Music and Sense in Handel’s Setting of Milton’s *L’Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*

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More than any other baroque composer, Handel has provided us with fortunate conjunctions of music and English poetry. Among his successful unions of voice and verse, none is more ambitious in its attempt to advance poetic meaning than his setting of Milton’s *L’Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*. But even to recognize such ambition, to employ music to advance the meaning of a text, compels us to acknowledge our distance from what the eighteenth century understood to be the power of music in conveying extra-musical meaning. To modern judgment, nothing is more surprising than the confidence with which seventeenth- and eighteenth-century discussions of music assert its ability to portray a reality outside of itself. Not only emotions and states of mind but often landscapes and even ideas are held to be accurately depicted in musical compositions. Music is an abstract art, modern theory objects, and its elements do not signify outside of the patterns and structures into which they are set. A theme or a melody may suggest a certain emotional state about which listeners may generally agree. But even music with a program works toward impression rather than specific meaning, and the necessity of its accompaniment by verbal description perhaps betrays most tellingly the abstract nature of the art itself. Music achieves its effects by a psychologically complex process of alternately fulfilling, suspending, and exceeding a listener’s expectations. This process may be said to involve “making sense,” but only metaphorically, as “sense” here would mean conforming in some way to the auditory structures which the music itself leads the
listener to expect, i.e., to structures of rhythm, tonality, harmony, modulation, and so forth. The notes or musical phrases themselves do not achieve meaning, as language does, by coherently signifying a reality beyond it; the metaphoric “making sense” of music is entirely self-contained.¹

For Handel and his contemporaries, however, music was not entirely abstract, and meaning was not simply a metaphor for internal coherence. Treatises on musical aesthetics were not only concerned with the elements of music but addressed themselves directly to the relation of music to the mind and emotions. This latter topic, known as the doctrine of the affections or the Affektenlehre, was developed by various writers into a loosely constructed theory that held music capable of portrays, and hence of moving in its auditors, particular emotions and states of mind. The various “affects” were evoked by particular thematic figures, tonalities, tempos and meters; in combination with these elements, even the choice of instruments had a role in portraying the affections.² Historically considered, the theory was a conservative one: sixteenth-century musical humanists traced it back to Plato’s approval and disapproval of certain modes and instruments for their affective qualities.³ But its real roots were in the association of the medieval modes (invariably—and wrongly—identified with the Greek modes) with particular states of mind. Renaissance humanists celebrated this association in their desire to view music as an analogue of poetry and rhetoric.⁴ Since music and language both have the power to move men, the most potent form of rhetorical persuasion would be the proper union of words and

¹ For a discussion of this understanding of musical meaning, see Leonard B. Meyer, Emotion and Meaning in Music (Chicago, 1956), pp. 1–82.
music. One of the best-known eighteenth-century theorists, Johann Mattheson (1681–1764), a good friend of Handel during his years in Hamburg, called music a form of “sound speech” and used rhetorical terms to speak of its psychological effects. The role of the *Affektenlehre* was to develop these ideas into an elaborate system, a virtual musical rhetoric for the use of composers.

Handel’s contemporaries often praised his music for its ability to portray, for the “sense” it made in communicating states of mind and emotion to its listeners. Readers of *The Dunciad* will recall that Pope opposes Handel’s “sense” to the excessive ornamentation of melodic lines (“division”) in Italian opera, an opinion which in all likelihood he shared with the Burlington and Chandos circles. This view of Handel as a composer who united music and sense occurs frequently in contemporary tributes—and particularly poetic tributes—to his musical powers.

Pope’s distinction, to be sure, needs some qualification. Handel was scarcely in rebellion against Italian opera and its elaborate stylistics. It is rather that he turned from Italian opera to English oratorio and altered his own stylistic practices accordingly. The contrast is rather between two phases of Handel’s own career. But having made such a qualification, we can understand why Pope favors the Handel whom he sees as rejecting the excesses of Italian opera. His satire of the latter has as its object not only the triumph of musical abstraction in the excessive ornamentation but also the divorce of the aims of music from the aims of language. In part, no doubt, such praise of Handel is negative: Handel’s music does not obscure the comprehension of words and phrases through excessive melismatic distortions of individual syllables. But in a note on this passage Pope also implies a positive commendation: he complains of “the taste of playing false tricks in Music with numberless divisions, to the neglect of that harmony which conforms to the Sense, and applies to the Passions.”

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8 Twickenham Edition, V, 346. There is an interesting consistency between Pope’s complaints and those of musical humanists in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; the abstract element of music to which the latter objected was polyphony,
is concerned with meaning and desires of moving its auditors, that is, with music that acknowledges its kinship with poetry and rhetoric.

Pope and his circle may well have seen Handel as a composer who still acknowledged the value of the doctrine of the affections in his music. But it may be instructive to interrogate his word “sense” a bit further than he perhaps intended we should. One notices, first of all, that the doctrine of the affections does not entirely answer the question of how Handel’s music achieves sense. The meanings assigned by the theorists to particular musical figures and keys were, as Manfred Bukofzer points out, “necessarily ambiguous”; the musical language could not express the affections in an immediate way but “presented” or “signified” them through a generally agreed upon symbolism. But there was no universal agreement about the particular musical symbols, and the ability of listeners to understand obviously varied according to their knowledge. There remains as well the question how far Handel himself followed—or could have followed—the specific recommendations of the Affektenlehre, a point on which we shall advance a suggestion below. But even more basic is the question how far his music intends to go—and does go—in advancing the sense of a poetic text. Music, clearly, does not create meaning, but even modern judgment agrees it can augment the effect of words. Obviously the emotional values of words may be heightened by musical setting, and it is upon this fact that all musical drama depends. But can the actual meaning of a poetic text be advanced by musical setting? Can music interpret a poem, that is, choose among possible ways of understanding a text and advance a particular reading? A modern reply would surely be skeptical; the abstract nature of music would most likely frustrate any attempt to do more than heighten the emotional tenor of the text. And it may well be that when music and language are brought together, the abstraction of music inevitably creates a tension with the communicative ends of language. But if one is to find optimism about the possibility of music’s advancing poetic meaning, it would be in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when, if ever, the humanist ideal of the kinship of poetry and music had its adherents.

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among musicians. Even then, of course, the very rarest musical masterpieces are those which employ texts of independent poetic greatness and achieve a synthesis of music and poetry. But in some of these rare instances, music appears not only to respect but to point up and enhance the meaning of the poetic text.

It is fitting that it should be Milton who called forth this attempt, for not only was he a musician himself and, as he reminds us in *Ad Patrem*, the son of a composer, but his own praise of the union of music and poetry in “At a Solemn Music” warmly portrays the religious ideal that Handel no doubt in some measure shared. As a synthesis of music and poetry, Handel’s *L’Allegro ed il Penseroso* is significant both in the undeniable quality of the poetic text and in the fact that the poems were not originally written for musical setting. With the two St. Cecilia’s day poems of Dryden, the composer’s task can be seen as considerably easier, for the subject of both *A Song for St. Cecilia’s Day* and *Alexander’s Feast* is music, and the poet has met the composer more than halfway. But with Milton’s companion poems the composer had no such explicit advantage; music must serve poetic meaning, not the reverse. To note this fact, however, is not to deny the musical suggestiveness of Milton’s poems. Music and sound not only play a significant role in the imagery, but in some passages the verse is as musical as anything Milton wrote. One understands this when one returns from Handel’s setting to a reading of the poems and hears how much of what the composer achieved was implicit in the verse. But the poet had not specified by his subject the direction the composer was to take, as Dryden did in his St. Cecilia’s day poems.

How Handel responded to this challenge deserves more attention than has yet been accorded the work. As one would expect, contemporaries most often praised the picturesque qualities of the music, the musical creation of moods to match the scenes of the poems. But Handel’s approach to poetic meaning is more than im-

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10 Joseph Warton asserted that Milton’s *L’Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, which before “lay in a sort of obscurity,” were made “universally known” in midcentury by Handel’s setting (*Essay on the Genius and Writing of Pope* [1756]). Typical of the appreciation of the musical setting is William Hayes's defense of Handel (1753) in reply to Charles Avison’s *Essay on Musical Expression* (1752): “There is not a Scene which Milton describes, were Claude Lorraine or Poussin to paint, could possibly appear in more lively Colours, or give a truer idea of it, than our Great Musician has by his *picturesque* Arrangement of musical Sounds: with the advantage, that his Pictures speak.” Warton and Hayes are excerpted by Otto Deutsch, *Handel: a Documentary Biography*, pp. 780–81 and 733 respectively.
pressionistic. He clearly attempted to use even the abstract elements of musical composition to serve the particular meanings of his texts. The doctrine of the affections stands behind the musical symbolism he employed, but his use of that tradition is more often general than specific. In fact most of the musical elements Handel used to serve poetic meaning are intelligible enough to a listener without a detailed understanding of the Affektenlehre. This is entirely understandable, for the audiences whom Handel had of necessity to please were musically sophisticated without being musically learned. The virtue of such a situation is obvious: the composer cannot depend upon communication through a well understood code but must use every resource at his disposal to convey poetic meaning. He employed, of course, the characteristic “word painting” of baroque musical setting, but other elements of musical composition bear the burden of meaning as well—the melodic writing, the approach to tonality and harmony, contrasts of learned music with simpler dance forms, and the structuring of small and large sections of the work. Structure in particular provides a means of gauging the sense Handel intended to convey, for his restructuring of the work three years later involved a significant adjustment of meaning. In effect the musical setting amounts to an interpretation, and later perhaps a reinterpretation, of Milton’s companion poems.

Handel wrote his setting of the poems with his characteristic speed in the two weeks between 19 January and 4 February 1740. The impetus for the work may have come from the success of the 1738 production of Milton’s Comus, for which Thomas Arne composed the music. Handel himself had behind him the successes of his setting of Dryden’s two St. Cecilia’s day poems, and Milton may well have seemed the next logical challenge to a composer eager to prove himself to an English public. He was fortunate to have Charles Jennens for his collaborator in the venture. Jennens had written the libretto for Saul and would within two years’ time present Handel with the text for The Messiah.

It was obvious that some selection had to be made to reduce Milton’s paired poems to aria-length sections. Jennens recognized that the poems relate to one another not only in their antithetical character but that Milton had developed his antitheses through carefully paralleled passages and motifs. Jennens accordingly took these

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PART THE FIRST

l'Allegro
1. Accompagnato: "Hence, loathed Melancholy"

Il Penseroso
2. Accompagnato: "Hence, vain deluding Joys"

l'Allegro
3. Air: "Come, come, thou goddess fair and free"

Il Penseroso
4. Air: "Come rather goddess sage and holy"

l'Allegro
5. Air: "Haste thee, nymph"
Chorus: "Haste thee, nymph"
6. Air: "Come, and trip it as you go"
Chorus: "Come, and trip it as you go"

Il Penseroso
7. Accompagnato: "Come, pensive Nun, devout and pure"
8. Arioso: "Come, but keep thy wond'ring state"
[9. Accompagnato and Chorus: "There held in holy passion still"]

l'Allegro
Recitative: "Hence, loathed Melancholy"
10. Air: "Mirth, admit me of thy crew"

Il Penseroso
11. Accompagnato: "First and chief on golden wing"
12. Air: "Sweet bird, that shun'st the noise of folly"

l'Allegro
Recitative: "If I give thee honour due"
13. Air: "Mirth, admit me of thy crew"

PART THE SECOND

Il Penseroso
20. Accompagnato: "Hence, vain deluding Joys"
[21. Air: "Sometimes let gorgeous Tragedy"]
22. Air: "But oh, Sad virgin that thy power"
Recitative: "Thus, Night, oft see me in thy pale career"

l'Allegro
23. Chorus: "Populous cities please me then"
24. Air: "There let Hymen oft appear"

Il Penseroso
25. Accompagnato: "Me, when the sun begins to fling"
26. Air: "Hide me from day's garish eye"

l'Allegro
27. Air: "I'll to the well-trod stage anon"
28. Air: "And ever against eating cares"
Il Penseroso
15. Air: “Far from all resort of mirth” 30. Air and Chorus: “These delights if thou canst give”

l’Allegro
Recitative: “If I give thee honour due”
[17. Air: “Straight mine eye hath caught new pleasures”]
[18. Accompagnato: “Mountains, on whose barren breast”]
19. Air and Chorus: “Or let the merry bells ring round” 32. Air: “May at last my weary age”

Organ Fugue
33. Solo and Chorus: “These pleasures, Melancholy, give”

PART THE THIRD
Il Moderato
34. Accompagnato: “Hence, boast not ye profane” Recitative: “No more short life they then will spend”
35. Air: “Come, with native lustre shine” 38. Air: “Each action will derive new grace”
36. Accompagnato and Chorus: “Sweet Temp’rance in thy right hand bear” 39. Duet: “As steals the morn upon the night”

FIGURE 1. Structure of 1740–42 version of L’Allegro, il Penseroso, ed il Moderato. Bracketed numbers were added during the first year of performance.

parallel passages and arranged them so that short groups of two or three arias from one poem would be “answered” by a corresponding series from the other poem. (See Fig. 1.) The passage in L’Allegro, for example, describing the lark (lines 41–46) is set alongside the nightingale passage from Il Penseroso (lines 56–64), and the nocturnal wandering of the thoughtful man comes between descriptions of the morning walk of his cheerful counterpart. The musical need for this alternation between Milton’s two poems is clear: more so than poetry, music requires contrast, and the contrasts of tempo, rhythm, and keys which the setting of first one and then the other of the poems required provide the listener with sufficiently diverse musical movements. In all Jennens arranged about two-thirds of
Milton's poems into the libretto.\textsuperscript{12} As one would expect, he made minor changes in the passages he selected for the poems, usually an alteration of syntax in the first line to render the section independent of the more complex syntax of the original. In several cases he omitted couplets within a passage, usually to condense the section or simplify its syntax. Though one may regret the excisions, it seems clear that Jennens's selection and arrangement of passages represents an intelligent understanding of the basic character of Milton's poems.

In addition, however, and with a somewhat typical eighteenth-century desire to resolve the antitheses which Milton, in accord with a Renaissance aesthetic, left unresolved, Jennens wrote a third poem entitled \textit{Il Moderato} for Handel to set. Handel may have encouraged Jennens to write this third poem, and certainly he acquiesced in its inclusion. Not surprisingly, \textit{Il Moderato} fails in the inevitable comparison—“moderatissimo” one wag remarked of Jennens's muse\textsuperscript{13}—but its forty-eight lines represent a competent, if unexciting, praise of a virtue which is, in the nature of things, resistant to poetic celebration. Fortunately \textit{Il Moderato} was not worked into the alternation between sections of Milton's two poems but was placed at the end as a third part. The inclusion of \textit{Il Moderato} in the first place represents a less than complete understanding of Milton's intentions in the companion poems, and apparently sensing this later, Handel dropped it in his revision of the work in 1743. When this revised version was performed, Handel usually added the Song for \textit{St. Cecilia's Day} to complete the evening's program.

While Jennens's collaboration was significant, one cannot doubt that Handel himself had independent experience and understanding of the poems. Popular tradition has portrayed Handel as a brusque Teuton who spoke a pidgin English copiously mixed with German,

\textsuperscript{12} Jennens's complete text is printed in the critical introduction to the \textit{Hallische Händel-Ausgabe: Kritische Gesamtausgabe} (Kassel and Basel, 1955– ), ser. 1, vol. XVI, \textit{L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato}, ed. and intro. James S. Hall and Martin V. Hall, trans. Siegfried Flesch; introduction (kritischer Bericht) by Una Bonn separately, pp. 44–52; thereafter cited as \textit{Hallische Händel-Ausgabe}. Robert Manson Myers also prints a libretto in \textit{Handel, Dryden, and Milton} (London, 1956), pp. 111–12; because his text is based on a wordbook for one of the first performances, however, it does not contain the text of all the additions Handel subsequently made.

\textsuperscript{13} Jennens himself enjoyed the quip and reported it in a letter to a friend; see Anthony Hicks, "An Auction of Handeliania," \textit{The Musical Times}, 114 (1973), 892–93.
but in fact he took a lively interest in the literature of his adopted country. He knew Pope, Swift, Arbuthnot, and, of course, Gay, who had written the libretto for *Acis and Galatea*, as well as a variety of lesser figures in the London literary and theatrical world. There is no doubt that Handel spoke English with a German accent all his life, and his settings occasionally show an incomplete sensitivity to the nuances of English syntax (perhaps the most amusing example is the chorus in *The Messiah* “For we like sheep”). But by 1740 he had been living in England for over twenty-five years. He was fluent in English by this time and had surely read Dryden, knew Shakespeare at least on stage, and was well-versed in Milton and the English Bible.\(^{14}\) There can be no doubt of Handel’s interest in literature or of his enthusiasm for setting English poetry.

Not surprisingly, the musical means Handel made most frequent use of to underscore the sense of the text is what has come to be called “word painting.” (The use of visual art for the metaphor suggests again the abstract nature of the elements of music.) As used by Renaissance and baroque composers, word painting consists of the immediate musical “imitation” of the words of the text. The theorists invariably warned against too literal or too lavish a use of word painting, and the inevitable melodic ascents at the word *caelum* and descents at *infernum* indicate that certain musical brush strokes had become clichés more than a century before. Most word painting employs a set of conventional metaphors which even an unsophisticated listener readily understands and responds to. We say *metaphors* because the musical “imitation” is usually conveyed metaphorically, though the metaphor is often dead and therefore unperceived (e.g., the “high” note to denote heaven or short “ascending” and “descending” figures to suggest the motion of waves). Not all word painting is metaphoric, of course; some musical effects imitate or approximate the sounds signified by the words of a text. Handel employs both sorts of word painting, and though he avoids obvious clichés, he does not shun the conventional metaphors. In the arioso “Come, but keep thy wonted state” (number 8), the melodic line suddenly ascends a fourth at the words “looks” and “eyes,” followed by an ascending arpeggio in the first violin, to por-

tray the heavenward vision of the “rapt soul.” There is a similarly straightforward use of the device in the second part of number 12 (“Sweet bird that shun’st the noise of folly,” measures 79 to 94): the rising of the moon is accompanied by a slowly rising vocal and orchestral line. But Handel achieves his most striking and original effects through imitation of sounds. Of these none is more immediate in its appeal than the “laughing song” (number 5, the tenor air and chorus “Haste thee nymph”). The line “And laughter holding both his sides” is set with several bars of repeated staccato figures on the syllable “ho” of “holding.” When the chorus repeats the passage in four parts, the music depicts mirth spreading in ever-widening circles. The comic effect is positively infectious, and it is a melancholy listener indeed who can resist its prompting.

Though such melodic word painting is more common, Handel accomplishes similar effects with orchestration. The text of “Mirth, admit me of thy crew” (number 13) describes the sounds of a hunt:

To listen how the hounds and horn
Cheerly rouse the slumbering morn,
From the side of some hoar hill,
Through the high woods echo the shrill.

While employing a rhythm that suggests the easy canter of a horse, Handel added a French horn to the orchestra to portray the echoing sounds of the hunt. (Wisely, no doubt, he ignored the hounds.) In the conclusion to Part One “Or let the merry bells ring round” (number 19), a glockenspiel makes the peal of bells literal. Perhaps the most gracious example of word painting in the work employs both melodic figures and scoring—and at the same time inextricably entwines convention and imitation. In the paired songs which refer to the lark (l’ Allegro’s number 10) and the nightingale (il Penseroso’s number 12), the birds are sketched musically in the repeated figures which portray, whether conventionally or imitatively, the songs of the birds. At the lines “To hear the lark begin his flight, / And singing startle the dull night,” the lark warbles in the repeated violin motif:

In number 12 the nightingale, “most musical, most melancholy,”
responds with a much longer figure played by the flute:

Both imitation and convention, no doubt, require the flute to portray the nightingale. Meaning here is achieved predominantly through the contrast of the two arias: the cheerful repetitions of the violin "lark" are set off against the complex, sinuous figure of the nightingale (the air is in fact a duet for flute and soprano), and the second bird thereby becomes a musical symbol of the meditative state of mind. The use of the flute, with its suggestion of pastoral poetry, may even gesture toward the traditional association of the nightingale with the poet. Such word painting forms the interpretational texture of Handel's setting. It is present in virtually every movement of the work and forms one of the main components of the picturesque quality which pleased contemporaries.

The "sense" of the work emerges predominantly in the contrasts of various sorts that appear between l'Allegro and il Penseroso "movements," the groupings of recitatives, airs, and choruses that are taken from one or the other of the companion poems. Handel was clearly concerned to distinguish the two states of mind by establishing differing attitudes toward melody and harmony. Something of what will be his method of portraying the contrast appears in the opening exchange between the two. The work is unique among Handel's large-scale vocal compositions in its lack of the traditional orchestral overture. The opening pair of recitatives and airs serve in effect as an overture for what is to follow: each state of mind is introduced, and their opposing characters are established. In this overture-like exchange, Handel portrays musically what Rosemund Tuve has judged occurs in the opening of Milton's poems: "Each poem begins with a banishing of the travesty of what is praised in the other," not the opposing state of mind itself, but what it might be mistaken for. L'Allegro banishes "loathed Melancholy," the melancholy which in Renaissance physiology led one to severe de-

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15 In performance a concerto grosso or organ concerto was generally played before each of the three parts of the work. These should not be considered the equivalent of an overture, however, since they were also performed before works which did have overtures, like the Song for St. Cecilia's Day. Rather, the concerti should be considered orchestral intermezzi.

pression and madness. Il Penseroso banishes not the country pleasures and sociability of l’Allegro but the triviality of “vain deduc-
ing joys,” the mere fancies of idleness. Perceiving this, Handel has each humor parody what will be the musical personality of the other. L’Allegro gives a mock-solemn version of Penseroso in a tenor recitative which, in a ponderously slow largo, melodically outlines discordant diminished seventh chords and moves through a number of keys in a disjunct vocal line. The tonal instability here is parodic of what will be the tendency of the Penseroso music to explore tonal progressions. In il Penseroso’s banishment of l’Allegro, the recitative is introduced by what Wilfred Mellers has called “tootling music on the fiddles.” The recitative itself firmly stills this innocent silliness and reduces the strings to a sober whole- and half-note accompaniment. Each is then free to assert its own true character, l’Allegro in a spirited B-flat major soprano air and il Penseroso in the soaring melodic line of a D-minor largo.

Handel carefully differentiated the two poems in the kinds of melodic lines he wrote for each. In l’Allegro’s music there is typically an underlying rhythmic organization that animates the melodic line. Dance terms are assigned as tempo indications for two of l’Allegro’s airs, menuet to “Come and trip it as you go” (number 6) and siciliana to “Let me wander not unseen” (number 16), and dance-like rhythmic patterns underlie a number of other airs (e.g., numbers 17, 21, 28). Athanasius Kircher, a seventeenth-century theorist, felt that the easily excited spirits of the sanguine man drew him in particular to dance music. These rhythmic patterns accompany melodic contours that are, compared with those of il Penseroso, relatively naive in design. The melodies of the mirthful man are for the most part unabashedly scalar or triadic, and dis-sonant harmonies are rarely suggested by the outlines of the mel-odies. The melodic range explored in individual musical phrases,
unlike those of Penseroso, rarely exceeds the span of an octave. Rhythm and meter are generally well defined, seldom subject to the ambiguity which one finds in many Penseroso numbers. And there was, of course, no escaping the title of Milton’s first poem; l’Allegro’s airs are set universally at brisker tempos than those of Penseroso. For the melancholy man Handel fashioned melodies that not only have a wider tessitura but often portray the soaring of his thought with poignant upward leaps. The melodies are frequently arioso-like, consisting of asymmetrical thematic fragments interspersed with rests. Dissonant harmonies often play a part, as for example in the opening phrases of “Come pensive nun” (number 7) and “There held in holy passion still” (number 9). As we should expect, the tempos of the pensive man are most often expressive largos or larghettos, and seldom is there any hint of dance rhythm.

Handel similarly distinguished between the two poems in his choice and manipulation of keys. In general l’Allegro airs follow standard harmonic progressions and form conventional tonal relationships—both within individual airs and in the groupings of recitatives, airs, and choruses. A tonal dualism of tonic and dominant for the major keys and tonic and mediant for the minor keys prevails in the music of the sanguine man. His music, for the most part, rarely ventures away from the most popular keys of the baroque period, and in fact half of his numbers are in the related keys of G- and D-major. These keys were thought of as bright and vibrant by the theorists, and they form a tonal center for l’Allegro.

Il Penseroso’s music leans toward more complexity in tonality and key progressions. Handel often assigned him the less popular key regions of baroque music, and the wider variety of his keys frustrates any attempt to associate him with a characteristic tonality. His music contains more chromaticism, and the modulations are often clever and unexpected. In two of il Penseroso’s airs, moveover, Handel achieves a significant effect with what Winton Dean calls “wavering tonality.” The air “Hide me from day’s garish eye” (number 26) follows the conclusive cadence in A-flat major of the accompanied recitative introducing it. But instead of beginning in that key, the air wavers momentarily between it and F-minor. Tonal ambiguity becomes virtually the point of the air “May at last my weary age” (number 32), which Handel inserted in the center of the

Penseroso section which initially concluded the work. After the resolute major tonality of the final Allegro chorus, the bimodal quality of this air is all the more striking and suggestive. The text envisions the contemplative man’s quest for knowledge leading him to sacred vision; in his ascetic old age he will scan heaven and earth, “Till old experience do attain / To something like prophetic strain.” The bimodality begins in the second measure of the basso-continuo, where the leading tone of D-minor is introduced and then chromatically altered. A pleasant harmonic surprise occurs at the end of the seventh measure, where the soprano, half-cadencing with the raised third of the dominant A-major chord, continues with the chromatically lowered third of the following A-minor chord; the voice then spins out a sinuous arioso which wavers at every melodic turn between major and minor modalities. In the setting, Milton’s “something like prophetic strain” escapes the confines of expectation and tonal definition until the concluding measures.

In the structuring of some of the “movements” or groups of recitatives, airs, and choruses, Handel portrayed the difference in the workings of the minds of Milton’s opposed characters. Not every movement received this structural definition, to be sure, but there are several instances of it, particularly in the version of 1740-43 that was augmented by seven additional airs. The clearest example of contrasting structure occurs in the two movements that follow the opening exchange of alternating recitative and air. L’Allegro’s first movement consists of two airs (numbers 5 and 6), each of which is followed by a harmonized choral repetition of the air; the musical structure is a straightforward Air-Chorus–Air-Chorus. Choral repetition is appropriate to the sociability implied in the text: the “quips and cranks” of social merriment call up the music’s infectious laughter in the chorus, and the dance described by “Come and trip it as you go, / On the light fantastic toe” becomes similarly a social occasion. The tonal structure is also uncomplicated, and there is no change of key between the airs and the choruses. The Penseroso section that follows weaves a more complex thematic and tonal design. Although grouped into three numbers, there are actually five sections ranging from twelve to twenty-four measures. The accompanied soprano recitative “Come, pensive nun,” beginning in F-minor and ending in C-major, leads to the arioso with ground bass “come, but keep thy wonted state.” Winton Dean notes that the
arioso begins in A-flat major "but suddenly drooping to F-minor, the tonal reverse from what might have been expected." The second accompanied recitative, "There held in holy passion still," which (with the air and chorus it precedes) Handel added in 1740, follows in C-minor and bears a strong thematic resemblance to the first recitative; this leads directly to the air "And join with thee calm peace and quiet," which the chorus joins at measure 37. Both the final arioso and chorus are set in F-minor, the key of the initial recitative (number 8), and are built on the ground bass of the first arioso (number 9). Figure 2 illustrates the thematic and tonal design of this section:

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"Come, pensive nun": F-minor to C-major
"Come, but keep thy wonted state": A♭-major to F-minor; ground bass —
"There held in holy passion still": C-minor
 "And join with thee" (arioso): F-minor —
 "And join with thee" (chorus): F-minor — ground bass —
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**FIGURE 2.** Thematic and tonal design of Numbers 7, 8, 9.

The complexity of design here portrays the greater subtlety of the contemplative mind. Instead of the simple and gregarious repetitions of the choruses in the Allegro movement, we have a progression of keys and a development of thematic material. And when the chorus enters the final arioso at the lines "And hear the Muses in a ring, / Round above Jove's altar sing," it is not to bring a dimension of sociability but rather to impersonate, in a hushed *piano*, the muses singing to the ascetic contemplative.

In certain of his key choices, Handel appears to have made some use of the specific recommendations of the *Affektenlehre*. One might have expected him to have chosen contrasting modalities to express the opposition between l'Allegro and il Penseroso—major keys for the sanguine temperament and minor for the melancholy—and in fact he does so for the majority of the settings. But there are four instances in which l'Allegro texts receive minor-key settings (numbers 6, 16, the final section of 19, and 28), and four in which

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20 Ibid., p. 321; we base our discussion of this section on Dean's analysis.
il Penseroso is in major (numbers 14, 15, 22, and 31). In general, Handel did not rigidly conform his choice of keys to the doctrine of the affections, that is, in the majority of cases in which major modalities define l’Allegro and minor il Penseroso. But Johann Mattheson’s descriptions of the affective quality of several keys appear to accord closely with what Handel achieved in at least seven of the eight exceptions. Mattheson devoted a chapter of his Das neu-eröffnete Orchester (1713) to the manner in which tonalities affect the emotions. To modern judgment this linking of keys and emotions or states of mind appears purely arbitrary, and in Mattheson’s sometimes indecisive or contradictory descriptions of the emotive qualities one can see confirmation of this suspicion. The theorists of the Affectenlehre, moreover, did not always reach perfect accord on the affective qualities of keys. Nevertheless, certain keys had particular associations for the musically sophisticated among his contemporaries, and Handel appears to have drawn upon those associations in these seven arias at least.

L’Allegro’s airs in minor keys correspond particularly well to Mattheson’s suggestions. The attractive soprano air and chorus “Come and trip it as you go” is in C-minor, and this key, Mattheson says, “possesses both exceeding loveliness and, at the same time, sadness. Since the first quality is too prevalent and one easily gets tired of too much sweetness, it will be best to enliven this key by a somewhat spirited and regular mouvement.” This, he adds, will keep the mildness of the key from becoming soporific. Mattheson’s advice here corresponds with Handel’s practice, for although the air is in 6/8 time, its tempo indication is menuet, and in conformity with the text it suggests a sprightly dance. Mattheson thought D-minor, the key of the pastoral siciliana “Let me wander not unseen,” devout and calm as well as agreeable and expressive of contentment. Since contentment has always been one of the primary focuses of literary pastoral, D-minor has an obvious propriety here. The air’s designation siciliana perhaps playfully acknowledges as well the Theocritan origin of the pastoral tradition. The final chorus of 19, which concludes the movement which the siciliana begins,

22 Lenneberg, p. 235.
23 Ibid., p. 234.
returns to D-minor for the text "Thus past the day, to bed they creep, / By whisp'ring winds soon lull'd to sleep." Here calm and contentment lead to sleep, as the music drops to a pianissimo and the eighth-notes turn to quarter- and half-notes. D-minor thus frames this pastoral interlude that concludes Part One. (The devotion which Mattheson finds inherent in the key may explain its use in the Penseroso fugue with which Part II ended in its initial form.) The final l’Allegro air in a minor mode, "And ever against eating cares," is one which evades several of the generalizations we have made about Handel’s writing for that humor. Since the text mentions "soft Lydian airs," he must have been tempted toward that mode, but in fact the air is in G-minor. This is perhaps explained by Mattheson’s description of G-minor as “almost the most beautiful key,” with not only the serious character of D-minor but with uncommon grace and complaisance (“Gefälligkeit”): “it is suitable for tender as well as refreshing things, for yearning as well as happy ones . . . in short it lends itself to moderate plaintiveness and tempered gaiety.”

If Handel had this or some such understanding of G-minor in mind, he might well have chosen the key as a way of momentarily synthesizing the two humors, for more than any other l’Allegro piece, the air approaches the lovely seriousness of il Penseroso’s music. The text itself, altered in its third line by Jennens, refers to music, and the composer who would set it cannot avoid its program:

    And ever against eating cares,
    Lap me in soft Lydian airs;
    Sooth me with 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.

Handel’s response is an air that approximates his tonal approach to melancholy; at the lines describing the voice freeing the soul of harmony, several bars of intricate modulation lead us from the F-

24 Ibid., p. 235.
major which had predominated in the first part of the air back to G-minor.

Among the Penseroso airs in major keys, the first, "Oft on a plat of rising ground," is in a key which prompts Mattheson to hedge his bets: B-flat major, he says, is "very diverting and showy, however, somewhat modest." It can pass "as both magnificent and delicate." Neither adjective is a compelling description of the air. But in the other three cases, Mattheson's account of the affects of the keys appears strikingly apt for what Handel made of Milton's lines. Mattheson spoke of the "pathetic appearance" and plaintive quality of E-flat major, the key of "Far from all resort of mirth." A rival theorist, Johann Joachim Quantz, went so far as to speak of the "madness and despair" of the key. (Significantly, it is the key on which is centered the "tragic" section of Alexander's Feast, beginning with the air "He sung Darius great and good.") The air is indeed plaintive, and when the bellman blesses the doors from nightly harm, the modulation wanders somewhat strangely on its way to the dominant (E\(^\flat\)-G-f-B\(^\flat\)). But a reassuring cricket figure in the violins surely saves the air from madness and despair. Mattheson did see hopelessness in E-major, the key Handel chose for setting the lines that yearn vainly for Melancholy's power to resurrect the incarnation of poetry itself:

But oh! Sad Virgin that thy power
Might raise Musaeus from his bower
Or bid the soul of Orpheus sing
Such notes as warbled to the string
Drew iron tears down Pluto's cheek
And made Hell grant what Love did seek.

Handel's setting poignantly expresses Orpheus' plaint. Mattheson says that E-major portrays desperate or fatal sadness. "Under certain circumstances it can be piercing, sorrowful, and penetrating," for it expresses "the fatal separation of body and soul." As such, it is obviously the key to sing in while descending to the underworld. And finally, the chorale-like chorus "There let the pealing organ blow" begins in F-major, which Mattheson describes as "capable of

\(^{26}\) Ibid., p. 236.
\(^{27}\) Lenneberg, p. 236.
expressing the most beautiful sentiments, whether these be generosity, steadfastness, love, or whatever else may be high on the list of virtues.” It is, he adds, “natural and unforced when used to express such affects.” Since this chorus ushers in the melancholy man's expression of yearning for a life of religious contemplation, the high seriousness Mattheson finds in F-major has a certain propriety. It is worth emphasizing, however, that some playfulness may underlie Handel's choice of keys commended for their particular affects. He was clearly half a believer in the doctrine of the affections, but we should recall that he also employs F-major for “Haste thee nymph,” the laughing song that no one will accuse of high seriousness. And one expects that similar anomalies are to be found in his choices of tonalities beyond L’Allegro ed il Penseroso.

Though Handel employed some of the tonal symbolism of the doctrine of the affections, it is evident that most of his approaches to meaning do not depend upon the more specific and specialized elements of the theory. To bolster the readily perceptible contrasts in the melodic writing and tonality, he significantly augmented the scoring in Part Two. In Part One l’Allegro receives somewhat more orchestral color in his pieces. As we noted in discussing orchestral word painting, the horns and glockenspiel imitate sounds mentioned in Milton's verses. But in Part Two each of the humors becomes associated with a particular coloration: in l’Allegro’s “Populous cities please me then” and his final chorus “These delights if thou canst give,” trumpets and timpani brighten the sound and give a pomposo, public character to the music. L’Allegro’s open, social temperament is propelled by the scoring here toward something like a moment of civic celebration. He becomes, in effect, public man. The equivalent of the trumpets and timpani for il Penseroso is the organ, the sound of which, in the augmented version of 1740–42, unifies the final four numbers. The associations of the organ, of course, are religious; in Alexander’s Feast St. Cecilia’s sacred organ is the instrument that raises man to heaven and draws heaven down to man. Here the organ expresses the sacred direction of the melancholy man’s desire for solitude and contemplation. The liturgical association may also provide a kind of qualification of his quest for solitude: “service high and anthems clear,” which the organ and chorus portray, are the public expressions of his solitary course.

26 Ibid., p. 235.
Before considering how Handel revised his interpretation of Milton’s poems in the structural revisions of 1743, we can briefly describe the sense of the poems that he conveyed through the disparate conventions of his musical “language.” In his centering of l’Allegro upon the common keys of G- and D-major and assigning him scalar or triadic melodies of fairly even proportions, Handel suggested an open, easy-going temperament, a man not likely to shock or offend. L’Allegro’s harmonies and key progressions please the listener but rarely surprise. The gaiety of the dance measures and the tendency of the chorus to repeat his airs give a sense of affability, an eagerness for society and its rites. The word painting frequently portrays delight in country things, and probably a majority of the imitative effects are devoted to l’Allegro—laughter, the sounds of the hunt, the “merry bells,” the whispering winds, the trumpets for the “high triumphs” of the court and city, and so forth. The straightforward and symmetrical structuring of l’Allegro’s pieces suggest a healthy, balanced temperament. There is nothing surprising in Handel’s interpretation, but it was the composer’s office here more to please, and to please with the familiar, than to startle his listeners. In the portrayal of il Penseroso, Handel does venture beyond expectation. His music is not only sober and serious, it is often strange and venturesome. The use of more complex tonal designs both in the individual airs and in the ordering of some of the sections personifies the intellectual nature of his temperament. In the 1740–42 version the work concluded with Penseroso’s four-part choral fugue “These pleasures Melancholy give” (number 33), and the “learned” quality of this piece emphasized Penseroso’s identity with the intellect and its processes. Clearly Handel understood the nature of Milton’s melancholy, and he appears to have been more challenged in his musical personification of this personality. He did not mistake that melancholy, on the one hand, for the mental instability which predisposes one to madness—this is the melancholy exorcised (in both poem and musical setting) in the introduction of l’Allegro. Nor on the other hand did he see it as the fashionable moodiness which Shakespeare parodied in Jaques in As You Like It. Rather he understood it as precisely that melancholy which derived from the Florentine Neoplatonists’ revaluation
of melancholy and which Panofsky has identified in Dürer’s *Melancholia I*, the temperament which, while unstable and introverted, is nevertheless the prerequisite for speculative and artistic genius. Handel musically acknowledges the instability of the melancholic temperament in the tonal instability of several pieces, and if in “Far from all resort of mirth” he employed E-flat major for its pathos or despair, he even portrayed the contemplative flirting with the dangers of melancholia. But the basic purpose of the tonal shifts and surprises is to express a questing, speculative cast of mind which avoids, so far as possible, the expected or the commonplace. There is one point at which the two states of mind appear to converge momentarily, in the delicate complexity of l’Allegro’s “And ever against eating care” (number 28), but here the text encouraged the musical intricacy which Handel achieved, and he may have seen this convergence as an anticipation of his Moderato.

In themselves there is nothing exceptional about the musical devices or symbolism Handel employed in *L’Allegro ed il Penseroso*. All could be found in other of Handel’s works and in those of his contemporaries as well. But what is significant is the concentration of these musical devices into a kind of musical language which brings out the sense of the poetic text. Musical “language” should be seen here as only an approximately appropriate metaphor, for there is more diversity and eclecticism than system in the assortment of conventions he used to achieve meaning. Some of these conventions depend on linguistic habits, as for example the verbal metaphors that underlie a good deal of word painting. Some are cultural conventions we share with the eighteenth century, like the associations of particular instruments. Some conventions are a part of the arbitrary symbolic systems of the *Affektenlehre* which we no longer accept. And a number of these conventions, among them perhaps the most effective, are difficult to categorize. Is it, for example, simply the use of the word which allows us to see tonal instability as symbolic of instability as a psychological state? Or does such music have an unsettling effect upon a listener quite apart from the word used to describe it? Is it because we are aware of the intellectual structure underlying the laws of music that we allow

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clever modulation or accomplished counterpoint to signify the intellect and its processes? It is surely convention that causes us to associate slow tempos with sadness and brisk rhythmic ones with gaiety, or melodies employing half-step intervals with dark moods and those of wider intervals with pleasure and happiness, but these conventions have established themselves so universally in Western culture that they come to seem more nature than nurture.\textsuperscript{30} Seen from the perspective of such questions, the \textit{Affektenlehre} itself is merely an attempt to categorize, no doubt too confidently and systematically, the conventions by which musical patterns had come to portray certain states of mind.

But Handel’s concentration of these affective musical devices gives only a part of the answer to the question of how he achieved meaning in the music. Clearly opposition was also of crucial importance. Il Penseroso’s music is hardly complex in itself (especially from a nineteenth- or twentieth-century perspective), but only in relation to l’Allegro’s. The latter’s music does not independently portray a balanced and social temperament, but only through the opposition of his melodies, tonalities, tempos, and so forth, to those of il Penseroso. One may see this readily if he tries to imagine Handel’s having set only one of the poems: only a fraction of the meaning could have emerged. One thinks inevitably of what structural linguistics has described as the oppositions supporting meaning within a language. Handel can be seen to have created a simple structure of binary opposition to organize the disparate conventions and enable them to convey meaning. Because his musical “language” is not precise in its signification, such a system of opposition was necessary if he was to achieve more than just approximation of emotional states. This system of opposition explains why the music of \textit{L’Allegro ed il Penseroso} surpasses Handel’s dramatic pieces, not in musical quality, but in the ability to portray poetic meaning. In the dramatic works narrative development must determine the ordering of the airs and choruses. But the non-narrative and non-dramatic nature of this text allowed for the construction of a musical structure built of oppositions.

HANDEL AND MILTON

As we have noted, the overall structure of *L'Allegro ed il Penseroso* underwent significant revision in 1743, and in this restructuring one can see the composer's second thoughts both on his own composition and on Milton's companion poems. As originally conceived, the work is more properly entitled *L'Allegro, il Penseroso, ed il Moderato*, for the poem Jennens composed formed an integral third part. In this form the work received its initial London performance of 1740. During the first year of performance, Handel added seven additional pieces (numbers 9, 15, 17, 18, 21, 29, 32), and probably by 1741 it reached the form shown in Figure 1. (The Hallische Händel edition gives this version in its ordering of the work.) The work was also performed in its original version, without the seven pieces added later; changes in vocal cast apparently required such performances from time to time, most notably in Dublin in 1741–42. But as early as a London performance of 1741, this original version was sung without *Il Moderato*. And when Handel returned from Ireland, he developed a version for performance in 1743 which dropped *Il Moderato* altogether and gave a different order to the second half of Part II; in addition, two pieces from Part I (numbers 17 and 18) were transferred to Part II, and il Penseroso's choral fugue was dropped (see Fig. 3). The editors of the Hallische Händel edition believe this to be the version which satisfied Handel, for after this he apparently made no more revisions. There are, then, two basic versions, the three-part work given originally in 1740 and supplemented by the seven additional pieces, and the two-part work which emerged in 1743 and had significant revisions in Part II.

If, as we have suggested, the initial exchange of recitative and aria by il Allegro and il Penseroso (numbers 1 to 4) is viewed as the equivalent of an introductory overture, then the version of 1740–42 shows an interesting juxtaposition of the two states of mind between Part I and Part II (see Fig. 1). L'Allegro's numbers 5 and 6 correspond to il Penseroso's 20, 21, 22, which begin Part II; Penseroso's 7, 8, and 9 are measured against l'Allegro's 23 and 24 in

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31 Our account of various states of the work is based on the Hallische Händel-Ausgabe, introductory volume to *L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato*, pp. 43, 54–68. It should be pointed out that the ordering of the work on the L'Oiseau-Lyre recording (OL 50195–6, SOL 60025–6) does not reflect either the augmented version of 1740–42 or the revised version of 1743 but a kind of amalgam of the two. The recording was made in 1961 and did not benefit from the researches of the Hallische Händel-Ausgabe editors.
Part II, and so forth. Only number 13 in the first part lacks an opposite Penseroso number in the second part, but this exception may prove the structural rule since, somewhat surprisingly, four Allegro airs follow in Part Two without the expected intervention of a Penseroso movement; it appears as if a Penseroso movement may have been intended to separate numbers 28 and 29. In any case, the significance of this structure lies in the fact that l'Allegro dominates Part I; Mirth makes its claims in the opening and closing movements. And il Penseroso initiates and concludes Part II, and thus there takes the more important role. Although the necessity of musical contrast obliged Handel and Jennens to split Milton's poems into aria-length sections and to alternate between them, they nevertheless preserved in this version something of the poet's ordering of the poems.

This dominance by one or the other of Milton's states of mind is most clearly evident in the conclusion of each part. Part I ends with four numbers portraying the country man's rambles. Here dance rhythms predominate and impart an ease and gaiety to the section. Between the airs, an accompanied recitative for soprano or bass (number 18, "Mountains on whose barren breast") intervenes and creates a moment of aural drama to match the visual impression of a vast landscape: the abrupt rise of craggy mountains, an expanse of meadows, brooks, rivers, distant towers and battlements—all "sketched" in the string accompaniment. As a whole, this movement has an evident symmetry to it. Two airs are placed on either side of the accompanied recitative: Air ("Let me wander"), Air ("Straight mine eye"), Accompanato ("Mountains . . ."), Air (reprise of "Straight mine eye") and Air and Chorus ("Or let the merry bells ring round"). The final chorus returns not only to the calm D-minor of the opening air but also to a tranquil dynamic level as the pianissimo strings paint the "whispering winds" by which the cheerful man is "soon lull'd to sleep."

Penseroso's dominance at the end of Part II is accomplished by a similarly substantial movement, but one which is characterized by development rather than symmetry in its form. As we noted above, the accompaniment of the organ unifies the three numbers and gives them their sacred character. First the recitative "But let my due feet never fail" sets a mood of quiet and simple dignity with its short eight-note phrases, one note for each syllable, over sustained har-
monies in the organ and cello continuo. Then a sacred service is evoked in a brief, ten-measure chorus, "There let the pealing organ blow," which develops the theme of the recitative into what would be a hymn-like chorale if it continued. But instead the soprano emerges with a soaring arioso line "and let their sweetness through mine ears / Dissolve me into ecstasies, / And bring all heaven before mine eyes." There follows the soprano air ("May at last my weary age") whose vocal line, as we saw, unfettered by certain rhythmic patterns and ambiguous in its tonality, seems to escape from any expectations or restraint. Only the walking bass of the organ, cellos, and contrabasses holds the piece together and earth-bound. The solitary strangeness of the air is answered by the four-part choral fugue in D-minor, "These pleasures Melancholy give," which in its "learned" and religious character seems to fulfill the serious, questing temperament of the melancholy man. Musically, the movement has progressed from the disciplined simplicity of the recitative and its chorale-like development to the unfettered complexity of the air and, finally, to the disciplined complexity of the fugue itself. In the impressive gravity of his music, the contemplative man has clearly moved well beyond the resources of his cheerful foil.

Handel was evidently counting on his Moderato for what he felt to be the necessary resolution of Mirth and Melancholy. Why he wanted this resolution is not at all clear from the music he wrote either for Milton's poems or for Jennens's praise of moderation. Milton did not celebrate extremes of Mirth or Melancholy—these are exorcised in the introductions—and the musical setting has not portrayed extremes. Il Moderato comes therefore as both antepenultimate and non sequitur after Parts I and II. This problem was compounded by the lack of contrast in Moderato's pieces; instead of the alternation between Allegro and Penseroso, one musical praise of moderation follows another for seven numbers. It seems inevitable that Part III should fail, and Handel's revisions of 1743, the most prominent of which is the elimination of Il Moderato, acknowledge that failure. But his reworking of the order of the pieces indicates his continued desire to express a resolution of the two states of mind. Now, however, the resolution is expressed by means of the settings of Milton's poems.

The conclusions to Parts I and II, which in the augmented version
PART THE FIRST

1. Accompagnato: "Hence, loathed
   Melancholy"

2. Accompagnato: "Hence, vain de-
   luding Joys"

3. Air: "Come, come, thou goddess
   fair and free"

4. Air: "Come rather goddess sage
   and holy"

5. Air: "Haste thee, nymph"
   Chorus: "Haste thee, nymph"

6. Air: "Come, and trip it as you
   go"
   Chorus: "Come, and trip it as
   you go"

7. Accompagnato: "Come, pensive
   Nun, devout and pure"

8. Arioso: "Come, but keep thy
   wonted state"

9. Accompagnato and Chorus:
   "There held in holy passion
   still"

10. Air: "Mirth, admit me of thy
    crew"

11. Accompagnato: "First and chief
    on golden wing"

12. Air: "Sweet bird, that shun'st
    the noise of folly"

13. Air: "Mirth, admit me of thy
    crew"

14. Recitative: "If I give thee hon-
    our due"

PART THE SECOND

15. Accompagnato: "Hence, loathed
   Melancholy"

16. Accompagnato: "Hence, vain de-
   luding Joys"

17. Air: "Sometimes let gorgeous
   Tragedy"

18. Air: "But oh, Sad virgin that
   thy power"
   Recitative: "Thus, Night, oft see
   me in thy pale career"

19. Air: "Populous cities please
   me then"

20. Air: "There let Hymen oft ap-
    pear"

21. Air: "Me, when the
    sun begins to fling"

22. Air: "Hide me from day's garish
    eye"

23. Chorus: "First and chief
    on golden wing"

24. Air: "Sweet bird, that shun'st
    the noise of folly"

25. Air: "I'll to the well-trod stage
    anon"

26. Chorus: "There let the pealing
    organ blow"
**Il Penseroso**
14. Air: “Oft, on a plat of rising ground”
15. Air: “Far from all resort of mirth”
16. Air and Chorus: “Let me wander not unseen”
19. Air and Chorus: “Or let the mery bells ring round”

**l’Allegro**
17. Air: “Straight mine eye hath caught new pleasures”
18. Accompagnato: “Mountains, on whose barren breast”
29. Air: “Orpheus’ self may heave his head”
30. Air and Chorus: “These de-lights”
32. Air: “May at last my weary age”
28. Air: “And ever against eating cares”

**l’Allegro**
Recitative: “If I give thee honour due”

**Il Penseroso**
31. Air: “Hope in the high and anthems clear”

FIGURE 3. Structure of 1743 version of L’Allegro ed il Penseroso.

of 1740–42 most clearly expressed the dominance first of l’Allegro, then of il Penseroso, were both altered (Fig. 3). L’Allegro’s conclusion of Part I is reduced to two numbers by the removal of numbers 17 and 18 (actually the removal of a three-part section because of the reprise of 17). And even more significantly, Penseroso no longer concludes Part II. The choral fugue “These pleasures Melancholy give” (number 33) is dropped altogether, and instead l’Allegro’s last air and chorus (number 30) conclude the work. The Allegro sequence 17, 18, reprise of 17, and 29, moreover, interrupts Penseroso’s 31 and 32, which describe his worship in “service high and anthems clear” and the solitude and mystic ascent of his old age. Since 17 and 18 portray the cheerful man’s delight in nature and pastoral scenes, the effect of this new order is to make that delight something of an equivalent of contemplative man’s worship and mysticism. Number 29 sets the Allegro text that envisions Orpheus hearing such music as would have persuaded Pluto “to have quite set free / His half-regain’d Eurydice,” a music that implies a superior Orpheus, a more potent version of the art that moved nature to pity. Since Orpheus had been so often associated with prophecy and mystic vision, the effect of placing this air immediately before number 32 is to associate the visionary yearning of both l’Allegro and il Penseroso. Handel then follows 32 with “And ever against eating cares” (number 28)—the one piece of l’Allegro’s music that has something of the musical complexity he ordinarily reserves for Penseroso. Mirth’s spirited chorus then brings the entire work to an exuberant close.
If one knows Milton's poems well, this altered order is a bit jarring, for Handel not only intrudes an early passage of L'Allegro in numbers 17 and 18, but in the reversal of numbers 28 and 29 he places lines 145–50 ahead of 135–44. The editors of the Hallische Händel edition, however, suggest that two advantages of this version are an increased dramatic effect in the sequence 16–19 that concludes Part I and a joyful conclusion of Part II, underscored by the sound of the trumpets and timpani. But it also seems clear that Handel wanted to draw the two states of mind together in the new ordering of Part II. Mirth now formally ends the work, but the association of melancholy's vision and pleasures with those of Mirth in the preceding six pieces suggests that both are finally celebrated in the chorus. The gravity of the choral fugue in D-minor must have seemed out of keeping with the lighter tone that this new order establishes, and there is no doubt that the pomposo feeling of the Allegro chorus comes as a musically effective conclusion in this structure.

The resolution or "tempering" of Mirth and Melancholy, which Handel had originally expressed through Moderato, he now accomplishes through the settings of Milton's poems. L'Allegro and il Penseroso, originally at odds with one another in temperament, now appear to have been moving toward similar ends; conflict was more apparent than real. What is fascinating about this position from the perspective of literary discussion of the poems is that it accords generally with one direction interpretation has taken. Milton's two figures are states of mind or soul which comprise a part of every human being's experience. Perhaps the most eloquent statement of this understanding is Tuve's essay on structural figures in the poems. "Every human mind," she writes, "has attempted the two allegiances Milton gives shape to, has felt both their differences and their compatibility." Handel may not be making exactly this point in his drawing together of the two figures in the concluding half of Part II. He still appears to treat them as temperaments or personalities, but now temperaments who discover their affinity. But a listener's ability to understand and respond to the musical delineation of each figure does accord with Tuve's judgment of the poems. One recognizes that both musical portrayals signify his own psychic allegiances. He is not obliged to choose and, indeed, should not want to.

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32 Hallische Händel-Ausgabe, series 1, vol. 16, kritischer Bericht, p. 56.
33 Images and Themes, p. 15.
Interpretation of Milton’s companion poems has, of course, also gone in another direction, toward viewing them as portraying a displacement of the one state of mind by the other, a progression toward a maturity of understanding. The succession of *L’Allegro* by *Il Penseroso* implies choice, choices within the poetic vocation and choices in a man’s life. Curiously, the earlier structure of Handel’s musical setting (Fig. 1) had implied something like this progression. Granted there is a certain similarity of intention visible in the replacement of the Moderato section by the moderating or resolving of Milton’s antitheses in the revisions of Part II. But the fact that in the earlier version Mirth, Melancholy, and Moderation emerge successively as dominant in their respective sections implies displacement and progression toward a goal. In Part II this earlier structure keeps the sections of the companion poems more distinct from one another, and the culmination of Penseroso’s delineation in the final choral fugue achieves an elevation and dignity to which *L’Allegro* has no access and can give no response. Handel was right to have dropped the fugue in the 1743 revisions which insist on the affinities of the two states. But one can also see that something was lost when in jettisoning *Il Moderato* he also re-ordered Part II and eliminated the choral fugue. If the augmented version of 1740–42 had been allowed to stand without *Il Moderato*, the work would portray quite effectively the progressive understanding of Milton’s companion poems. Such a version, indeed, might be seen as a third possible structuring of the work. In such a version Penseroso’s impressive sequence 31, 32, 33 would conclude the setting with its assertion of Melancholy’s claims. And not only would it retain the choral fugue in the work, but it would keep numbers 17, 18, 28, and 29 in the order in which they appear in Milton’s poems. But, more important, from the alternations between the two states of mind, Penseroso would emerge, not as victorious—Mirth’s claims cannot be cancelled—but as expressive of the greater elevation of spirit.

The possible superiority of this alternative third version lies in the nature of music as an interpreter of poetic meaning. This version allows the assertion of il Penseroso’s claims, but because the ass-


35 Admittedly, the version proposed here as an alternative cannot depend for its authority on Handel’s clear intentions or on traditions of contemporary performance. The original ordering of *L’Allegro and Il Penseroso* (without the added songs) was, however, performed without *Il Moderato* at least once in 1741.
tion is musical it does not demand, as verbal interpretation does, intellectual assent. Perhaps because music is, fundamentally, an abstract art, it is essentially playful. Even the modes of achieving meaning we have considered here are playful—always ambiguous, always demanding opposition and contrast, always conventional and yet pretending to universality. (Indeed, when one returns to a reading of Milton's poems from Handel's music, he finds it is the playful elements of the poems, predominantly, that have been enhanced for him.) Because of the playful nature of its claims to interpretation, the musical setting can conclude with the dominance of Penseroso but not in the least dispel the impression made by l’Allegro. Memory may be the factor that allows this paradox in music. With most people, music works its way into memory more readily than words. And though music in performance progresses linearly, in memory its return is commonly unordered and even capricious. L'Allegro's music makes every bit as strong an impression—indeed, its greater simplicity may make it more available to memory—and here the claims of Mirth remain equal to those of Melancholy. The playful nature of music refuses to force any choice with finality. The progressive musical interpretation of Milton's poems implies the choice of one state of mind over the other, but the nature of musical "interpretation" allows the choice to be both made and unmade.

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