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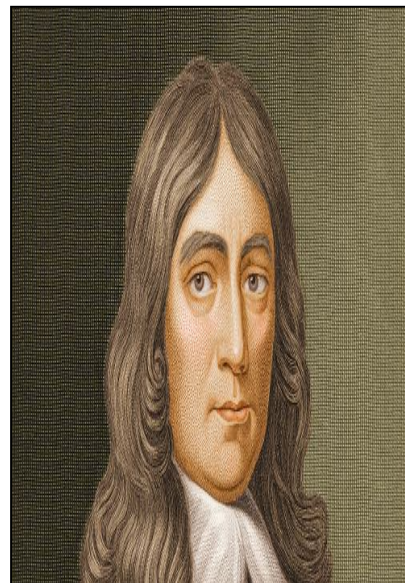
## SUBLIMITY IN MILTON'S SELECT POEMS

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### ABSTRACT

*The present paper aims to study Milton's poem 'L' Allegro in the light of sublimity as it was defined by Longinus as 'an echo of great salt.' The pleasures of the light hearted man is the simple theme of the present poem but it has the touch of sublimity due to Milton's lofty diction, noble lines, high incidents and noble classical story. Longinus' definition of sublimity shows that the poets who have sublime i.e. great souls, so they could produce great poems. Milton could produce such a great poem because his soul was noble and great. The research methods used are analytical, interpretative and evaluative. The poem L' Allegro is analysed, interpreted and evaluated in the light of Longinus concept of sublimity.*



**KEYWORDS:** Sublimity, echo, soul L' Allegro.

### INTRODUCTION

John Milton (1608-1674) was born in London on 9th December, 1608. His father was a lover of literature, and the child enjoyed all the advantages of a cultivated home. He was educated at St. Paul's School, and at Christ's College, Cambridge, where he remained seven years, taking his B. A. in 1629 and his M. A. in 1632. His systematic studies did not, however, close with the close of his College course. He now, took up his abode in the country house of the family at Horton and I'si decided to give himself up entirely to self-culture and poetry. During six years of his stay here, he was able to pursue his studies undisturbed and thus became a great scholar. This point is important because his learning everywhere nourishes and interpenetrates his poetic work. Having now reached his thirtieth year, he resolved to complete his studies by travel. He therefore left London in May, 1638, and went by way of Paris to Italy, however, he was called back by news of the critical state of things at home. Back in London from 1640 he was quite active as a supporter of the Puritan cause. On the establishment of the Commonwealth he was appointed Latin Secretary to the Committee for Foreign Affairs. In 1643 he married Mary Powell, but the union proved a most unhappy one. Early in 1653 a terrible calamity overtook him; he lost his sight and became totally blind. Three years later he married again, but his wife, Catherin Woodcock, died within fifteen months. On the restoration of Charles II, Milton was arrested and two of his books were publicly burnt; but he was soon released and permitted to drop into political obscurity. He was

now poor and lonely as well as blind; his third wife, Elizabeth Minshull brought some comfort to his declining years. It was in darkness and sorrow, therefore, that he now turned back upon the ambitious poetical designs — his *Paradise Lost* was published in 1667, *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes* together in 1671. Three years later on 8<sup>th</sup> November. 1674 Milton died.

His famous works are - *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* (1633), *Comus* (1634), *Lycidas* (1637), *Areopagitica* (a collection of his prose pamphlets), *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*. In Milton's work the moral and religious influences of Puritanism were blended with the generous culture of the Renaissance. It was this combination of elements which gave its distinctive quality to his greatest poetry. After Shakespeare, Milton is the greatest English poet outside the drama. He is regarded as one of the three or four supreme poets of the world. We find in him a wonderful union of intellectual and creative power. He is also a consummate artist. He is the most sublime of English poets and the acknowledged master of the grand style. In sustained majesty of thought and diction he has no rival. His descriptive power is astonishing. He is known for the great and varied beauty of style and versification; he is, thus, the greatest master of the blank verse which had not been thus far used so effectively for a non-dramatic poem.

### L' ALLEGRO

*L' Ailegro* and *Il Penseroso* — the two companion poems came early in Milton's life, and are therefore more 'simple' in thought, being purely poetical reflection and feeling. They should be in fact considered as a unit, reflecting two different moods of the human mind interwoven into appropriate natural scenes. The two poems are Idylls, redolent of the scenes, sounds and scents of rural life.

*L'Ailegro* describes the pleasures of the light hearted man not too deeply reflective, but in love with the innocent pleasures of the senses. We might almost say that *L'Ailegro* is a more youthful type than *Il Penseroso*. The poem starts with experiences of early morning and ends with the evening theatre. It does not, however, mean that *L'Ailegro* describes an ideal day of enjoyment from morning to nightfall. It is evident that some of the pleasures which are described are those of springtime, while others of midsummer and of autumn.

The scheme of *L'Ailegro* is no more than some description of the pleasures which are available, or were available in Milton's time, to a man of cheerful and light-hearted disposition, who is prepared to enter into all enjoyments provided by any season. *L'Ailegro* is filled with the joy of living, the same joy which inspires the singing bird or the young rabbits frisking in the fields. His pleasures are innocent and pure. He enjoys the dancing of the lads and lasses on the village green. There is not much thought or seriousness in *L'Allegro*, and so it is perhaps a one-sided picture of human nature. *L'Allegro* is a sociable and companionable type, an extreme type of the light hearted man who lives for the moment. The style of the poem is intensely classical. The style and imagery are artificial, in the sense that they are the product of a specialised art and not natural expression. It is a masque of life, rather than a procession of real characters. In *L'Allegro*, we are given a sketch of a morning in 'Country Surroundings, (Lines 42-68) and then some glimpses of Country-Life and Scenery (lines 69-90). This has made some speak of Milton as a poet of Nature. He was no poet of nature in the sense that Wordsworth and Tennyson were. Milton's pictures are traditional, drawn from the old pastoral conventions in English Poetry. His scenes are rather beautifully 'painted' properties than the real scenes. They do not strike us with the intensity of actual observation. His pictures are broad, vague, and abstract, only meant as a background for the human element. His nature was of the study rather than of the open air. His rustic characters are also conventional pastoral figures; he has only given them a literary hue and flavour. The poem can be taken as a personal revelation of an early Milton, a normal young man, capable of enjoying revels, dancing on the green, and an amusing play at the theatre. His style has loftiness of diction, sweep of noble sound in the lines, and the

abundance of highly coloured names and incidents from classical story. Personification runs throughout. This is the art of rich elaboration. He must embroider the simple idea and lavish on it all the wealth of his picturesque fancy. No other poet has been so ambitious in his use of comparison, so powerful in the use of classical romance; though this also explains why Milton is never likely to appeal to the reader of slight scholarship.

### OF MAN'S FIRST DISOBEDIENCE

Milton produced the greatest English poem in 'Paradise Lost', from which the lines 'Of Man's' First Disobedience' are taken. It is in this masterpiece that the great qualities of Milton as a poet are quite -apparent. The inspiration and the subject-matter of the poem alike come from Milton's Puritanism; Paradise Lost is written as an exposition of his theology; upon the foundation of that theology it undertakes to 'assert Eternal Providence and justify the ways of God to men'. Though the subject-matter reveals the Puritan in Milton, in its form and style, its machinery and method, the poem reveals the qualities of Renaissance in Milton. The poem has righteousness and the strenuous moral purpose blended with love of learning and the passion for beauty.

It is an epic in twelve books. In Paradise Lost Milton set forth the revolt of Satan against God, the war in heaven, the fall of the rebel angels, the creation of the world and man, the temptation of Eve and Adam, and their expulsion from Eden. His central purpose was to show how 'man's first disobedience' brought sin and death in its train', however, he does not close on the note of evil triumphant, but prophetically introduced the divine "work of redemption. Thus Milton elaborates the biblical story of Adam and Eve's blissful life in Paradise, their eating of the forbidden fruit of the tree of knowledge at the instigation of Satan and their consequent expulsion from Paradise by God.

The lines below are taken from the first book of Paradise Lost. Milton begins by stating the theme of his poem. He is going to tell the story of Man's first sin and the way in which that sin brought sin and death into the world. Man's first disobedience was the act whereby they ate the fruit of the tree which God had forbidden them to eat. The punishment of eating the fruit was that man became subject to death. This is a mighty theme and so he invokes the aid of the Heavenly spirit that once inspired muses, the great leader of the Jews, who taught his people how God first created Heaven and Earth, raising them up out of disordered universe. Milton implores the aid of the Divine Spirit because he knows that it prefers to dwell in pure temples built by man. He requests the spirit to illumine his mind and elevate it to noble heights, so that he may justify the ways of God to men. Milton applies the form of classic art (an epic) to the treatment of a biblical subject. Though in theory an epic poem is supposed to be quite impersonal, Milton's epic is throughout instinct with the spirit of the man himself. The poem is in blank verse and Milton was making an experiment when he took up as the measure of Paradise Lost 'English heroic verse without rime'. Of this measure (the blank verse) he remains the greatest master.

### CONCLUSION:

Milton was making an experiment when he took up as the measure of Paradise Lost 'English heroic verse without rime'. Of this measure (the blank verse) he remains the greatest master.

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