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The Effect of Sound in Paradise Lost As Seen Through Satan's Perceptions of Eden

Sounds play an important factor in poems as poems are expected to be read out loud by readers, in which process the sounds of the lines help convey meanings deeper than those of the texts. *Paradise Lost* is no exception. Although Milton, in creation of *Paradise Lost*, disdained to employ a rhyming scheme, which he deems to be “the Invention of a barbarous age” (The Verse, Milton), nonetheless, the different sound patterns and their characteristics inherent in the English language can reveal much about the subtler meanings intended by the poet. Through analyzing the effects of sound in two of the occasions of Satan's intrusion into Eden, I will argue that the use of sound aids to the contrast between the happy state in Eden and the hateful evil of Satan.

In Book 4, as the first sight of Eden unfold before Satan(205-246), a few exceptional uses of sound in description of Eden come to our attention. On line “in this pleasant soile / His farr more pleasant Garden God ordaind; (214-215)”, Milton describes God's creation of Eden. The first part of the two lines extensively utilize fricatives (the /s/ sound in “this”, “pleasant”, “soile”, “his”, the /f/ in “farr”, and the /ð/ in “this”) to create a sense of pleasure and liveliness in God's creation of the Garden. The smooth beginning of the sentence, however, draws a sharp contrast to the later half of line 215: “Garden God ordaind”. The

repeated plosives of /g/ and /d/ densely packed in the phrase brings the continuity of fricatives to a sudden stop, drawing heavy attention from readers to this short fragment. By the sudden change of sound from extensive fricatives to hard stops, Milton puts an emphasis on God's almightiness and authority as he "ordains" the creation of Eden, thus reinforcing God's omnipotent figure and justifies the rightfulness in his decisions and orders.

Surprisingly complete with the "object-subject-verb" sentence structure, the acoustically striking segment also serves as a textual emphasis on both the action ("ordain") taken by God, and the positive outcome (the "Garden").

We know from the rest of the book that Satan, viewing God's perfect creations, is consumed in envy and disfigured by his desire to destroy the joy of human. Thus, the description of Satan's first sight of the garden, though mostly rendered in a positive manner as the view is a wonder even to Satan (205), also mentions the lurking threat to all of the beauty, joy, and bliss. In middle of all trees "with noblest kind", Satan soon sees the Tree of Life and Tree of Knowledge:

And all amid them stood the Tree of Life,
High eminent, blooming Ambrosial Fruit
Of vegetable Gold; and next to Life [220]
Our Death the Tree of Knowledge grew fast by,
Knowledge of Good bought dear by knowing ill.

In description of the Tree of Life, the verse uses a rich combination of liquids (/l/ - "blooming", "ambrosial", "vegetable", "gold" and /r/ - "ambrosial", "fruit") and nasals (/m/, /n/, - "eminent", "blooming", "ambrosial"). This soft, smooth, and flowing mix of sounds well conforms to the lively, nurturing, and exuberant characteristics of the Tree of Life, thus offering the readers a tender sense of nourishment and vitality while reading this line. This sense of bliss and happiness, however, is soon brought to a full stop with the horrible sight of "our Death", the Tree of Knowledge on line 221. While describing how closely the Tree of

Knowledge grows to the Tree of Life, The succinct adverb “fast” is especially striking to the ear. The plosive sound produced by /t/ following the gentle flow earlier in description of the Tree of Life brings us to a chilling stop. By emphasizing the very proximity of the Tree of Death to the heavenly Tree of Life, “fast” also reminds us of the great evil who has already snuck into the blissful Eden and is therefore in close proximity to the innocent Adam and Eve. By strategical structuring of the sentence, Milton also manages to place the words “Life” and “Death” near to each other: “next to Life / Our Death” (220-221), thus taking the comparison of Life and Death, bliss and blight, Divinity and Evil even further.

To see more of the contrast between the evil in Satan and purity of Eden and creatures therein, we will investigate Satan's sighting of Eve gardening alone in book 9. From line 426-435, Milton describes Eve’s activity of “upstaying” the roses: “[Eve] oft stooping to support / Each Flour of slender stalk, whose head ... / Hung drooping unsustained” (427-430). The two verbs “stoop” and “support” to capture Eve’s actions have the exact same consonants, with a variation in order. The acoustic repetition of the consonants /s/, /t/, and /p/ gives the readers a sense of smoothness in Eve’s actions of bending down and supporting each flower. The preposition “to” whose sound appears in its entirety in the preceding verb “stooping” also renders the phrase in a more recurring sound pattern, further enhancing the natural beauty in Eve’s motion. In description of the roses that Eve deals with, Milton uses the word “drooping” to portray the picture of the flowers. In picking the “drooping” which is suspiciously similar in sound to “stooping” used earlier to describe Eve, Milton seems to encourage the readers to draw a comparison between the flowers and Eve. Indeed, the comparison is made explicit by Milton in the next few lines: “mindless the while, / Her self, though fairest unsupported Flour, / From her best prop so farr, and storm so nigh” (431-433). With repetitions of the same sound (“support”, “prop”), Milton effectively

hints at us for his metaphor that compares Eve to an unsupported flower, Adam to the flower prop, and Satan to the storm. This delicate metaphor incorporates all of the three main characters in Eden and offers valuable insight into their relationship, especially that between Eve and Satan. While in an abject state himself, Satan as the “storm” can bring abysmal destruction to the beauty of the Rose of Eve, unsupported.

After devising the metaphor that sheds light on Eve’s situation, Milton turns to construct another sophisticated metaphor to illustrate the desperate and miserable state of Satan:

As one who long in populous City pent, [445]
Where Houses thick and Sewers annoy the Aire,
Forth issuing on a Summers Morn to breathe
Among the pleasant Villages and Farmes
Adjoynd, from each thing met conceaves delight,
The smell of Grain, or tedded Grass, or Kine, [450]
Or Dairie, each rural sight, each rural sound;

This metaphor compares Satan who fled from Hell to Eden to a resident in a populous city issuing forth to pleasant villages and farms. The first two lines (445-446) features a pattern of alternating in long and short syllables (as in “long in populous City pent” and “houses thick and sewers annoy the aire”) to convey the irritation of a man long “pent(confined)” in a claustrophobic and stinking city. On the other hand, the places that he fled to are “pleasant villages and farmes adjoynd”. The later part of the metaphor also appeals to olfactory senses, drawing a sharp contrast between the “sewers annoy the aire” in the city to the “smell of Grain, or tedded Grass, or Kine, or Dairie” in villages and farms. Overall, the metaphor vividly illustrates the unhappy situation of Satan, who temporarily flees to Eden yet is expected by the infernal Hell.

In the above discussion, we analyzed the role of sound in helping to shape Milton’s arguments. Milton’s skillful use of sound aids to draw the contrast of God’s divinity, blissful

state in Eden, and purity of Eve, to the miserable state and sad mission of Satan, who, though successfully destroys the happy state in Eden, “of worse deeds worse sufferings must ensue (book 4, 26)”.