While it must be admitted that Milton is a very great poet indeed, it is something of a puzzle to decide in what his greatness consists. On analysis, the marks against him appear both more numerous and more significant than the marks to his credit.

 As a man, he is antipathetic. Either from the moralist's point of view, or from the theologian's point of view, or from the psychologist's point of view, or from that of the political philosopher, or judging by the ordinary standards of likeableness in human beings, Milton is unsatisfactory. The doubts which I have to express about him are more serious than these. His greatness as a poet has been sufficiently celebrated, though I think largely for the wrong reasons, and without the proper reservations. His misdeeds as a poet have been called attention to, as by Mr. Ezra Pound, but usually in passing. What seems to me necessary is to assert at the same time his greatness -- in that what he could do well he did better than any one else has ever done -- and the serious charge to be

made against him, in respect of the deterioration - the peculiar kind of deterioration -- to which he subjected the language.

Many people will agree that a man may be a great artist, and yet have a bad influence. There is more of Milton's influence in the badness of the bad verse of the eighteenth century than of anybody's else: he certainly did more harm than Dryden and Pope, and perhaps a good deal of the obloquy which has fallen on these two poets, especially the latter, because of their influence, ought to be transferred to Milton. But to put the matter simply in terms of 'bad influence' is not necessarily to bring a serious charge: because a good deal of the responsibility, when we state the problem in these terms, may devolve on the eighteenth-century poets themselves for being such bad poets that they were incapable of being influenced except for ill. There is a good deal more to the charge against Milton than this; and it appears a good deal more serious if we affirm that Milton's poetry could only be an influence for the worse, upon any poet whatever. It is more serious, also, if we affirm that Milton's bad influence may be traced much farther than the eighteenth century, and much farther than upon bad poets: if we say that it was an influence against which we still have to struggle.

There is a large class of persons, including some who appear in print as critics, who regard any

censure upon a 'great' poet as a breach of the peace, as an act of wanton iconoclasm, or even hoodlumism. The kind of derogatory criticism that I have to make upon Milton is not intended for such persons, who cannot understand that it is more important, in some vital respects, to be a good poet than to be a great poet; and of what I have to say I consider that the only jury of judgment is that of the ablest poetical practitioners of my own time.

The most important fact about Milton, for my purpose is his blindness. I do not mean that to go blind in middle life is itself enough to determine the whole nature of a man's poetry. Blindness must be considered in conjunction with Milton's personality and character, and the peculiar education which he received. It must also be considered in connexion with his devotion to, and expertness in the art of music. Had Milton been a man of very keen senses - I mean of all the five senses - his blindness would not have mattered so much. But for a man whose sensuousness, such as it was, had been withered early by book-learning, and whose gifts were naturally aural, it mattered a great deal. It would seem, indeed, to have helped him to concentrate on what he could do best.

At no period is the visual imagination conspicuous in Milton's poetry. It would be as well to have a few illustrations of what I mean by visual imagination. From Macbeth :

This guest of summer,  
The temple-haunting martlet, does approve  
By his loved mansionary that the heaven's breath  
Smells wooingly here: no jutty,frieze,  
Buttress, nor coign of vantage, but this bird  
Hath made his pendent bed and procreant cradle:  
Where they most breed and haunt, I have observed  
The air is delicate.

It may be observed that such an image, as well as another familiar quotation from a little later in the same play,

Light thickens, and the crow  
Makes wing to the rooky wood.

not only offer something to the eye, but, so to speak, to the common sense. I mean that they convey the feeling of being in a particular place at a particular time. The comparison with Shakespeare offers another indication of the peculiarity of Milton. With Shakespeare, far more than with any other poet in English, the combinations of words offer perpetual novelty; they enlarge the meaning of the individual words joined: thus 'procreant cradle', 'rooky wood'. In comparison, Milton's images do not give this sense of particularity, nor are the separate words developed in significance. His Language is, if one may use the term without disparagement, ;trti~cial and conventional.

O'er the smooth enamel'd green . . .

... paths Of this drear wood   
The nodding horror of whose shady brews  
Threats the forlorn and wandering passenger.

('Shady brow' here is a diminution of the value of  
the two words from their use in the line from *Dr. Faustus*

Shadowing more beauty in their airy brews.)

The imagery in L'Allegro and II Penseroso is all general:

While the ploughman near at hand,  
Whistles o'er the furrowed land,  
And the milkmaid singeth blithe,  
And the mower whets his scythe,  
And every shepherd tells his tale  
Under the hawthorn in the dale.

It is not a particular ploughman, milkmaid, and shepherd that Milton sees (as Wordsworth might see them); the sensuous effect of these verses is entirely on the ear, and is joined to the concepts of Ploughman milkmaid, and shepherd. Even in his most mature work, Milton does not infuse new life into the word, as Shakespeare does.

The sun to me is dark  
And silent as the moon,   
When she deserts the night

Hid in her vacant interlunar cave.

Here interlunar is certainly a stroke of genius, but is merely combined with 'vacant' anti 'cave', rather than giving and receiving life horn them. Thus it is not so unfair, as it might at first appear, to say that Milton writes English like a dead language. The criticism has been made with regard to his involved syntax. But a tortuous style, when its peculiarity is aimed at pretension (as with Henry James), is not necessarily a dead one; only when the complication is dictated by a demand of verbal music, instead of by any demand of sense.

Thrones, dominations, princedoms, virtues powers,

If these magnificent titles yet remain  
Not merely titular,  
Another now hath to himself engrossed  
All power, and us eclipsed under the name  
Of King anointed, for whom all this haste   
Of midnight march, and hurried meeting here,  
This only to consult how we may best  
With what may be devised of honours new   
Receive him coming to receive from us  
Knee-tribute yet unpaid, prostration low  
Too much to one, but double how endured  
To one and to his image now proclaimed

With which compare:

'However, he didn t mind thinking that if Cissy

should prove all that was likely enough their having a subject in common couldn't but practically conduce; though the moral of it all amounted rather to a portent, the one that Haughty, by the same token, had done least to reassure him against, of the extent to which the native jungle harboured the female specimen and to which its ostensible cover, the vast level of mixed growths stirring wavingly in whatever breeze, was apt to be identifiable but as an agitation of the latest redundant thing in ladies hats.

taken almost at random from*The Ivory Tower*, is not intended to represent Henry James at any hypothetical 'best', any more than the noble passage from Paradise Lost is meant to be Milton's hypothetical worst. The question is the difference of intention, in the elaboration or styles both of which depart so far from lucid simplicity.

The sound, of course, is never irrelevant, and the style of James certainly depends for its effect a good deal on the sound of a voice, James's own, painfully explaining. But the complication, with James, is due to a determination not to simplify and in that simplification lose any of the real intricacies and by-paths of mental movement; whereas the complication of Miltonic sentence is an active complication, a complication deliberately introduced into what was a previously simplified and abstract thought. The dark angel here is not thinking or conversing, but making a speech carefully prepared for him; and the arrangement is for the sake musical value not for significance. A straight-forward utturance, as of a Homeric or Dantesque character, would make the speaker very much more real to us; but reality is no part of the intention.

We have in fact to read such a passage not analytically, to get the poetic impression. I am not suggesting that Milton has no idea to convey which he regards as important: only that the syntax is determined by the musical significance, by the auditory imagination, rather than by the attempt to follow actual speech or thought. It is at least more nearly possible to distinguish the pleasure which

arises from the noise, front the pleasure due to other elements, than with the verse of Shakespeare, in which the auditory imagination and the imagination of the other senses are more nearly fused, and fused together with the thought. The result with Milton is, in one sense of the word, rhetoric. That term is not intended to be derogatory. This kind of 'rhetoric' is not necessarily bad in its influence; but it may be considered bad in relation to the historical life of a language as a whole. I have said elsewhere that the living: English which was Shakespeare's became split up '"to two components one of which was exploited by Milton and the other by Dryden.

Of the two, I still think Dryden's development the healthier, because it was Dryden who preserved, so far as it was preserved at all, the tradition of con- versational language in poetry: and I might add that it seems to me easier to get back to healthy language from Dryden than it is to get back to it  
horn Milton. For what such a generalization is worth, Milton's influence on the eighteenth century was much more deplorable than Dryden's.

If several very important reservations and exceptions are made, I think that it is not unprofitable to  
compare Milton's development with that of James Joyce. The initial similarities are musical taste and  
abilities, followed by musical training and curious knowledge, gift for acquiring languages,  
and remarkable powers of memory perhaps fortified by defective vision. The important dift`erence is that Joyce's imagination is not naturally of so purely auditory a type as Milton's. In his early work, and at least in part of Ulysses, there is visual and other imagination of the highest kind; and I may be mistaken in thinking that the later part of Ulysses shows a turning from the visible world to draw rather on the resources of phantasmagoria. In any case, one may suppose that the replenishment of visual imagery during later years has been insufficient; so that what I find in *Work in Progress* is an auditory imagination abnormally sharpened at the expense of the visual. There is still a little to be seen, and what there is to see is worth looking at. And I would repeat that with Joyce this development seems to me largely due to circumstances: whereas Milton may be said never to have seen anything. For Milton, therefore, the concentration on sound was wholly a benefit. Indeed, I find, in reading Paradise Lost, that I am happiest where there is least to visualize. The eye is not shocked in his twilit Hell

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as it is in the Garden of Eden, where I for one can get pleasure from the verse only by the deliberate  
effect not to visualize Adam and Eve and their surroundings.

I am not suggesting any close parallel between the 'rhetoric' of Milton and the later style of Joyce.  
It is a different music; and Joyce always maintains some contact with the conversational tone. But it  
may prove to be equally a blind alley for the future development of the language. A disadvantage of the rhetorical style appears to be that a dislocation takes place, through the hypertrophy of the auditory imagination at the expense of the visual and tactile, so that the inner meaning is separated from the surface, and tends to become something occult, or at least without effect upon the reader until fully understood. To extract everything possible from *Paradise Lost*, it would seem necessary  
to read it in two different ways, first solely for the sound, and second for the sense. The full beauty of  
his long periods can hardly be enjoyed while we are wrestling with the meaning as well; and for the  
pleasure of the ear the meaning is hardly necessary, except in so far as certain key-words indicate the  
emotional tone of the passage. Now Shakespeare, or Dante, will bear innumerable readings, but at  
each reading all the elements of appreciation can be present. There is no interruption between the sur-  
face that these poets present to you and the core.

While therefore, I cannot pretend to have pene-trated to any 'secret' of these poets, I feel that such appreciation of their work as I am capable of pointing in the right direction; whereas I cannot feel that my appreciation of Milton leads anywhere outside of the mazes of sound. That, I feel, would be the matter for a separate study, like that of Blake's prophetic books; it might be well worth the trouble, but would have little to do with my interest in the poetry. So far as I perceive anything, it is a glimpse of a theology that I find in large part repellent, expressed through a mythology which would have better been left in the Book of Genesis, upon which Milton has not improved. There seems to me to be a division, in Milton, between the philosopher or theologian and the poet; and, for the latter, I suspect also that this concentration upon the auditory imagination leads to at least an occasional levity. I can enjoy the roll of

Cambula, seat of Cathaian Can  
.And Samarchand by Oxus, Temir's throne,  
To Paquin of Sinaean kings, and thence  
To Agra and Lahor of great Mogul  
Down to the golden Chersonese, orwhac

The Persian in Ecbatan sate, or since

In Hispakan, or where the Russian Ksar  
On Mosco, or the Sultan in Bizance,

Tzachestan-born ...,

and the rest of it, but I feel that this is not serious poetry, not poetry fully occupied about its business, but rather a solemn game. More often, admittedly, Milton uses proper names in moderation, to obtain  
the same effect of magnificence with them as does Marlowe--nowhere perhaps better than in the  
passage from Lycidas:

Whether beyond the stormy Hebrides,  
Where thou perhaps under the whelming tide  
Visit'st the bottom of the monstrous world;  
Or whether thou to our moist vows deny'd  
Sleep'st by the fable of Bellerus old,  
Where the great vision of the guarded Mount  
Looks toward Nalnancos and Bayona's hold .. ?

than which for the single effect of grandeur of sound, there is nothing finer in poetry. I make no attempt to appraise the 'greatness' of Milton in relation to poets who seem to me more comprehensive and better balanced; it has seemed to me more fruitful for the present to press the parallel between Paradise Lost and Work in Progress; and both Milton and Joyce are so exalted in their own kinds, in the whole of literature, that the only writers with whom to compare them are writers who have attempted something very different. Our views about Joyce, in any case, must remain at the present time tentative. But there are two attitudes both of which are necessary and right to adopt in considering the work of any poet. One is when we isolate him, when we try to understand the rules of his own game, adopt his own point of view: the other, perhaps less usual, is when we measure him by outside standards, most pertinently by the standards of language and of something called Poetry, in our own language and in the whole history of European literature. It is from the second point of view that my objections to Milton are made: it is  
from tills point of view that we can go so far as to say that, although his work realizes superbly one  
important element in poetry, Ire may still be considered as having done damage to the English  
language from which it has not wholly recovered.