From references made by Spenser and Harvey, it appears that one Thomas Drant drew up a strict set of rules for versifying by quantity. Whether these were printed or merely formulated is not known, but they were well known enough to cause some discussion between Harvey and Spenser.

George Puttenham advocated a system of scansion which disregarded the foot as a unit of measurement. He based his argument upon the fact that most English words have only one or two syllables while the classical languages are more polysyllabic. He believed that the classical foot was a measurement of the length of a single word and not of a rhythmic unit.<sup>8</sup>

#### Establishment of a Sound System

Although George Gascoigne's little treatise on English versification was published earlier than some of the previously mentioned works, it made a much more sane approach.

Certain Notes of Instruction in English Verse was published in 1575. Its most important features were the discussions on the importance of accent and on the position of the caesura. Gascoigne recognized that both the quantity and stress of a syllable might vary according to its position. He said, "And

<sup>8</sup>George Puttenham, "The Art of English Poesie," in Elizabethan Critical Essays, edited by Gregory Smith, Oxford University Press, London, 1904, vol. II, pps. 70-73.

in your verses remember to place every word in his natural Emphasis or sound, that is to say, in such wise, and with such length or shortnesse, elevation or depression of sillables, as it is commonly pronounced or used."<sup>9</sup> He also hinted at the desirability of the use of several kinds of feet in the same line. He was dismayed that the iambic foot was used almost exclusively. He warned the writer not to use any more polysyllabic words than necessary because words of one syllable allow more flexibility in foot construction.<sup>10</sup> With regard to the caesura, Gascoigne said, "It is at the discretion of the wryter, and they have been first devised (as should seeme) by the Musicians; but thus much I will adventure to wryte, that in my opinion,.....in a verse of tenne it will best be placed at the end of the first four sillables."<sup>11</sup>

Thomas Campion was the first writer fully to advocate accent as a basis for versification rather than quantity. In the section on English verse in the Observations, he said, "But above all the accent of our words is diligently to be obseru'd, for chiefly by the accent in any language the true value of the sillables is to be measured."<sup>12</sup> He believed that English verse should be based entirely on the iambic and

<sup>9</sup>George Gascoigne, op. cit., p. 49.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 54..

<sup>12</sup>Thomas Campion, "Observations in the Art of English Poesie," in Elizabethan Critical Essays, edited by Gregory Smith, Oxford University Press, London, 1904, vol. II, p. 351.

trochaic foot with occasional substitution of spondee in the fifth foot and rather free use of trisyllabic feet. The third and fifth feet should almost always be iambic. Trisyllabic substitution should occur only in the second and fourth feet.<sup>13</sup> Although Campion clung stubbornly to the old-fashioned aversion to rhyme, his theory of the importance of accent over quantity became the foundation for modern prosody. He discussed all of the classical feet but rejected their use in English poetry. Saintsbury interestingly points out the similarity between Campion and Milton in that both were good rhymers but both ultimately rejected rhyme.<sup>14</sup>

Samuel Daniel, in his Defence of Rhyme (1603), succeeded in firmly reestablishing rhyme in its proper place in versification, but since this thesis is not concerned with rhymed verse, his arguments are not discussed.

#### Milton's Theory of Versification

Except for a few chance remarks by Jonson, nothing more of importance was said about versification until Milton's time.<sup>15</sup> As mentioned previously, most of the major trends

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 335.

<sup>14</sup>Saintsbury, op. cit., vol. II, p. 193.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 193.

were decided before Milton did his writing. The use of foot-substitution, the license to shift the caesural pause within the line, and the use of an extra-metrical syllable or syllables at the end of the line were all firmly established by 1610. Milton took these already discovered devices and developed them to a highly artistic degree.

References to versification are rare in the works of Milton. Most of them occur in places where he felt the restraining bonds of meter. In his Elegy VI to Charles Diodati, he said:

Art thou desirous to be told how well  
I love thee, and in verse? Verse cannot tell,  
For verse has bounds, and must in measure move;  
But neither bounds nor measure knows my love.

In An Apology for Smectymnuus, Milton said:

For this good hap I had from a careful education,  
to be inured and seasoned betimes with the best and  
elegantest authors of the learned tongues, and thereto  
brought an ear that could measure a just cadence, and  
scan without articulating; rather nice and humorous in  
what was tolerable, than patient to read every drawing  
versifier.<sup>16</sup>

There is a note appended to Ad Rousium explaining the stanzaic form used and it is hardly necessary to mention the famous attack upon rhymed verse in the introduction to Paradise Lost.

None of these references, however, give much of an idea of his practical methods of versification. These methods become apparent only from the careful study of the verse itself. Such a study shows that Milton did have a consciously

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<sup>16</sup>John Milton, "An Apology for Smectymnuus," The Prose Works of John Milton, edited by J. A. St. John, Henry G. Bohn, London, 1848, vol. III, p. 140.

formulated system and that he followed its rules almost without exception. He used the caesura in any position in the line. The final extra-metrical syllable was admitted in passages where smoothness was not necessary. He consistently used the glide-trisyllabic foot in place of an iamb. Although he allowed lines of more than ten syllables, there is no instance of a line with less than ten. His verse is clearly based upon the accentual system and not the quantitative, although it is not feasible to believe that Milton was not thoroughly acquainted with the classical quantitative system. That he built his lines on feet is proved by a reference to the spondee in the note appended to Ad Rousium.

Naturally Milton did not hesitate to alter his method if he found a better device or if he found one to be unsuccessful. There is a considerable variation in the number of times he used a certain device at various periods of his life as well as a great difference in the skill with which he used it. The approximate degree of these variations is the object of study in this thesis.

#### MODERN OPINIONS ON MILTON'S VERSIFICATION

There has been a large amount of comment on Milton's style of versification ever since the time of Dryden, but very little of it is in the form of objective study. Many state-

ments have been made describing the general effects of his style and a large number of discussions of the exceptional degree in which Milton combines mood and sound. There have been a few objective studies made of Milton's prosody, however, and only these will be discussed here.

#### Robert Bridges

Bridges' study of Milton's habits of versification, Milton's Prosody<sup>17</sup>, is probably the most widely accepted and most practical treatment of the subject by any modern critic. By his rules of elision, almost any of Milton's lines may be explained. The study discusses three major topics: the exceptions to the decasyllabic line, the number of stresses per line, and the inversion of feet. Bridges reduces all of the lines except a few so-called "Alexandrines" to ten syllables by his rules of elision and contraction. He also allows the hypercatalectic line and a few mid-line extra-metrical syllables before the caesura. He permits the elision of all open vowels and vowels separated by the liquids "l", "n", and "r". According to his system, final en and at may be contracted. He does not, however, recommend that the elided syllables be suppressed entirely.<sup>18</sup> This is where Saintsbury misunderstands Bridges.<sup>19</sup> Bridges argues

<sup>17</sup>Robert Bridges, Milton's Prosody, revised final edition, Oxford University Press, London, 1921.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 35

<sup>19</sup>Saintsbury, op. cit., vol. II, p. 262.

very convincingly against the theories that explain the extra syllables by full trisyllabic substitution or foot equivalence. He proves that Milton's apparently trisyllabic feet do not have the same character as true trisyllabic feet which cannot be reduced by elision. With regard to the equivalence theory, Bridges says:

There is one insuperable theoretic objection to explaining Milton's trisyllabic places as examples of 'Equivalence' in the fact that he does not refuse to admit two classically short syllables for a full foot. On the theory of equivalence these are defective, so that it can be only enforced inconsistently to explain the trisyllabic places.<sup>20</sup>

Bridges says that the normal line contains five major stresses but that many lines have only four or three. In saying this, he acknowledges the existence of the pyrrhic. I fail to see the consistency in his argument when he says that more than five stresses per line is not possible for this statement denies the existence of the spondee which I believe is as logical as that of the pyrrhic.

Bridges' remarks on foot inversion are quite conventional. He allows inversion in all five feet and calls attention to the rarity of inversion in the fifth foot.

George Saintsbury

Saintsbury, in opposition to Bridges, champions the

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<sup>20</sup>Bridges, op. cit., p. 17.

theory of trisyllabic substitution. He makes no distinction between the full trisyllabic feet of Milton and those which can be reduced by elision. He states, on the basis of equivalence, that a trisyllabic foot is pronounced in exactly the same time as a dissyllabic foot.<sup>21</sup> His system is much simpler than that of Bridges but does not seem to be so logical. He allows the substitution of the trochee, the anapest, the spondee, and occasionally the tribrach for the regular iambic foot.<sup>22</sup> He does not acknowledge the pyrrhic.<sup>23</sup> He believes that the apostrophes and contractions which appear in the early editions of Milton's works were not intended by the author but were the ignorant attempts of the printer to fit the trisyllabic feet into the iambic pattern.<sup>24</sup> His attack upon Bridges' theory is very violent. He says that perhaps some people are able to say "Abominablunutterabland worse", but that his vocal organs are incapable of it. In response to Bridges' statement that the elided syllables are not to be completely suppressed, Saintsbury backs up a little and says that although Bridges is right here, his predecessors had been wrong.<sup>25</sup> He does not approve of the theory that a line may have less than five stresses.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Saintsbury, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 259.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 265.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 260.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 262.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 264.

## David Masson

In the beginning of the chapter on Milton's verse, which is in the third volume of his edition of the poetical works, Masson makes the following common-sense statement:

Because Milton's poetry is a property which, by his own express intention, we may use and enjoy after our own habits and methods, the right way of scanning his verse is to read it freely and naturally as we should read verse of our own day, subject only to a few transmitted directions, and to register the actual results as well as we can in metrical formulae.<sup>27</sup>

Although Masson completely rejects the theory of elision, his theory of trisyllabic substitution is much more consistent than that of Saintsbury. Masson admits all forms of the trisyllabic foot as well as the pyrrhic. Like Saintsbury, he fails to distinguish "glide-trisyllables" from true trisyllables. By allowing spondees and pyrrhics, he tacitly acknowledges that a line may vary in the number of major stresses it contains. He defines the caesura as "the pause attending the conclusion of a period, or of some logical section of a period, when that pause occurs anywhere else than at the end of a line".<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup>David Masson, "An Essay on Milton's English and Versification", The Poetical Works of John Milton, Macmillan and Co., Ltd., London, 1910, vol. III.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 228.

## Coral Frances Scott

Miss Scott has used the more modern though less satisfactory system of scansion of T. S. Omond<sup>29</sup> in her comparative study of the blank verse of Milton, Wordsworth and Tennyson.<sup>30</sup> This system abandons the attempt to divide poetic lines into feet and counts only strong and weak syllables. This permits her to avoid the problem of substitution but leaves the one of extra-metrical syllables. She accounts for these mostly by Bridges' system of elision. She does not, however, reduce the following words or groups of words: riot, being, variety, to whom, who yet, spirit, temple of. Using this system, she finds lines taken from Paradise Lost to vary, according to the number of stresses per line, from three to nine. She does not give a definition of caesura and does not mention a line with no break. It seems impossible that this method of scansion could possibly have been Milton's.

<sup>29</sup> T. S. Omond, A Study of Metre, Alexander Moring, Ltd., London, 1920.

<sup>30</sup> Coral Frances Scott, A Study of the Blank Verse of Milton, Tennyson, and Wordsworth, Unpublished thesis, University of Chicago, 1924.

## Enid Hope Hamer

Mrs. Hamer distinguishes between true trisyllables and feet trisyllables reducible by elision very clearly. She calls both of them trisyllabic feet but separates those which are subject to elision by calling them "glide-trisyllabic feet". She says:

The feet which contain easily suppressed syllables may be distinguished from their unequivocal counterparts by the names of glide-anapest, glide-dactyl, etc., and even when they are given the fullest possible pronunciation, as is the custom of modern times, they are certainly much less noticeable, and much less disturbing to the monotonous norm of the iambic rhythm, than the full trisyllables.<sup>31</sup>

Mrs. Hamer allows the use of any foot in place of the regular iamb. She calls an extra-metrical syllable at the end of a line a part of the fifth foot, which thus becomes a full trisyllable. If there are two final extra-metrical syllables, the last foot becomes a four syllable foot. Mrs. Hamer's system is the basis of the one used in this thesis.

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<sup>31</sup> Enid Hope Hamer, The Metres of English Poetry, Macmillan and Co., New York, 1930, p. 15.

## SYSTEM USED IN THIS THESIS

The data used in the following pages of this discussion were collected by scanning seven hundred lines from each of the four works by Milton written in blank verse, Comus, Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained, and Samson Agonistes. Care was taken to use lines representing all varieties of subject matter - narrative description, dialogue, tirade, and so forth. The following passages were selected for study.

Comus: Lines 145-229 and 244-858.

Paradise Lost: Book I, lines 1-100, 271-370; Book III, lines 274-373; Book IV, lines 1-100; Book XII, lines 1-150; 285-434.

Paradise Regained: Book I, lines 1-100, 321-420; Book II, lines 1-100, 302-401; Book III, lines 203-302; Book IV, lines 1-100, 394-493.

Samson Agonistes: Lines 1-79, 187-276, 330-429, 502-601, 624-823, 1310-1409, 1541-1640, 1708-1738.

In addition to this, five hundred additional lines from Paradise Lost were scanned to provide sufficient material for the comparison of various sections of the work itself. They were: Book I, lines 622-721; Book III, lines 1-100, 622-721; and Book IV, lines 902-1001, 358-457.

The text used was edited by Merritt Y. Hughes.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>32</sup> John Milton, Paradise Lost, edited by Merritt Y. Hughes, Doubleday, Doran and Co., Inc., New York, 1937.

John Milton, Paradise Regained, The Minor Poems, and Samson Agonistes, edited by Merritt Y. Hughes, The Odyssey Press, Inc., New York, 1935.

The scansion was based on the system of five feet per line. A line containing five iambic feet was considered normal. Variation from this type was accounted for by allowing the substitution of other types of dissyllabic feet and trisyllabic feet for the regular iamb. Of the Dissyllabic feet, the trochee (/x), the spondee (//), and the pyrrhic (xx) were used. Trisyllabic feet of two kinds were used. Those which might be reduced to dissyllables of elision and contraction were considered as "glide-trisyllables; those which were not reducible were considered as full trisyllables. The trisyllabic feet used were: the anapest (xx/), the dactyl (/xx), the tribrach (xxx), the amphibrach (x/x), the cretic (/x/), the bacchius (/x), and the antibacchius (x//). All extra-metrical syllables at the end of the line were regarded as belonging to the final foot. Because of the fact that two extra syllables occasionally occurred, it was necessary to use the second paeon (x/xx), and the Ionic a majore (//xx).

The caesura was defined as that pause which occurs within the line where some punctuation is found, where a non-restrictive clause begins, or before a verb which is separated from its subject by a modifying word or phrase. This system leaves a number of lines without a mid-line break.

A line without punctuation at the end was regarded as run-on. One with punctuation was regarded as end-stopped.

A verse-paragraph was defined as that section of lines which began at the beginning of a line and closed at the end

of a line with a period.

This system may seem unduly arbitrary. It is meant to be. Since the results to be obtained are purely comparative, the most completely objective standards are desirable. The author tried to keep these standards as constant throughout as possible and worked out twenty-five lines of each poem at a time so that any alteration in judgment over a period of time would affect all poems equally.

By recording the data on a mimeographed scansion sheet (Appendix, Form I), the author avoided having to copy the passages and was able to count the results easily. The line number was recorded in the first column. The next five columns represent the five feet of the pentameter line. The symbols for the types of feet were recorded in these columns. This method enabled one to see at a glance the general character of a certain passage. The position of the caesura was recorded under the heading "Caesura". Symbols for "end-stopped" or "run-on" were recorded under "Flow". Masculine or Feminine rhythm was recorded under "MF", and any other irregularities were noted under "Misc.".

#### THE DEGREE OF CONFORMITY TO THE REGULAR IAMBIC PENTAMETER LINE

One of the most important problems of the poet is to conform to the rhythmic pattern enough to maintain a musical effect and yet occasionally to vary this pattern to a

sufficient degree in order to avoid monotony. The purpose of this study is to determine how nearly Milton conformed to the regular iambic pentameter pattern.

Although the regular iambic pentameter line contains five iambic feet, there are relatively few such lines in any of the blank verse of Milton. Milton allowed the substitution of any dissyllabic or trisyllabic foot for the iambic foot. Some lines contain only one irregular foot, while others may have as many as five. A line which contains only one irregular foot is hardly noticed, but one with no iambic feet is definitely disturbing to the rhythmic flow of the passage.

By classifying the lines used in this study according to the number of iambic feet per line, there is evidence of some interesting changes in Milton's use of the irregular foot. Table 1 and Fig. 1 show that Paradise Lost has the greatest number of regular or nearly regular iambic pentameter lines of any of the works examined. Paradise Regained shows a definite tendency to increase the number of lines containing two substitutions and to decrease the number containing only one substitution. This tendency is even more marked in the passage from Samson Agonistes, where there is an equal number of each type of line. The passage from Comus also exhibits a greater number of substitutions, containing four lines which have no iambs at all. It is interesting to observe that the passage from Paradise Lost contains no lines

that have no iambic feet.

Table 1. The number of lines containing various numbers of iambs.

Number of iambs per line	5	4	3	2	1	0
Comus	81	266	222	111	16	4
Paradise Lost	119	275	208	84	14	0
Paradise Regained	98	255	226	104	16	1
Samson Agonistes	76	252	252	104	14	2

This general tendency towards regularity in Paradise Lost and away from it in Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes is confirmed by classifying the lines of the various books of Paradise Lost according to the same criterion. If the figures in Tables 1 and 2, which are based on different numbers of lines, are changed into percentages, it is apparent that there is a gradual increase in the number of regular lines which reaches a peak in Book IV of Paradise Lost. This is

Table 2. The number of lines containing various numbers of iambs.

Number of iambs per line	5	4	3	2	1	0
Book I	47	119	90	40	4	0
Book III	62	129	71	33	5	0
Book IV	61	135	77	23	4	0
Book XII	57	107	99	31	6	0

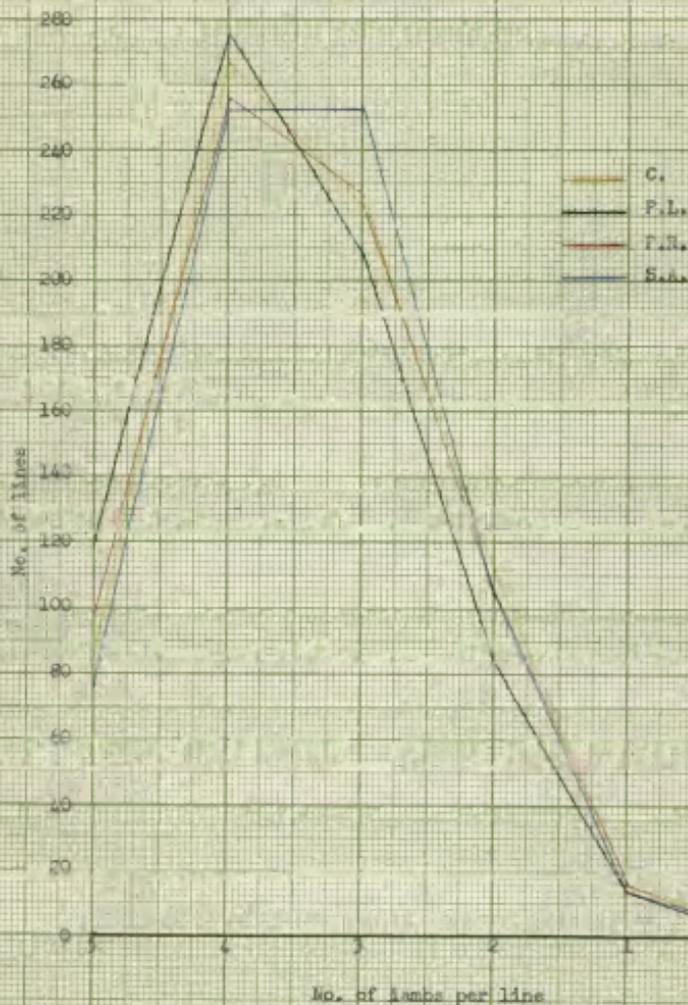


Fig. 1. The number of lines containing various numbers of iambs.



followed by a steady decrease in the number of regular lines which terminates in the passages from Samson Agonistes. The figures for Comus expressed in percentages are: five iambs, 11.5; four iambs, 38.0; three iambs, 31.7; two iambs, 15.8; one iamb, 2.2; no iambs, .5. In Book I of Paradise Lost, an increase in regular lines and a decrease in irregular lines is seen: five iambs, 15.6; four iambs, 39.6; three iambs, 30.0; two iambs, 13.3; one iamb, 1.3; no iambs, 0.0. Table 2 shows that this tendency continues to Book IV. The figures for Book XII show that between Books IV and XII, the tendency has reversed and that now there is an increase in irregular lines. A comparison based on percentages shows that Book XII is more similar to Paradise Regained than it is to the other Books of Paradise Lost: Book XII, five iambs, 19.0 percent; four iambs, 32.3; three iambs, 33.0; two iambs, 10.3; one iamb, 2.0; no iambs, 0.0. Paradise Regained, five iambs, 14.0; four iambs, 36.4; three iambs, 32.2; two iambs, 14.8; one iamb, 2.0; no iambs, 0.1.

This study shows, therefore, that Comus and Samson Agonistes are the least regular and that Paradise Lost is the most regular of Milton's blank verse. It shows a greater freedom in Paradise Regained than in Paradise Lost. It shows also that Book IV is the most regular of the Books examined from Paradise Lost. This last statement does not conform with the opinion of some modern scholars that Book IV was written

before Books I and III.<sup>35</sup>

#### THE SUBSTITUTION OF DISSYLLABIC FEET FOR IAMBIC FEET

One of the means of securing variety in the rhythmic pattern is the use of dissyllabic feet other than the iamb.

Milton used the pyrrhic, spondee, and trochee freely in place of the iamb. A comparison of the number of occurrences of these feet in the passages scanned revealed several interesting characteristics of Milton's style. Table 3 and Fig. 3 show that Paradise Lost contains the fewest number of pyrrhics and spondees and the greatest number of trochees. This is a significant proof of the comparative

Table 3. Dissyllabic substitutions.

Type of foot	Pyrrhic	Spondee	Trochee
Comus	519	240	184
Paradise Lost	411	191	241
Paradise Regained	471	236	206
Samson Agonistes	468	201	194

regularity of Paradise Lost because neither the pyrrhic nor

<sup>35</sup> Grant McColley, Paradise Lost, Packard and Co., Chicago, 1940, p. 310.

Samuel Albert Nock, Parallel Word Constellations in the Writings of John Milton, Unpublished thesis, University of Tartu, 1929.

the spondee are equivalent quantitatively to the iamb while the trochee is equivalent. That is, it takes a shorter time to pronounce a pyrrhic and a longer time to pronounce a spondee than an iamb but a trochee is pronounced in exactly the same time. In this study, Samson Agonistes is more closely related to Paradise Lost than either of the other two poems. The unusually high number of pyrrhics in Comus would seem to indicate a less masterful adaptation of natural accent to rhythmic accent.

When the same study was made of the various books of Paradise Lost (Table 4 and Fig. 4), Books I and XII were found to be the least regular and Books III and IV more similar to each other than to the other books. Book IV is the most equally balanced of any of the books.

Table 4. Dissyllabic substitutions in Paradise Lost.

Type of foot	Pyrrhic	Spondee	Trochee
Book I	182	69	101
Book III	149	86	94
Book IV	115	101	107
Book XII	181	67	104

In this study, as in the first study, Paradise Lost is the most regular and Book IV is the most regular of the books studied in Paradise Lost. The experimental characteristics

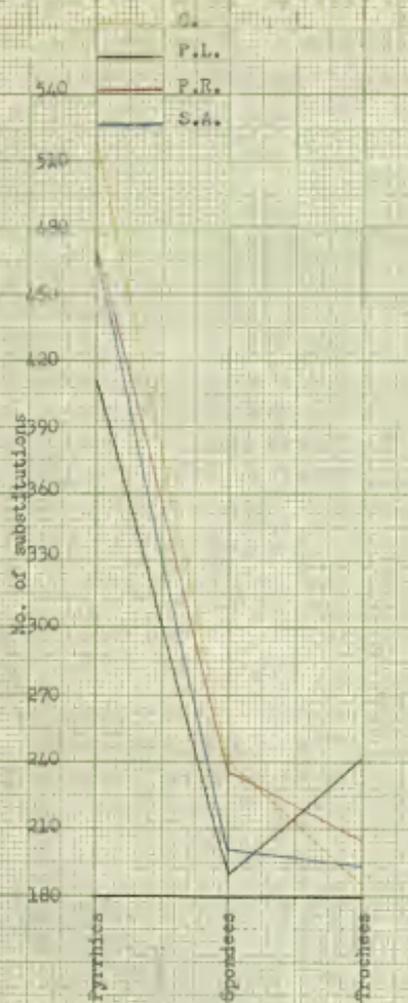


Fig. 3. Dissyllabic substitutions.

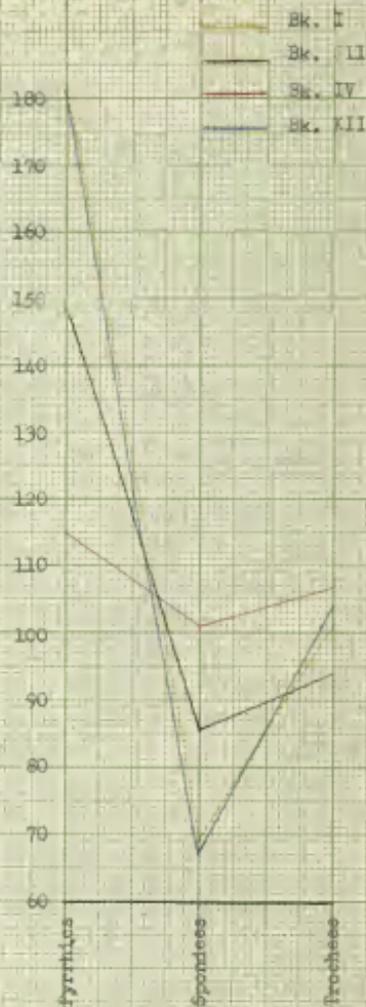


Fig. 4. Dissyllabic substitutions.

of Comus are shown to a certain degree.

#### THE SUBSTITUTION OF TRISYLLABIC FEET FOR IAMBIC FEET

Another criterion for estimating the regularity of poetry is the number of syllables used in the poetic foot.

As I stated in the introduction I have divided the trisyllabic feet used by Milton into two groups, those which can and those which cannot be reduced by the application of Bridges' rules of elision and contraction. The study of those which can be reduced, glide-trisyllables, did not show any significant differences between Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained, and Samson Agonistes. As Table 5 and Fig. 5 show, there are considerably fewer glide-trisyllables in Comus than there are in the other poems. This apparently shows that Milton was undecided about the use of them at the time he wrote Comus and that when he finally did decide to use them, he used them consistently throughout his later work in blank verse.

The full trisyllabic feet were divided into two groups, those which occur at the end of the line and those which occur in any other position in the line. This was done because the greatest number are final feet. This large percentage of final full trisyllables is due to the fact that all final extra syllables were considered as belonging to the final foot.

Table 5. Glide-trisyllabic substitutions.

Poem	Number used
Comus	97
Paradise Lost	123
Paradise Regained	132
Samson Agonistes	131

Table 6 and Fig. 6 show the much greater use of final full trisyllables in the dramatic blank verse than in the narrative blank verse. Evidently, Milton considered it a dramatic device and used it in his narrative poems only when necessary.

Table 6. Full trisyllables in the final foot.

Poem	Number used
Comus	61
Paradise Lost	6
Paradise Regained	23
Samson Agonsites	118

The greater use of it in Paradise Regained shows a further relaxation of the more or less strict practices of Paradise Lost. In all of the instances in Paradise Lost, the final extra syllable is a participial ending such as -ing or -ed,



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No. of full trisyllables



Fig. 6. Full trisyllables in the final foot.

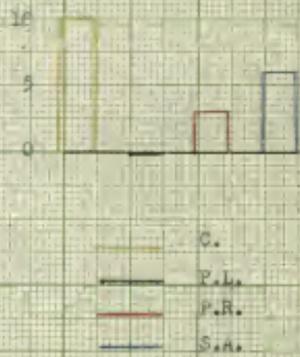


Fig. 7. Full trisyllables in the mid-line.

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while in the other poems it is often an independent word or in the case of a tetrasyllabic foot, two words. There are four instances of full tetrasyllabic feet in the passages from Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes. These were classified with the full trisyllables.

Table 7 and Fig. 7 show the number of full trisyllabic feet which occur in any of the first four feet of a line. There are not many of these and most of them occur before the caesural pause or where a line is divided between two speakers. It is interesting to note that in Paradise Lost, Milton did not permit the full trisyllable in any foot except the final one. The use of it in Paradise Regained again shows evidence of a freer style.

Table 7. Full trisyllables in the mid-line.

Poem	Number used
Comus	10
Paradise Lost	0
Paradise Regained	3
Samson Agonistes	6

This study shows that Milton evidently considered the full trisyllable to be a dramatic device and used it only when necessary in non-dramatic verse. It gives evidence of

a freer style in Paradise Regained than in Paradise Lost. Except in Comus, Milton used the glide-trisyllable freely.

#### RELATION OF END-STOPPED LINES TO RUN-ON LINES

Milton is notable among English poets for the degree of escape from confining the thought by line or stanza.

A comparison of the relation of end-stopped to run-on lines in the four poems shows a significant variation in style and accounts in part for the general opinion that Paradise Lost moves with a greater sweep than any of Milton's other verse. In counting the lines, I considered any line without punctuation at the end to be a run-on line. Comus, Paradise Regained, and Samson Agonistes all have more end-stopped than run-on lines but Paradise Lost has more run-on than end-stopped lines (see Table 8 and Fig. 8). Comus and

Table 8. Number of run-on and end-stopped lines.

Poem	Run-on	End-stopped
Comus	268	432
Paradise Lost	377	323
Paradise Regained	354	366
Samson Agonistes	289	411

Samson Agonistes have about the same majority of end-stopped lines. This is probably due to the dramatic style. Here again, Paradise Lost is at the peak of the perfection of Milton's "grand style".

Table 9 and Fig. 9 show the results obtained from counting end-stopped and run-on lines in the various books of Paradise Lost. All of the passages that were examined have a majority of run-on lines. This majority, therefore, is evidently a general characteristic of all parts of Paradise Lost. The greater number of run-on lines in Book I is probably due to the long tirades and long descriptive passages which make up the major share of this section.

Table 9. Run-on and end-stopped lines in Paradise Lost.

Book	Run-on	End-stopped
Book I	203	97
Book III	160	140
Book IV	172	128
Book XII	179	121

The purpose of this study is to show the superior skill with which Milton used the device of overflow from line to line in Paradise Lost.

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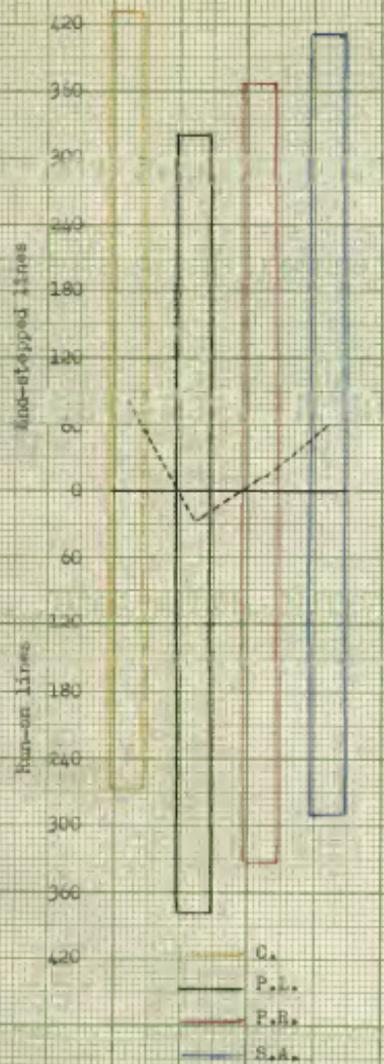


Fig. 8. Number of run-on and end-stopped lines.

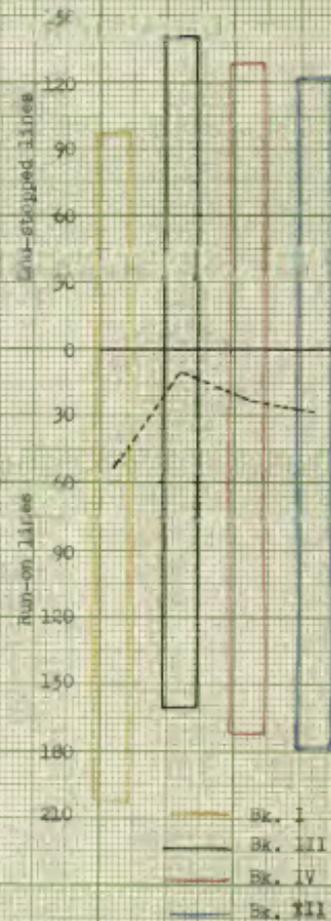


Fig. 9. Number of run-on and end-stopped lines in various sets.

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VARIATIONS IN THE MANIPULATION OF THE CAESURA

The length of the line in classic blank verse was so great that it was necessary to break the line somewhere near the middle to allow for a breath. Although this break is not necessary in English pentameter or hexameter verse, the lines usually tend to fall into two sections. For lack of a better word, I have called this mid-line break a caesura although it is not a true classic caesura.

As mentioned in the introduction, the definition of the caesural pause is purposely arbitrary in order to keep the study as objective as possible. When this method is used, a great number of lines do not contain a pause of any kind. In the opinion of the author, many lines really do not break into two parts, especially if they are intelligently read aloud. Many writers have mentioned the remarkable manner in which Milton shifts the pause to any position in the line. Miss Scott called attention to the almost perfect balance that exists in Milton's blank verse with regard the number of occurrences of the caesura at all positions in the line.<sup>34</sup> Table 10 and Fig. 10 show the number of times that the caesura occurs at each possible position in the line. All lines containing more than ten syllables were reduced

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<sup>34</sup>Scott, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

Table 10. Position of the caesura.

Position of break	No									Two breaks	Three breaks	
	1-9	2-8	3-7	4-6	5-5	6-4	7-3	8-2	9-1			
Comus	2	16	19	90	63	127	49	11	2	282	38	1
Paradise Lost	4	41	50	140	87	153	64	43	2	70	43	3
Paradise Regained	3	25	47	99	85	185	73	42	2	82	52	5
Samson Agonistes	3	29	36	129	65	123	72	39	3	135	52	14

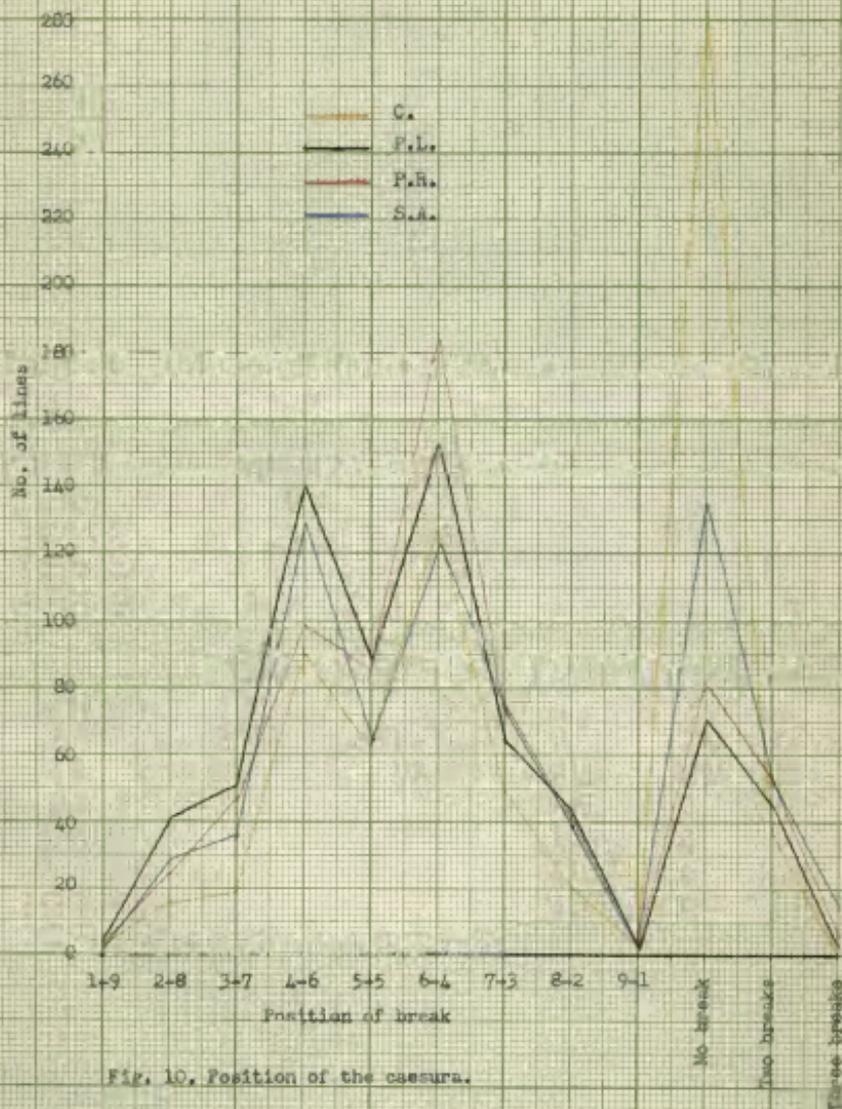


Fig. 10. Position of the caesura.

to ten in order to make this study practical. The graph shows very clearly that Paradise Lost is the most evenly balanced of all the poems. It has the fewest lines without a break. This characteristic is probably related to the greatest amount of overflow. The abnormally large number of lines without break in Comus shows a less skillful and more monotonous rhythmic technique. The rather general opinion that Paradise Regained is monotonous may be accounted for in part by the definitely overbalancing number of breaks before the seventh syllable. There are many instances in the passages from Paradise Regained in which several consecutive 6-4 lines occur. One passage has nine consecutive 6-4 lines. The large number of lines in Samson Agonistes which do not have a break may be due to the dramatic style.

In the matter of manipulation of the caesura, Milton reached his peak of perfection in Paradise Lost. Paradise Regained shows a much more irregular, if not decadent style. Samson Agonistes comes very near the perfection in balance of Paradise Lost.

#### VARIATION IN THE LENGTH OF VERSE-PARAGRAPH

Any discussion of the Miltonic style of versification would be incomplete without some mention of his most important contribution, the verse-paragraph. Although there have

been many subjective discussions of it, no convincing analysis of the actual mechanical construction of the verse-paragraph has been discovered. It is almost too elusive for objective study. Because of this elusiveness, the present study is rather unsatisfactory. However, it seems to reveal some interesting tendencies. All of Milton's verse-paragraphs apparently begin at the beginning of a line and close at the end of a line with a full stop. Therefore, the lines between full stops ending lines were counted and the paragraphs thus obtained were classified as short (1-5 lines), medium (6-15 lines), long (16-25 lines), and very long (26 and over). Table 11 and Fig. 11 contain the results of this investigation. The passages from Comus and Samson Agonistes contain the most short paragraphs and those from Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained contain the most long paragraphs. However, if the dialogue passages from Samson Agonistes are excluded and the remaining parts compared with Paradise Regained, there is a greater number of long paragraphs in Samson Agonistes. This study shows again the tendency of Paradise Regained to lack the sweep and "grand style" of Paradise Lost.

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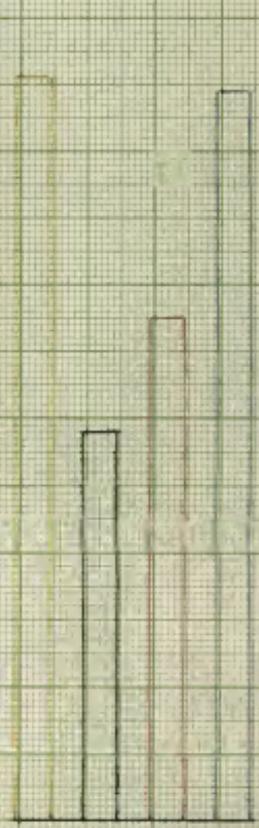
No. of paragraph

70  
60  
50  
40  
30  
20  
10

Short Medium Long Very long

C.  
P.L.  
P.R.  
S.A.

120  
100  
80  
60  
40  
20



Total number of paragraphs

Fig. 11. Length of versus-paragraph

Table 11. Length of verse-paragraph.

Poem	Short	Medium	Long	Very long	Total number of paragraphs
Comus	66	38	5	2	111
Paradise Lost	19	26	15	4	58
Paradise Regained	24	37	10	4	75
Samson Agonistes	60	39	8	2	109

## SUMMARY AND GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

In this thesis, an objective study of 700 lines from each of Milton's four major poetical works in blank verse was made. Five hundred additional lines from Paradise Lost were examined and combined with the other 700 lines from Paradise Lost to form the basis for a separate comparative study of Books I, III, IV, and XII. The following data were obtained with regard to the variation in Milton's habits of versification.

Study I shows that Paradise Lost contains the greatest percentage of regular or nearly regular iambic pentameter lines, and that Book IV of Paradise Lost contains the greatest number of regular lines of the four books studied. This evidence opposes the theory that Book IV is earlier than I and III. Study I also showed that Comus and Samson Agonistes have the least number of regular lines and that Paradise

Regained has more regular lines than either Comus or Samson Agonistes but less than Paradise Lost.

Study II shows that Paradise Lost contains the least number of unequivalent dissyllabic substitutions and the greatest number of equivalent substitutions. Book IV is again shown to be the most regular of the books studied. There is some evidence here of Milton's experimenting with prosodic devices in Comus.

Study III shows that Milton considers the trisyllabic substitution as a dramatic device and uses it only where necessary in the non-dramatic verse. By far the greatest number of full trisyllabic feet occur at the end of the line. In Paradise Regained, Milton makes a greater use of the trisyllabic foot than in Paradise Lost. Except in Comus, Milton uses the glide-trisyllable freely.

Study IV shows the superior skill with which Milton uses the device of overflow from line to line in Paradise Lost. It shows a majority of end-stopped lines in Comus, Paradise Regained, and Samson Agonistes but a majority of run-on lines in Paradise Lost. This may account in part for the "grand style" of Paradise Lost.

Study V shows that Milton places the caesural pause in any position in the line and that there is a very definite balance in the number of times the pause occurs in the various positions in the line. This balance is most perfect in Paradise Lost and least perfect in Comus and Paradise

Regained. Lines without a caesural pause are characteristic of the dramatic blank verse.

Study VI shows that the greatest number of long verse-paragraphs occur in Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained and that long verse-paragraphs are not so adaptable to dramatic blank verse as to epic blank verse. Paradise Regained shows a tendency toward shorter paragraphs and a less extended sweep.

The most important conclusion to be drawn from this analysis is that Paradise Lost contains by far the most regular and smooth of Milton's blank verse. His standards of versification were not well formulated in Comus, were strictest in Paradise Lost, were relaxed in Paradise Regained and freest in Samson Agonistes. Apparently, Milton used certain prosodic devices in the dramatic verse which he did not use in the narrative verse.

The reasons for the greater regularity of Paradise Lost can only be conjectured. Possibly Milton spent more time on it than on any other work or was more anxious that it be perfect than he was that the other poems be. It is probable that Milton knew Paradise Lost completely from memory and worked it over and over in his conscious and unconscious mind.

Because of the consistency of his use of characteristic devices, Milton doubtless was working with a conscious and well-formulated set of standards, but because of the

sonorous sound and smooth flow of the sweeping, mammoth scale rhythms, it would seem evident that he always put effect before conformity.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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## APPENDIX

